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# Pluralizing Nationalism: Narrative, Politics and the Figure of the Revolutionary in the Hindi Novel from the 1930s to the 1950s

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

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Professor Vasudha Dalmia, Chair

This dissertation investigates the figure of the revolutionary in the Hindi novel by establishing its lineage in the literary tradition of the Bengali novel from the eighteen eighties to the nineteen twenties, as well as its lineage in the historical world of the nineteen twenties in the debate between Gandhi and the several revolutionaries who were hanged by colonial authorities. The usefulness of the Hindi novels of the nineteen thirties to the nineteen fifties is that they served as the primary site for an elaborated introspection of the aims and motivations of the revolutionaries. The novel-form yields a diversity of responses to the meaning of revolutionary action. Each of the three Hindi novelists discussed has a singular perspective. Jainendra uses the interruption of the apathetic middle class household by the revolutionary to probe the unexpected opening of political as well as sexual desire. Agyeya uses the imminence of punitive death by the colonial authorities as an occasion for an extended meditation on the entirety of the subjective forces that shaped the revolutionary's brief life. Yashpal uses the revolutionary figure to demonstrate a variety of evolving political thought in the interwar years, especially the relation of older forms of anti-colonialism predicated on the simple experience of injustice to the new, unabsorbed, mutating ideas of international socialism. All three novelists extended the bare political ideal of anti-colonial revolution into new domains of heterosexual desire and modes of subjectivation, thus facilitating the cross-fertilization of the novelistic form between, on the one hand, conventional social realism and on the other hand, the many emergent and experimental modernist forms.

Dedication:

Kozhikode Veettil Bhaskara Menon
Sarojini Menon
Karumathil Govindan Kunhiraman Nair
Indira Nair
Rahul Govind
Ryan Parker

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This dissertation emerged out of the conversations in the many seminars I attended under Professor Vasudha Dalmia, whose stewardship has made a hospitable and stable home for Hindi literary studies in North America. My friends in the seminars include Rahul Parson, Greg Goulding, and Vasudha Paramasivan. It is also my pleasant duty to thank Professors Munis Faruqui and Gautam Premnath who painstakingly commented on various aspects of my thesis.

Note on Diacritics:

Diacritical marks are used only for the first instance of a non-English word of Indian origin. All subsequent appearances of the word occur without them. No diacritical marks are used for the names of individuals, places, language or other words of non-English origin that have a commonly accepted English spelling.

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# INTRODUCTION

## INTROSPECTIVE NATIONALISMS

Perhaps the most widely known historical event of twentieth century India is its liberation from British rule in 1947, and the most widely known architect of this liberation is Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948). What is less known is the opposition to Gandhian principles of non-violence from within the Indian nationalist movement. The nationalist struggle against the British, from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, wrestled continually with the moral issue of violence and dissent. It would seem that by the last decades of the struggle (the nineteen thirties and the forties), Gandhian non-violent struggle had won the moral and tactical victory. Yet, the popularity and moral legitimacy of Gandhi was continually challenged by several groups of nationalist figures. Many young underground revolutionaries were hanged by British authorities, foremost among them Bhagat Singh (1907-1931). There was widespread public outrage at the perceived refusal of Gandhi to mediate with British authorities over such punishment. Figures such as Bhagat Singh and his colleagues were mostly young men, but the movement also included prominent women who believed in the legitimacy of violence for the overthrow of British rule in India. To a large extent the question of violence did not stand on its own—it was linked to fundamental questions over the ultimate moral end of the nationalist struggle. By the nineteen twenties these questions were largely driven by socialist thought which had gained ground in India following the Russian revolution of 1917. However, this layer of socialist thinking stood on older layers of thought regarding questions of violence. From the late nineteenth century onward, nationalist thinking was charged with a deep sense of the injustice of colonial rule, an injustice which many believed legitimized the violent overthrow of the Empire.

This dissertation intervenes in two influential contemporary debates. One is the study of the late nineteenth century Hindi literary public sphere, pioneered by Dalmia[1]. Orsini[2] extended this study to the nineteen twenties and thirties. This dissertation supplements the work on the Hindi literary public sphere, with a focus on the nineteen thirties to the nineteen fifties. In addition to the changed historical time frame, this dissertation also attempts a greater engagement with the specific mechanics of the narratological and subjective properties of the novelistic form in the hands of extremist political actors and writers. This is in contrast to the more generic notion of the novel that the concept of the "public sphere" yields—for the novel in a purely "public sphere" discourse pays more attention to the social relation of the novel to numerous other contemporary novelistic productions, rather than concentrate on the inner world of individual novels.

The second debate with which this dissertation engages is the historiographical account of this period by Marxian writers Sarkar[3] and Habib[4] who seek to understand the driving force of

[1] Dalmia, Vasudha. *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[2] Orsini, Francesca. *The Hindi Public Sphere (1920-1940): Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[3] Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India, 1885-1947* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).

the emergent cultural consciousness of the second quarter of the twentieth century as deriving purely from the ideals of socialism. What this dissertation reveals is that it is hard to dis-embed the question of socialist consciousness entirely from older layers of nationalist thinking on questions like violence and moral subjectivity. There is also the compelling work of cultural theorists like Ashis Nandy.[5] This dissertation, following Nandy's oeuvre more generally, attempts a cultural and ideological understanding of the last phase of nationalism—chiefly nationalism wrestling with questions of violence, gender, and notions of self and community-making.

The first chapter of the dissertation starts with an analysis of the early ideologizations of violence as found in the influential 1882 Bengali novel *Ānanda Maṭh*.[6] The literary tradition that concerns itself with the moral question of violence continues well into the nineteen twenties setting leitmotifs that re-emerge continually in the following decades, as evidenced by the influential 1926 novel *Pather Dābi*.[7] The second chapter deals with the competing moralities of Bhagat Singh's brand of violent socialism and Gandhian non-violence. The question of competing moralities is then taken up by the Hindi novelistic tradition in the nineteen thirties. The remaining three chapters of the dissertation are concerned with three Hindi novelists—Agyeya (1911-1987), Jainendra Kumar (1905-1988) and Yashpal (1903-1976)—whose work explores the lives of revolutionaries branded as advocating violence by both the colonial state as well as mainstream Gandhian nationalist traditions. These three Hindi novelists, though not self-consciously a group, knew each other, as well as revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh. The protagonists of their novels live lives on the run, as they find themselves relentlessly pursued by colonial authorities. This lifestyle on the margins of respectable society results in their being unconventional in other matters as well—chiefly in their socialization with unmarried young women who were colleagues and activists for nationalist and progressive social causes. These relationships made them introspect with regard to their motivations, and contributed to their existential self-understanding. Thus a political radicalization resulted in a wider and more multi-dimensional radicalization that gave rise to new literary forms such as the first extensive autobiographies and memoirs in Hindi literature. These also included the first articulations of the complexities of romantic relationships beyond the normative "arranged marriages" that so characterized Indian society, and which both women and men of those decades sought to escape in pursuit of new ideals of romantic and sexual love. It is arguable that the dilemmas of the nationalist period—political as well as interpersonal—are key to any hope of understanding Indian society even up to our contemporary historical moment.

These novels have as their protagonists and their political world the figure of the revolutionary. The revolutionary political ethos defined itself against the dominant strain of both Gandhian Congress nationalism and institutional socialism. This revolutionary milieu was in debate with itself over almost every precept that it held dear—on the use and abuse of violence,

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[4] Habib, Irfan. *To Make the Deaf Hear: Ideology and Program of Bhagat Singh and his Comrades* (Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2007).

[5] See especially Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[6] Chatterjee, Bankimchandra. *Anand Math, or the Sacred Brotherhood*, trans. Julius Lipner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

[7] Chatterjee, Saratchandra, *Pather Dabi, or the Right of Way*, trans. Prasenjit Mukherjee (Delhi: Rupa and Company, 1993)

on the need for sacrifice and martyrdom, on the relationship of its leadership to the other foot soldiers of the revolution, and on the nature of organization when colonial persecution and torture made public recruitment exceedingly difficult. Intertwined with these political considerations, the revolutionary also had to understand herself on the axes of romance, livelihood, the social sanctions of the middle-class neighborhood and household, as well as the more existential question of understanding her life through fragmentary self-narrativization that always risked being depicted as criminal by the state, or licentious (in terms of the mixing of young men and women) by family and the religious culture. This dissertation relies chiefly on literary sources. In so doing it brings to the forefront questions of self-narrativization that were foundational to Hindi literature in the decades of the nineteen thirties to the nineteen fifties—following the age of the great Hindustani writer Premchand's (1880-1936) brand of meticulously observed social realism. But this dissertation also hopes to pose larger questions regarding the political and intellectual significance of these revolutionary figures. This is both in terms of their relation to available norms and constraints of organized socialism, as well as the questions they raised for mainstream nationalism and socialism with regard to permisible relationships between genders, between parents and children, as well as questions of how expansive the notion of freedom ought to be with regard to individual self-presentation and livelihood, romance, and political choice. Is there a fundamental immodesty and grandiosity in the very exercise of the first-person narrative?

The Bengali revolutionary communist leader Manabendra Nath Roy (1887-1954), who wrote a partial autobiography of the six years of his life spent as a revolutionary collecting arms against the British Empire, wrote in a letter from jail:

> I consider autobiography very unreliable as a source of objective truth. It is practically certain that nobody can ever write the truth and nothing but the truth about his or her intimate experience. I really don't understand why intelligent people rush to compose autobiographies. That itself is a matter of psychoanalytic study. Biography is a different proposition; but a self-composed biography? Well, with due deference to the honesty of the authors, I remain skeptical about the historical authenticity and psychological value of their work, which may otherwise be meritorious as literature. It is not a question of honesty or integrity. It is the great 'Unconscious'. Who could ever be free from the dictations of the Freudian God? Indeed, I dare express the iconoclastic opinion that to write autobiography is worshipping in the temple of that deity. Even the most truthful man packs his autobiography with lies. Otherwise, the venture could not be rationally explained. One able to think, able to express his thoughts, with something of value to add to the common stock of cultural attainments, can easily find so many other subjects to write about, without the handicap that one must feel while composing an autobiography. To talk about oneself? Well, it is a matter of taste, I suppose.[8]

In addition to political writing, and its reluctance to discuss the processes whereby the revolutionary is constructed over time, there seemed a similar inhibition in literature. Literature, intuitively, might have been a more hospitable affective soil for an investigation of autobiographic desire and nourishment. The most dominant Hindustani writer up to his death in the nineteen thirties, Premchand, never tried to write an autobiography or a large-scale first-person account of his life—Manabendra Nath Roy at least attempted a memoir of the more explicitly political aspect of his life. Nor did the generation of the Hindi *Chāyavād* (literally, of the shadows, and hence considered mystical or romantic) poets—Jayashankar Prasad (1889-

[8] Roy, Manabenra Nath. *M.N.Roy's Memoirs* (Bombay: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1964), 566.

1937), Suryakant Tripathi Nirala (1896-1961), Mahadevi Varma (1907-1987), Sumitranandan Pant (1900-1977)—explore the prose auto-narrative in extended fashion, though some, like Varma, Nirala, and Pant occasionally wrote autobiographical fragments at later points in their lives. The star of these poets as a group shone brightest from the nineteen twenties to the nineteen thirties, and ironically, they were often accused of being highly individualist. Neither did the widely read trio of Bengali novelists Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), and Saratchandra Chatterjee (1876-1938), write extended first-person public accounts even though each did investigate, as this dissertation discusses, the travails and self-accounting of this larger than life figure of the revolutionary in their novels. Unlike the Hindi novelists discussed, they did not participate directly in extremist political activity. In contemporary times much of the life of these Bengali novelists can be pieced together thanks to the publication of their private and public correspondence. It is significant that they did not see the autobiography as a genre worth directly engaging with. Proximate to autobiography, Hindi writers like Jainendra and Agyeya present a fictionalized autobiographic testament with a first-person narrator. Yet the self-narrativization seems more than the grammatical fact of the first-person due to the narrative being suffused with an almost desperate and extended sense of affect. It may be wondered if a third-person account would not have considerably diluted this total affect. Yashpal alone writes in the first-person in his memoirs, and yet these memoirs seem more remote in their affect and in this sense more third-person, rather like Manabendra Nath Roy's memoirs. Thus the problem of the relation of self-narrativization, affect, and perspectival form (first, second and third-person) remains a fundamentally open literary and political question throughout the dissertation.

## CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

The first chapter discusses the origins of the revolutionary sentiment and ethos in Bengal. It begins by evaluating what is arguably the foundational text of revolutionary nationalism—Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Anand Math* published in 1882. Several of the themes that resonate continually in the revolutionary archive are already inaugurated and developed in *Anand Math*, a novel which recounts the *sannyāsī* (renunciant) revolution of the late eighteenth century. The revolutionaries are called "children" in the novel. Instead of a reflex psychoanalytic hypothesizing, what is also in balance in this term is the rhetoric of absolute devotion, loyalty and love to the Motherland as it is being conceptualized in the time in the novel. In the eighteen eighties the idea of the nation as being an entity that is intimate and valuable, and as a mother, was not something that could be taken for granted—indeed this lack of faith is what the children-order constantly chastise the lay-citizenry with.

The novel invests a historical kernel of a hundred-year-old rebellion with the strongly anachronistic notion of the nationalism of the eighteen eighties. This polemicized articulation is perhaps not surprising, for a trans-regional nationalism was not a given at the time of Bankimchandra Chatterjee's writing. The Indian National Congress, the first official, nationwide representation of the interests of colonial subjects, was formed in Calcutta only in 1885 with the help of the Scottish official, Allan Octavian Hume (1829-1912). It was conceived as an explicit safety valve against the disaffection of colonial subjects. Indeed it is a difficult question of civic

science to understand what Indians were at this time—they were not citizens in the contemporary democratic sense of being able to vote, nor did they have fundamental or human rights guaranteed by a constitution. They did exist however as loose associations of bodies advancing varying kinds of interests. In the case of many members of Congress, this was to chiefly ask for greater representation in government bureaucracies, especially the powerful Indian Civil Service.[9] It is in this milieu that the address of *Anand Math* can be better appreciated. In the novel, the totality of the motherland is being addressed, a totality both in terms of temporal spread (the sequential whole of mother as she was, is, and will be) but also, perhaps more significantly, a totality in terms of the demand for individuals and groups to sacrifice everything, including if need be, their life for this cause. It is significant that the geographic spread and determinations of this mother as Motherland is not yet available, but rather, the mother is conceived in the older quasi-religious sense of *shakti* (power). Even the famous hymn *Vande Mātaram* (Praise to the Mother) sung throughout the novel images the Mother as luxuriance, abundance, and power, rather than geographical. This hymn can be contrasted to the later influential Bengali writer Rabindranth Tagore's hymn *Jono Gono Mono* (Thou art the ruler of the minds of people) first sung in Calcutta in 1911 that became the national anthem of India, which appropriates a geography for the nation by naming and emphatically itemizing it.

In *Anand Math* the rebellion is led by a group of renunciants—a leadership of Bengali Brahmins, who expect that at a propitious moment in their fight against tyranny, thousands of erstwhile apathetic "Indians" will enlist. There are clearly violent invocations against Islamic rule, and secular apologists for Bankimchandra Chatterjee believe that Islamic rule serves as a proxy for current British rule as he, being a civil servant, could not afford to alienate his masters. The chapter does not speculate on Bankimchandra Chatterjee's motivations or alibis. It is rather concerned with how he constructs the ideal and field of a revolutionary. The Children are not born warriors—it is clearly stated that they have left the life of the household for the cause of the Mother. It is also to be interpreted as a sign of their disinterestedness in political or material power that they insist on renouncing governance after their battlefield triumphs—as Gandhi wished to do at the moment of Independence.

Thus a revolutionary is one who sacrifices the intimacies of the conjugal household and the agricultural labor of the farm, for the work of a likely martyrdom. This martyrdom is for a notion of Mother-land that is simultaneously being abstracted and polemicized. The Mother has not become a definitive contemporary motherland yet. The description is more derived from classical Sanskritic imagery of verdant forest rather than an identifiably geography of the late nineteenth century—or the late eighteenth century, the internal time of the novel. The novel is also able to internalize criticisms of this fabrication of the Mother. There are skeptics represented within the novel who question every premise—be it the morality of the sacrifice of the conjugal and traditional duty for an abstracted notion of Mother, or the more pragmatic assumption of whether a band of Children, bound by courage alone, can take on the might of an entrenched military Empire. There is also a clear economic impetus to the actions of the Children—the famine. But the emotionality of the response is determined by a sense of the violation of the Mother, and of the ubiquitous political tyranny more generally. Though jurists like Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) had, as early as 1876, written the *Poverty of India,* the purely economic

[9] Seal, Anil. *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in Later Nineteenth Century India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

history of Indian decline, agnostic of an autonomous concept of moral and political tyranny, does not find representation in *Anand Math*. Rather, one has the notion of a privileged revolutionary insight into a history that is beyond the scrutability of any social science. This is familiar to readers of Walter Scott (1771-1832), the Scottish novelist whom Bankimchandra Chatterjee deeply admired. As Ian Duncan writes of Scott's revolutionaries: "Typically he flies across unknown country, falsely accused of treason, unwittingly shining the plight of those on the wrong side of historical power; his agency aloof from the meaning of events (yet expressing their essential, deadly truth) as he invests it in the pure motion of escape."[10] Equally, as in Scott, as also in many of the Latin American national romances, this universal trope of the revolutionary requires that he be rarely alone in his escape and indeed has a love interest which complements, nourishes, and validates his struggle: "What better way to argue the polemic of civilization than to make desire the relentless motivation for a literary/political project."[11] The international variations of the revolutionary semiotic are beyond the scope of this dissertation, however the universality of the trope needs to be called to attention as a site of possible research.

The chapter seeks to memorate the contribution of a fairly continuous Bengali intellectual tradition of the revolutionary from the eighteen eighties till the nineteen thirties before the focus shifts to Hindi literature picking up the threads of this tradition. In attempting to bring the revolutionary tradition up to the nineteen twenties, the chapter focuses briefly on the works of another representative and widely influential Bengali litterateur and activist—Saratchandra Chatterjee who likewise meditated on the question of the revolutionary. The point of the chapter is not to establish the continuity, staggered or otherwise, of the revolutionary tradition as a whole in Bengal *per se*, but rather to discuss certain persistent motifs of the revolutionary subject and his or her values as they appear paradigmatically between the eighteen eighties and the nineteen twenties. The motivation is to bring out salient thematic clusters with reference to the trope of the revolutionary—both the validation of the moral charisma of the revolutionary, and the internal critique of that moral charisma within the novels themselves.

The second chapter demonstrates the bi-directionality of literary and political discourse with reference to the figure of the revolutionary. It traces the life of the most famous of the revolutionaries in public imagination—Bhagat Singh (1907-1931). The chapter traces his growth in a family that was no stranger to revolutionary ideals. On a larger scale, Punjab was an especially charged province as it had a long history of martial values, including historical opposition to British rule from the eighteenth century (the British finally conquered the region in 1849). Punjab was also the province that was the most brutally exploited by colonial government in the First World War in terms of recruitment for service on global battlefields. Globally, the First World War inaugurated the assumption by the State of an almost permanent stage of emergency powers, including the right to assign treason to several newly conceptualized forms of dissent.[12] The British made special use of these emergency powers when they did not give satisfactory representation to Indian interests even after their success in the First World War. There was also the new ideology of mass communism on the horizon after the Russian

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[10] Duncan, Ian. *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 253.

[11] Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 27.

[12] Agamben, Giorgio. *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 19.

Revolution of 1917 that frightened colonial powers to an even greater degree. The older generation of revolutionaries like Manabendra Nath Roy began to interpret the triumph of the Russian Revolution as a harbinger of worldwide communism. To that generation's earlier dream of stitching together a scattered, semi-armed and semi-trained vigilante revolutionary army, there was now the added powerful and overarching motivation of a coherent ideological and internationalist explanation of the arrow of history. Such ideas affected Bhagat Singh and his revolutionary army. And yet the national context remained paramount and it was his frustration at the disbanding of Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement due to an outbreak of violence, and later, due to the state-sponsored assassination of the Congress leader Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) that spurred Bhagat Singh to political violence. The chapter studies his intellectual evolution and the interaction of his many nationalist interests (including the ideal of a multi-lingual polity) with his moral evolution (over questions of suicide, violence, and secular martyrdom). The chapter then discusses Gandhi's similar concern with moral questions as opposed to the Congress' more legalistic stance that utilized crowds and masses for the purely utilitarian purpose of extracting concessions from the British. Gandhi and Bhagat Singh, different though they were in many ways, shared a similar need to ground and explain their rhetoric in detailed, and individuated moral terms quite distinct from the abstracted Congress rhetoric of a generalized justice for the generalized masses. Hence they both profited from being forced into the introspections, and the socialities of the small inner-group—be they the residues of his "Army" in Bhagat Singh's case or the elite cadre of *satyāgrahis* (graspers of truth) in Gandhi's case. The self-reflections and intimacies of these groups were consolidated in the social site of the prison. It is not surprising that Gandhi wrote his autobiography in prison in these very years of the late nineteen twenties. He too, like Manabendra Nath Roy and Bhagat Singh, wondered if he was not being egotistical.[13] Self-narrativization of those deeply involved in politics did not come easily, as it seemed like an obvious competition between personal and extra-personal political value.

It was in Hindi literature of the nineteen thirties that the personal-political novel came to be articulated in its multi-axial form. Jainendra Kumar (1905-1988) wrote *Sunīta* in 1935. In *Sunita*, the character of the revolutionary, Hariprasanna, remarks that the storm that had overtaken the country only a few years earlier had passed. He was referring to the hanging of Bhagat Singh and the public outrage it engendered.[14] Yet the revolutionary, though now criminalized, disbanded and on the run, nevertheless had that old desire to "touch eternity".[15] What is significant in this confession, couched though it is in the grandiose terms that were familiar to readers of Saratchandra's *Pather Dabi,* is that despite such a desire, the everyday life of the revolutionary is one of constant agitation and self-doubt. The external world of the predatory police mirror his internal world, a world that oscillates between grandiosity and self-doubt. This differentiates the subjectivity of Hariprasanna from the earlier Hindi novelistic tradition. Subjectivity needs the cracks of doubt to smuggle itself in—the revolutionary characters in *Anand Math* and *Pather Dabi* were too armored against self-questioning. When doubt needed to be represented it was in the shape of an external character—hence the novel resolved itself into characters who either never devolved into self-doubt, or who remained

[13] Gandhi, Mohandas. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Trust, 1927), 7.
[14] Kumar, Jainendra. *Sunita* (Bombay: Hindi Granth Ratnakar Ltd., [1935] 1975), 28.
[15] Kumar, *Sunita*, 30.

permanent skeptics, or still others who were simply educated into the "truth" of the those who never had self-doubt. In historical actuality it is an open question of how much even a historical character like Gandhi was really willing to be changed by any other skeptical interlocutor. From his *Collected Works* it seems that his days of self-doubt were resolved in the eighteen nineties and the first decade of the twentieth century—his only real interlocutor seems to have been the Jaina poet Raichand Bhai. Bhagat Singh however seems to constantly evolve in his thinking, continually synthesizing new ideas—his voluminous reading and notetaking in prison testify to this.

The twist in *Sunita* however is that it is the encounter of the revolutionary with the household—that supposedly safe space in contrast to the prison—that precipitates the confusion in the mind of the revolutionary. Simultaneously, Sunita, the eponymous character of the novel, develops from a life of desultory wifely domesticity into illicit desire. Though this illicitness is represented not by her yielding to the revolutionary but by her being seduced by the equally illicit prospect of secret revolution. There is a clear debt in Jainendra's formulation of this seduction to the Bengali novelist Rabindranath Tagore's (1861-1941) 1916 novel, *Ghare Baire* (Home and the World). However, unlike Tagore, Jainendra does not editorialize. Tagore's novel ends with a clear indictment of the revolutionary and his need for violence. In *Sunita*, Jainendra avoids didacticism and Tagore's coerced ending and vilification, and allows instead the full confused play of desire. Revolutionary subjectivity allows no simple closure, and instead is suffused with an affect of sexual excitement and loss, a sentiment with which the reader is in sympathy, unlike Tagore's novel where there is little attempt to enter the complex subjectivity of the revolutionary figure. *Sunita* makes it plainly impossible to return to the simpler moral world of the Gandhian, or even Tagore's, monogamous asexual household. *Sunita* disallows further moralisms—it critiques the rigid, violent, ascetic revolutionary (who is celebrated in *Anand Math* and *Pather Dabi*). It also critiques the norm of the punished hypersexual, violent revolutionary of novels like *Ghare Baire*. This punished, hypersexual revolutionary has its antecedents in minor characters in *Anand Math* and *Pather Dabi*. In both these novels the hypersexual, violent revolutionary is punished to make way for the ideal of the detached, charismatic leader. In *Ghare Baire*, the hypersexual, violent character is punished to make way for Tagore's favored "non-violent" morality of a rural landed class. *Sunita* avoids the simple vilification of sexuality or violence, presenting both these axes as part of the protagonists' (male and female) horizon of self-exploration and freedom. In narratological terms, *Sunita* is more focused on plot than the development of the affective subjectivity of the characters—as the literary scholar Theo Damsteegt remarks of Jainendra's early work: "In most of these stories the narrator is clearly present, and there is an emphasis on actions, plot and climax that is lacking from the psycho-narration stories, while character-bound focalization is found in scattered, individual passages only."[16] It is in his next novel, *Tyāgpatra* (The Resignation), that Jainendra masterfully integrates plot and affect. The novel reflects the necessary impossibility and confusion of moral judgment in its highly compressed narrative of a beloved aunt who slips down the moral and social scale by leaving the household to live with a low-caste man. This is even as each slippage unveils the resilience of moral power that exposes the morality of the upper-caste and middle-class household as inherently intolerant and dogmatic. In this sense, the beloved aunt, like the externalized and ostracized revolutionary, serves as the Archimedean point that challenges the

[16] Damsteegt, Theo. *The Present Tense in Modern Hindi Fiction* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2004), 53.

ground of social and individual moral authority. This challenge cannot be met within the moral universe of the late nationalism of the nineteen thirties. It is this realization that under-girds the melancholy of the novel and makes certain that the malaise already present in the nineteen thirties, and expressed in the idiom of sexual and filial relation, will haunt Hindi literature for several decades. It is a common but inaccurate sentiment that it is the disillusionment of the post-1947, post-Partition era, represented by the *Nayi Kahāni* (New Story) movement in the nineteen fifties that comprehensively explored the fraught, anomic relationship between the sexes in modern, urban settings. In truth, the problem of sexual and marital incompatibilities was fully articulated by the nineteen thirties. Hence one must disagree with the following, commonly believed and influential formulation: "During the Independence Movement, a person breaking away from traditional society and religious codes could still feel the excitement of attachment to a cause which offered the promise of a better economic, political and social order."[17] The Hindi novelists discussed in this dissertation—Jainendra, Agyeya and Yashpal—all realized by the nineteen thirties and forties that even the success of the Independence Movement did not offer the ability to cohere the many competing and contradictory dimensions of social, sexual and political freedom. But perhaps the open articulation of weakness, disappointment, doubt, and shame testify to the growing literary and political confidence of the Hindi novelists in creating a more deeply developed characterology.

The fourth chapter, chiefly devoted to two novels of Agyeya, explores Agyeya's inheritance of Jainendra's work—not only in terms of the general thematic, but also in its formal and narratological conditions. Like *Tyagpatra*, Agyeya's first novel *Śekhar* begins with a childhood already vitiated by violence—the mother in both novels is not a nurturing figure, but one who is petty and violent in *Tyagpatra* and untrusting and contemptuous in *Shekhar*. The fathers are remote and do not emotionally protect the children or relatives in their care from the violence of the mother. One does not need the revolutionary to abruptly bring an external violence to the household as in *Sunita,* or as will be discussed in the last chapter, Yashpal's contemporaneous novel of the nineteen forties, *Dada Comrade* (Respected Comrade). Rather, the violence of the household in *Shekhar* nurtures the boy-revolutionary. The daydreaming, constantly questioning child seems to be an only child even though he does have siblings. What distinguishes him is his painterly eye for natural beauty, especially that of the mountains of both southern India and the Himalayas in the north. Some of his solitariness is eventually ameliorated in his friendships in college, and these friendships often occur in the context of his keen sense of social injustice in caste-ridden Madras in South India, and later, in the more direct sense of militant anti-colonialism in Lahore. Though Agyeya took a simpler, bolder political line by being associated with Bhagat Singh and his Army, in the novel, the slow precipitation into politics seems to occur in the same dream-like state of consciousness via which the narrative represents his childhood. Unlike Hariprasanna in Jainendra's *Sunita,* there is no extensive articulation of the appeal of the revolutionary life. In *Sunita*, Hariprasanna is initially represented as a renunciant in the culturally loaded manner of the characters of Bankimchandra's *Anand Math.* Shekhar however does not seem to have a clear self-consciousness of either the renunciant figure or the vehement anti-colonial figure of Bhagat Singh's Army. Instead, he ends up in jail the first time without seeking to—but he does not resist either. Though he meets several knowledgeable

[17] Roadermel, Gordon*, The Theme of Alienation in the Modern Hindi Short Story* (unpublished dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1968), 247.

figures in jail, it is clear that the only relationship of profound value to Shekhar is with his "cousin" (the exact relationship is unspecified) Shashi. Shekhar involves the married Shashi in his political actions and at the end of the novel Shashi dies in almost sacrificial manner, unable to bear the strain of the life of constant pursuit by the police. Thus a novel that began as the self-narrativization of a political prisoner ends as a love story with an exorbitant sense of loss and melancholia—reminiscent again of Jainendra's *Tyagpatra*. In Agyeya's second novel *Nadi ke Dvīp* (Islands in the Stream) these themes are re-enforced. Although the novel is published in a newly independent India, and has much to say of the prevalent opportunist political milieu (even of the supposedly idealistic communistic variety), the affective nub clearly lies in the radicality (and entailed pain) of the female character's sexual choices and lunge for freedom.

The last chapter focuses on the memoir, and some of the novels of the nineteen forties of the writer Yashpal (1903-1976). Yashpal was the most politically involved of the writers studied in this dissertation. He was a close friend of Bhagat Singh and integral to the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army. He grew up in the conservative school milieu of the *Ārya Samāj*—an important Hindu revivalist organization of the late nineteenth century that sought to purify Hinduism by returning to the ideals of the oldest extant Hindu tradition of the *Vedās*. In practice, the *Arya Samaj* was influential because it built an extensive network of schools that, over time, taught modern and traditional disciplines and did so in a puritanical atmosphere of absolute devotion to the *gurū* (teacher). Yashpal rebelled against this, and, like Agyeya, became further radicalized in Lahore where his path crossed with Bhagat Singh. He was jailed for several years and was only released on grounds of health due to the pleas of his wife (herself a prominent revolutionary) in the late nineteen thirties. The novel that made him widely known was *Dada Comrade*, published in 1941. The novel charts the evolution of the protagonist's political thought from atomized violence to a more international world-view of the polity that is increasingly enunciated in the communistic idiom of class-warfare and the need for union-led strikes and bargaining power. This does mark a shift from the older anti-colonialism represented by the elder characters in the novel whereby the anti-colonialism is precipitated by a fierce sense of visible injustice that the British perpetuated—a historical example is Bhagat Singh's outrage over the police brutality that led to the assassination of the respected Congress leader Lala Lajpat Rai's (1865-1928) and a literary example is the murder by the police of the family member of the protagonist Sabyasaachi in Saratchandra's *Pather Dabi*. In contrast, by the nineteen thirties, anti-colonialism rhetoric was not centered in personal outrage, but in a global-historical diagnosis of colonialism as impersonal economic exploitation. As the historian Ranajit Guha remarks of these different notions of insurgent anti-colonial violence:

> Two types of violence are clearly distinguished in one important respect. Unlike crime peasant rebellions are necessarily and invariably public and communal events. To generalize, the criminal may be said to stand in the same relation to the insurgent as does what is conspiratorial (or secretive) to what is public (or open), or what is individualistic (or small-group) to what is communal (or mass) in character.[18]

Yashpal's oeuvre represents exactly this attempted transformation from the criminalized, small-group revolutionary army to the more broad-based discourse of mass-nationalism expressed in an

[18] Guha, Ranajit. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 79.

increasingly socialist accent. Yet the mechanism of this transformation has not been explored in the historical scholarship of this period. This dissertation attempts to move the literary and historiographic debate from the Subject of mass-universalist nationalist identity—be it the large-group identity of Hindu or Muslim, peasant or capitalist, toward the different analytical axis of the individual and the small group—whereby, using literature as a comprehensive tool for introspection, a different accounting of political and narratological subjectivity can be isolated and synthesized.

It might be said of Yashpal's oeuvre, in contradistinction to Jainendra's and Agyeya's, that the romantic aspects do not overwhelm the political, and that the two elements are held in mutually beneficial, narratively productive, tension. His many novels written during the nineteen forties and fifties echo the array of anti-colonial political positions available in India and the merits and demerits of each. Importance is always given to the many dimensions of freedom beyond the narrowly political, such as sexual and literary freedom. In Yashpal, there is likewise the continuity of genres. It seems to make little difference if it is a novel, or a memoir, or a short story. The moral clarity of Yashpal's imagination is transparent, perhaps overly so, in contrast to the overt thematization of the intrinsic relativity and ultimate un-knowability of moral values in the works of Jainendra and Agyeya. Yet all three Hindi writers add something essential to the unfolding conversation in late nationalist India of the nineteen thirties and forties as well as in the (largely continued paradigm of) post-Independence nineteen fifties. They all affirm that the imagination of and faith in political freedom is indissociable from the narrativizing of individual and social introspection and affect. This imagination and faith is articulated chiefly through the novel-form, and it is in the novel, as deeply informed by its historical moment, that a deeper insight into that very historical frame can be conceptualized.

Peter Heehs offers an exhaustive account of the rich tradition of the Bengali revolutionary in the first decade of the twentieth century; his work centers on events like the Alipore Bomb Case and the first-hand accounts of figures such as Aurobindo (1872-1950), Barindra Ghose (1880-1959) and Jatindra Nath Banerji (1877-1930).[19] However, he does not seek to theorize the political as it emerges out of a tortured sexual morality as this dissertation demonstrates with regard to the Bengali and Hindi novels. My work also draws from the insight of Ashis Nandy in bringing together these two specific Bengali novels of the revolutionary, but it extends the analysis by a closer narratological analysis of the formulation of revolutionary subjectivity.[20] This dissertation also links the Bengali novelistic tradition to the Hindi novelistic tradition in the specific formulation of the new revolutionary subjectivity in a frame that distinguishes it from the analysis by the Hindi scholar Premsingh.[21] Bhagat Singh functions as an intermediate figure between the period of the Bengali and Hindi novels—Christopher Pinney has pointed out the pervasive presence of Bhagat Singh in popular visual memory even up to the present but has not sought to establish the lineages of that figure in the Hindi or Bengali literature of the pre-Independence period.[22]

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[19] Heeh, Peter. *The Bomb in Bengal: The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India, 1900-1910* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).
[20] Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism*, 1994.
[21] Premsingh, *Krānti vicār aur Hindi Upanyās: Agyeya, Yashpal aur Renu ke viśishta sandarbh* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2000).
[22] Pinney, Christopher. *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004).

In a final sense, it might be useful to distinguish the ontological facticity of history from literary characterizations though there are significant overlaps in terms of the narrativization and construction of both historical citizenship and literary subjectivity. What this dissertation aims to achieve is to bring the novels of these three Hindi writers into a political frame thereby casting light on the overlapping processes of the construction of both historically actual, as well as literarily imagined, political and narratological subjectivities. This elaborated form of the novel and the close readings offered here present an essential dimension of nationalism and provide a large canvas for an elaborated introspection of the ends and aims of an expansive political citizenship. They show how a reading of these Hindi novels reveals how inextricable the question of socio-sexual freedom is from a purely abstracted, disembodied, citizenship-based notion of freedom and justice.

# CHAPTER I

## STRANDS FROM THE BENGALI LITERARY HERITAGE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MORAL REVOLUTIONARY

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses a select strand at two instances in the Bengali literary genealogy—one in the eighteen eighties and the other in the nineteen twenties. This strand may be broadly determined as engaging in a construction of the figure of the moral revolutionary. Later chapters in the dissertation discuss the conjunction that this ideological strand of the moral revolutionary has for Hindi Literature of the late nineteen thirties to the late nineteen fifties. The primary texts discussed in this chapter are the 1882 novel *Anand Math* by the preeminent Bengali novelist of the nineteenth century Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894), and the widely read Saratchandra Chatterjee's (1876-1938) 1926 novel *Pather Dabi*. It may be mentioned that the most esteemed Bengali writer of the first half of the twentieth century Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) also wrote at least two major novels centered on the theme of the revolutionary in different decades of his long literary career–his 1915 novel *Ghare Baire*[1], and his 1934 novel *Char Adhyāy*.[2] This chapter is not making the argument that this figure of the revolutionary is the most significant protagonist in the oeuvres of any of these three writers, or even that there is a necessary, continuous or exclusive fascination with the revolutionary—in fact, the chapter hopes to demonstrate a variety of engagements with this figure. But the chapter does hope to establish that there is a persistent fascination with the figure of the revolutionary over a period of several decades in the Bengali novelistic tradition, and that the three most cherished writers in the language felt the need at least once to extensively engage this figure.

This chapter discusses *Anand Math* and *Pather Dabi*. It seeks to demonstrate how the claims of politics and morality intertwine from the late nineteenth century, and how this intertwining, albeit with modifications and developments, persists over time in the Bengali novelistic canon. The two sections in the chapter engage each of the two novels to discern the constant transaction of plot-point within the novels, to the literary anxieties around the narrative construction of the revolutionary. For the revolutionary can only be constructed in relation to the very anxieties that such a figure poses to the more conservative viewpoints that are given voice within the novel itself, through secondary characters, or situations in which the protagonist finds him (and often, her) self.

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[1] Tagore, Rabindranath. *Ghare Baire, or The Home and the World*, trans. William Radice (Delhi: Penguin Classics, 2005).

[2] Tagore, Rabindranath. *Chaar Adhyaya, or Four Chapters*, trans. Rimli Bhattacharya (Calcutta: Srishti Publications, 2002).

## *ANAND MATH:* THE INITIAL ARTICULATION OF THE MORAL REVOLUTIONARY

In tracing the origins of a self-reflective anti-colonialism in Bengal, it is possible to go back at least as far as Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Anand Math*, published in 1882. Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) was born in the Naihati region of Bengal, an important railway crossroad. His father was a civil servant who ensured that his son received the best education (including at Presidency College, Calcutta) and would follow the father's footsteps into the civil service. Civil service labor was however a mixed blessing—Bankimchandra was to become intimately exposed to the prejudices of the colonial rulers.

This significance of Bankimchandra Chatterjee's understanding of anti-colonialism lay in his insight that beyond the basic fact of present-day colonial administration, British rule invoked fundamental questions about the very nature and justifications of governance in the South Asian polity. Indeed, for Bankimchandra, the syndrome of British rule indicated an urgent need for a larger investigation that India had to initiate with its own political and moral traditions and past. This investigation needed to take place even as the geographic and administrative region loosely called India is simultaneously engaged with the British in the contemporary historical moment of the late nineteenth century of which he, as colonial bureaucrat, was a part of. One of the likely sources of the novel are the few lines in the influential colonial administrator William Wilson Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal*, first published in 1860.[3] Hunter's account is significant for many reasons—he was among the first to reveal, to great controversy, that Hindus were a minority in Bengal. In Hunter's work, two separate incidents are mentioned in roughly the same time frame, though it is a moot point whether they were as causally related as Bankimchandra was to represent them in his novel. One incident is the famine of 1768-70, and the other involved the general alleged lawlessness of the time. Thus Bankimchandra Chatterjee likely uses a hundred year incident to make a point about the present moment of the late nineteenth century. It is not simply a matter of updating the past to make it relevant to the present, but rather to underscore the fact that the question of revolt against tyranny needs to be understood in a manner sensitive to the historical traditions of dissent in India. This dissent might take place under the leadership of renunciants leading a lay army of followers—and this tradition of revolt preceded British rule in India.[4] What is odd is that Bankimchandra gives leadership to a group of people never associated, up to that historical point, with violent anti-colonialism—the upper-caste Bengali. Indeed this group of the upper-caste Bengali was, like Bankimchandra himself, part of the minor bureaucracy that facilitated Empire. This was unlike, for example, the many peasant and millenarian movements that did object with violence to the Empire throughout the nineteenth century.[5] Yet Bankimchandra's fantasy was perhaps prophetic—in the next few decades, many of these upper-caste Bengalis would form a large part of the revolutionaries who would seek to overthrow the Empire with violence. Some of the credit for that transformation would be due to the inspirational example of *Anand Math* itself.

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[3] cited in Lipner, *Anand Math, or the Sacred Brotherhood*, trans. Julius Lipner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27. All translations used for this novel are from Lipner.
[4] Pinch,William. *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[5] Guha, Ranajit. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

The Prologue of the novel begins within the setting of a vast, dense, dark forest, a primeval space where "human nature" never ventured—but this very setting provides the context for an all-too human cry that foregrounds desire: "Will my heart's desire never be fulfilled?"[6] After hearing thrice this human/inhuman question, a human/inhuman answer replies as a question—this encounter then becomes a question and answer session:

> What will you pledge in return?
> "The pledge is my life, my all", was the reply.
> "Life is trifling; anyone can give their life".
> "What else is there? What else can I offer?"
> And the answer came: Dedication. (130)

The word used for dedication is *bhakti*, a rich word with a millennia worth of connotations, both of the Sanskritic and post-Sanskritic traditions that would not be possible to investigate here—but there is a useful discussion of the term in Lipner's Notes (235). The question of the value of human life haunts the entirety of the novel. In this Prologue is already seen the intersections of desire, death and dedication that is so important to the entirety of the revolutionary path. On the one hand, life is trifling in the sense that it is individual, unreflective—the very context of *Anand Math* is the time of famine, where death was pervasive. On the other hand, life becomes valuable only when it is mediated by concepts of an absolute dedication and the corresponding "inhumanity" or ruthlessness with which it can look at its own life or another's. This new concept of life then paradoxically requires you to sacrifice that life—made valuable now in and through its dedication—at short notice, and for greater causes, for the call of a cause greater than that of a single individual. And yet, it must not be forgotten that this whole conversation is bound by the original question of the fulfillment of the heart's desire. Bankimchandra has already enshrouded the question of human dedication in a metaphysic with the highest stakes and demands—one that straddles both desire and death.

The first chapter helps date the time and place of the novel to a village in Bengal around 1770 where, due to famine, there is simply no one about, and the normal transactions of everyday life—from the poorer households, to the wealthy mansions—has largely been terminated due to death, disease and a pervasive poverty. One of the last surviving men of these mansions is a Mahendra Simha, with his wife Kalyani and a baby daughter, who are debating if it makes sense to leave the house with its ancestral property, to looters, as they try to make their way, again amidst looters, to towns where there might be some relief. Arming themselves, they finally decide to leave. On the way, Mahendra Simha leaves Kalyani for a brief while in search of cow's milk for the baby. But in the time he is away, she is kidnapped by "black, gaunt, shadowy bandits"(134). The bandits take her deep into the beautiful forest. Nature, strangely in this time of famine and human loss seems to be unusually fertile. Is Bankimchandra suggesting that famines were caused by administrative mismanagement rather than natural causes, in the manner that his contemporaries like the economist and jurist Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) were suggesting in their theories of the drain of wealth from fertile India? At any rate, in the novel, the bandits who had kidnapped Kalyani end up fighting each other—for some say that stealing Kalyani's ornaments makes little sense when it is rice that is needed. They then demonically

[6] Chatterjee, *Anand Math*, 129.

conclude by saying that it is the plump baby they must feast on. But by then, in the midst of the clamor, Kalyani has fled with the baby. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya concludes the chapter with a moralist observation: "In certain circumstances, human beings become nothing but ravening beasts" (135). Kalyani, struggling in the dark of the forest, calls out to her childhood deities: "Where are You, whom I worship and revere daily, and with whose help I've been able to enter even a forest like this! Where are You, Lord?" (136). And then, miraculously, this call receives a response, as she hears a chant invoking similar gods. She knows then that she is amongst benign, perhaps even beneficent presences—the recognizable names of gods certify both beatitude but also the simpler traits of recognition and trust. Kalyani, on the verge of fainting, thinks in her trance-like state, that this voice may belong to the divine messenger, Nārada, of the Hindu epics. But it is a real person—in contrast to the dark gauntness of the earlier bandits, this one is the "very form of the sage—bright", and Kalyani, in some instinct, attempts to pay this person—perhaps the "deliverer" of the Prologue—reverence before she faints (136). She wakes to find herself in a large monastery, in presumably the same forest, and is addressed as "My child" by the same sage-like form, before being fed and told that she is safe. After the nightmare of the forest and the near cannibalization, she is in the dream-like state of a nourished and safe infant—but perhaps this is also the state of the reverential wife who drinks the water that the sage touches with his feet—for she does refuse to eat without news of her husband (138). The sage even knows her husband Mahendra Simha, and promises to bring news of him.

From subsequent chapters, it is learnt that Mahendra Simha had been embroiled in a fight with British sepoys and had been imprisoned by them. Two of the monks from the monastery where Kalyani finds herself, Bhabhananda and Jibananda, eventually find Mahendra Simha, and rescue him (141-143). Mahendra Simha asks these monks who they are, but they remain silent at first, promising only to take him to his wife and child. Later though, in the hours of moonlight, they began to sing among themselves of a mysterious mother, "rich in fruit, verdant in the harvest fair" (144). This is the hymn, *Vande Mātaram* (Praise to the Mother), which was to become historically famous among later revolutionaries as an ardent invocation of the motherland.

The reader too is educated into this process of the symbolization of the nation as mother through the questioning, puzzled and skeptical character of Mahendra Simha. Mahendra Simha expostulates:

> But that's our land, not a mother! [to which] Bhabananda replied, "We recognize no other mother…we say that our birthland is our mother. We've no mother, father, brothers, friends, no wives, children, houses or homes. All we have is she who is rich in fruit". (145)

A certain irony—that this conversation and conversion is occurring in the time of famine and the motherland is thus supposed to be rich in fruit—seems perhaps to be lost, as also the fact that despite the varied disaffiliations to mothers, fathers and so on, there is a powerful re-emergent affiliation to the monastery and the renunciant order itself which organizes around the theme of Mother. The liability of the famine is thus understood and responded to differently in the novel. At one end, as with Kalyani's captors, there is the possibility of the deterioration into cannibalism with its implicit assumption that human nature is indeed capable of deteriorating into the order of the savage in a time of distress. On the other end, there is the emergence of the

very phenotype of the revolutionary order with its fiercely anti-tyrannical nature, with it's corresponding political interpretation of the famine—one which sees the famine itself as less a natural, cyclical occurrence of rural Bengal, and more an effect of a neglectful and callous political leadership.

The song in praise of the Mother remains cryptic, and contradictory of the historical situation—and this may explain some of its fervent aspirational and conative powers:

> Powerless? How so, Mother,
> With the strength of voices fell,
> Seventy millions in their swell!
> And with sharpened swords
> By twice as many hands upheld!
> To the mother I bow low
> To her who wields so great a force…
> And drives away the hostile hordes!
> In our bodies the living force is thine! (145)

The full force of the generative contradiction stems from the strong mother/weak mother interaction overlaying the mismatch between past history and the fantasmatic future imagined from the vantage point of the present and its melodic enunciation: "You are speech, to you I bow" (145). For the mother (and thus the children under her nurturing vigilance) would seem to be weak, invaded and emaciated in this time of famine and tyrannical governance—the fact that the country has been brutally pillaged has been stressed time and again in the novel. Yet it is this very state of pillage that is to be overturned trans-formatively—"bearer of the tenfold power" (145), not just as remediation but into the very opposite—i.e. fertility and abundance. Thus famine has to be converted into fertility and emaciation into glorious speech—with this speech being the very instantiation of freedom. Later in the novel there is again this transformative moment where the Mother-as-she-is makes the leap in and through the revolutionary's dedication (as discussed in the Prologue) into the Mother-as-she-can/will-be. The devotee/revolutionary's dedication is the very engine and motivation of history and the freedom from present emaciation and violation.

Mahendra Simha however remains the skeptic who perhaps stands in for many contemporaries of Bankimchandra—this figure of the respectful skeptic of the revolutionary path is also found in later Bengali and Hindi novels that have revolutionaries as protagonists. Mahendra Simha asks if the revolutionaries must indulge in wanton plunder, to which the reply is that they have the right to plunder the King who does not look after his people (146). There is the contrast of the fertile, abundant Mother-earth with the aloof paternal King—but equally, there is the tension of what actions may be deemed criminal (plunder) if the political ground is itself being called into question. There is an ongoing attempt to conscientize Mahendra into a newer, more just, more demanding, and perhaps more fantastic action— that of rebellion. To further his case, one of the revolutionaries Bhabhananda cites the long and recurrent histories of other kingdoms that remain better off in this time of famine—"Magadha, Mithila, Kashi, Kanchi, Delhi and Kashmir" (146). It is an odd, mythic list—ancient, Sanskritic, spilt over from epics, and with little clear historical reference, except perhaps for Delhi, to the contemporary powers of either the time of the novel, the seventeen seventies, or the eighteen eighties, the time of Bankimchandra's writing. It seems to certainly evade, or perhaps even repress, reference to the

major current anti-Empire polities (for example, the Marathas and the Sikhs) of large parts of the subcontinent for significant parts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

When Mahendra Simha asks more logistical questions— for example, how many of these revolutionaries have been recruited, the only reply proferred is a non-specific "thousands" (147). The revolutionaries argue that a small number was all the British had at the Battle of Plassey in 1757—the Battle of Plassey was a turning point in Indian history and the unexpected victory of the relatively small British army established Britain as India's preeminent power. This logic is also found in many later revolutionary novels. The argument remains that the significance in the revolutionary's struggle is not in the absolute number of recruits, which may likely be small, but rather in this small group being in a position of leadership in key strategic battles whose triumphs would have great symbolic power. Mahendra Simha however continues to express doubts as to whether the Bengali revolutionaries can take on, even symbolically, the physical and military power of the British. It is then that the revolutionaries speak of their other, moral strengths—the strengths of self-discipline and renunciation. This renunciation is, however, temporary—they plan to return to their households after the "job is done" (148). Mahendra Simha, in an act of resistance and continued skepticism, and as a proxy of perhaps some still unconvinced reader, refuses to take the initiation—for an initiation would mean that, at least for the time of the task, he would not be allowed to see his wife and daughter, and he felt unwilling to relinquish these attachments.

Later chapters reveal the strict and ritualized hierarchy of the monastery (148). The head monk Satyananda takes Mahendra Simha to a "hall of vast proportions" (149)—again, this might seem profligate in a time of famine, as is the later description at the end of the chapter of the "heaps of gold" (151). There he sees a statue of the Hindu deity Vishnu, with other deities like Lakshmi and Saraswati (these latter are often taken to be the goddesses of wealth and learning respectively). The arrangement of the deities corresponds to no known monastic or iconographical tradition. In an adjacent chamber, there was another deity: "a beautiful image of the Goddess as Bearer of the Earth, the '"mother-as-she- was"…perfectly formed and decorated with every ornament… one who subdued the wild beast" (149). The next deity is Kali, the "mother-as-she-is". This representation of her as garlanded with skulls and crushing her Lord underfoot is traditional and derived from the *Devi Mahātmya* (247). The last deity, mother-as-she-will-be, is again, shown as '"crushing her enemies"', and is again, a non-sectarian and hence non-traditional iconography. Mahendra Simha interrupts the otherworldly reverie by insisting on seeing his this-worldly wife Kalyani and daughter. Meanwhile, in another chamber of the novel, and suspended in the time of the plot, Kalyani, like the good Hindu wife, has still not eaten, as she is still waiting for her husband. After escorting Mahendra Simha to Kalyani, Satyananda remarks to his fellow monks, in a relatively prosaic manner especially considering it is after the aforementioned visions of the deities, that Mahendra's wealth will be useful to their cause, "but unless he becomes a wholehearted devotee of the mother, do not accept him" (151).

The meeting of Mahendra Simha and Kalyani, despite the explicit emotionality of the reunion, does not return them to simple conjugality, domesticity or parenting. Indeed, Kalyani soon recounts a dream of a beautiful, weeping, four armed female form calling her away from her husband and demanding a total filial surrender: " I am husband, mother, father, son, daughter" (153-154). This is rather like the deity Bhabananda had imagined earlier before singing the *Vande Mataram* hymn. Kalyani goes on to tell Mahindra that everyone dear to her,

"my parents and all our friends have died in these awful times" (156). In a rapid series of events of high melodrama, she goes on to take poison as she thought that her child would die from some poison the child had mistakenly taken earlier. With Kalyani's seeming death, and the violent and painful sundering of the tie of conjugality, Satyananda finds himself holding Mahendra in "his arms", becoming his sole protector—thus indirectly fulfilling the dream Kalyani had of a single figure being this filial totality of mother, father and the ground of all dedication (157).

The revolutionaries are soon engaged in war with the State and there are many scenes of gratuitous insensitivity on the part of the State, especially with regard to its treatment of sepoys and prisoners (158). The revolutionaries seem protected by little except the constant chanting of the god Hari's name. But Satyananda too seems extraordinarily and concretely insensitive. He asks why Mahendra Simha is sad and angry at the fate of the bodies of his wife and child being devoured by jackals. Satyananda adds that if he had taken the vow of the Order, he would have had to sacrifice his wife and child anyway (159). Yet, when Satyananda rescues Mahendra from prison, Mahendra concedes that Satyananda is indeed a holy man with magical powers (160). This authoritarian magicality of Satyananda is further confirmed when one is shown Jibananda, another important monk, repeating to himself: "The first thing he had learnt form him [Satyananda] was to follow instructions" (160).

Jibananda ignores the emaciation of the people all around him, and the beauty of the dark, rich forests, when he rescues Mahendra Simha's daughter who had survived the poison. He takes the child to his village-house where he meets his seventeen-year old sister Nimai, who having lost a child, and whose husband had wandered off with the last of the rice, offers to rear this child. Domestic motherhood, even if often thwarted or threatened, is thus never far away, even amidst the straitened circumstances of the deathly famine with its destruction of both economic and filial propriety. It is the husband-figure that seems more severely compromised—not only Nimai's absconded husband, but Jibananda himself who says that he cannot meet his wife, who was also living with Nimai, as he has killed too many people (164).

Jibananda's wife is described in elevated tones—youth, beauty, and even though "oil, food and clothing may have been in short supply, her glowing, incomparable beauty shone even through those patched-up clothes… food may have been scarce, yet her body had an exquisite charm … an ineffable sweetness and nobility, warmth of heart and devotion" (164-165). It can be said from the narrative investment in this description that this woman will play an important role in the novel. Indeed she has the distinct signage of the revolutionary figure that will occupy Bengali literature till at least the figures of Sabyasachi and Sumitra in Saratchandra Chatterjee's *Pather Dabi*. The revolutionary who stands amidst want and poverty, yet who is magically, in god or goddess-like fashion, transcendant of their surroundings—in both his or her sheer physical beauty, as well as their seemingly serene health, self confidence, self-contentment and ability to be always articulate. These revolutionaries are indeed found amongst the people, and purportedly exist for them but do not seem by them or of them—an aristocracy of spirit and beauty is assiduously maintained and deployed throughout the narrative.

This woman, Jibananda's wife, is called Shanti, and she is twenty-five years old. The sight of his wife, who comes out to greet him despite his guilt at having killed so many, brings tears to Jibananda's eyes, tears that must immediately be wiped away, for, as Shanti says, as if on cue, already playing the heroic part: "Shame on you, don't cry. I know you're crying because of me, but you mustn't. I'm quite happy with the arrangements you've made" (165). She then says

that "when you have fulfilled your vow… [you can] start loving me again"(166). Perhaps for the reader's sake, and echoing Mahendra Simha's question, Jibananda repeats the stakes: "on the one side there's duty, wealth, pleasure, salvation. The concerns of this world, my vow and its religious rites… and on the other side—there's you"166). A traditional trope of having to choose worldliness or the spiritual life has now mutated and forms the dramatic under-girding of the plot—love counterbalances both worldliness and vows. When Jibananda wavers in this great dilemma, Shanti cries: "Shame! You are a hero! ... How can you abandon a hero's duty for the sake of a lowly woman?" (166).

Shanti's earlier life, which the author describes in the next chapter, includes her preference for male attire, companionship, and knowledges like Sanskrit literature (171). Her parents having died young, she had joined a monastery, and married Jibananda. She learns from wandering groups of ascetics, collectivites that had strange values:

> The ascetics of those days were not like the ascetics of today. They stayed in groups, and were well educated, powerful, skilled in combat, and proficient in various other qualities. They were generally hostile to the king in one respect—they lived by looting his revenues. Any sturdy lad that fell into their hands they would abduct, educate and initiate as a member of their own order. This is why they were known as kidnappers of boys. (172)

This Order adopts Shanti despite knowing that she was a woman, and "as ascetics are generally in control of their senses, no one said anything"(173). Yet, control of the senses is neither facile nor universal, and one teacher was attracted to her. She had to knock him unconscious in self-defense (173). She returns to Jibananda and they feel desire for the first time, but this interferes with the vow he had meanwhile taken to serve the revolutionary's ideals, and so he decides to leave her for the time being. Shanti then undergoes another transformation, backwards perhaps, into the more traditional role of a patient, domestic, waiting wife. But after the meeting described earlier in the section, when he brings Mahendra Simha's child, she reshapes herself back again into the ascetic-warrior by trimming her tresses into the ascetic's matted locks (175). Later, as only the elite of the Order are able to, and in the manner of warriors from the epics, she strings an unyielding bow—intervening domesticity had not inhibited or cost her any of her martial training or will (183). Her joining the Order is however questioned as coming in the way of the men, and some men even go on to make the old allegation that the women's path is that of the householder (184). To this, she replies:

> Is it sinful? The wife follows her husband… If the code of the revolutionaries call this sinful, then the code itself is sinful… Could Rama have become a hero without Sita? Tell me how many times Arjuna married…who drove Arjuna's chariot while he fought the Yadavi army from mid-air? ... I am here to practice virtue, not to attend to my husband. (184)

This role indeed does seem to transform her desire, and she says to her husband Jibananda: "If you continue to believe I'm a woman—many make the mistake of thinking a rope a snake—then you should sit apart from me" (187). The transformation from the householder to the warrior is simultaneous and indissociable with the transformation from womanly wifehood to a male companionship and the fraternity of the Order.

Meanwhile the ascetics are being defeated, and Satyananda offers the diagnosis that this is due to the lack of modern weapons. He then thinks up a plan to make weapons in the

monastery using Mahendra Simha's money. Here again, there is no guilt at using a person if the cause is just, and if the punishment for failure in the cause is an afterlife of permanent hell (176). Satyananda indeed initiates Mahendra Simha even as he tells Mahendra Simha that those who take the vow will not be allowed to touch their filial kin and caste. In Mahendra Simha's case this would be his daughter who Jibananda rescued and who is still alive (178-181). This is an early example of caste identity being seen as sectarian whereas the larger Hindu-Bengali ideological complex of the numerous Hindu deities that were the very milieu of the Order being seen as more national-universalist, or nouveau pan-Indian—this issue remains central to nationalism for several decades. For the Order explicitly recognizes no caste, and anyone who is willing to make the great sacrifice of domestic life is in theory welcome. Yet all the deities are from the Hindu tradition even if the iconography is inconsistent with any particular sect—and the leadership seems entirely made up of Bengali upper castes.

To return to the novel, Mahendra Simha is finally resolved to take his vow, in the manner Satyananda requires: "Only he who has given up everything is fit for this task… Will you be able to lay down your life if you keep thinking of your daughter?" (178). Satyananda goes on to explain the fundamental hierarchy:

> There are two kinds of revolutionaries… Those who have been initiated and those who have not. The latter are either householders or beggars. They appear when its time to do battle. And after they've received their share of the loot or some reward, they go away. But those who are initiated have renounced everything. They are the leaders of our Order… those who don't aspire to temporal power. (178-180)

Arguably this hierarchy continues throughout the revolutionary movement and its affiliate ideologies for even Mohandas Gandhi in the twentieth century would insist on separating the satyagrahi from the mass Congress worker. There is thus an elite corps, a leadership, one based on an alleged meritocracy achieved through a willingness to perpetually sacrifice for the cause or at least until the cause culminates in victory or death.

Mahendra Simha still occasionally relapses into being a skeptic. He wonders if violence is particularly anathema to the prominent Hindu sect of Vaishnavism, from which at least some of the deities of the Order are drawn. Satyananda counters that this Vaishnavism, derived from the Bengali saint Chaitanya (1486-1534), is an imitation of Buddhism, that Vishnu was an active, demon-slaying god and that the "Lord is not only love, but is infinitely powerful" (179). Perhaps this argument parallels Bankimchandra's contemporary Balagangadhar Tilak (1856-1920), who too interpreted traditional Hindu texts like the *Bhagavad Gita* in a more activist, this-worldly and historical mode.

When, in the novel, the rains finally return to the land of the famine, it does little good as the economy has been fundamentally altered and people are unable to go back to their old life in the village. The mass cadre of the Order continue to live by plunder and by the conversion of the people into their military philosophy. This army grows so powerful that the British were finally forced to take steps to quell the rebellion, even though Shanti tells an English commander that the rebellion is not directed against his people (192). After the military successes, she goes on to discuss with her husband Jibananda, how they both may retain their present celibate relationship and increases their "virtue", now that the explicit motive for the creation of the Order has been taken care of—there is no famine any longer. They both believe that as marriage is for all lives to come they can forfeit pleasure and romance in this for the next life and that their present love has

as its consummation not the fruits of desire but this very feeling and moment of love itself (193). There is the sense that the saved virtue/sacrifice is offered as principal to be returned with interest in the great task of the battles at hand that the revolutionaries are still to fight—what is at stake in these final battles is left unclear. This attitude is contrasted to another ascetic Bhabananda who is attracted to Mahendra Simha's wife Kalyani who had, as it turns out, survived the drinking of poison. Despite his vow of celibacy, the sight of Kalyani makes him remember the older Vaishnava codes that condoned polygamy (199). He also admitted to wishing to disregard the present ascetic codes –"[the codes] choke you to death" (199). He wishes to marry her for he believes that the "wife is a partner, a support in virtue" (196). He nevertheless knows that the only real solution for his illicit desire is martyrdom in the impending battle—and Kalyani avers, harshly, that she will indeed remember him, but only as a sinner (198). Many traditional notions of male heterosexual desire are explicitly, and without ratiocination, condemned. Indeed Bhabananda's pain and consequent feelings of suicidality are not validated by his leader Satyananda who simply enjoins him to do his "duty" (201). Stylistically too, Bhabananda's pain and desire is represented by the dense impenetrability of the jungle where the monastery is housed—the jungle, serving as metonym for nature in the novel is this labile palimpsest on which all varieties of emotion can be represented, from the serene classical image of frolicking deer, to the "wild beast-- impassable, hushed" notes of the heart enmeshed in desire, doubt and grief (200). Bhabananda's desire is more threatening to the Order than the layman Mahendra Simha's skepticism, as Bhabananda is already an initiate of the Order—it raises the question of whether the initiation is a sign of achieved spiritual privilege, or merely the permission to seek spiritual privilege.

It is in this favored jungle—a kind of motherland within the motherland where the revolutionaries find both refuge and sustenance and are truly at home in the knowledge of its intimate topography—that Bhabananda eventually does win a battle, by bravely stealing the enemy's cannon (206, 209). Though Bhabananda had fought bravely and could have retreated in his victory, his inner turmoil in regard to his desire for Kalyani causes him to stay on and fight till death, chanting *Vande Mataram*, and telling his accompanying monks to commend his courage to Satyananda and Kalyani. The only resolution of illicit desire is heroism and death.

The site of the jungle also sets the almost religious tone for Shanti's conversation with Satyananda regarding her and her husband Jibanananda's likely deaths and the question of how they must at all costs still perform their respective "duties" (202). This courageous and openly avowed idée fixe regarding duty has Satyananda remarking: "I shall die, and so will Jibananda, and Bhabandanda and everyone else—perhaps even you, child. So far I have called only our country Mother… Now I call you Mother too" (202). A war is thus made inevitable with its imminent and veritable harvest of "ten thousand' martyrs"—this is especially as these warriors are rendered powerless by the enemies' cannons (202- 203). Paradoxically, Bhabananda's courage finally gives them victory, but no one is willing to govern the liberated province as Satyananda furiously states: "None of us are kings. We are renouncers! … But now that our task is accomplished, [we] can go back to living as householders" (212). It would seem that the ideology of the ascetic revolutionary serves chiefly as a speculative instrument for a leadership to arouse the horde of the ten thousand followers. After victory, such an instrument would be surrendered as would the real instruments of war, and the leadership would disband to return to

their earlier role of householders—or, perhaps Bankimchandra, the native bureaucrat, recognizes the limit to his claims.

It is extraordinary in the terms of the novel that this process is to be accomplished without concern for the possible greed some may have for political power or material wealth. This renunciation would be the overt ideological message of the sacrifice, the *bhakti* (dedication) referred to in the Prologue. There is little accounting for the seeming lack of difficulty of battle-scarred revolutionaries simply returning to an older form of domestic life—as if the intervening history was transparent and merely a corrigible and regrettable aberration. The values of an ethical governance, as opposed to an instantaneous revolt against tyranny, does not seem to exist—the ethics lies only in two spaces, either in the justice of the revolt or the hereditary value of the householder—again, is this Bankimchandra's consciousness of writing as a bureacrat in the colonies? All governance is seen as corrupting—the seduction of power and lust. Satyananda had clearly spelt out his understanding of his values and role: "When you conquer the city you can crown anyone you wish king, but know for sure that I will not change my celibate state for any other" (212). Predictably enough, this move away from taking responsibility for later stages of the uprising by Satyananda leads to gratuitous loot by the lower cadre—there is anarchy in the violence that the leaderless "revolutionaries roaming in bands" let loose on unarmed townspeople (215). It is the British who have to put down this mobile rebellion against an enemy that was using classical guerilla warfare, to use a term coined later—a tactic where the mass cadre remained pervasive in the jungle and did not engage the British directly but rather dispersed whenever the British army came only to reassemble and claim territory as soon as the British left. There follow many brave incidents whereby Shanti shows her skilled horsemanship with the British army (222). But it is ultimately a doomed cause due to immensely superior British military technology that mows down the hymn-singing revolutionaries:

> But the sound of this mighty song was drowned in the English cannonade. Hundreds of revolutionaries lay there on the hill, killed or wounded, together with their horses and weapons…the English thunderbolts began to pour forth, making a mockery of the Children's sacrifice of their lives. Like ripe paddy under the farmer's sickle, their army was being cut to pieces. (224)

Still, even in the midst of this there is the relentless search for truth and meaning that characterizes the leadership, perhaps in contrast to the more volunteer cadre—Jibananda argues that this is the time of martyrdom, but Mahendra Simha, still a skeptic despite the initiation, insists that to die for the sake of dying makes little sense—he does not mind dying, but only if it has a strategic or useful value (224). There follows an episode where Shanti finds Jibananda's body and thinking him dead, bursts out crying—"Like any other woman, she broke out in a loud wail" (226). It is as if only the horror of a spouse's death can restore her desire. But when it turns out that Jibananda is alive, Shanti persuades him to leave the revolutionaries to their spoils and insists that they must continue to repudiate power and even domesticity and stay perennial renunciant pilgrims—she wonders if they could perhaps best end their days in the classical utopian space of the "hut in the Himalayas" (228). The novel thus ends ambiguous in the political and military success of the revolutionaries, ambiguous in the aims of dissent or the lures of governance, and ambiguous too in the desirability and morality of conjugality in the context of the larger community or nation. The articulation of these ambiguities remains influential, and in

circulation for several decades and many of these same moral conjunctures are reappraised in the novel *Pather Dabi* published forty years later.

## SARATCHANDRA'S *PATHER DABI*: MORAL DILEMMAS CENTRED AROUND THE FIGURE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY IN THE 1920S

In the other chapters of this dissertation, there is an attempt to interweave analysis between discrete novels within the oeuvre of a single author. In this chapter however, *Anand Math* and *Pather Dabi* will be analyzed in separate sections to respect the large difference in historical time—over forty years—between their publications. Admittedly, the historical landscape had undergone a vast change. Nationalism, under the leadership of Mohandas Gandhi in the 1920 Non-Cooperation Movement, had become a mainstream political movement. Indeed, the appetitite for mass movements had grown so strong that when Gandhi called off the movement due to an incident of violence, many young people simply went underground and continued the struggle. All of these historical events were reflected in the novel-form. Most prominently, Tagore's 1916 novel *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World), established a duality between two means—that of the violent revolutionary on the one hand, and that of the more gradualist, moderate (and one might add, privileged and elite) nationalist on the other. However, Tagore, by making his preference for moderation so clear, ended up evading the question of revolutionary subjectivity altogether. For the continued development of the theme of the moral and charismatic revolutionary inaugurated by Bankimchandra, one has to turn to Saratchandra Chatterjee (1876-1938).

Saratchandra Chatterjee was born in Debanandpur in Bengal. He grew up in relative rural poverty, and according to legend, wandered awhile as a sannyasi. Later, perhaps desirous of returning to a more stable employment, he found a job as a clerk in Burma, then a part of the British Empire, and a site that is important to the novel *Pather Dabi* discussed in this section.[7] He is arguably even today the most widely read and popularly beloved Indian author with many of his works being made and remade into film.

Saratchandra's *Pather Dabi* was originally serialized in the Bengali monthly journal *Bangabani*, published by Ramaprasad Mukerjee, between February 1922 and May 1926. On seeing the Journal's provocative anti-colonial contents, the British government decided to proscribe it when they (the government) realized that the Journal editors had decided to republish the contents in book form. To avoid this proscription, the last installment in the Journal carried a deceptive note mentioning that the story was "To be continued". A separate publisher, Sudhir Chandra Sarkar, proprietor of Messrs M.C. Sarkar and Sons had offered to publish the novel if it deleted certain material. Saratchandra objected to this, returned his advance, and sought other publishers—finally, the original publisher of the serialized version offered to publish. By this time however, printing presses were expressing extreme reluctance. Eventually, booksellers Merssrs. S.C. Lahiri & Sons, agreed, and it was published in late August 1926, and fees began to be immediately collected for the legal defense that was likely required. On release the book became an instant bestseller, selling out all five thousand copies in the first week itself. By the

[7] Chatterjee, Saratchandra. *Pather Dabi, or the Right of Way*, trans. Prasenjit Mukherjee (Delhi: Rupa and Company, [1926] 1993). All translations from this novel are from Mukherjee.

time the police came to impound copies from the publisher, there were none left in stock. Apparently, even the publisher had to borrow a copy from his sister to give to the police.[8]

In November 1926, the Commissioner of Police of Calcutta, Sir Charles Tegart, wrote to the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal, Political Department, stating that that the Public Prosecutor held that the book might be liable to be proscribed under Section 99A of the Criminal Procedure Code and that both the author and the printer could be prosecuted under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code. The Advocate General of Bengal, B. L. Mitter favored only proscribing the novel. The Chief Secretary concurred, and issued a gazette notification in January 1927 " hereby declaring to be forfeited to his Majesty all copies, wherever found, of the Bengali book entitled *Pather Dabi*… on the grounds that the said book contains words which bring or attempt to bring into contempt and excite or attempt to excite disaffection towards the government established by the law in British India…" (ix).

Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya wished to protest this action of the government, and so sought the help of the eminent Bengali poet and novelist Rabindranath Tagore, who replied, in perhaps characteristically longwinded and lofty terms. These terms did little to assuage Saratchandra. The letter is quoted below to show the tortured reasoning employed even by writers who had found themselves to be on the wrong side of the colonial state—Rabindranath Tagore had returned his knighthood in 1919 to protest the attack on unarmed citizens in the famous *Jalianwala Bāgh* incident in Amritsar. Among other things, Tagore wrote simply that the Saratchandra must be "prepared to face the danger arising out of your action". He continued:

> If we are bold enough to speak ill of the British government not out of our own strength of mind, but taking advantage of their patience, we demean ourselves and show by our behavior that we actually have regard for the British government. The government has the physical force; if we consider it our duty to stand against it, we must possess the spiritual force… If we consider that the British government is all powerful, they have simply proscribed your book and not taken any action against you, it is almost an act of pardon. No other government, whether in the east or west, would have done this… In the circumstances, had the British government not proscribed your book, it would have proved that they were either unaware of your power as a writer and your high position in Bengali literature, or were contemptuous of your influence. (x)

In reply, Saratchandra composed a long, unsent response, equally fascinating in its discussion of the relationships of the claim to historical truth by and through literary form. Saratchandra wrote:

> You say that a perusal of this book causes disaffection in the reader's mind towards the British government. That indeed was the intention. But had I done so by writing something false or untrue, certainly I would have had reason to feel ashamed or guilty. But to the best of my knowledge and belief, I have not written anything that might be regarded as untrue. Had I done so, the book would have become a piece of political propaganda, and not a work of art. For various reasons no writer in Bengal has written such a book before… When throughout India, large numbers of people are being imprisoned or externed by the government on flimsy grounds without trial or in flagrant miscarriage of justice, I did not entertain any hope that I would escape scot-free… I am in quest of the truth. That is why I have exiled myself to this obscure place. I feel my days are numbered. So I wanted to do something really good for the country. (xii)

[8] cited in Mukherjee, *Right of Way*,viii

Saratchandra had planned to write a sequel to *Pather Dabi*, a fact that was mentioned in the above letter, but he gave up supposedly due to health reasons. Indeed, it was only after his death, in a public meeting at Albert Hall in Calcutta on the occasion of his first death anniversary that fell in January 1939 that the provincial government of Fazlul Haque lifted the ban on the book and brought out a second edition on the occasion (i.e. the months of April-May) of that year.

The novel begins by introducing Apurba, the unmarried son of a Deputy Magistrate, an orthodox Brahmin who nevertheless held a Masters degree in Science. He seems especially orthodox in contrast to his chicken-eating older brothers who make fun of his conservatism. Apurba is attached to his pious, widowed mother Karunamayee. Early in the novel, he gets a promising job offer in Rangoon, Burma but he and his mother worry about the irreligion of the Burmese. Apurba's chicken eating brother Binode is keen that Apurba leaves for the sake of his career. He reminds his mother of the time seven or eight years ago when Apurba had caused distress in the family: "you remember during the swadeshi movement, even though he was a child, his activities had put father's job in jeopardy" (21). Later in the novel the truly motivated revolutionary, Sabyasachi, is introduced before whom Apurba pales—and yet, the novel continuously cues us into the vision of the sacrificing and bold revolutionary as it exists in the imagination of the middle class and the orthodoxy. Binode says of such people:

> But in every country there's a group of people who're different from the others… Your youngest son belongs to that group. To them the soil of their native land is dearer than their own flesh, the water of its rivers like the blood flowing through their veins… they try to absorb the entire nation within themselves! Perhaps it was one such person who in the past described his motherland as his mother! Where their motherland is involved, never trust them… you'll be let down. Pointing at the tip of his forefinger, he added: 'To them the difference between life and death is as negligible as this.'… I'd rather say that this unorthodox son of yours is far more dependable than your god-fearing, orthodox, M Sc degree holder. (21)

In Burma, Apurba heaves a "sigh of disappointment" on learning that his neighbors are a "dark-complexioned man, possibly a South Indian" and a Chinese gentleman (24). He begins to feel alone in this distant land, and the lack of caste consciousness around kitchen utensils fills him with "revulsion" (25). Later he encounters an insolent and drunk Sahib, and reveals an angered and political consciousness when he remarks: "It is not just between that drunkard and myself. It's because we as a race have tolerated such insults meekly that they've become bold enough to treat us so brutally" (30). Later he is again racially taunted by Anglo-Indian youths in the presence of North Indian workmen (48), and wonders: "Was there any other country in the world where a native suffers so much indignity and humiliation in the presence of his own countrymen?" (50). Further, the drunk Sahib had him summoned in court and made him pay the humiliating fine of twenty rupees (53). Apurba's sole friend among the office staff is a Maharashtrian Brahmin called Ramdas Talwarkar who insists on speaking to Apurba in broken Hindi rather than English. On hearing of the fine, he says that nothing else is to be expected from a British court, and indeed, a fine was light punishment—for he himself had been tortured by the British on equally false charges (54).

In contrast to the vocal figure of Sabyasachi who emerges later in the novel Ramdas remains a largely silent figure. It is remarked at one point: "Apurba knew that Ramdas had been to jail, had been whipped and tortured for the sake of the motherland. Though Ramdas never spoke about it except once, Apurba knew it and idolized him for that" (178). For Ramdas, torture

seems to have revealed the *factum brutum* of colonialism. It renders him mute, seemingly incapable of self-narrativization, and this is contrasted to the flowing speech and ideations of other male and female revolutionaries in the novel, especially Sabyasachi. The figure of Ramdas persists through the novel as the silenced accusation—a silence is perhaps more a form of mourning and loss and one that cannot be recuperated through the anger and political actions that Sabyasachi argues for. Though the sequence of incidents in Ramdas' life is unclear, it seems that after the torture and his release he had sought to settle down to a life of domesticity and parenthood. In his case however, even domesticity seems not to tame his loss—domesticity appears instead as a symptom of impotent rage and dissatisfaction. After his politicization, Apurba considers recruiting Ramdas: "He knew that Ramdas had suffered a lot for the sake of the motherland, that the fire in his heart had not totally died out… He respected him for that. He did not believe that Ramdas would leave his wife and child and rush to join the organization if he was invited to it" (179). Ramdas exists in the novel as a haunting, spectral presence, one from an earlier generation of revolutionaries who had taken part in the labor struggles in turn-of-the-century Bombay and had been brutalized in prison for it (182-3). But by the time of the events of the book, he is more of a muted question mark that challenges the self-complete splendor of the still highly functional revolutionaries like Sabyasachi. Hearing of the secret organization of the organization Pather Dabi (Right of Way), his nationalism is rekindled and he gives a powerful speech. This causes the police to arrest him again and separate him from his family (186-187). The breakdown of sanity and of bourgeois domesticity that he experiences repeats the constant pattern in his life of speech, torture, silence, and then speech again, and so on, beyond all exhaustion and sometimes, life. It is this that makes the character so powerful—and perhaps it is this that makes him closer to the protagonists of the Hindi novels of the nineteen thirties and the nineteen forties who too are marked by deep violence, and are very far from the monumentality of the older Bengali constructions of the self-confident revolutionary—be they the revolutionaries, male of female, in *Anand Math*, or Sabyasachi and Sumitra in this novel.

Apurba first hears of Sabyasachi through a mentee of his father, the Police Commissioner of Bengal, who has come to Rangoon to arrest a prominent activist. But as the Commissioner immediately clarifies:

> At one time, even you and your friends were called political activists. No, that does not do justice to him at all! He's a revolutionary! An enemy of the state! A worthy enemy indeed! The person who named him Sabyasachi must have been really inspired. According to the Mahabharata, Arjuna or Sabyasachi would wield both his hands with equal dexterity. He never misses a target with gun or pistol. He can swim across the mighty river Padma… His friends and foes are unanimous in their views, and we also know that there can be no change in his attitude as long as he lives... like Arjuna he is known by different names in different regions… He can speak a dozen languages so fluently… he studied medicine in Germany, engineering in France, law in England, and since he lived for some time in America, he must have done something there as well. Like playing cards, these served as recreation for him… The burning passion he has for his country is like an inextinguishable flame coursing through his veins. (66-67)

Apurba, like the Commissioner, falls under the spell of Sabyasachi without having seen him—he exclaims in his mind to Sabyasachi: "You are no ordinary mortal… you have sacrificed everything for your motherland" (70). As Apurba is the character through which the novel is focalized, the reader is seduced and awed by this hyperbolically constructed revolutionary character. Fortuitously, Sabyasachi is the leader of the secret society, Pather Dabi, that Apurba

had joined after his racial insult. Still fulminating over the racisms he has suffered, Apurba had enrolled in the secret organization Pather Dabi as it was formed "by exceptionally learned men and women in this friendless foreign country"; the novel and Apurba remain indifferent to the Burmese, yet easily pronounce the country friendless (119). In this organization he is assured that his orthodoxy does not matter, even though most of the members also make a point of stating that they do not believe in caste restrictions (119). In a meeting of the society he notices a regal woman, Sumitra, arguing over controversial topics such as whether a woman has the right to leave her husband for the sake of "service to her country" (121-122). As much of the novel remains focalized through Apurba, this debate on the role of women also serves as an occasion to gradually educate an orthodox viewpoint into progressive thinking. Such a technique is found in later Hindi novels discussed in the dissertation—for example in the Hindi novelist Yashpal's novel *Dada Comrade*, the initial cuing of response to the figure of the revolutionary is through the eyes of a conservative middle-class woman Yashoda.

In *Pather Dabi*, Apurba is largely immune to the charms of the central woman character Bharati. Bharati is a Bengali Christian and the conservative Apurba seems unable to imagine a romantic relationship with her. The utility of a conservative viewing, through Apurba's eyes, of a revolutionary figure such as Sabyasachi is that it facilitates a seduction into the figure of the revolutionary that is at once unexpected (due to Apurba's caste and class background) but perhaps because of this initial unexpectedness becomes total and mesmeric. Arguably this is due to the very vastness of the difference in the lives and perspectives of Apurba and Sabyasachi. Apurba acts as the foil of naïveté against which the enormous self confident *weltanschauung* of Sabyasachi unbraids itself—he functions like the skeptical Mahendra Simha in *Anand Math*, whose probing questions and doubts cause the revolutionaries to have to continually justify their stance. Unlike Ramdas whose torture in the colonial prison mutes his patriotism, Sabyasachi (on whom no trace of torture remains) is always aloft, serene, unafraid, without self-doubt and seemingly invincible: "whatever be the situation, the Doctor retained his serenity and composure, despite the anxiety and the excitement… oblivious of his surroundings, he was engrossed in a search within himself" (136). Sabyasachi is a link to figures like Shanti in *Anand Math*—revolutionaries seemingly without self-doubt or desire. This is the type of construction of the revolutionary that will be contested by the Hindi novelists of later decades—in these later Hindi novels the protagonists, male and female, are decidedly wounded and self-doubting in their desires and aims.

As the novel progresses, the site of the ethical proselytizing shifts, perhaps unexpectedly to the destitution among the laboring classes in the nearby mills. The female counterpart to Sabyasachi, Sumitra—the one who had educated Apurba about gender—too seems barely human:

> Very few of them had actually seen Sumitra, but when an exaggerated, verging on the superhuman, account of her beauty and prowess reached the ears of these ignorant worker, it created a stir among them… the stories about Sumitra's supernormal powers were accepted by them unquestioningly… If as the rumor went, she possessed supernatural powers by which she could change their lot overnight, they must not fail to take advantage of it. (176)

Apurba, though perhaps not sharing the awe of the workers was struck by her powerful public presence. Yet, despite the oratory in public there is a great silence between the two

politically articulate characters of Sabyasachi and Sumitra. Bharati functions as the figure which alone can interrogate this superhuman quality that Sabyasachi and Sumitra claim to possess. She wonders:

> Though she was quite familiar with Sabyasachi, she still had not the liberty to discuss his relations with Sumitra. Indeed, she knew nothing about Sumitra—who she was, what her relationship was with the Sabyasachi, when she had joined the organization. They were prohibited from showing any curiosity about the personal affairs of any member… she was not only embarrassed but also frightened. Frightened not of Sabyasachi, but of Sumitra… Her reticence, stateliness, striking beauty, reserved manner and grave demeanor made her appear aloof and distant from the others even as she was in their midst… If Sumitra ever felt that someone had tried to destroy her seclusion by a show of unwanted sympathy, she would be greatly annoyed. (202)

Here Sumitra is presented as an almost un-gendered, de-sexualized (yet beautiful), distant personality that seems to exist in a continuum with Sabyasachi's personality and with earlier figures in the Bengali novelistic tradition like Bankimchandra's Shanti in *Anand Math*. This remoteness is what is deeply inspiring to Apurba and Bharati—but while Apurba is able to absorb that insularity best, perhaps as it coincides with his ritual Brahminism, Bharati escapes its cold touch. Bharati alone in the novel is allowed to express emotion and questioning, both for herself and as surrogate for other characters: "Being a woman, she had been able to understand Sumitra's feelings for Sabyasachi" (202). Perhaps her marginality as a Christian allowed her this, and perhaps also her marginality caused by her unrequited attraction to the conservative Apurba.

This remoteness of the revolutionary subject is also constructed through the mode of a childhood both distanced in time as well as singular in its events. The supposed reason for the politicization of Sabyasachi is that as a child he had witnessed dacoits mercilessly kill his brave cousin—the cousin had been the only one in the village who had stood up to them. The sub-inspector of police had denied this cousin a gun on account of an earlier minor infraction of his, and so the cousin was foredoomed, arming himself rather pathetically with bows and arrows. The dying cousin's last words to Sabyasachi, who was then a child, were: "Do not cry like a woman along with these sheep and goats. But never forgive those who've destroyed the manhood of this country to preserve their power" (208). On hearing this story from Sabyasachi, Bharati "realized that death meant nothing to him… It seemed to Bharati that this unbearable insult and humiliation of the entire nation had darkened the face of this man forever" (208). Immunity to the fear of death may be interpreted in many ways—as a reckless suicidality, a loss of love or faith in the world or in oneself. The incident of the cousin and the interpretation of his death could have taken diverse turns. Yet, in the world of the novel it would seem that to Sabyasachi, there is only one response—a furious, unappeasable anti-colonialism. The ravaged nation is symbolized by the cousin and his pathetically inadequate means against superior technology. Is this incident then the cause, or outcome of this innate rigidity of Sabyasachi's thinking, one that even the Police Commissioner had remarked on earlier—"it will not cease as long as he lives" (68).

Consistent with this vicious cycle of colonial "justice" that triggers the revolutionary's equally ruthless counter-justice, Apurba finds himself condemned to death for allegedly having given information to the police. The members of the secret society ask Bharati to shoot him, but Sabyasachi asks that he be simply handed to Bharati so that she can "try to make a man out of him…[Sumitra objects as do many others, saying that]For the sake of the country, for its

independence, we will not tolerate this. To which Sabyasachi calmly replied, 'You all know that my voice alone carries more weight than all of yours' " (215). Here the shadow justice of the secret society shows an authoritarianism that mirrors colonial authority—a man is condemned with no trial, but is then granted a miraculous reprieve by a single leader equally without trial, the leader having overruled the entirety of those present. This mercy is delivered with insult, and the timid and conservative Apurba is again explicitly made to stand in for the slavish masses of the country: "He (Apurba) loves his motherland with all his heart, but like most of our countrymen—no, I shall not speak ill of my people—he's a weakling" (216).

The organization *Pather Dabi*, like the Order in *Anand Math*, penetrates the innermost heart of any individual, leaving no room for private life except for his duty to the Order. When Bharati meets Sabyasachi the next day to assuage her shame on having loved Apurba, she wonders at Sabyasachi's generosity in forgiving him. This amazement and shame then finds a curious correlate in her feelings for Sabyasachi. She says: "I wish I could hide behind you in some jungle. Those who want to hang you don't know your worth… Your own countrymen call you bloodthirsty, dacoit, murderer! I sometimes wonder how, with all your kindness and love, you could live amongst them" (229). She then pleads with him to never distrust her again for her weaknesses. This is the closest she comes to expressing an emotional relationship to Sabyasachi, though it is closer than Sumitra ever manages—yet these affects are still mediated by loyalty to the Order as it is in *Anand Math*.

It is the marginalized, cadre-level Christian Bharati who also continually wonders if anger and violence are the only means of anti-colonialism that are possible. She pleads with Sabyasachi: "I believe human intelligence has not become so denuded as to be unable to discover an alternate way" (238). Sabyasachi proceeds to show her the tangible poverty in which he lived with other poor Burmese—a rare occasion in the novel when the local Burmese are even mentioned. This starkness of poverty, "knee deep mire… stench of rotting" persuades her of the need for anger against colonialism (i.e. nationalism), and the novel again links the poverty amidst which Sabyasachi lives to the state of the nation: "Repugnance and anguish filled her soul. A wave of deep sorrow swept across her; she felt she would burst into uncontrollable tears. Oh, this county! This love for independence! To this man nothing else in this world mattered" (240). Sabyasachi gulps the "inedible" food of the poor with much contentment (240). Though living amidst this poverty, Sabyashachi is never reduced to it, and indeed stands in this relationship of intimate and healthy transcendence to poverty—this is the home of his soul, akin to the classical metaphor of the lotus leaf that is not moistened by the water that surrounds it. The revolutionary is this moment, site and affect of transcendence, the transcendence that needs poverty as dramatic background, poverty that though horrific cannot disrupt and indeed increases his love for the nation.

It is this monumentalization that this dissertation tracks and unpacks in the following chapters. The numerous Hindi novelists of later decades, indebted though they remain to the Bengali literary formulation of the revolutionary, find more directly brutalized figurations of these revolutionaries more accurate and meaningful for their historical period. It is Ramdas' tale that persists, with the facts of torture reconstituting the heroic form of the Bengali heritage into the more openly injured protagonists that emerge in later Hindi novelists like Agyeya's Shekhar in *Shekhar* or Yashpal's Harish in *Dada Comrade*. Ramdas and Sabyasachi are also contrasted in the novel to the more animalistic character of a revolutionary called Brojendra—the latter's sin is

his agitated desire for Sumitra. The ideal revolutionary, as is evident from *Anand Math* and the character of Bhabananda, must be moral and in complete control of his senses. Brojendra can neither control his physicality in his lust for life nor in his lust for women. He is the caricature of the revolutionary who enjoins violence for courage's sake. Such a figure was the target of colonial propaganda as well as many elements of more anti-violent anti-colonialism, including Gandhi's many repudiations of misguided violence by the young. The narrative has to make it clear that Brojendra is only one type of soldier for the cause, and moreover, one who will be punished by the true self-controlled revolutionary. In the novel Sabyasachi decides to kill Brojendra, but not before the novel at least grants him the right to be thought as courageous even if misguided. But clearly raw courage alone does not make a revolutionary—to be a true revolutionary one must also be discerning and moral. Brojendra had proclaimed: "I'm an anarchist, a revolutionary! Life is no consequence to me. I'm prepared to give it as also to take it" (264). But he must be killed to highlight the true moral tenor of the revolutionary—for according to Sabyasachi, Brojendra's feelings for Sumitra, "knows no shame, no decorum, no decency—it's a bestial lust!" (268).

What then is the aim of the secret society if its aim is not quite material and if its very suspicion of this-worldliness and materiality make it susceptible to lust—lust for women or lust for power. Again, there is the echo of the dilemma of *Anand Math*, where the revolutionaries do not know what to do with state power after they win the war. For they are fearful of the possible corruptions of secular rule and power. Sabyasachi responds to such a question regarding the means and final ideals of the revolution:

> It will be proper to tell you, Bharati, that I didn't establish Pather Dabi for the betterment of a few factory workers. It has a much higher aim. To achieve that aim it may even become necessary to sacrifice these people one day like so many sheep and goats… You must not waste your time trying to improve the lots of factory workers. Nothing worthwhile can be achieved that way. Their true emancipation can come only through revolution. The aim of my Pather Dabi is to bring about such a revolution. You must remember that revolutions cannot be achieved through peaceful means. Violence is essential for its success—this is both its curse as well as its boon! Look at Europe. It has happened in Hungary. It has taken place in Russia, not once but several times…. No government has given in peacefully… It has always been my dream to bring about human emancipation through such sacrifice. How will we wash away the sins of generations except with their blood … Tell me have you ever seen a cow die at the place where it is tethered? It prefers to die than to tear apart the tattered rope lest it should disturb its master's peace! It's the same with these poor people. That's what has been holding up their progress … The [worker's strike they were organizing] ends in an apparent defeat for the impoverished, illiterate, famished workers, but this defeat leads to a sense of anger and hatred that erupts one day! This brings about the revolution! … There are so many institutions, big or small, that are doing good work in the country, like nursing the sick... they'll show you the path. But I'm a revolutionary. I've no love, no affection, no compassion; good and bad are both meaningless to me. These acts of piety appear to me to be a child's play… How shall we expiate the sins committed by our grandfather over the ages? Justice is far more important than compassion. (270-283)

Perhaps such a eulogization of violence was not quite there even in *Anand Math*, though some of the seeds for its sacralization were. At any rate, the fantasmatic evocation of violence seems distinctly out of place in Mohandas Gandhi's India of the nineteen twenties. And yet, there had been a distinctive lull in mass agitationalist politics in the nineteen twenties after Gandhi had called off the Non-Cooperation movement. Many young political workers had become disillusioned with the lull and were regrouping, and the late nineteen twenties and early thirties

saw an increase in violent revolutionary activity. These were the years of activity of men like Bhagat Singh who will be discussed in the next chapter. Internationally too, a world war had been fought the previous decade, and new nation states were being constituted especially in Eastern Europe—there was also the civil war in Russia following the 1917 socialist revolution.

Violence was thus again beginning to be seen as effective and productive of historical events like the birth of nations. But within the novel, Bharati persists in her resolute and frank questioning of these notions—she seeks to disinvest from the narrative mythicization of Sabyasachi, seemingly caricaturing or even mocking him, if only gently. One might have to read the comments even against the narrative tendency to qualify this caricature with constant adjectival qualifications like "Bharati's eyes were full of reverence" (300). Reverential perhaps, Bharati nevertheless opines of a certain inhuman ruthlessness that Sabyasachi radiates:

> What to speak of me or Sumitra-didi, even if Indra, king of gods, were to order the three celestial nymphs—Urvashi, Menaka and Rambha—to break the vow of the modern Sabyasachi, instead of disturbing the religious austerities of the ancient sages, I'm sure they would have had to go back disappointed and disgraced. One can win the heart of a man of flesh and blood, but what can one do with one who has a heart of stone? Your anger against foreign domination has turned your heart into stone. (300)

Bharati, in the mode of the reverential that she is almost always in even as she persists with her questions, remarks that at least he must be irreplaceable—this is even as Sabyasachi is speaking of everyone's dispensability. Perhaps the very question of the irreplaceable is anathema to the revolutionary, for he traffics in violence and loss that cannot be fully accounted for. Sabyasachi says: "It's futile to sing praises of the past. Besides, we're revolutionaries. We've nothing to do with the past. Our outlook, our actions, our aims, are all progressive. We have to forge ahead only by demolishing old barriers" (313).

There is an enormous and avowed ruthlessness in Sabyasachi. In theory at least, everyone is dispensable, though the question of who gets to decide dispensability is never addressed. Implicit in this belief is the assumption that there is a moral leadership that will decide without an open, participatory trial—as was the case with Brojendra, and with Apurba's pardon. Likewise the moral leadership decides the dispensability of past traditions—even if they are valued by the very people whom the revolutionaries are supposed to serve. This leadership sets priorities without consultation because it alone can discern the trajectory of history and take the long view. In the words of Sabyasachi: "I've told you many times, my aim is independence, not the welfare of the people. When Rana Pratap [a medieval king] turned his kingdom desolate, he caused great misery and harm in his people… this act of misery and harm is remembered with greater reverence today than many acts of welfare that were performed by others" (315). In all these valuations—of violence to the self and other, in terms of self narrativization, and in terms of the modes of personal and community-memory, Hindi novels of later decades take a different approach.

At the end of the novel, after Sabyasachi leaves for the last time on a mysterious mission, the character who largely provided the focalization of the novel, Apurba, decides, after his mother's death, to turn into an ascetic. The sort of ascetic, he clarifies, who serves the villages where he believes the lifeblood of India flows (343). Within the novel, though not directly admitted or credited, this seems to be Bharati's influence for she embarks on a similar journey. Perhaps in a larger sense this decision by Apurba and Bharati is due to the extra-novelistic

influence of Mohandas Gandhi's ideals in nationalist work in the nineteen twenties and his firm belief that India lived in its numerous, dispersed villages. It is the encounter between Gandhian thought and the revolutionaries that will be discussed in the next chapter—this time with the revolutionaries as historical figures and not literary constructions.

# CHAPTER II

## BHAGAT SINGH AND GANDHI: COMPETING MORALITIES REGARDING THE QUESTION OF REVOLUTIONARY SACRIFICE

### THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL QUESTION OF THE CONTINUITY OR DISCONTINUITY OF THE REVOLUTIONARY TRADITION

In his widely read *Modern India* the historian Sumit Sarkar has a section entitled Revolutionary Terrorism in the chapter titled "Mass Nationalism: Emergence and Problems 1917-1927".[1] In this chapter he writes of the disillusionment suffered by "educated youth" after Gandhi withdrew the Non Co-operation Movement of 1920 due to the outbreak of violence in the north Indian village of Chauri Chaura in February 1922. This disillusionment led to a renewed interest in the relationship of violence to mass politics. However, according to Sarkar, in Bengal this interest did not go further than the "veteran *dādas* [respectful Bengali term for elders], living on their past"(251). However, two Bengalis living in the United Provinces—Sachin Sanyal and Jogeshchandra Chatterji—took a more concrete step against the passivity following Gandhi's withdrawal of the Non Co-operation Movement and organized a group called the Hindustan Republican Association that specialized in dacoities meant to raise funds for armed insurgency. This association, which included Ajoy Ghosh, future general secretary of the Communist Party of India "established links with an emerging Punjab group under the brilliant young student Bhagat Singh and constituted the famous Hindustan Socialist Republican Army in September 1928" (251). Sumit Sarkar goes on to make a clear distinction between the older Bengali revolutionary traditions and the newer ideals of Bhagat Singh's group:

> The weight of an established revolutionary terrorist tradition in Bengal on the whole prevented much rethinking on broader social goals or methods. *Youths of Bengal*, a leaflet brought out by the *Mechuabazar* [neighborhood in Calcutta] group, still insisted on the cult of heroic self-sacrifice by a handful... and there was not a trace of any socio-economic program. A remarkable openness to new ideas, in sharp contrast, was the striking feature of at least some of the leaders of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army… Bhagat Singh in particular was marked by an increasing deep commitment to Marxian socialism and—equally remarkable, perhaps, given the strong Hindu religiosity of the earlier terrorists—militant atheism. (267-268)

Sumit Sarkar has only a few pages for the revolutionaries in his fairly exhaustive discussion of the nationalist movement from 1885 (the year of the founding of the Indian National Congress) to 1947, the year of Indian Independence. It has been demonstrated in the previous chapter that at least some strands of revolutionary terrorism—as represented in *Anand Math*—engaged deeply with the political (in terms of the diagnosis of colonial tyranny) even as they remained deeply ambivalent about this explicit political engagement. By the time of *Pather Dabi,* this engagement is made explicit. However even in that novel contemporaneous to the foundation of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, numerous moral ambivalences remain in regard to the articulation of political violence. For Sabyasachi, there is no possible politics that

[1] Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India, 1885-1947* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).

can be entirely disengaged from the persona and charisma of its actors. Can it be claimed, as Sumit Sarkar does, that the power of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army lay solely in the abstracted and detachable ideology of its "socio-economic program" and not in the enormous iconic charisma of its actors' "heroic self-sacrifice?" In addition, how can the very emergence of this socio-economic program be explained? The belief that the earlier phase of the nationalist movement—of which Gandhi was the last and most skilled exemplar—was of obscurantist religious origin rather than of scientistic-materialist rationality was comprehensively articulated before Sumit Sarkar as early as 1942 by the Hindi novelist Yashpal (1903-1976) in his book *Gandhivād ki Shavparīkshā* (Postmortem of Gandhian Thought).[2] Yashpal's novels are the subject of the last chapter of the dissertation and it is significant that he enunciated this view which was to gain so much currency in leftist circles at the moment when Gandhi was trying to revitalize mass politics in India through his 1942 Quit India Movement.

As will be shown in this chapter, there was a long process of intellectual development before Bhagat Singh whole-heartedly admitted such socio-economic claims—how may the articulation of this process and the elements of this growth be achieved? Is there as clear and decisive a rupture between the *dadas* living in the past and the new ideals of socialist and atheistic socio-economics as Sumit Sarkar suggests? It would be useful to begin with a sense of the historical and ideological context in the Punjab from which Bhagat Singh emerged.

## PUNJAB: AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIRST THREE DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IN TERMS OF REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITY

This section is meant to be a brief historical overview of the revolutionary moments in Punjab. It is conceptually futile to date with certainty the precise origins of this revolutionary movement. This difficulty is in some respects due to the very nature of this anti-colonial revolutionary activity; archives are hard to come by if activities are carried out by members of secret societies. These secret, informal societies do not officially and publicly register themselves. These societies pay relatively little attention to self-documentation, chiefly for fear that these documents may in later stages be used for the purpose of incrimination, or as intelligence by the colonial police. This undocumented nature also complicates simpler notions of the "public" sphere; for to be even allowed to be public and published means that one has yielded to the certain rules or diktats of colonial censorship and the permissible range of discourse. The historian Peter Heehs has attested to some of these issues in his work on Bengal's turn of the century secret societies[3].

While methodological issues remain, certain facts are more widely and publicly attested. It is pertinent to quote the much-hated Sir Michael O'Dwyer (1864-1940), the Governor of the Punjab during the First World War. O'Dwyer was also the Governor during the infamous incident in Amritsar's Jalianwala Bagh incident where nearly four hundred unarmed persons were killed by unprovoked government firing. In his 1925 memoirs, O'Dwyer discussed his

[2] Yashpal, *Gandhivad ki shav parīkshā* (Lucknow: Viplav Karyalay, 1941).
[3] Heehs, Peter. *The Bomb in Bengal: The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India, 1900-1910* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

opinion of the origins of Punjabi militancy and he gave much blame to the *Arya Samaj* [Society of the Noble], an organization he describes thus:

> In fact the *Arya Samaj* is a nationalist revival against Western influence; it urges its followers in the *Satyarth Prakāsh* [The Light of Truth], the authoritative work of Dayanand [1824-1883], who was the founder of the sect, to go back to the Vedas, and to seek the golden future in the imaginary golden past of the Aryas. The *Satyarth Prakash* also contains arguments against non Hindu rule, and a leading organ of the sect, a few years ago, claimed Dayanand as the real author of the doctrine of *Swaraj* [self rule]... However, the *Arya Sama*j in 1907, thought it wise to publish a resolution to the effect that as mischievous people here and there spread rumors hostile to them, the organization in reiterating its old creed, declared that it had no connection of any kind with any political body or with any political agitation in any shape. While accepting this declaration as disassociating the Samaj as *a body* from extremist politics, it should be noted in fairness to the orthodox Hindus that while the Samaj does not include perhaps more than 5% of the Hindu population of the Punjab, an enormous proportion of the Hindus convicted of sedition and other political offences from 1907 down to the present day are members of the *Samaj.*[4]

This passage, along with some others from O'Dwyer's memoir, was copied down by the revolutionary Bhagat Singh (1907-1931) in the notebooks he kept in jail. A useful source of information on the politicization of Bhagat Singh is the memoir of Ajoy Ghosh (1909-1962), Bhagat Singh's junior colleague in the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army. This section follows Ghosh's biographical narrative of Bhagat Singh's life. Bhagat Singh's life was an instantiation of the larger political ferment in Punjab in the first three decades of the twentieth century and an account of this larger history is briefly presented alongside Bhagat Singh's life.

The first major political influence on Bhagat Singh was his paternal uncle Sardar Ajit Singh. Ajit Singh was a colleague of the prominent Arya Samaj leader Lala Rajpat Rai (1865-1928) the fiery nationalist leader who was exiled by the British authorities in 1907 (the year of Bhagat Singh's birth) for his allegedly seditious writings. Sardar Ajit Singh accompanied Lala Lajpat Rai in exile. Ajit Singh subsequently went on to have a spectacularly cosmopolitan career, participating in later life in many "world freedom movements" in places like Persia and Turkey, returning to India only on the eve of Independence in 1947. Another strong political influence on Bhagat Singh was his own father who had been jailed in protest against British rule—he was serving his sentence when Bhagat Singh was born. In later life though, Bhagat Singh's father was to plead his son's case (to the son's extreme embarrassment) to British authorities. Lastly, a second uncle of Bhagat Singh, Sardar Swaran Singh, was severely tortured by British officials in jail in 1910. Sardar Swaran Singh was soon to die in that jail, at the age of twenty-three, the same age Bhagat Singh would also be hanged. Thus an intergenerational family history is linked at several points to the broader history and tragedy of Punjabi, Sikh, national and international revolutionary activity.

In his memoir, Ajoy Ghosh wrote of Bhagat Singh's special admiration and love for Sardar Kartar Singh.[5] Sardar Kartar Singh had sailed to San Francisco in the United States of America in 1912. While studying at the University of California, Berkeley, he helped organize the *Gadhar* (Revolutionary) Party on the 21st of April 1913. Legend has it that he was enraged that a rude San Francisco immigration official referred to India as a slave country and consequently treated him badly. After launching the *Gadhar* Party, he started the *Gadhar*

[4] O'Dwyer, Michael. *India as I knew it* (Delhi: Mittal Publishers, [1925] 2004), 184.
[5] Ghosh, Ajoy. *Bhagat Singh and his Comrades* (Delhi: Communist Party Publication, 1945), 18.

newspaper in November 1913. The paper was apparently published in Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, and Pashto. The paper openly preached sedition against the British Empire and encouraged Indians to seek military training.[6]

Working in collusion with the American authorities, the British eventually apprehended Kartar Singh. They sentenced him to hanging in 1915, in what was to become a legal landmark—and came to be known as the first Lahore Conspiracy case. The *Gadhar* Party is unique because it seems to have been the first to openly demand the violent overthrow of the British Empire—in contrast to the secret societies and their secret manifestos. In his last statement, Kartar Singh wrote:

> I am a member of the Gadar Party. We had jointly planned a rebellion. I wish that I may be sentenced to death and not life imprisonment, so that after rebirth, I may endeavor to get rid of the slavery imposed by whites. If I am born a female, I shall bear lion hearted sons, and engage them in blowing to bits the British rulers. (42)

In response, the judgment noted: "He is very proud of the crimes committed by him. He does not deserve mercy and should be sentenced to death" (42). Kartar Singh was eighteen years old. His death, and the hanging of others like him, led to a wave of anti-colonial enthusiasm in the Punjab that was exacerbated by the contemporaneous situation of the First World War. In addition, some believe that the war emboldened revolutionaries against what they perceived as a weakened British presence. The human cost of the war may have contributed to a further anti-colonial or anarchist sentiment. For Punjab especially, the human cost of war was not abstract—it was on their soldiery that the British Empire depended most directly. Fifty thousand Indians, with Punjabis being a percentage in the armed forces disproportionately larger than their percentage of the total Indian population, were to die in the fields of Flanders alone in 1914-1915. This is also perhaps why sedition and anti-colonial sentiment in Punjab excited fear in the British in a way that no other part of the country did. Reprisal was swift and brutal.

This was after all the regime of the aforementioned notorious Lieutenant Governor Michael O'Dwyer (Governor in the Punjab from 1913-1920). O'Dwyer, a Balliol graduate with a first class in jurisprudence, was clear about the centrality of Punjab to the Empire. As he was to write in his memoir: "the Punjab is the province about which the government was then most concerned; there was much inflammable material lying about; which required very careful handling if an explosion was to be avoided".[7] Dwyer was to sentence as many as 42 Punjabi revolutionaries to death, transport 114 for life, and imprison another 93 for various terms (202-207). He was to gloat: "Punjabis were quick to take to heart the lesson that revolution was a dangerous game" (220). Dwyer's tenure of seven years culminated in the Jalianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 where nearly four hundred unarmed people were killed. This incident immediately caused nation-wide outrage, helping precipitate Mohandas Gandhi's Non-Cooperation movement, arguably the first mass movement in Indian history.

Bhagat Singh was born in 1907 in Lyallpur district of the British Punjab. His personal and political growth began, as described, with the highly politicized male members of his family. Perhaps unusually, his first major intervention in politics was in the context of language. At the

[6] Jagdev, Santokh. *Tales of Truth: Sikh Martyrs* (Birmingham: Sikh Missionary Resource Center. 1999).
[7] O'Dwyer, *India as I Knew it*, 31.

age of sixteen he won a prize of Rupees 50/- in a province-wide essay competition sponsored by the Punjab Hindi *Sāhitya Sammelan* (Literary Group), for an essay titled *The Problem of Punjab's Language and Script*. The essay itself was written in Hindi/Urdu and is indicative of how important the issue of the relationship of language to identity and religion already was in the nineteen twenties. The key arguments will be summarized and analyzed below.

Bhagat Singh begins by approvingly quoting an unnamed source on the necessary linkage between the country and its own inmost soul; the latter being best represented by its literature. The task of the patriot is to create new and elevating literature—thus literature is the baseline of identity even as this tradition must not prejudice the necessarily continuous creation of new literature. Bhagat Singh goes on to write of his many European heroes and their intimate relationship to their own language—Rousseau and the French Revolution, Irish literature and its anti-colonial struggle, and Russian literature and Russia's Revolution. He then turns to India and likewise speaks of the famed medieval poetic and religious figures of Kabir (1440?-1518) and Guru Nanak Devji (1469-1539). He writes: "Centuries of continual warfare and Muslim invasions had dried up the literature of the Punjab".[8] He goes on to speak of another Guru in the Sikh lineage, Guru Angad Devji, whose use of the Gurumukhi script Bhagat Singh relates to the Kashmiri script. Still later, Bhagat Singh writes of the inspiring poetry of the Sikh Gurus. There is much writing on Sikh warriors versus Muslim "rulers"—throughout he identifies Sikh with Hindu and unites them against Muslims. He writes about how Sanskrit literature, for all its greatness, could not "revive Hindu society" (47). He turns to the contemporary age where he finds that there is indeed a revival of greatness due to figures like Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and Swami Ram Tirtha (1873-1906) of Punjab. There is a hint of regret that the great men of nineteenth century Punjab were not as well known as the Bengali intellectuals and this leads to an interesting deduction. He says this lack of fame (both nationally, but also within Punjab and in relation to Punjab's inability to properly memorialize its own heroes) is due to the lack of development of the Punjabi language. He links this to the "unfortunate communalization" of the Punjab (48) and bemoans the lack of unity amongst Punjabi writers and poets. "Does not after all, [writes Bhagat Singh] the great Muslim poet, Nazrul Islam, write in Bengali, Latif Husain 'Natwar' in Hindi, and Gujarati poets too? But Punjab is unfortunate. Here, even Hindus and Sikhs are not united, leave alone the Muslims" (49). He says Punjabi should have been the state-wide language, but Muslims have adopted Urdu:

> Muslims totally lack Indianness, therefore they want to propagate Arabic script and Persian language. While failing to understand the importance of Indianness in the whole of India, they fail to understand the importance of one language, which could only be Hindi. That is why they keep repeating the demand for Urdu like a parrot and take an isolated position. (49)

He writes of the Arya Samaj: "while Sikh staunchness secured Punjabi, the insistence of Arya Samajists helped Hindi secure a place of its own" (50). While in the early days Sikhs supported Hindi, soon enough a few sentences in *Satyarth Prakash* (the key Arya Samaj text written by its founder Dayanand Saraswati and published in1875), caused much rancor. Bhagat Singh writes approvingly of how an Arya Samaji leader attempted to get the Punjabi language in the Hindi script recognized in the University—but unfortunately, according to him, narrow-

[8] Singh, Bhagat. *The Jail Notebook and Other Writings* (Delhi: Leftword, 2007).

minded people aborted this attempt. In the next paragraph, he writes that Urdu cannot be the national language as the "flights of imagination of the Urdu poets—even if they are Hindi (Indians)—reach the *saqis* [the legendary muse serving the poets and musicians wine] of Persia and the date palms of Arab countries" (50). He gives a humorous example of how an Urdu translator mistook the Vedic Sage, Nachiketa, as *neechi kutia* [low female dog/bitch]! He then reasserts his central thesis: "We have to adopt one language, one script, one literature, one ideal and one nation, but the adoption of a single language precedes all the other unities, so that we can communicate with and comprehend each other" (51). He grants that this ideal—of the Madrasi learning Hindi—will take many years to realize.

In the next paragraph, Bhagat Singh comes to a still more controversial point—to him, the Punjabi of Central Punjab, written in the Gurmukhi script, "is neither widely prevalent nor has any literary or scientific significance" (51). For this he attempts to give technical examples—the lack of a *halant* (letter ending without the sound a), the inability to write compound letters, the incomplete script. In contrast, Hindi has a perfectly scientific script, the phonetically developed and complete Nagari, so why, asks Bhagat Singh, should there be any hesitation in adopting it? According to him, the Gurumukhi script is only a distorted form of the Hindi script. Furthermore, thanks to the Arya Samaj, wasn't the Hindi script widely known? He writes: "Punjabi will become like Hindi by adopting the Hindi script and then all the differences will disappear; and it is desirable, too, that common people could be educated which is possible only through our own language in our own script" (52). The last page of the essay is a paean to the sweetness and captivating charm of Punjabi poetry, of which many examples are given, and a hope that someday "Punjab will have such beautiful and 'quality' literature that it will also be counted among the good languages of India" (54). It may be speculated from this essay that by reaching out to Hindi, Bhagat Singh (who wrote in both the Nagari and the Urdu script) is attempting to represent in his person and reflections, the widening ambit of a pan North Indian nationalism. And this may have contributed to the wider and more enduring popularity of his martyrdom and radicalism all over the country to an extent that the earlier generation of arguably more provincial martyrs was unable to achieve.

Bhagat Singh first met Ajoy Ghosh around the time he was writing this essay. Few later portraits can match the Ajoy Ghosh memoir for its contemporary quality regarding the everyday life of Bhagat Singh. Ghosh first met Bhagat Singh "sometime in 1923"—Bhagat Singh was then 16 years old.[9] The two started a "gymnasium [Ghosh uses the English word instead of the more traditional word *akhara*] in Kanpur for physical culture and as a recruiting centre" (18). Though the recruitment presumably went well for a time, there was confusion a year later due to the mass arrest of leaders following the sensational Kakori train robbery case of 1925. Kakori was a small station near Lucknow in the United Provinces in northern India. An armed robbery of ammunition had been carried out on this spot by Ashfaqullah Khan (1900-1927) and Ramprasad 'Bismil' (1897-1927), the latter a Hindi literary figure of some renown as a "revolutionary" poet. Bismil was a member of the *Arya Samaj*. He and Ashfaqullah Khan were also members of the Hindustan Revolutionary Army, an organization of unclear origins believed to have begun sometime in the first decade of the twentieth century in East Bengal and linked both to Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) and Bankimchandra Chatterji's ideals. Later, in 1928, at the

[9] Ghosh, *Bhagat Singh and his Comrades*, 17.

insistence of Bhagat Singh, this Army was to add the term *socialist* to its title, becoming henceforth known as the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army.

The British finally managed to apprehend the perpetrators of the Kakori train robbery. In a swiftly concluded judgment, and despite the protestations of senior Congress leaders like Motilal Nehru (1861-1931) to the Viceroy and the Privy Council, the British Government went ahead and hanged four persons in 1927—Ashfaqullah Khan, Ramprasad Bismil, Roshan Singh (unknown birthdate-1927) and Rajendra Lahiri (1892-1927). It was probably in response to these hangings that a special edition of the prominent literary journal *Chaṃd*—the *Phaṃsi Ank* (Special Edition on Hanging)—was published in 1928. This important edition will be discussed in greater detail in the last chapter featuring the Hindi novelist Yashpal (1903-1976), a colleague of Bhagat Singh. There remains the unconfirmed legend that Bhagat Singh contributed extensively but anonymously and under various pseudonyms to this special edition.[10]

According to Ajoy Ghosh the Kakori trial with its consequent repression disoriented the nascent Hindustan Socialist Republican Army and caused its members to flee Kanpur. Bhagat Singh returned to Punjab and worked on the editorial staff of a journal called *Kīrti*.[11] This is another facet of Bhagat Singh mentioned by many of his peers, and one that certainly gave ground to the notion of the thoughtful and intellectual revolutionary. Ghosh writes of him as one who was incessantly reading, studying, and writing—it is known that he read and wrote with great passion in jail to the very end of his days. This image of the morally engaged revolutionary is also central to his self-representation in essays like *Why I am an Atheist.*[12]

As stated, the Kakori case had caused members to temporarily disperse from Kanpur. Ajoy Ghosh was to next encounter Bhagat Singh two years later in 1928. Ghosh speaks of him as much matured—and in the company of the sole absconder of the Kakori case, Chandrasekhar Azad (1906-1931). It was at this time that Bhagat Singh reorganized the Army, adding the term *socialist* to its title. It must be emphasized that the appeal of socialism in the nineteen twenties lay both in its moral ideals of absolute equality, but also equally, in the fact that it had tasted significant military and political triumph. The Russian revolution had proven that an elite, even diasporic (Lenin was in Geneva, Trotsky in New York in 1917) leadership with substantial international connections could overthrow a tyrannical and seemingly omnipotent Czarist regime. Another of Bhagat Singh's colleagues, Bejoy Kumar Sinha (1909-1992) wrote:

> In the closing years of World War 1, the revolutionaries intensified their propaganda. Raja Mahendra Pratap (1886-1979) approached Trotsky, after the victory of the Russian Revolution. At the socialist International Conference at Stockholm in 1917 and at London, the Indian revolutionaries raised the question of their country's right to self determination. In the Far east, Dr Sun Yat Sen was contacted, as also Count Terauchi, the Japanese Premier, and Count Okuma a former Premier.[13]

Indeed it is these resources, and the possibility and belief in military success that likely differentiated the revolutionaries of the nineteen twenties from the more mythic, trans-historical imaginaries of the renunciants of *Anand Math*. In *Anand Math*, ultimate power was believed to lie in the spiritual practices of renunciation rather than real and available military power. The

[10] Gupta, Manmathnath. *Bhagat Singh and his Times* (Delhi: Lipi Publications, 1977), 106.
[11] Ghosh, *Bhagat Singh and his Comrades*, 19
[12] Singh, *The Jail Notebook*, 2007.
[13] Sinha, Bijoy Kumar. *Indian Revolutionary Movement* (Pune: Lokmanya Tilak Smarak Trust, 1966), 49.

historical irony lies in the fact that this rhetoric of the purely spiritual power of a small leadership band of renunciants was to be used in the nineteen twenties and beyond, with success, by Mohandas Gandhi. In Gandhi's case this spiritual power was entirely and explicitly non-military (the last section of this chapter engages with Gandhi's response to the revolutionaries). The ones who still believed in the military—but this time fortified with real weapons and strategy rather than the purely spiritual—were the bands of revolutionaries. What all these different ideologies shared in common was the belief that political and moral freedom is ultimately gained by the dedication of a few exceptional people. In the modern democratic age which purportedly believes only in the legitimacy of mass politics, the ultimate elitism of these ideologies still raises questions about the credibility of the category of the 'mass-political'. Or was the attraction of this politics by the dedicated few in response precisely to the perceived failure, and withdrawal, of Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement in the early nineteen twenties?

Meanwhile, in 1928, there was a very public outcry against the Simon Commission. This Commission was appointed by British authorities to look at participative governance but it angered Indians as it did not have a single Indian member. Lala Rajpat Rai, the *Arya Samaj* and Congress leader in the Punjab, led strident demonstrations against it. He was severely *lathi-charged* (the lathi being a long wooden stick favored by the colonial police) and was to eventually die of the injuries he sustained from police violence. An indignant Bhagat Singh decided to take revenge on the officers responsible. He killed a police officer—this action, with its attendant public acclaim, effectively moved him outside the pale of the law. A threshold had been crossed.

After this assassination Bhagat Singh went underground, and was only to re-emerge in dramatic fashion by throwing bombs in the Central Assembly in Delhi just as the anti-worker Trade Dispute Bill was being tabled. Ironically, Bhagat Singh and his colleagues were eventually to be executed as rebels by a British Labor Government. A lengthy trial was soon to commence, with much injustice by the authorities—especially in terms of the jail conditions of the political prisoners. It was to affirm their rights and dignity as political prisoners that Bhagat Singh and many of his comrades went on a series of hunger strikes. Jatin Das (1904-1929), a member of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, and its chief bomb-making expert, was to die on the 63rd day of his hunger strike. These hunger strikes were so inspiring that all over the country countless groups of formerly apathetic people emulated their jailed heroes and went on simultaneous hunger strikes.[14] The contrast in the public arena could not have been stronger in 1930—on the one hand Mohandas Gandhi, as Congress representative willing to negotiate tortuous agreements with the British on power-sharing, and on the other hand Bhagat Singh, asking to be executed by the British as an enemy soldier and hence prisoner of war. In a famous appeal to the Punjab Governor, Bhagat Singh wrote:

> That we were sentenced to death on 7th October 1930 by a British court, L CC Tribunal, constituted under the Special L.C.C Ordinance, promulgated by H.E. The Viceroy, the head of the British Government in India, and the main charge against us was that of having waged war against H. M. King George, the King of England. The above-mentioned findings of the court presupposed two things:
>
> First, that there exists a state of war between the British nation and the Indian nation and, secondly, that we had actually participated in that war, and were, therefore war prisoners…Let us declare that the state of war does exist and shall exist so long as the toiling Indian masses are being exploited by a

[14] Ghosh, *Bhagat Singh and his Comrades*, 26.

> handful of parasites. They may be purely British capitalists or mixed British and Indian, or even purely Indian…No matter if once again the vanguard of the Indian movement, the revolutionary party finds itself deserted into the thick of war. No matter if the leaders to whom personally we are much indebted for the feelings they expressed for us, but nevertheless we cannot overlook the fact that they did become so callous as to ignore and not to make a mention in the peace negotiations of even the homeless, friendless and penniless female workers who are alleged to be belonging to the vanguard and whom the leaders consider to be the enemies of their utopian non-violent cult which has already become a thing of the past, the heroines who have unimaginably sacrificed or offered for sacrifice their husbands, brothers and all that were nearest and dearest to them, including themselves, whom your government has declared to be outlaws… The choice of course, whether bloody or comparatively peaceful [agitational struggle] which way it should adopt, rests with you. Choose whatever you like. But that war shall be incessantly waged without taking into consideration the petty [illegible in manuscript] and the meaningless ethical ideologies.[15]

Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), the leader of the Muslim League, who was present in the Central Assembly in Delhi when Bhagat Singh threw the bomb, spoke strongly against the unfair trials. This was the first time in British law that prisoners were being tried *in absentia* as Bhagat Singh and his colleagues had refused to engage in the norms of appropriate conduct in the colonial court. They had refused to cooperate in their trial, and had resorted to stalling proceedings by shouting anti-British slogans. All of this political courage and inventiveness had led to these young revolutionaries challenging even Mohandas Gandhi in their popularity. The intelligence report, *Terrorism in India, 1917-1936* was to state: "Bhagat Singh especially became a national hero, and his exploits were freely lauded in the nationalist press, so that, for a time, he bade fair to oust Gandhi as the foremost political figure of the day".[16]

Though the political heat generated by the hangings seem to have abated by the late nineteen thirties, it was to never entirely go away. Memories were long, and, as the erstwhile Governor of the Punjab, O'Dwyer was to find out, the taste for political vengeance remained. In 1940, twenty-one years after the *Jalianwala Bagh* massacre, O'Dwyer was assassinated while addressing the Royal Asiatic Society in London. His killer was Uddham Singh, a former member of the Bhagat Singh's Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, and one who had been in jail during the tumultuous events of 1929-1931 when Bhagat Singh and his colleagues were being tried.

## BHAGAT SINGH'S PRISON LITERATURE: INTRODUCTION TO *DREAMLAND*, AND *ON SUICIDE*

Two major tracts that Bhagat Singh wrote in prison will be discussed below. These texts were found amongst his jail papers and were unpublished in his life (unlike the essay on language) and can be assumed to belong to the time of his final imprisonment. The Introduction to *Dreamland* (a book written by a colleague) is perhaps Bhagat Singh's clearest introspection on his political development. The writings on suicide may be said to be more private in nature—they were written to his colleague Sukhdev Thapar (1907-1931) as they both awaited judgment. The works discussed are an amalgam of his political and existential beliefs. The works are

[15] Singh, *Jail Notebook and Other Writings* (Delhi: Leftoword), 178-179.
[16] Pinney, Christopher. *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Basic Books, 2004), 114.

discussed in conjunction—to demonstrate how the issue of revolutionary morality still remained central to the enterprise of nationalism even as it negotiated new meanings of that morality itself. Morality was no more to be found in the image of the emaciated goddess in the forest as in *Anand Math*, or in foreign Burma as in *Pather Dabi*, but rather in the heart of India. Its image was indeed finally finding its centre in the huddled masses that Sabyasachi in *Pather Dabi* had held in detached contempt. The masses however still seem to need icons and leadership—this was the role that Bhagat Singh and his comrades envisioned for themselves. Unlike in *Anand Math*, politics was no longer seen as inherently corrupting but was instead now seen as the very centre of morality—and it had to be engaged with in the full glare of publicity, through open challenge in the newspaper and courtroom not in the secret societies of Sabyasachi.

According to Bhagat Singh's colleague Shiv Verma, Lala Ram Saran Das was the first formally recruited revolutionary in the Punjab. It was believed that he had been recruited by a Bengali absconder in 1908. Since then he had been in touch with different revolutionary cells and had finally joined the *Ghadar* Party. Lala Ram Saran Das was convicted for life in 1915 in the first Lahore Conspiracy case. While in Salem Central Prison, Madras Presidency, he wrote a book in verse entitled *The Dreamland*. After his release in the mid-nineteen twenties he contacted Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev and became active with the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army. He was arrested again in connection with the second Lahore Conspiracy case, which had also involved Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev. This time, according to Shiv Verma, he "wavered and accepted the King's pardon. Soon he realized the mistake and retracted the statement. He was charged of perjury and convicted for two years which was subsequently reduced to six months in appeal… It was during this conviction that he passed on his manuscript to Bhagat Singh for an introduction."[17] Bhagat Singh, in introducing the book, wrote:

> Today, sitting in the condemned cells myself, I can let the readers know as authoritatively that the life imprisonment is comparatively a far harder lot than that of death. L. Ram Saran Das had actually to undergo fourteen years of imprisonment. It was in some southern jail that he wrote this poetry. The psychology and mental struggle of the author has stamped its impressions upon the poetry and makes it all the more beautiful and interesting. He had been struggling hard against some depressing mood before he had decided to write. In the days when many of his comrades had been let off on undertakings and the temptation had been very strong for everyone and for him too, and when the secret and painful memories of wife and children had added more to the longing for liberty, he had to struggle hard against the demoralizing effect of these things and had directed attention to this work. Hence, we find the sudden outburst in the opening paragraph:
>
> Wife, children, friends that me surround
> Were poisonous snakes all around.
>
> He discusses philosophy in the beginning. This philosophy is the backbone of all the revolutionary movements of Bengal as well as of the Punjab. I differ from him on this point very widely. His interpretation of the universe is teleological and metaphysical, while I am a materialist and my interpretation of the phenomena would be causal. (152-153)

The Introduction to *The Dreamland* is perhaps the most substantial self-reflection of Bhagat Singh's own political conscientization. This conscientization so clearly derived from and paralleled the nascent political awakening in the Punjab in the early decades of the twentieth

[17] Varma, Shiv Kumar (ed.), *Selected Writings of Shaheed Bhagat Singh* (Delhi: National Book Center, 1986), 151.

century. Bhagat Singh begins his introduction by saying that he himself is a political worker and not a litterateur. Furthermore, he is not an uncritical enthusiast of all the ideas in the book (151). Nevertheless, he believed it filled an important gap—the lacuna, to his mind stood thus:

> In spite of all my efforts, I could not find any revolutionary party that had clear ideas as to what theory we were fighting for, with the exception of the *Ghadar* Party which, having been inspired by the USA form of government, clearly stated that they wanted to replace the existing government by a Republican form of government. All other parties consisted of men who had but one idea, i.e. to fight against the alien rulers. That ideas is quite laudable but cannot be termed a revolutionary idea. We must make it clear that revolution does not merely mean an upheaval or a sanguinary strife. Revolution necessarily implies the program of a systematic reconstruction of society on new and better adapted basis, after complete destruction of the existing state of affairs (i.e., regime). In the political field the liberals wanted some reform under the present government, while the extremists demanded a bit more and were prepared to employ radical means for the same purpose. Amongst the revolutionaries, they had always been in favor of extreme methods with one ideal, i.e., of overthrowing the foreign domination. No doubt, there had been some who were in favor of extorting some reforms through those means. All these movements cannot rightly be designated as revolutionary movements. (152)

This is a far-reaching claim, and shows how evolved and clear Bhagat Singh's thinking had become by this time. "Revolution" is now a concept, not just a set or sum of actions—be they expressed in the formulaic ways of "reformism" versus "extremism" or peaceful means versus violent means and such. The substantivity and durability of the category rests on the degree of self-consciousness and intentionality of a set of strategic actions. The mere causal chains and efflorescence of anti-colonial history, and action that is only contingently ethical (contingent because it does not know why or how it is ethical) is insufficient—this is the lesson that is derivable from the narrative of the writer, Lala Ram Saran Das, of *The Dreamland*. The careful, fully explicit and developed manner in which Bhagat Singh differentiates himself from this earlier generation is worth quoting at some length as it gives an idea of the historicizing arc of the rhetoric and ideologems of the revolutionary figure as it traces its prospective and retrospective keystones of development. This encompassing view includes both the personal subjective sacrifice of the revolutionary and the relationship of that personal struggle to the larger and normative ideals of public service.

What might an understanding of Bhagat Singh's summary notion of materialist and causal versus teleological and metaphysical be? It is not the intention of this section to indulge in a purely philosophical discussion of these terms *in vacuo*—it rather wishes to unweave the fabric of this self-selecting and recursive rhetoric to better illuminate some of the productive contradictions of this phase of the nationalist movement. All of these affects—the sacrifice of the domestic, the depressed mood, the solitariness and arbitrariness of being sent to some far corner of the country's penal system are signs of the sheer involuntary thralldom that political prisoners were held in relation to the mystery of the processes of colonial justice. A partial amelioration of this thralldom was effected through the attempt at narrativizing and hence making some sense of these experiences through language and literature. There is a poignancy as well as an appositeness in this commentary of one condemned prisoner to another, with its interlinked empathy and yet differences of perspective with regard to L. Ram Saran Das' thoughts and conclusions. This reveals, beyond the detail of the different conclusions, that an intellectual culture of debate and reflection on the most fundamental political and existential themes was explicitly emerging in the anti-colonial landscape of the nineteen twenties. The significance of

this will be fully explored in the remaining chapters where this reflection is carried to an even higher and wider degree of introspection and critical questioning by several Hindi novelists of the nineteen thirties and beyond.

## ON SUICIDE AS A POLITICAL ACT

A similar development of these moral and existential ideas regarding the revolutionary's ethics is present in other works written in the same prison and is exemplified in Bhagat Singh's letter to Sukhdev regarding the quandary of suicide. The long letter to Sukhdev was written, again according to their comrade Shiv Verma, when Sukhdev had suggested that he (Sukhdev) would rather commit suicide than serve the twenty or more years of life transportation that the British often imposed on the revolutionaries. Bhagat Singh, according to Shiv Verma, grew agitated and said "Escaping from hardships is cowardice". It was then that he set about writing the letter. The letter can be understood within that evolving notion of a political that cannot be disembedded from a host of related ontological concerns—notions of personal love, sacrifice, and service. Even a sacrifice in an "invisible" jail chamber is a form of service. This is held to be true even when the "served" masses outside the prison are not even aware of the revolutionary-martyr's sacrifice. Other themes in the letter include the spatialization and heirarchization of the world into the inside (i.e. jail) and the outside world whereby the inside is a sort of purification chamber—and where the political valency and concept of martyrdom differentiates it from the more atomist notion of individualist, and hence selfish suicide. As often, inseparable from these political values are literary values—for example the notion of obstinate "realism" in Russian literature, "nowhere visible in our own," which is held up as a kind of truth-seeing and hard headed political realism that India desperately needed (143). The extraordinary terseness and epigrammatic nature of Bhagat Singh's swift-moving whirlpool of consciousness is worth quoting at some length:

> My opinion is what you had held earlier, that suicide is a heinous crime. It is an act of complete cowardice. Leave alone revolutionaries, no individual can ever justify such an act… You say you fail to understand how suffering alone can serve the country. Such a question from a person like you is really perplexing, because how much thoughtfully we loved the motto of the *Naujawan Bharat Sabha* [Young Indian Association] "to suffer and sacrifice through service". I believe that you serve as much as was possible. Now is the time when you should suffer for what you did. Another point is that this is exactly the moment when you have to lead the entire people…At the time of our imprisonment, the condition for the political prisoners of our party were very miserable. We tried to improve that. I tell you quite seriously that we believed we would die very shortly. Neither were we aware of the technique of force-feeding nor did we ever think about it. We were ready to die. Do you mean to say that we were intending to commit suicide? No. Striving and sacrificing one's life for a superior ideal can never be called suicide. We are envious of the death of our Comrade Jatindra Nath Das. Will you call it suicide? Unfortunately our sufferings bore fruit. A big movement started in the whole of the country. We were successful in our aim. Death in the struggles of this kind is an ideal death…. You will recollect that we have talked several times about realism in Russian literature, which is nowhere visible in our own. We highly appreciate the situations of pain in their stories, but we do not feel that spirit of suffering within ourselves… I will say that only the references to their resolve to bear pain has produced the intensity, the suffering of pain, and this has given great depth and height to their characters and literature. We become pitiable and ridiculous when we imbibe an unreasoned mysticism in our life without any natural or substantial basis … I want to tell you that in jail,

> and in jail alone, can a person get an occasion to study empirically the great social subjects of crime and sin… The best part of the self-study for one is to suffer oneself. (143-144)

Part of the very notion of the political ontology of the revolutionary is this continuity between inside and outside. The world outside is imprisoned in its own illusory consciousness and thus needs the leadership of the jailed, but awake, revolutionary. There is also the continuity between death and life even if life involved invisibility in a distant or secret prison. Bhagat Singh was to write to B. K. Datta (1910-1965) on learning that he himself had been "awarded" the death penalty and Datta had been sentenced for life:

> Those revolutionaries who have escaped the gallows, should live and show to the world that they cannot only embrace gallows for the ideal but also bear the worst type of tortures in the dark dingy prison cells. (149)

It must remain a curious question in nationalist history as to why Bhagat Singh, more than any other figure, was to achieve the degree of iconicity that he did. Was 1931, the year in which he was hanged, a time of a more broad-based nationalism than the older time of Kartar Singh's 1915 hanging? According to Bhagat Singh's mother, as a child he used to carry a photograph of Kartar Singh in his pocket proclaiming him "hero, friend and companion"—yet Bhagat Singh achieved a wider celebrity than his idol.[18] Why did he achieve such fame even relative to his compatriots Sukhdev and Rajguru? Is there perhaps a more readily available iconography of martyrdom in the Sikh Punjab—Sukhdev Thapar was a Khatri Punjabi and Rajguru a Deshasth Brahmin from Maharashtra. Or is it that Bhagat Singh's more varied and heart-felt writings—on the need for a pan-Indian language or in his search for a more universal ethic which took him toward socialist ideas—gave him a more widespread appeal in an India that was increasingly being brought together by a mass and pan-regional anti-colonialism. In his *Autobiography*, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), the prominent Congress leader and later first Prime Minister of India, wondered at the "phenomenon of Bhagat Singh, his sudden and amazing popularity in northern India… Terrorists have flourished in India off and on for nearly thirty years and at no time, except in the early days in Bengal, did any of them attain a fraction of that popularity which came to Bhagat Singh".[19] Likewise, another prominent Congress Leader, Subhash Chandra Bose (1897-1945), commented, "Bhagat Singh is not a person but a symbol. He symbolizes the spirit of revolt."[20]

As an instance of Bhagat Singh's pan-Indian appeal, as well as the contemporaneous formulation of a tension between Gandhi's ideals and Bhagat Singh's ideals, it is pertinent to observe the chord that his death struck in South India. To some extent contradicting Bhagat Singh's lament that the Madrasi may never learn Urdu, it might be said that the Madrasi did certainly care for the fates of the youthful revolutionaries. Soon after the hanging of Bhagat Singh, the Dravidian leader E.V. Ramaswami Naicker (1879-1973), known more widely as *Periyar* [the elder leader], remarked sarcastically of the Congress and its supporters in an editorial in March 1931:

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[18] Deol, G.S. *Shaheed Bhagat Singh: A Biography* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1969), 13.
[19] cited in Gupta, *Bhagat Singh and his Times*, 139.
[20] cited in Deol, *Shaheed Bhagat Singh: A Biography*, xi.

> They praise Mr. Gandhi for coming to an agreement with him [the Viceroy Lord Irwin]. They are not satisfied that the agreement has been reached without laying down the condition of not to hang Bhagat Singh, but [yet] also consider signing of such an agreement as a great victory and celebrate the same.[21]

## GANDHI AS INTERLOCUTOR FOR THE MORAL REVOLUTIONARY

To begin with, Gandhi's chief interlocutors in the ideological morality of the Indian freedom movement were the extremists—this was true from the beginning of his career in India. It is clear from as early as the 1909 text *Hind Swaraj*. This text was written at the time when the lines were most sharply drawn between the so-called Extremists and Moderates, both of whom were at war with each other, and had almost come to blows in the famous Congress session held in Surat in western Indian in 1907. At that time, the ideology of extremism was well represented in the Alipore trial (Alipore is a neighborhood in Calcutta) involving the intellectual heirs of Bankimchandra Chatterjee—chiefly the charismatic writer and alleged revolutionary Aurobindo Ghosh. Ghosh was a Cambridge educated civil servant and educator in the service of the King of Baroda, an area in western India. Soon he was radicalized by contact with figures like Balgangadhar Tilak (1856-1920), an influential editor and severe critic of British rule. The separate trials of Tilak and Aurobindo in 1908 were among the first and most influential sites for the public articulation of extremist sentiments of complete freedom from British rule using a variety of the means at hand, not excluding violence. Tilak and Aurobindo were seen in many parts of the country, and by many classes of people, as courageous martyrs to a righteous cause. *Hind Swaraj* was written in response to this ferment in the country regarding the means and ends of political freedom. While Gandhi clearly repudiated violence he had to take into account the extremely high moral regard in which the 'extremists' were held by the larger public—especially in contrast to the more moderate and constitutionalist wing of the Congress, who were mostly seen as meek petitioners. This moral conflict came to a head in the Surat Congress of 1907 where the extremists staged a walkout from the Congress as the Congress was widely believed to be dominated by the elite Moderates. It is thus easy to derive some of the ideological lineage that Bhagat Singh and his colleagues adhered to with respect to mainstream constitutional and moderate methods.

However, by the time of the trial of Bhagat Singh in 1930, the Congress had widened its reach and could not be said to be a purely elite, moderate force. Much of the credit for this is given to Gandhi who had launched mass agitations, especially the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920—this had gone beyond the reach of any movement that the Moderates had envisaged. It is debatable however if the Non-Cooperation Movement reached every level of the nation—geographically and in terms of classes like agricultural labor. There is much scholarship on Gandhi's successes, failures, and limitations in this period of the nineteen twenties.[22]

However in this section, the focus is narrower. It methodologically limits itself to Gandhi's writings during the period of Bhagat Singh's trial—i.e. 1930-1931, and so does not

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[21] Singh, *The Jail Notebook and Other Writings*, 188.

[22] There is a distinguished literature on the relationship of Gandhi to various mass mobilizations, including that of the peasantry and along religious lines, in the nineteen twenties. See especially Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Gyan Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

engage with the larger empirical question of the legitimacy and limits of Gandhi's claim to being a mass leader. The section is concerned with probing the competition between Gandhian and revolutionary ideals—this is significant as both Gandhi and the revolutionaries make their claim at a moral level, beyond the immediate instrumentality of independence from British rule.

To begin with, it is perhaps significant that relatively little direct reference is made to the revolutionaries in Gandhi's writings during these years. It is well known to readers of Gandhi's voluminous writings (there are over ninety volumes) that much of his oeuvre consists of his correspondence with a rather large and faithful band of followers, most of them living in his Ashram in Sabarmati, a suburb of the city of Ahmedabad in western India. Much of the letters in this crucial period of 1930-1931—when he was in prison for the Dandi March protesting British taxes on salt—are of extraordinarily mundane events. This too is typical of much of his writing—an almost obsessive preoccupation with the mechanics of the *charkha* (the spinning wheel specially devised for him to spin Indian *khadi*, the latter a term largely used for handspun cotton), of his (and his correspondents') weight and diet, of their handwriting, of certain kinds of baths as an elixir for a wide range of diseases, and so on.

The issue of Bhagat Singh and his colleagues however does come up occasionally. In a letter dated August 31, 1930 the Nehrus (father Motilal and son Jawaharlal) and Syed Mahmud, a prominent Congress leader, all of whom like Gandhi were in prison, wrote to Gandhi about the ongoing negotiations with the Viceroy Lord Irwin:

> Regarding the Bengal and Lahore Case Ordinances we feel no exception should me made in their favor as suggested by Lord Irwin. We have not claimed release for those political prisoners who may have been guilty of violence not because we would not welcome their release but because we felt that as our movement was strictly non-violent, we would not confuse the issue.[23]

It would seem that these Congress leaders were complicit in the harsh sentencing of Bhagat Singh and his co-conspirators. The final verdict on the death penalty was made by the seventh of October, 1930, a little more than a month after this capitulation. As stated, Gandhi's letters of this period reflect little concern with the revolutionaries and their fate. This is strange as the revolutionaries had specifically targeted "meaningless ethical ideologies" and "the cult of non-violence" as anachronisms in their writings—the phrases were clearly meant to evoke and challenge Gandhian thought and strategy. Some commentators argue over whether Gandhi's power over the Congress and the people at large was not already slipping after his self proclaimed "Himalayan blunder"—this blunder referred to the descent of the Non-Cooperation Movement into violence. At any rate Gandhi's seeming indifference to the fate of the wildly popular Bhagat Singh and his colleagues did not help.

It is ironic that what Bhagat Singh and Gandhi shared (perhaps only dimly consciously) was this sense of being deliberately anachronized, even as they were used as icons by their party organizations. In Gandhi's case it was the Congress Party, and in Bhagat Singh's case it was the Communist Party (which had been formed in 1925) and which had evinced little interest in the ideas of Bhagat Singh's Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, even though they were happy to appropriate its popularity. Gandhi had been constantly complaining in the letters of the period of

[23] Gandhi, Mohandas. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: Volume 50, 1930-1931* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Trust, 2000), 475.

how no one, neither in the Congress Party nor in the country at large, was taking his economic *charkha* program seriously. More powerful ideological differences were becoming apparent even within the Congress as the new, youthful, and charismatic Mayor of Calcutta, Subhashchandra Bose (1897-1945), protégé of the veteran Congress leader Chitaranjan Das (1870-1925), was openly opposing Gandhi precisely over the question of the treatment of political prisoners in places like Meerut and Calcutta.

Thus Gandhi and Bhagat Singh's charisma was being claimed and expropriated by diverse spectrums of the nationalist movement. Bhagat Singh was assimilated both to the emerging socialistic Left (within Congress, as well as outside in the Communist Party which Bhagat Singh's younger colleague Ajoy Ghosh (1909-1962) was soon to join and lead), and by the Right. It is perhaps no coincidence that both the Communist Party and the militantly nationalist upper-caste-led *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (known more widely as RSS, and translates as National Self-help Group), were formed in 1925. These were the years of a maximal revolutionary sentiment, and the time when mainstream Congress nationalism was in thorough disarray after the arrest of Gandhi and several prominent Congress leaders following the violence involved in the Non-Cooperation Movement. Gandhi seemed to have run out of political ideas after the self-proclaimed blunder of the Non-Cooperation Movement, and the *Khilafat* (Caliphate) Movement, meant to unify Hindus and Muslims, had come to an embarrassing end. Many Congress members had dual membership with newly emerging blocs like the RSS on the one hand, and the socialist faction on the other hand—the latter within the Congress Party itself.

Perhaps it matters little in terms of this political appropriation that Bhagat Singh died in 1931, and the Gandhi lived for seventeen more years. Both of these moral ideologues benefited from being pitted against each other at that historical moment. For if, as Periyar and others claimed in their editorials, Gandhi profited from being seen as the more pliant alternative to the more intransigent revolutionaries, then it was also true that Bhagat Singh and his conspirators rose to a certain prominence by taking their aim squarely at the Gandhian ideology of *ahiṃsa* (non-violence) by any means and to any ends. The implication was that Gandhi was passive toward, or even unable to recognize, the *hiṃsa* (violence) of state violence and the punitive punishment directed at political opposition. Indeed, Gandhi made it explicitly clear that civil disobedience must stop at the jail's door—in jail, one has reached the limits of one's political goal, and one must once again revert to a sort of good citizenship. This outlook may be contrasted to Bhagat Singh's view of the task of the revolutionary as that of waging perpetual war against colonialist capitalism—it did not matter if this war was waged within jail or in the outside world. This good citizenship in jail may seem to be a curious insistence on Gandhi's part. However, one can never accuse Gandhi of being inconsistent or not thorough in his thinking and strategizing. If one reads his work, his logic is clearly laid out. For instance, Gandhi wrote in a note titled *Duty of Satyagrahi Prisoners*:

> Our civil disobedience is fulfilled when we seek imprisonment. Disobedience would cease to be civil if we defied legitimate jail discipline. We may not therefore shout or create a row in the jails. We may not refuse work when it is demanded of us according to rules. We should rather be anxious to do as much work as we can and that too as efficiently as we are capable of. It would be nice if even 'simple prisoners' volunteered to do some useful work not necessarily with a view to get any remission. Prisoners undergoing

> simple imprisonment have helped a great deal in easing tense situations by merely offering to do hard labor. Whatever work we turn out is so much addition to the National Wealth.[24]

Again, this notion of an almost "perpetual peace" and obedience in the polity may be contrasted with Bhagat Singh and his comrade's notion of perpetual war between colonialism and nationalist armies. It was not a minor matter of nomenclature that Bhagat Singh's group insisted on calling itself an Army. It is an open question how Gandhi would have responded (and told his followers to respond) to the overt brutality that Bhagat Singh's revolutionary Army was subject to—especially measures like force feeding—which was never carried out on Gandhi, not even when he was on one of his fasts-unto-death. This aspect of the colonial prison was plainly something that the members of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army never foresaw—or at least nothing is indicated in their writings prior to imprisonment. Their writings were largely abstract and ideological in nature, a sign perhaps of a certain naiveté with regard to colonialism. It seems as if in the cavern of the prison a whole new paraphernalia of horror was suddenly illumined for these special cases. In contrast, Gandhi, a self-admittedly pampered prisoner was complaining in these same times at things that would seem relatively trivial. His chief grouse at this time was that all the prisoners had not been given *charkhās* (spinning wheels)—and even this plea was later heeded. If he wished *satyagraha* to stop at the prison door, colonialism most certainly did not—it took on an acuteness that was nowhere acknowledged in the public discourse of British justice and fair play, or even in the demands of mainstream nationalists with regard to prison reform.

The purpose of revisiting this historical juxtaposition of Bhagat Singh and Gandhi is not to justify, or choose one politics over the other, but to point out certain similarities and divergences of their notions of the political practice of freedom. Both insisted on a certain extreme and continual ontologization of the political. The work and judgment of political service was derived from the knowledge of this ontologization. It can be further argued that the ideal (expressed in the language of Truth in the case of Gandhi and "Revolution" and a cluster of associated terms like Liberty, scientific realism etc in the case of Bhagat Singh) serves more in the form of a sort of providential deism—God or the Revolution exist in terms of the absolute ground or *telos* of politics. This is an ideal that in its scope and in the inner details of its unfolding, are beyond the individual political worker and his group, and is indeed no direct business of theirs. The space of the ethically engaged human-citizen is in the work, practice, and labor of sacrifice and service for both Gandhi and Bhagat Singh. The final tangibility and achievement of that labor might be beyond the ken of the individual worker or leader but the ethical demand is relentless and always immediate. In this sense they both test the scope and robustness of a nationalist surface that is supposed to accommodate this tensile diversity of varied political thought and practice.

This chapter reads this relation (even in the relative meagerness of the direct interaction between Gandhi and the revolutionaries) not just as a benign diversity of the nationalist spectrum that is amenable to a liberal or Marxian reading. For in the liberal imagination of nationalism, Gandhi and Bhagat Singh represent extremes of fervor, but both in the end only hymn to the greater glory of nationalism—such interpretations certainly make for good school textbooks.[25] In

[24] Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: Volume 50, 1930-1931*, 280
[25] Chandra, Bipan. *India's Struggle for Independence* (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989).

the more Marxian readings, Gandhi is seen as compromised and a Hindu obscurantist, but one who was nevertheless politically useful for mobilization, while Bhagat Singh is seen as being useful only in the teleological sense of being a transitional figure toward the clearer Marxian or socialist ideology of the various Communist Parties.[26] This chapter editorializes less on the supposed rightness of different methodological approaches and rather seeks to ground nationalist hermeneutics as having to continually wrestle with the contingent fact of the juxtaposition of divergences that have nevertheless found surprising common ground and shared motifs in a moment of historical actuality, i.e. the moment of the late nineteen twenties and the early nineteen thirties, or in other words, the last phase of the nationalist movement.

In the explicit terms of 1930, in the letter to Gandhi cited above, and written by the Nehrus and Syed Mahmud, there was the references to "political prisoners." Gandhi's responses are again consistent with the political philosophy he had been developing ever since his days in South Africa from the last decade of the nineteenth century. He took responsibility only for those who claimed to be directly following his orders. This referred to the inner core within the folds of the Congress Party who were the self-proclaimed *satyāgrahis* (literally, "graspers of truth")—those who upheld the vow of an absolute *ahimsa*. Within this corps of *satyagrahis*, Gandhi did not discriminate in terms of region, caste, class, gender, or religion.

The relationship of Gandhi to this inner core is worth exploring in greater depth in relation to the question of political morality and motivation. A woman named Gangabehn Vaidya from his Sabarmati Ashram had written of how she and her colleagues had stood nonviolent even when surrounded by the bloodied heads of demonstrators beaten by the police.Gandhi responded to her letter with approving wonder:

> How I would have smiled with pleasure to see your *sari* made beautiful with stains of blood. I got excited when I knew about this atrocity, but was not pained in the least. On the contrary, I felt happy.[27]

There is thus an almost mystical fascination with blood, an inverse perhaps of the terrorist's intoxication for blood. The rhetoric of blood as sacrifice permeated both discourses—of *ahimsa* and revolution. In the revolutionary's case blood forms a circuit—it is both spilled from others as well as from oneself. Bhagat Singh and his co-conspirators had appealed to the colonial authorities to have them shot rather than hanged. This was because being shot gave them the honor of being enemies of state, while being hanged was the punishment handed out to homicidal criminals. To be shot perhaps had the additional appeal of bloodied corpses, the making visible of the state of war they had proclaimed. This circuit of blood is escalative in the case of both Gandhi and Bhagat Singh. Except in the case of a final achievement of a meta-stable end (be it the utopian Revolution or the mythically perfect kingdom of *Ram Rajya*), the spilling of blood and people who are always ready to die is the very currency of the development of political praxis. For Gandhi, a polity where blood is not being spilled is politically inert, one intent on only materialist gain and lacking conviction, or fearlessness. As Gandhi noted, in words that could have been written by Bhagat Singh:

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[26] Habib, Irfan. *To make the Deaf Hear: Ideology and Program of Bhagat Singh and his Comrades* (Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2007).
[27] Gandhi, Mohandas. *The Collected Works of Mohandas Gandhi: Volume 51, 1931* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Trust), 94.

> Fearlessness connotes freedom from all external fear, fear of disease, bodily injury and death, of dispossession, of losing one's nearest and dearest, of losing reputation, of giving offence, and so on. One who overcomes fear of death does not surmount all other fears, as is commonly but erroneously supposed. Some of us do not fear death, but flee from the minor ills of life. Some are ready to die themselves, but cannot bear their loved ones being taken away from them. [28]

This is why non-violence is to be understood as a necessary work of self-violence, an expiation of debt to earlier savants. This self-violence is as old as its mirror correlate of non-violent *ahimsa*, which, as Gandhi was fond of saying, "is as old as the hills." For Gandhi, life is ceaseless debt:

> Every single act of one who would lead a life of purity would be in the nature of a *yajna* [ritual sacrifice]. *Yajna* having come to us with our birth, we are debtors all our lives, and thus forever bound to serve the universe. […] He who does this duty with love and devotion for god and to the best of his ability, discharges his debt fully.[29]

This is arguably no different from the cycles (and overt rhetorics of debt relieved by blood alone) among the revolutionary vanguard like Bhagat Singh. These debts are both to personal ancestors (the male lineage of his uncles) and to the more abstracted and global historical figures (of the French Revolution, of Italian unification, Sardar Kartar Singh, etc.) that he always cited as inspiration for his actions and beliefs. By the time of Bhagat Singh's last essay *Why I am an atheist,* he clearly stated that the age and situation of violence was past. In the new historical moment of mass-politics, ethical service to his countrymen required a public rhetoric that could only be achieved by an internal clarity of social values, diagnoses, and ends, i.e ideology:

> Now realism was our mode of thinking. At times of terrible necessity, we can resort to extreme methods, but violence produces opposite results in mass movements. I have talked much about our methods. The most important thing was a clear conception of our ideology for which we were waging a long struggle…People who have ideas like ours do not throw bombs at their own innocent people.[30]

Gandhi too had consistently reasoned values that were not swayed by political opportunism or simplistic types of historical "intelligibility" or rightness. Rather, it was based on what he believed to be his conscience derived from the *Bhagavad Gita*'s (a central moral text of Hinduism, believed to be composed in the first century of the Common Era) injunction to be not swayed by the fruits of action. Likewise, the reason Bhagat Singh wrote his long essay on atheism was his feeling of the need to respond (perhaps ironically, perhaps not) to the question of an elder prisoner who felt that he (Bhagat Singh) was acting in the spirit of egotism, and not "without concern for fruit [i.e. fame]" as the *Bhagavad Gita* instructed. Of course it is logically impossible to prove that one is not acting with egotism and is being purely selfless—or rather, one can prove it only indirectly, not so much by arguing against the principle, but rather against

[28] Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Volume 50: 1930-1931*, 20
[29] Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Volume 50: 1930-1931*, 161, 208
[30] Singh, Bhagat. *Jail Notebook and Other Writings*, 2007.

the originary nature of such principles itself—i.e., the privileged, normative status of a religious text like the *Gita*. Yet Bhagat Singh took the moral question seriously and wrote his long essay on atheism in response. And yet the content of the answer did indeed take him away from theistic religion. He wrote that when he died, he believed that there was no after life, and that his life of service was to be consummated in spite of the risk of anonymity and the forgetting of his contribution in the secularized heaven of the revolutionary state if and when it does form. Arguably this is not far from Gandhi's notions, for even though Gandhi felt that there might be the eventual utopian release from worldly birth (*moksha*) at some later life, he insisted repeatedly that he was very far from that stage—all he could do was try to act with the same lack of egotism.

Again, what is being argued is that given the enormous unlikelihood of an achieved *moksha* or *Ram Rajya* or the perfect revolutionary state, the derivation of ultimate legitimacy and ethics from these end-states seems of dubious effectivity. What is significant is the worldly tools at hand for the politics of the present moment. It is in this ground, of an active and absolutist moral politics that nevertheless derives from a deep political and existential uncertainty that Gandhi and the revolutionary may be said to share certain traits. This moral absolutism, in opposition to more mainstream and utilitarian nationalists and socialists, makes them similar to each other even if the political ends and means they envisage are opposed. The next chapter explores the extension and generalization of these competing and yet occasionally similar moral universes. The inner self-doubt of the revolutionary (perhaps even of the Gandhian revolutionary) made for some generative literary figurations and explorations.

## CHAPTER III

## JAINENDRA KUMAR AND THE HINDI NOVELISTIC TRADITION: THE POLITICAL REVOLUTIONARY IN THE SOCIAL, FILIAL AND AFFECTIVE SPHERES

Jainendra[1] could be said to be of the same generation as Bhagat Singh—he too was to come of age as a young man in the late nineteen twenties and thirties. He was born in the first decade of the twentieth century, in 1905, in Aligarh. This city was home to the distinguished Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College (later Aligarh Muslim University) founded in 1875 by the progressive and loyalist Muslim aristocrat-educationist Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898). Aligarh was located in what was then called the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (present day Uttar Pradesh). Jainendra finished his exams in the Punjab before joining the Benares Hindu University for further studies. It was there that he first became involved in political activism—the young man quit his education due to the call of Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement that had been launched in 1920. A decision to quit one's education for political reasons was a sacrifice that would have made the conservative middle class social milieu Jainendra came from look warily at him. The early influence of Gandhi and the type of politics he engendered is central to understanding Jainendra's work.

The other decisive influence was literary, that of the most eminent of Hindustani novelists, Premchand (1880-1936), who too was deeply inspired by Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement. Speaking in very general terms, Premchand could be said to be the author most responsible for bringing the realist social novel into Hindustani. Some of his novels are large and sprawling with many characters of different social strata—like the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Russian authors he so admired—most especially Tolstoy and Gorky. Equally, some of his novels are smaller and more focused on single themes of contemporary social import. These have often to do with issues regarding gender norms—such as the marriage of widows, or the marriage of young women with much older men. There is a correspondence brought out under the editorship of the distinguished Hindi literary scholar Vidya Niwas Mishra, which brings together everything that Jainendra wrote about Premchand.[2] It is extraordinary in its documentation of literary mentorship, and this section will spend time delving into the correspondence in detail to bring out the evolution of Jainendra's mature novelistic style, the development of his protagonists, and their relationship to each other.

His relationship to the legend of Premchand began as early as his childhood:

> I had heard of Premchand ever since I was a little boy. To me he was a mythical being… It was in 1926, or maybe 1927 that I came across a copy of *Rangabhūm*i [which can be approximately translated as *Theater of the World,* and which significantly had a pietistic Gandhian character as the protagonist], and read it at one

[1] This dissertation will refer to the Hindi writers by the name they are known in the Hindi-speaking world—hence Jainendra, Premchand, Agyeya and Yashpal.

[2] Kumar, Jainendra. *Premchand and Jainendra: Letters*, trans. Sunita Jain (Agra: Y.K. Publishers, 1993). All translations cited from this book are by Jain.

> go. It was the second and not even the first portion of the novel, but so what! It was Premchand's and I devoured it… By 1929 I had written something myself… I mailed my piece to Premchand.[3]

A story of Jainendra was published by Premchand in the journal Premchand was then editing—*Mādhuri* (Sweetness). A correspondence began between the two writers and Jainendra visited Premchand in his house in the winter of 1929-1930. The correspondence continued even when Jainendra was in jail at Multan, an ancient city in southern Punjab, due to his involvement with Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement in the early nineteen thirties. The mentorship was to end only as Jainendra sat by the bedside of the dying Premchand—and in a sense it continued even after that as Jainendra kept revisiting the personal and literary achievement and influence of Premchand on his own life and work. Much of his praise of Premchand was in regard to Premchand's extraordinary humility—this trait was indeed commented on by many people. Jainendra seemed particularly shocked that Premchand's indifference to worldly acclaim was so pronounced that he had not bothered to visit Delhi, the capital city till 1931, till he was over fifty years old.

In a letter from a Congress meeting in Karachi in March 1931, the time of Bhagat Singh's hanging, Jainendra wrote to Premchand: "There is plenty going on here. The young are eager to do something to undo Gandhi. They forget that Gandhi will be undone only by death. But we are sure to have a bit of drama because of these educated young men. Let us see what happens" (93). Two years later, Jainendra asked Premchand if he (Jainendra) could send him a book-length work by a new writer called Agyeya (112). Within a month Premchand had agreed to publish two stories side-by-side, one by Jainendra and the other by Agyeya, in the September 1933 issue of *Haṁs* (Swan—Premchand's last and most beloved journal which he often requested Jainendra to edit). In a letter a few months later Premchand wrote: "Agyeya's story was superb. We're of the opinion here that the emotional aspect of his poems is very, very good, but he has yet to carve them better. People say that his stories and prose-poems are better than his poetry" (116). The next chapter of this dissertation focuses on the novels of Agyeya—the reason Agyeya is named in connection with Jainendra and Premchand is in order to show how intimately connected these writers and their literary evolution and aesthetics were. This was true even if they seemed to be of different generations and of different political persuasions. Literature and publishing did bring them together—and even more, the development of certain themes in Hindi prose of that time. It is significant that Premchand praised Agyeya's "emotional aspect." This aspect was what Premchand felt himself deficient with in regard to the Bengali writers Sharatchandra Chattopadhyaya and Rabindranath Thakur—as he felt of most Hindi writers of his generation, with the possible exception of the poet and essayist, Jayashankar Prasad, who lived from 1889 to 1937 (13).

Some of the differences between Premchand and Jainendra's interpretations of themes like desire, subjectivity, gender, class, freedom, as well as literary form, can be pithily understood from Premchand's candid befuddlement at one of Jainendra's short stories called *Gramophone Record* (the original title is in English). Premchand asks: "But why did the woman leave her house? Perhaps because she was illiterate. The illiterate however are not bored, they always find something to do. How to spend time is a problem only for the new, sophisticated

[3] Jainendra, *Premchand and Jainendra: Letters*, 5-6

woman of western education. They need thrills and excitement all day, so they can't stay home… In short, I'm trying to understand your story. Perhaps to want to understand is wrong. Perhaps you merely wanted to draw a portrait of a woman in a particular state of mind" (141).

In addition to the literary conversation, Jainendra's response is valuable for another reason –it shows the continuity of the literary to the political, as also the relative access and privilege these writers had to political leadership. He writes to Premchand at the end of the letter: "If you go to Wardha please convey my greetings to Gandhiji. Tell him that I have his letter, and the moment I gather sufficient courage, I'll send him a reply" (143). In terms of the more specific literary conversation, Jainendra writes:

> The woman in the story fell because of the surroundings of course, but did you not see a bit of self deception in her character? I tried to work that into it. Without her self-deception, the whole affair could be easily justified. But that is not what I aimed at. I had hoped that the reader will not find the woman merely despicable, but impart her a little sympathy. That was the sole purpose of words like *vishva-ātma* [literally, world –soul]. It is obvious in the story that the woman suffers from guilt. And because of the guilt she has to go away and leave behind the world in which her husband protects and loves her. Could she have shared that guilt with those around her? She could not. And because of this inability, she quarrels with her husband. I hope from these comments the story will improve in your estimate and you will not find it encouraging indiscipline. (142-143)

One can already see in this early story Jainendra's figuration of the woman as the bearer and boundary-crosser testing social morals. Jainendra is clearly a sort of moralist—this concern with "indiscipline" seems to chime well with the closing reference to Gandhi. Yet the scope and challenge of morality is itself the central theme of the short story. Premchand had seemed surprised in his comments over the fact that the point of the story might be no more than "merely want[ing] to draw a portrait of a woman in a particular state of mind." It was not about understanding her "exterior" motive—her illiteracy, and its social location—but rather the isolated interior and locked-in landscape of her guilt. It is in the development of these new emotional aspects—in certain privileged forms of subjectivity like that of the revolutionary, or of the young, desirous woman who emerge from mostly conservative, middle-class backgrounds—that Jainendra and Agyeya would develop Hindi prose psychology beyond Premchand. These subjectivities—being already at the margins of society—are fertile ground for the explorations of new ideas of political and marriage relations.

## *SUNITA* (1935) AND THE INTERNALIZATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY SENTIMENT BY THE HOUSEHOLD

Premchand was perceptively aware of the radicality of Jainendra's work. Significantly, he makes an explicit and unexpected connection to politics. In his first, brief review of *Sunita*, Jainendra's novel published in 1935, Premchand writes: "You have thrown too big a challenge like Gandhi wanting freedom for India at one go. It will be a tight rope walk" (155). It is significant that Premchand makes the comparison to Gandhi—for in theory the revolutionary (the central male character in *Sunita*) repudiates Gandhi's slow, non-violent methods. Yet Premchand perceptively sees that the radical nature of the revolutionary is not that far from Gandhi's own radicalism—at least the radicalism of the Non-Cooperation Movement when

Gandhi had declared that if the masses followed him with discipline they would be able force the British to leave the country immediately. At the level of literary form and accomplishment, *Sunita* the novel is like Gandhi—in danger of over-reaching and thus at great risk of failure while at the same time at the verge of genuinely new forms of political and literary sensibility.

However, Premchand's more detailed letter discussing *Sunita* reveals how profoundly he might have missed the novel's central point and appeal. To understand the letter a brief synopsis of *Sunita* is required. The novel concerns itself with three chief protagonists—a young, middle-class married couple (the eponymous Sunita and her husband, the lawyer Shrikant), and Hariprasann, a college-mate of Shrikant. Hariprasann returns after a gap of some years to Shrikant's life, even though the author makes clear that Hariprasann was never far from Shrikant's thoughts.[4] Though the marriage of Sunita and Shrikant seems outwardly happy, there is some suggestion of a certain inchoate frustration on Sunita's part. It is only when Hariprasann re-enters their life on Shrikant's urging that a relationship begins to develop between Sunita and Hariprasann. However, the twist in the novel lies in the fact that Hariprasann is also part of a revolutionary party, and perhaps to distract and disavow his relationship with Sunita, he urges her to join the party. All this time the husband Shrikant plays a strangely passive role, at moments even seeming to encourage the relationship by leaving for Lahore, and allowing the two to spend more time alone with each other. The area where the party operates (or is forced to operate) by the colonial police is in the forest. It is thus in the forests reminiscent of *Anand Math* that the climactic trope of the test of moral courage and abstinence is played out. For while Hariprasann, perhaps disinhibited by the non-domestic site of the forest, reveals his desire, Sunita shames him into de-tumescence by unclothing herself. By the end of the novel Hariprasann leaves the couple.

It is worth quoting Premchand's detailed letter in response to *Sunita* at some length. Unfortunately, Jainendra's reply to this, if there was one, is lost. Premchand writes:

> Why should a woman not aspire beyond herself? If she has to capacity to go beyond being a housewife, then she must. The conflict that Sunita feels upon entering the wider world is in keeping with her married life. But your Hariprasann seems to be going [illegible] toward the end. Why did they have to hide it from Shrikant? It smacks of moral weakness. Shrikant could have been taken into confidence. A man as generous as Shrikant, would not have been a hurdle. And even if he proved one, Sunita should have paid the price. It seems that Hariprasann tried to seduce her. That Sunita remains the flag bearer is a matter of pride for her as well as for the nation. But why must Hariprasann bring her down from leadership to debauchery? Sunita is a married woman, he could have had a liaison with Sathya [Sunita's unmarried younger sister]. But since Shrikant and Sunita have already formed a relationship, why must Hariprasann behave in that way? And in case Sunita loved Hariprasann then she should have told this to her husband. Why this effort at being sly? In any case, I did not think Sunita was infatuated with Hariprasann, nor is she unhappy with her husband. She shows no signs of rebellion against her married life. Then why must she bend before Hariprasann? Is it because of Hariprasann's personal magnetism? If is so, it is unbecoming of Hariprasann, and shows a lack of discipline. He has cheated his friend who loves him more than a brother. For a rebel, marriage can be of no consequence. But its social consequence should not be forgotten. A woman can work in films and continue to be a housewife. She can even go so far as to kill her husband if he is a debauch. But to fall in the clutches of a young man, and a freedom fighter at that, is neither to her credit nor to his. [5]

[4] Kumar, Jainendra. *Sunita* (Bombay: Hindi Granth Ratnakar, [1935] 1955), 5. All translations from *Sunita* are mine.
[5] Jainendra, *Premchand and Jainendra: Letters*, 156-157.

Premchand questions, in a manner both naive and extremely rational and skeptical, almost every innovation that Jainendra Kumar was trying to bring to the form of the protagonist's subjectivity. Implicit in Premchand's universe is the understanding that the revolutionary/freedom-fighter/nationalist is a moral, domestic householder. Indeed one can retain a simple seriality of those terms (revolutionary/freedom-fighter/nationalist) in Premchand's oeuvre only because they are all equally moral. Insofar as gender enters, it is only as a progressive cause—widow remarriage, the plight of the exploited prostitute and suchlike. However what Jainendra Kumar seeks to do is to use desire (especially taboo desire) as a tool to probe the formation of subjectivity—in both men and women, and in both the middle-class job-holding householder and the criminalized but educated revolutionary at the political margin. The power of the novel lies in exactly the seduction (in the simultaneous sense of politics and illicit desire) of the householder Sunita. Premchand is understandably puzzled at the de-centering of morality (with the householder-couple as explicit metonym for "nation")—and for reasons that he variously calls "unbecoming," "lack of discipline," "moral weakness," "debauchery," "sly[ness]," and the "[forgetting of] social consequences."

In turn, at a later period after Premchand's death, Jainendra wrote a brief essay entitled *Premchand's Godān: Had I written it. Godan* (The Gift of a Cow) is to many, Premchand's greatest novel. It was also his last, published in 1936—the year Premchand died. Jainendra writes:

> I would not have needed them all [he is referring to the sheer number of Premchand's characters]. A few would have served my purpose. Partly, because to handle so many is not my cup of tea, but mainly because quantity sometimes is a hurdle to intensity. It gets lost in the broad canvas. The foreground recedes. Expanse, of course is needed for a good and realistic account of a particular society of time. But depths of feeling and soul may then be a casualty… One may not know many people, but knowing a few intimately seems more valuable to me. A friend you understand is worth more than a hundred casual acquaintances… On analyzing [any] particular mental state I would not have made any definitive statements. Knowledge, after all, is a conjecture… so I would have suggested and not concluded… Agony speaks best through silence… Except Hori [the oppressed peasant-protagonist] all others are shown to be aggressors. Instead, I would have shown that each is a victim locked in a futile effort to victimize the other. Actually all the forces that affect us are abstract. (165-170)

What Jainendra seems to do with the Hindi novel in the nineteen thirties is to miniaturize and escalate core conflicts. The conflict moves from the expanse of the entirety of the social spectrum (and the representation of it in Premchand) to the intimacy of the domestic, of the friend, of the filial. This is even more true in his next novel, *Tyāgpatra,* published in 1937.[6] Even the canvas of the revolutionary-political is scaled down, thus magnifying its power by the compacting of it, to a love affair. As has been shown in the previous chapters, the revolutionary sentiment operates best in small groups—be they the literary characterization in *Anand Math* and *Pather Dabi*, or indeed in the actual historical role played by small groups like the Hindustan Socialist Revolutionary Army. This narrative meme of the small, criminalized revolutionary group of men and women thrown together also runs through the oeuvre of later novelists discussed in this dissertation—Agyeya and Yashpal. A suspicious colonial system does not allow the right of assembly of large, hostile groups. Hence all these characters have to constantly

[6] Kumar, Jainendra. *Tyagpatra* trans. Agyeya (Delhi: Hind Pocket Books [1937] 1980). All translations used are from Agyeya.

retreat to distal sites like the forest in *Anand Math* or *Sunita*—or to the foreign (Burma in *Pather Dabi*), or to the many hiding spaces of Bhagat Singh's army, or to the depths of factory warehouses in Yashpal's novels. The members of this small group develop intense relations with each other if only because their life is literally in each other's hands.

Jainendra's creativity is in seeking to subvert the equation of the colonial oppressor and the criminalized revolutionary. Even as the political establishment attempts to keep order by banishing its enemies to the margins, an apocalyptic scenario comes to be born. The revolution has, instead of organizing and amassing at the margins, switched strategy and penetrated the innermost haven—that of the householder-citizen. Arguably, in every one of the homes in the city, a revolution(ary) could be born—it is no longer out there in geography, but within, in a new political ideologization. By abstracting the revolutionary sentiment, Jainendra is able to universalize and to demonstrate how each seemingly conservative middle class home may serve as potential site of recruitment to the revolution in *Sunita*. Sunita's dilemma stands metonymically for any householder—and this situation is also repeated in novels like Yashpal's *Dada Comrade*. It is also not surprising that desire (and the correlative attempt to suppress it) is twinned with political dissent—the novelistic tradition from at least as far back as *Anand Math* has mandated and expressly formulated this twinning. By allowing himself to concentrate on one triangle, Jainendra is able to pack that triangle with as much emotional concentrate as it can bear. This speaks to his minimalist aesthetic, contra Premchand; for Jainendra less is indeed more, and "agony speaks best through silence." He chooses his terrain intimately, but even here in this intimate space of a "friend you understand," he is happy to leave things only suggested, "without definitive statements," for "knowledge is only a conjecture."

In Jainendra's 1937 novel *Tyagpatra* (The Resignation), there is a further abstraction—the revolutionary party in its explicit historical iteration is abandoned altogether. Only the transgressive sentiment remains in the relation between the protagonist and his aunt. The nation-in-miniature—the household, remains. The world of punitive conservatism—colonial and middle-class—is represented by the protagonist who embodies its compromised though partially penitent epitome. The protagonist is a judge in the colonial order. The novel is largely the story of the judge's helpless love for his father's younger sister—this aunt's life rapidly descends the class ladder as she is accused by her husband of unfaithfulness, and ends up living with undesirable men. This is even as the protagonist climbs the colonial-bourgeois ladder. Unlike *Sunita*, where Shrikant is only a young lawyer, in *Tyagpatra* the protagonist is a full-fledged, aged, respected, judge. By the end of the novel, the aunt is living with a working-class man, as far away from her original home in terms of class, caste, and filial status as possible.

## CHALLENGES TO THE MIDDLE CLASS MARRIAGE THROUGH THE NARRATIVE FORMATION OF SELF-MARGINALIZING PROTAGONISTS

The early challenge to the traditional, middle-class, caste-based marriage emerged from many women's reform movements of the late nineteenth century. These reform movements mostly focused on extreme cases like that of the child widow—the tragedy of a child who lost her "husband" whom she barely knew. If the husband died when the woman was a child, she was

deemed a widow even if the marriage was unconsummated and the child had not even reached puberty. The practice of then sequestering this child-woman forever within the household, or in some far-off holy place such as Kāshi, caused indignation in all but the most conservative traditionalists. However, by the nineteen twenties, the case had been extended from a condemnation of such extreme cases, toward a more tentative rhetoric around choice-based companionate marriages. For instance, in Premchand's *Nirmalā*, published in 1925, the narrative sympathy lies with the chief protagonist, a young woman Nirmala who is married to an old man but attracted to his eldest son who is much closer to her in age.[7] Clearly by the mid nineteen twenties, the theme of romantic love is represented as one being most tenable between people of similar age and temperament—rather than being based on the purely financial need that led to Nirmala marrying the jealous and grasping older man.

It is in this context that Jainendra's innovation and Premchand's puzzlement can be understood. For Premchand had helped pioneer many of the themes of romantic love. Yet in Premchand there is rationality to that love. The husband is presented as purely petty—one is thus in full sympathy with Nirmala's distaste for him. Nirmala's attraction to the husband's son is not developed much in terms of either plot or sentiment—it is only skillfully suggested. The plot then takes other twists and does not much develop this taboo relationship.

Jainendra, on the other hand, is interested almost exclusively in the nature of the transgressive, as for him it is the transgressive alone that reveals something essential about marriage and desire. It has been stated that in *Sunita* there is no clear reason for Sunita to be unhappy with Shrikant—indeed Shrikant seems the epitome of gentlemanliness as Premchand remarked. Yet something nameless in desire draws Sunita to Hariprasanna. Is this desire that different from Shrikant's own unexplained fascination with Hariprasanna, the one who, as Shrikant reminds himself early in the novel, has not settled down into bourgeois domesticity or bourgeois professionalism or education, and who still wanders with something of the college student's amorphous political idealism? This idealism had then morphed into the Gandhian politics of Non-Cooperation for which Hariprasanna served in jail—and in Shrikant's memory, Hariprasanna's explicit rebuttal of domesticity had to do with his sense of service to the nation.[8] The themes of personal abstinence and sacrifice versus political service are familiar from *Anand Math* and *Pather Dabi* and this broad thematic is indeed the keystone of this dissertation. What is new in Jainendra and this period of the late nineteen thirties is the light skepticism that anchors the narrative focal point—at this point early in the novel, the perspective is provided from that of the bourgeois husband and professional. The grandiose vision of sacrifice is being gently questioned—yet with affection, respect and a still lingering fascination. Hariprasanna is never formulated with quite the grandiosity accorded Sabyasachi in *Pather Dabi* or to the many revolutionaries in *Anand Math. Sunita* is all about vulnerability and growth and change—for both Sunita and Hariprasanna.

This might well be Jainendra's special insight—his focalization is often from the domestic sphere looking out. He does allow the play of fascination with the figure of the revolutionary. After all Sunita is seduced by Hariprasanna's ideals. Jainendra also does not overly editorialize this fascination. This is perhaps what makes the novel an improvement on the Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore's 1916 novel, *Ghare Baire,* which presents a similar

[7] Premchand, *Nirmala* (Delhi: Manoj Publications, 2004).
[8] Jainendra, *Sunita*, 11-13.

situation with a housewife being seduced by the violent call of a revolutionary. Yet Tagore's novel suffers from its overly didactic sympathy with the husband—in *Ghare Baire* the husband represents rural landed interests rather than the urban professional one represented by Shrikant in *Sunita*. In *Ghare Baire* the revolutionary is gradually exposed as being more and more confused, violent and corrupt, and the wife realizes her mistake and returns to the husband and his values—Tagore seems incapable of sympathetically examining the subjectivity of the revolutionary figure. Even though *Sunita* ends with the eponymous character returning to domestic duties, the powerful moments in the narrative are in the representations of her gradual seduction and assumption of leadership of the revolutionary organization. Even when she returns Jainendra does not in heavy-handed fashion extol the conservative virtues of the legal profession. Indeed in his next novel he explicitly renounces those values. In disavowing overt moralism, and in admitting vulnerability Jainendra avoids the simpler world of both Tagore and Premchand—as he had written: "knowledge is a conjecture. There is always a question mark, so I [would have] suggested and not concluded."

This exposure of the inner hollowness of the legal profession—of the supposed guardians of the just Empire—is taken to the extreme in *Tyagpatra.* In the manner of a complex legal artifact, the novel begins by parodying notions of will and testament. From the start, there is an extensive unpacking of an elaborate framing. There is no simple Subject and his/her perspective. Rather, there are interpretations of fragments and much conjecturing over whether the world can ever disclose moral and legal intelligibility. The novel begins with a Prologue, which states the passing of a high-ranking judge, Sir Pramod Dayal. It is noted that he lived a "simple, austere" life in the pilgrimage town of Hardwar—thus there is already more than a hint of penitence and guilt. No family is mentioned; the novel that follows is from a text found "hidden" amongst his papers, some extracts of which, for reasons not explained, nor ever explored, had already been published. There is already a tense engagement with the public sphere—private, hidden papers, yet published by the judge himself or perhaps someone else, perhaps when he was still alive—and all this only fragmentarily, with unclear motives. The Prologue ends stating that the text, "almost like a novel," will be published in full but with altered names of persons and places, as well as some omitted details. So there is a fragment, torn in unknown places, for unknown motivation, for fear of unclear consequence. It is not even known what these details might be, and whether they are truly as innocent as claimed—the writer of the Prologue does not himself or herself appear, and the relation to the solitary and austere Sir Pramod Dayal can only be guessed. The evocative obscurity of the Prologue is mentioned here as indicative of the narrative craft already at play. Long before the fetishising of a modernist obscurantism, this 1937 novel has already approached the ground where a revealed text always speaks of, and invokes, unrevealed and extra-textual truths, and the recognition that it is only with one's knowledge, ignorance, and speculation that one can approach the truth. Furthermore, the events of the novel represent a still older time, perhaps around the turn of the century. Much has happened in the social climate of northern India in the first three decades of the early twentieth century, as Sir Pramod Dayal went about his rise up the professional ranks—and yet is the point of the memoirist (or, the memoirist-narrator hidden in the novel) that of showing how little indeed had changed in that social climate, at least for women, for family politics, and for male and female relationships. In all of these dense evocations of form and memory *Tyagpatra* anticipates Agyeya's *Shekhar*, a novel discussed extensively in the next chapter.

Disavowing the omniscience of the knighted Judge, the "I" in the memoir/novel claims to be no judge of good and evil, for he feels that this is impossible and transcendent of the more utilitarian aims of legal justice that he earlier embodied. Instead, one is presented with a Judge who dwells at length on his childhood and youth. The *bua* (his aunt Mrinal) is introduced precisely at the moment that Judge Pramod Dayal announces that he cannot call her sinful, and that indeed he only felt great sorrow and pity for her. And yet this pity is not a simple gift of forgiveness. For her very abjectness (which may now be inferred, but without explication) makes him question his life and its values—"her memory makes the high wall of respectability that surrounds me and insulates me seem sham" (7). It also dooms Pramod to a life without any peace of mind—and if this lack of peace of mind was due to any sense he had of not having done right by her, the situation now seems irreparable. For these thoughts have been triggered by his receiving the news of her death in what he is certain were wretched circumstances. The realization that she might have thought of him in her last moments "sends a chill of terror through me" (7).

Thus the novel begins with two deaths, the frame-death of Sir Pramod Dayal, and the more significant death of the aunt within the novel. It is the death of the aunt that is the narrative trigger for the Judge's memories within the novel-testament. In this it is unlike another famous novel that also begins with the death of a maternal figure—the French writer Albert Camus' near contemporaneous 1942 novel *The Stranger*.[9] Unlike *The Stranger* however, the narrative in *The Resignation* never returns to the present and the actions in the present; rather the death is felt so keenly that the rest of the novel is entirely drenched in the past. The effect of the death is openly acknowledged, again unlike *The Stranger* where there is at least the pretence of an indifferent male machismo.

Mrinal is the protagonist Pramod's father's youngest sister, and was only four or five years older than Pramod, so it was natural that they were playmates. Pramod writes, "my aunt and I were inseparable."[10] Pramod introduces his father as a "highly respectable gentleman"—but this must be interpreted in the light of his decrying that very respectability in later life and in relationship to himself. The suggestion is that though the father was fond of his little sister, he was relatively distant from her, leaving the task of bringing her up to his wife. Soon though, in the prose, a more direct yet couched animus is directed toward Pramod's mother:

> If only she had been as gentle as she was capable… But "if" is a monster that devours everything. It is enough to say that she lacked tenderness… And like myself, she [Mrinal] lived under my mother's iron rule. This was a rule that knew no mercy, and to this day I am still uncertain whether such inflexibility does more harm than good… It could not perhaps be said that her love for the girl was any the less, but she fully intended to mould her in accordance with her own pattern of the model housewife. (7-8)

It has not been sufficiently remarked in the literary criticism of novelists like Jainendra Kumar and Agyeya how much the starkness of maternal cruelty is formative for the protagonists. Much of this cruelty is directed at other women in the household, and at the men via the women. The mothers are not just hard-hearted, but also serve as petit-bourgeois defenders of moribund social and religious values. Even in Jainendra's first novel, *Parakh* (The Examination), published in 1929, it is the mother who is the chief obstacle to the love of the progressive, dreamily

[9] Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*, trans. Mathew Ward (New York: Everyman's Library, 1993).
[10] Jainendra, *Tyagpatra*, 8.

idealistic law-student for an ebullient fourteen year-old widow—the father in that novel is dead.[11] In *Tyagpatra*, the father might seem a little more affectionate and progressive due to his responsibilities of being the income-earner, but he is relegated to the margins of the intra-family dynamic. Reading novels like *Tyagpatra* calls for the problematization of generic notions of the piety of the maternal that are supposed to undergird consciousness in these early decades of the twentieth century—notions like Mother India, and similar notions of the nutritive maternal matrix in earlier Bengali novels like *Anand Math*. It can be seen how Jainendra inaugurates this new sensibility that is later taken up by Agyeya. There was clearly an emerging critical consciousness of dysfunctional family dynamics. And furthermore, such an insight was allowed to be expressed fairly openly within the novel. Indeed the novel could not proceed were it not for the actions of the mother—she is the central narrative trigger and affective influence in the childhood, adolescence, and adult life of Pramod and Mrinal.

Mrinal always called Pramod's mother "your" mother, never quite accepting the role of dutiful young woman of the household. Even in her childhood her "carefree and happy" nature seemed at odds with the discontented and joyless outlook of the mother.[12] The intensity of the memory of Mrinal's carefree nature (which was at odds with all that was to subsequently befall her) is such that Pramod feels it absolutely present even as he recalls it several decades later. Childhood, at least initially, is painted in idyllic colors in this novel—this is unlike *Sekhar*, whose memories of childhood are mostly unhappy, and whose idyllic moments were to be mostly found in solitude, and in the midst of natural beauty. In *Tyagpatra*, the joy of childhood was chiefly the company of the loved sister/aunt/playmate.

Mrinal did make some effort to mould herself in her sister-in-law's image—occasionally she lectured Pramod (in what one must imagine was contrived fashion), on how important it was to follow elders and their traditions. She also precociously sensed that this way of the elders would more likely benefit the male Pramod than her—and she took pride and delight in fantasizing what he would become in his adult professional life. In retrospect, and perhaps to her even at that moment, this must have been a tender moment, one which throws into relief the societal cruelty that is going to imminently condemn this bright, lively, and lovable girl-woman to misery and destitution. It reveals how quickly her self-consciousness—even though it is represented narratively only through Pramod's memory—apprehends in precocious fashion her gender and age positionality within the household.

The boy Pramod was unable to comprehend what must have been a growing subjectivity in a pubertal Mrinal, and could only make the observation that she soon began to spend much time alone, staring at kites, doodling and not noticing his presence (12-13). Mrinal's growing consciousness that puberty would alter her childhood relationships forever, even as new desires evolved in her, made her seem strange to Pramod as she could not communicate any of this to him. She began to spend many hours late into the day at her friend Sheila's house—this was socially unacceptable for a girl growing into womanhood especially as Sheila had a brother. Servants had to be sent to fetch Mrinal home. This situation ultimately precipitated the fury of Pramod's mother who caned Mrinal. A terrified, agitated Pramod brings the cane expecting to be beaten himself, so confused was he by the sight of his mother's rage. Mrinal was defiant in

[11] Jainendra, *Parakh* (Delhi: Rajkamal Publications, 1929).
[12] Jainendra, *Tyagpatra*, 10.

refusing to scream in pain—Pramod is exposed to the horrific sight of his mother and Mrinal trembling, albeit from different motivations.

This turn of events found its final meaning within five or six months, in the announcement that Mrinal was to be married off. These swift-moving incidents of strange adult decision-making regarding gendered roles, ordered amidst a simmering and roiling ocean of affect, is depicted in glittering and detached prose. The only overt sign of violence is the mother yelling at servants. Yet the implications are clear—unlike the protagonist in *Sunita*, Mrinal, is abruptly taken away from school and not allowed to graduate. She is denied the education that might have allowed her greater and more self-conscious agency in the world.

The reason *Tyagpatra* seems more powerful than *Sunita* is that unlike *Sunita* with its direct and straightforward narration, *Tyagpatra* gives us the central moments of injury only through narrative indirection and retrospection. From the beginning the narrative has already been undercut by much loss. This makes the injury more powerful in its haunting incompleteness and lack of clarity. Even the narrator of the novel, the adult Judge Pramod, cannot bring to the surface this enormous complex of pain and suffering regarding Mrinal. His subjectivity is permanently disabled by the event of his aunt being abruptly married away and by his mother's cruelty and apathy. Pramod seems more aligned to his father's emasculated inability to seriously intervene in societal expectations with regard to his sister's marital prospects.

The subjectivity of Pramod cannot be disentangled from Mrinal's—both in terms of his love for her, but also in the narrative terms of his ending his testament with this novelistic address to her. Indeed, the entirety of his self-reflection, i.e., the novel, is framed from beginning to end as an unrequited and endless address to her. This is true even if it ends up being only a call to the soundless and unresponsive hollow space of the dead woman. This fused subjectivity is similar to *Sunita* insofar as Sunita's subjectivity too is meaningfully awakened only by the arrival of Hariprasanna's—and for the duration of the novel their subjectivities are enmeshed. However, unlike Mrinal at the end of "her" novel *Tyagpatra*, Sunita does have a domestic role to which to return. The narrative does not speculate on how Sunita might later re-understand her relationship to Hariprasanna—it is the assailable and fragmentary retrospection of Pramod that makes the formal structure of *Tyagpatra* especially foreboding and potent.

Mrinal never settled into domestic life—she returned to Pramod's home a few days after the wedding and entrusted him with delivering a letter to her friend Sheila's brother—it was her alleged relationship with this brother that had precipitated her hasty marriage, and yet she boldly resumed the correspondence. Eight months later, Mrinal turns up unexpectedly at Pramod's house visibly pregnant. She compounds her distance from Pramod by sticking to the aunt's role of telling him to attend to his studies and not worry about her. A clearly gendered fate resolves itself—this pair, inseparable and indistinguishable friends until recently, now have their futures arranged in strikingly different ways. She is pregnant as wifely duty demands and he is already the absorbed, determined student on the road to professional success. The contradictions clearly show—in spite of her admonishing him about his studies, she nevertheless communicates her frustration—"She [i.e. herself Aunt Mrinal, speaking from a self alienated third person perspective] no longer belongs here. She belongs there—to him. What right have you to bar your uncle from his property?" (27).

Mrinal progressively disavows her wifely duty by refusing to return to her husband. The husband then deems her books evil. Literary education had been used to cement the heterosexual

relationship and also functioned as an anti-bourgeois gesture against utilitarian professional education from as early on in Jainendra's career as his first novel *Parakh*. In *Sunita* too, the graduate protagonist Sunita is first seduced by Hariprasanna on account of their shared love of English romantic poetry. Literary education is also central to several of the female characters of the Hindi novelist Yashpal. Reading is paradoxical—on the one hand seemingly otherworldly, abstract, and trance-inducing in its pleasures, it nevertheless, swoops down swiftly and surely into the real historical world and effects genuine changes and actions on the part of its heroines. Reading is linked to desire, and there is a strident denunciation of the temptations reading induces. This understanding of reading as a temptation of the modern world is endorsed by Mrinal's husband: *"He* didn't approve of them, they were a waste of time. No, she would have nothing more to do with books, old or new (34). The other literalized sign of desire—the child in her womb—is also a rejected image of pain, and instead of the typical up-swell of maternal feeling that might be expected, Mrinal is instead found writhing and sullen, speaking openly of this "damned belly" (37). Perhaps this is not unexpected as there have been only negative representations of the maternal in the novel. In the end, Pramod brings the oil that forces the abortion.

## NARRATIVIZING DISEMPOWERED SOCIAL SUBJECTIVITY

It is not a coincidence that *Tyagpatra* followed *Sunita*, or that Agyeya's *Nadi ke dvip* followed *Shekhar*. Both Jainendra and Agyeya first centered their conflict on revolutionaries and then abstracted that conflict into the realm of the purely heterosexual relationship by removing the superstructure of the political claim. The history of Hindi literary modernism (and its later avatars in the nineteen fifties including the *Nayi Kahani,* i.e. the New Story movement) with its complex, desiring male and female subjectivites, cannot be written without reference to the original formulation of that conflict on a political basis. This is true even if that political basis was to be later discarded. Yashpal's oeuvre remains a testament to this binding of the personal and the political, and indeed, as he kept the faith longest as a political activist, he never made the move of entirely extracting the romantic relationship from its political milieu. Additionally, let it be recalled that these Hindi novelists were themselves re-interpreting the political conflict in a less masculinist model than that of *Anand Math* and *Pather Dabi.* They gave greater play to the equalities and enmeshments of male and female political desire within small, criminalized, and dissident political groups where a certain equality and trust between the sexes was necessary for the group's basic survival from the police.

Nevertheless, different modes of narrativizing the Subject remain—both between the three writers, as well as internally in their oeuvre. In Jainendra's *Sunita*, the three main characters are already adults at the beginning of the novel—though the revolutionary Hariprasanna has not settled into traditional sociality, he is presented as an educated man self-consciously choosing his revolutionary path and making the case for others to do the same. Yet, despite his self-confidence in much of the novel, the most climactic scene has him reduced to helplessness by desire. Hariprasanna is similar to characters in *Anand Math* and *Pather Dabi,* where the trope of abstinence was used to confirm and test the single-minded purity of the revolutionary mind. When Hariprasanna attempt to seduce Sunita in the forest, Sunita defuses

the crisis by baring her body. This sight abruptly halts Hariprasanna, and his paralysis is expressed in his calling out to the earth to swallow him. The mythological reference is to Sita in the Hindu epic *Ramāyan*—wishing the earth to swallow her when she had been wrongly accused of unchastity. Hariprasann thus becomes woman-like in his shame. As in *Anand Math* and *Pather Dabi*, the masculine revolutionary is always only one lustful moment away from losing both his revolutionary credentials as well as his masculinity. However, there is a critical difference from the earlier Bengali novels—this is a tribute to the development of the Hindi novel in the nineteen thirties. Hariprasanna's helplessness in the face of desire does not condemn him to death, or to the reader's censure, or indeed, to Sunita's contempt. Rather, the portrayal continues to be sympathetic—this is in clear contrast to the way Sabyasachi condemns Brojendra in *Pather Dabi* to death, or Kalyani likewise condemns Bhabananda in *Anand Math.* The narrative of male helplessness—understood not in the traditional negative sense of loss of control of the aforementioned Bengali novels, but in the new sense of an increased sensitivity to the world (including the sorrow of the world)—is achieved gradually in *Tyagpatra* through a narrativizing of the entire process of naïve childhood as ridden with the pain of family and gendered social roles. Male emasculation thus creates the ground and desire for an increased sensitivity to other's sorrow in contrast to the cruelty and insularity of typical male power and worldly success.

Just as there is no idealized code of desire and abstinence, there is no code of idealized masculine control in either *Sunita* or *Tyagpatra*. In *Tyagpatra*, the incapacities of Pramod's father constantly under-cut notions of achieved and stable masculinity and social power. Though nominally in charge, Pramod's father seems to be a mere spectator to the events affecting his sister. This trope of the distant father is widely prevalent and yet only inexplicitly stated; again, here many of the moments of Agyeya's *Shekhar* may be anticipated. In *Tyagpatra* the father makes brief and rather pathetic efforts to engage his sister, but then quickly withdraws, stung at her moodiness and obstinacy. When later on in the novel the father dies, it is mentioned without much comment or analysis or feeling by the son—indeed the chief significance of the father's death is a renewed interest and freedom of feeling on Pramod's part toward his aunt.

This tension between effete fatherhood and the disaffected son, between adult and child, is again configured through narrative. The tension is reflected and doubled in the further narrative distance between the child-boy Pramod and the mature narrator/author. The formula that Jainendra follows, though not consistently, is that often the thoughts are adult-like, while the actions –such as his stroking Mrinal's forehead—are of the child. The verbalizations—the supposed direct quotations from the past—are mostly of the child and Mrinal in that photographic moment of the past. But equally, not all of the thoughts are of the adult. The narrative has the ability to get into the child's mind and see the world from there—for example, to remember deeply the simple thrill of being attended to by the big, older brother of Sheila. Yet the poignancy, for the (adult) reader and the now adult Judge Pramod, lies in the fact that the child does not know that he is actually getting his aunt into very deep trouble. It is in this twilight world between the world's moral intelligibility (naively available to the child with his/her entitled sense of the wellbeing of loved ones) and the social responsibility the world demands (which the adult of both genders is unable to perform—the judge has to resign, Mrinal has to leave her husband) that the novel constructs fundamental questions about moral action, the good and evil that Pramod as the adult Judge refuses to answer or even entertain anymore.

There is a literal and clean split of the child Pramod (and its correlate pure affect of non-verbal agony) and the guilty, remembering, memorializing adult of many years later. The dream of that final resignation of the adult male judge is the dream of a return to the simpler moral world of childhood and its affects—one travels through adulthood to reaffirm one's past, the very past that one was in haste to transcend in order to reach the wiser judgments and power of adulthood. What is more, this retrospection is not innocent nostalgia but one compounded and made urgent by guilt. For while the judge may as adult have the luxury of claiming the higher morality of the renunciant, the instructor of all this wisdom (Mrinal), lies un-helped, ostracized, and later, dead, abandoned as it were, even by the narrative. It may be asked if Pramod ever does learn or understand Mrinal or her motivations. The letters and attestations of humility are found amongst his private papers and were perhaps meant to remain private after his death. Unlike Mrinal he was not tested in the public sphere on his newfound conviction—the simple, austere life at the holy site of Hardwar elides the fact that he had not taken a strong, public stance on these matters with his family and had left it to an unknown posterity to perform the task for him. And it is in exactly this straightforward politics that he refuses to learn from Mrinal whose life was lived in contrast to his—not as success or resignation, but in a public and defiant war with her social baiters. The novel brings to sharp relief a critique of the very value so important to a certain kind of Hindu nationalism—that of the "renunciant," including that of the renunciant revolutionary who is renunciant in his sexuality even if dissident in his politics. Here, one thinks of *Anand Math* and *Pather Dabi* again. The power that Mrinal manifests is not that of the quietist renunciant revolutionary but that of open courage in the service of social change.

What is powerful in much Hindi literature in the reform movements from the late nineteenth century is the marriage of melodramatic narration and reform. This chapter has briefly discussed *Nirmala* as an instance of a melodramatic reform novel. It is not just that there is the representation of domestic violence at the historical moment when the companionate marriage is emerging as a social fact, but also that this violence is often directed against a child—for the woman in these novels have indeed barely emerged from un-gendered childhood. Thus the dramatic moment sometimes conflates childhood and the woman to an uncomfortable degree. Is the supposed greater sensitivity (and the awakening of protective tenderness in the reader, male and female) elicited by what we feel for her as for a child or as for a woman? In what sense is it meaningful to fuse these sensibilities when it is the adult female subjectivity that is so socially repressed? This is why the argument for companionate marriage is difficult to articulate—in order to have full agency, the protagonist must be capable of reflection and desire, not just pain. But has the child been yet given a space to grow in the novel or in history, toward full womanhood, and to a lesser extent, manhood? Is not adult subjectivity thrust too quickly, and without forewarning and forethought? Again, this may be why Jainendra felt the need to further explore male and female subjectivities not so much from the fully formed adult political perspective as in *Sunita*, but rather from an evolving affective architecture—one he explores in greater length in *Tyagpatra.* This architecture can hope to meaningfully raise the question of why, in *Sunita,* a political revolutionary might be paralyzed in a moment of desire. In this one might speculate if Sunita's action of disrobing is an agential even if sacrificial act, or if it too is a form of paralysis and annulment. *Tyagpatra* lays the speculative groundwork for this affective architecture—and in the thwarted relationship between Judge Pramod and Mrinal a reader might better understand the impasse of Sunita and Hariprasanna in the forest. The child is indeed the

father of the revolutionary—in *Anand Math* the revolutionaries call themselves children. *Shekhar* too is about the uncertain emergence of the revolutionary from the child. If adolescent sexuality is the threshold that the child crosses to become a man, then is abstinence and the rejection of sexuality a reversion to childhood or to a still more obscure masculinity?

The other adult models seem disempowered too. The powerless father of Pramod is left to petition the equally childlike, surly husband of Mrinal, to take her back into his (the husband's) household, promising that he (Pramod's father) would never receive Mrinal at his home again without the husband's permission. Pramod's father then proceeds to give his sister Mrinal homilies on the duties of virtuous wifehood, even while privately sympathizing with her plight (30- 31). Again, Pramod hears this adult conversation only through the narrative device of "overhearing" and this overhearing hastens his resolve to enter the iniquitous world of adulthood so that he can ameliorate, perhaps even redeem Mrinal. The child's fantasies of powerful adulthood are brought to grief just as surely as the adult sense of loss at the simpler faiths of childhood, are discovered to be irretrievable in adulthood. These themes of childhood and a necessarily hollowed adulthood persist, rendering any convictions, including the political convictions of revolutionary consciousness, uncertain and discontented—in both Jainendra and Agyeya. Just as Jainendra abstracts the problem of modernist self-consciousness from its political articulation in *Sunita* into the more generalized bourgeois-professional heterosexual relational site of *Tyagpatra*, so too Agyeya's work abstracts the signature existential dilemmas away from the ore of its revolutionary politics of *Shekhar* to the more generalized milieu of romantic relationships in his later novel *Nadi ke dvip.*

What is this adult male self-consciousness that seems unable to ground itself? It may be argued that even the secular novel needs to invoke the beneficence of a basic bourgeois rational order. The rift in the ground of this order is suffering—this view is also explicit in the opening sections of *Shekhar*. Pramod, as he grows into a male adult makes a metaphysical statement about the world. The emphatic statement is that there is simply too much undeserved suffering:

> Oh thou, all loving and all good, I cannot understand thy way. On all sides I hear the voices of suffering and want. O father of the world, what place has all this anguish in thy benign purposes? Consider the work of thy hand. To thee it is idle sport but for us mortals, it is the whole cycle of being and negation. What is the value of our bravest efforts … We are the fruits of our own actions. ( 45-46)

Though it seems that Pramod is formulating a traditional question, even a traditional dissent, in reality it is a negation of specific Hindu pieties. There is a calling into accountability of the traditional Vaishnavite notion of the world being simply the play (*līla*) of god. While earlier this claim might have been used to elicit a compensatory call to veneration and awe, here the question seems simply unappeasable—for Mrinal is gratuitously dead. Likewise, the traditional injunction to leave the fruits of action to God (enjoined especially in the sacred Sanskrit text the *Bhagavad Gita*) is overturned—there is a claim that man is his own fruit, the owner of his actions. And there is the sense that this fruit is false or merely social—the eminence of the respected Judge is hollow, as was his law—and perhaps higher laws too. Jainendra once wrote to Premchand that his view of religion could not follow Premchand's simple caricature of religious people, rather that narrative drama is at its most powerful when one finds it impossible to believe, and yet cannot not believe. It is at the boundary of faith and resignation that "agony speaks best through silence" (168).

Pramod's metaphysic borders on the salvific powers of suffering, closer to Jainendra's Jain religion with its prominent belief that asceticism toward worldly rewards is the only possible bulwark against pain. This brings him closer to Gandhi who too was very indebted to Jain thought:

> As a man moves, under life's relentless pressure, pain accumulates within him. It is the only truth, the essence, the jewel within the lotus. It is what illuminates his path. Without it, there is only the dark and trackless maze in which, bruised by appetite, desire and vanity, man wanders here and there like a waif… Not success, but suffering; success is dross, while suffering is a salve for the soul… We can only pay homage to those who carry the burden of the world's suffering upon their shoulders without complaining. (48)

And yet the question persists of the differential experience of social disempowerment by the two genders. Did not Mrinal loudly, and with her whole body, protest? And did her asceticism and social and material sacrifice save her? Pramod did not visit her even though he heard of her stillborn child. He saw her next only after gaining a diploma. By this time Mrinal's husband had "discarded her. She had been unchaste: he [the husband] discovered that she had always been so" (51). She refused to return even when her husband sought restitution, which included threats of violence (51). Pramod then hears the extra-ordinary news that she had taken up residence with a retailer in charcoal—this latter trade being full of negative associations to a middle class North Indian Hindu/Jain upper caste sensibility with its obsessive notions of ritual hygiene.

It is likely that this "chance" reencounter is due to the liberating effect of his father's death. He one day simply decided to revisit his aunt because he suddenly noticed that the station sign indicated her town. This liberation is not so much from the authority the father never had, but rather from the "timid and morose" attitude of his father toward Mrinal's fate (50). He also sought to avoid the claustrophobic attempt of his mother to marry him off now that he had achieved professional success. The shock of the encounter, in "filth and squalor" where his aunt lived with the "charcoal *bania*" (italics in original, bania being a derogatory general term for traders), rolling chapattis like any wife/servant/girl child—is appropriate enough as she was visibly pregnant (53). In spite of the neighborhood and situation, she is strangely more empowered in her new social role than Pramod.

When he persists in inviting her home, she loses her temper and states the social facts of the case—that she had left her husband's home and was staying with a man with whom she had no legal or socially sanctioned relationship, and yet to whom she felt obligation as he had been her sole refuge. He had made sacrifices for her and had offered her compassion when everyone else scorned her—even when she had been distraught enough to contemplate suicide. At this moment, indeed in the entire novel, this silent man who hospitably offers prized Benaras tobacco to Pramod, seems the only capable and self-reliant male. No wonder then that Pramod at this moment felt a strange intimacy in being in this destitute tenement with her and this man, feeling as if the rest of his life—his mother, his education, his past, and his indoctrinated values would vanish: "Why does one need a future…what was, was also right just so; including our being here thus. I was held in a sort of timeless, eternal present" (62-63).

It is significant though that Pramod still does not seem to feel any particular responsibility toward her—despite being the male head of household upon his father's death and

well on the way to judge-ship. He is still mired in understanding her choices on an abstracted moral level of "woman's dharma," and does not comprehend her more direct and courageous level of action. If he had comprehended it, he would have brought her back into the household, and stood up to his mother's and other assorted family member's censure (73). The language register for Pramod is still that of late nineteenth century Hindu upper caste reform, with its strong caste and class boundaries, rather than that of autonomy. Mrinal's language is not much different—her self-representation too has strong overtones of a conservative imaginary, even if her life and actions had taken her far away from such pieties:

> Here was a woman, who having left her husband and home to live a life of sordid adultery, talked of chastity and woman's dharma, and here was an intelligent, educated man listening to her, not merely unable to condemn but even full of sympathy! It was all incomprehensible… The young, ambitious student, full of self importance and self- righteousness with his eyes fixed at the heights could not concede that truth might also reside there down amongst the lowly and the lost. (73)

As Pramod departs from her home, Mrinal says that she does not want to be "helped" back into the orbit of respectability, but only wants a simple human relationship with any who would befriend her in times of especial loneliness. It is in this sense that she values Pramod, not in the moralist sense that Pramod understands, of atonement and rehabilitation. But his confused understanding of the world and his aunt create competing moral voices inside him. Strangely, this confusion urges him to excellence in the competitive examinations, and he is soon set on his path to administrative power. He returns, passes more exams, and becomes a still more prized candidate for marriage. Yet, though he does not dissuade his mother from marriage plans, he feels a pervasive sense of inner hollowness. He learns that Mrinal's baby died from starvation. This does not cause much comment from his seemingly inured conscience, which would rather debate women's role and societal and political cruelty in the abstract. When he agrees to marry, Pramod insists on an open acknowledgement to his fiancée's family of his aunt's status. Coincidentally, Mrinal is a resident tutor at his fianceé's house. Mrinal, more socially perceptive than he, predicts that this would forestall the marriage, as indeed it does, due to the malicious talk of relatives of the bride. Again, this dubious heroism of Pramod has unfortunate effects, Mrinal has to resign her position as tutor, and become a vagrant again, this time for the last time. Although Pramod clearly bears some responsibility, this astonishing turn of events perpetuates no guilt but rather more ponderings on the nature of the cosmos.

Still, there is a brief moment of understanding in Pramod's ruminations on Mrinal's fate, where he does seem close to understanding her freedom. This is achieved through his imagination of her words toward the very end of this miniaturized but powerfully compacted novel—perhaps this is a fitting end, and the closest the male subjectivity ever comes to a thoughtful tribute and evaluation of the revolutionary Mrinal:

> I do not disdain love, Pramod. But there are things you do not know. It is only when the water is deep enough that one can swim. True, one can also drown. But having sensed the depths, I cannot surrender the joy, of sounding them, whether I sink or swim… (92-93)

Though Jainendra miniaturized the novel from Premchand's expansive canvas, he still retained the form of the novel, or its cousins—the novelette and the long short story. It was left to Agyeya to explode the form from within, with some of the thematic tools Jainendra had given

him. According to some legends, the character of Hariprasanna was itself based on Agyeya. Agyeya's first novel *Shekhar* has as its center a revolutionary protagonist—as in *Sunita,* this protagonist is enmeshed with a romantic female other. But *Shekhar* resembles *Tyagpatra* also in that the lover of the protagonist is taboo to the protagonist due to her being related to him in a way not made explicit in the text. Thus *Shekhar* derives many of the ingredients of the recipe of the revolutionary novel from Jainendra's novels—the thematic of the marginalized revolutionary and taboo love. *Tyagpatra* may have also served as the inspiration and model for Agyeya's retrospective understanding of his life up to the charged moment of the present—and the centrality of childhood and boyhood in the making of the present sense of selfhood. In *Shekhar's* case too, the novel begins with the likelihood of an ultimate renunciation—the protagonist Shekhar is on the verge of being hanged for his anti-colonial activities. However, Agyeya does not follow Jainendra's compacting density of form—instead, using the transitive ingredient of the narrator-as-memoirist, he is able to construct an almost endless frieze of the narrator's past, often returning obsessively to the same images and moments of heightened tension in childhood and boyhood to find the keys to a self-understanding in and for the present.

# CHAPTER IV

## AGYEYA: ENMESHMENTS AND DISINTEGRATIONS OF REVOLUTIONARY SUBJECTIVITY

In a Condemned Cell

They tell me
From behind these very bars two years ago
Two eyes looked out
That never saw again.

I do not stand self-condemned,
Yet how lovely is the thought that I too,
Could shut out these bars.
I do not fear death—
Why then is the blindness not in my eyes.[1]

Sachchidanand Hiranand Vatsyayan is better known by his pseudonym Agyeya, a name he took in jail to escape the censorship of British authorities. He was born in 1911 in a Saraswat Brahmin family. His father worked in the Indian Archaeological Survey, was a scholar of Sanskrit grammar, and was in favor of speaking and writing a highly Sanskritised Hindi. Agyeya had two older bothers (one who died young), an elder sister, and a younger brother. According to Vidyaniwas Mishra (1926-2005), a close friend of Agyeya's and noted literary scholar, and on whom this biographical account chiefly relies, Agyeya had a Farsi Maulvi and an American missionary to teach him English. Agyeya met strongly pro-Hindustani activists for the first time in Patna, where he lived occasionally with his father in the period 1919-1925.[2] He had also lived in Ootacamund, in the Madras Presidency, and in 1921, learned Sanskrit and Tamil from the traditional school of the Udupi Madhavacharya. As for English, at the encouragement of an English Professor in Lahore, he took to reading Wordsworth, Longfellow, Whitman, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster, George Eliot, Thackeray, Goldsmith, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Gogol, Hugo, Melville, and especially Browning and Tennyson—this last is clear from *Shekhar* (1941, 1944). With reference to some of the chief influences from within the Indian traditions, his extensive reading and translation of Rabindranath Tagore may be remarked upon, and of the deep inspiration from the art of South Indian temples as well as in the natural beauty of mountain regions like the Nilgris and the Himalayas—places he wrote about in his literary works and travelogues.

In 1927 he joined Forman College in Lahore. This is when his politicization may have begun—Lahore colleges in the nineteen twenties served as a potent site for sedition for some time. He joined the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army and met Chandrasekhar Azad (1906-1931), Sukhdev (1907-1931)—both colleagues of Bhagat Singh (1907-1931)—as well as the

[1] Agyeya, *Prison Days and Other Poems* (Benaras: Indian Publishers, 1946).
[2] Mishra, Vidyaniwas. *Agyeya-kāvya stavak* (Delhi: Rajkamal Publications, 2008).

novelist Bhagavaticharan Varma (1903-1981). He completed his Bachelors of Science in 1929. Agyeya worked as a volunteer in the 1929 Congress session in Lahore where Dominion status was for the first time repudiated and *pūrna swarāj* (full freedom) demanded. Then, even as he enrolled for a Master of Arts in English, he joined a revolutionary party. The immediate task at hand was to free Bhagat Singh, the iconic revolutionary figure discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation. Agyeya joined as a scientist to help make bombs, but was arrested in 1930. He was kept for a month in the Lahore prison and then transferred to Amritsar. His trial was prolonged and inconclusive, and he was in jail from 1931-1935. It was in jail that he began to read *Chayavad* poetry (the chief Hindi poetry movement of the nineteen twenties and thirties) and started to write prolifically—this included the early drafts of *Sekhar*. In 1934 his mother and a younger brother died, and his father retired from service. On his release in 1935 he planned to open an *ashram* (a traditional monastic or service community) but his father was determinedly against it. He then started a magazine and began to meet prominent writers and critics of the Hindi literary world like Ramvilas Sharma (1912-2000), Prakaschandra Gupt (1908-1970), Prabhakar Machwe, and Nemichandra Jain (1919-2005). At this point he was still anti-Gandhi and did not much care for the fiery Subash Chandra Bose (1897-1945), but did respect some of the young Nehru's radicalism. He spent a year and a half in Calcutta and met Hazariprasad Dwivedi (1907-1979) and Bhisham Sahni (1915-2003). When the Second World War began, he volunteered in the fight against fascism in 1943 even though he had achieved stable employment with the All India Radio. He was by now a well-known member of the Hindi literati, though he did not much like the Progressives he had met—including Krishan Chander (1914-1977) and Ramvilas Sharma—though he agreed with their diagnosis of fascism. Posted in Kohima, Assam, he was fascinated by the traditional Hindu beliefs of the Vaishnava faith (this was the milieu in which his second volume of *Shekhar* was completed).

Some preliminary remarks may be made on Agyeya's prose. It must be remembered that to many he remains primarily a poet—there is a deep poetic strain in the prose-poem that make up many parts of *Shekhar*. The language is Sanskritic because Sanskrit already had the poetical and philosophical vocabulary that best suited his needs. Agyeya was also able to make Sanskrit sweeter, lighter, and more full of mood by breaking it up—the medieval Sanskrit of Jayadeva's *Gīta Govinda*, not the monolith sonority of much later classical Sanskrit poetry. In Agyeya's best work, Sanskrit is made to exhale an extraordinary atmosphere that seems very precise and apposite to mood. In the poet Sumitranandan Pant's (1900-1977) famous preface to his own collection *Pallav* (New Foliage, 1928), Pant complained mostly about Braj, but also about Sanskrit. His complaint was that Sanskrit was an abstract language, full of synonyms, and yet lacking precision for, as Pant might say 'this concrete *kumaoni* (lower Himalayan) flower.' [3]Yet this precision and nuance of mood is precisely what Agyeya manages to achieve in his modern reformulation of the Sanskritic sound. A good example is the following sentence from *Shekhar*: "Meghācchann ākāsh. Prakāshhīn sāyaṃkāl. Pavan acaṅcal. Caṅcala bhī adṛshya" (which translates approximately as "Cloud-covered sky. An evening bereft of light. Unmoving breeze. Movement itself unseen.") The words unmistakably invoke the grand Sanskritic tradition, and yet, perhaps due to modern punctuation, can capture a mood deeply apposite to the present—a

[3] Pant, Sumitranandan. *Pallav* (Delhi: Rajkamal Publications, [1928] 2008).

moment of gloom as an incarcerated protagonist remembers his past with a sense of precious finitude.[4]

## NATIONALISM AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE

The political milieu in which the novel *Shekhar* is set (up to the nineteen thirties) is different from that indicated by the date of its publication in 1941 and 1944. In the swiftly changing political environment in the South Asian subcontinent this is perhaps significant. It may be stated that in the nineteen twenties and the nineteen thirties, the revolutionaries had their chief interlocutor in the centralizing figure of Gandhi. By the time of publication, in the historical moment of the Second World War, and imminent Partition/Independence, it may be asserted that central authority was fundamentally fragmentary and different issues had taken center-stage in both national and international arenas. The war, European socialism, and the Pakistan movement, are some of the key factors that breached any possible centralization of authority. Indeed even the primary, and relatively stable binary of the National Movement versus Colonial Authority was breached, as in a sense the colonial authority was in the process of disempowering itself. And yet the vacuum of power thrown up had not yet been filled by an equivalent native state apparatus. The very horror of the violence of the nineteen forties, both national and international, seemed to destroy a notion of centralized solidarity, even if one were to add up the powers of the Congress, the Muslim League, and the residual powers still held by the colonial government.

Thus the decades of the nineteen thirties and the nineteen forties leave their mark in *Shekhar*'s political imagination. This chapter will discuss the key political events in *Shekhar* and compare them, when analytically useful, to both the time of Bhagat Singh and his comrades (the nineteen twenties), and the loss in the nineteen forties of any effective political vocabulary against all the historical distress of the Second World War. The War paradoxically allowed the colonial government to further centralize political authority and incarceration in the name of fighting Fascism and Hitler's National Socialist Army.

The novel begins politically, and yet this 'political' lies at its own limit. For the protagonist of the eponymous novel *Shekhar* is about to be hanged. The first dramatic word in the novel is *phāṃsi* (hanging). It is clear soon enough that he is in a cell for political prisoners, and this death is the result of a judicial order. Yet, rather than an insistence on injustice, the analysis turns into a dramatization on the internal pain in his mind. The first person narrator is a young male, twenty-one years old. In this first chapter, unlike some later chapters, he seems to be alone, and furthermore, alone in his pain. This pain itself seems to be the narrative trigger, providing the unity of the chapter insofar as it jumps back and forth in time. The trigger thus takes him, perhaps therapeutically, or perhaps just in a sense of witness-memory, back to a wholly different environment in space, time and filial relation. It takes him, in the first developed scene, to the Kashmir of his early boyhood, to his sister and parents, to the boat on the *Dāl* Lake.

This seemingly seamless transitioning between the personal and the political is of course a large part of the power of the novel. Each enhances the other, and moreover, each enhances the faith in the other. The personal provides much of the resource of the political, and the political provides the resource for similar transgressive developments in the personal—both with

[4] Agyeya, *Shekhar: Volumes 1 and 2* (Delhi: Mayur Paperbacks, [1941, 1944] 2001), 7.

reference to oneself, and in reference to the patterns of growth and relationships of the protagonist. This reinforcing circle may be interpreted as a doubled escapism, where one provides refuge from the other, but in its many successful moments, it provides imagination and momentum to the novel and the protagonist's life. In terms of the protagonist Shekhar, it is unclear whether it is precisely the exhaustion derived from this pendulum (or, to vary the metaphor, the shrinking, downward spiral of this mutually reinforcing nature of the personal and the political) that causes the ultimate sense of pain and defeat evinced so clearly at the beginning of the novel.

In terms of the developmental narrative of the novel, there is the growth from childhood to youth—one wonders if Shekhar is too young, being at most twenty-one, to be called self-consciously adult. Shekhar's child consciousness is naturally mediated by several other consciousnesses whose import he will only gradually, and always only partly, unravel through the course of the book—there is a clear literary debt to the novelist and friend Jainendra for representing in miniature the conflicts of the adult in the child. Indeed, childhood and youth is so exhaustively mined in *Shekhar* that Agyeya does not return to these themes in his later novels.

An imported and decisively other consciousness taken in by Shekhar, is naturally his father's. This father himself exists as a rich mediation of several sites—and here the site is literal and temporal, for he is an archaeologist. What moves the father is ancient India, and he is thus an older type of Indian nationalist, one fascinated with ancient India. The sites he discovers (and it be must remembered that the Indus Valley was discovered in systematic fashion only as late as the nineteen twenties), speak to him of an ancient Sanskritic India, a time whose values must still pervade and resuscitate modern India. Hence the father wished to teach the boys chaste Sanskrit, and among the few intimacies that the father affords his son Shekhar in the novel is a shared rapture at the beauty of classical Sanskrit poetry. This Sanskritic language is familiar to anyone who has read almost any of Agyeya's works. But this shared love of language also brings curious differences—later in the novel, we have the boy Shekhar resolutely avoiding speaking English, choosing instead to speak a highly Sanskritized Hindi. The father, clearly a good bureaucrat Orientalist, does not understand the son's animosity to English at all. For him, nationalism is not anti-English, as it had become by the time of the son's generation. At the time of Agyeya's youth, the early nineteen twenties, the general up-swell of the politicization of Hindi both in terms of its separation from Urdu, as well as in the desire to make it the national language had peaked. Here it can thus be discerned how an intergenerational conflict reflects the complexity of language and nationalist politicization. It seems that for many of the generation who came of age in the nineteen twenties seeing the colonial government as hostile and adversarial was necessary as an affirmation of nationalism. Shekhar's father feels no such essential contradiction between deeply loving Sanskrit and serving as a bureaucrat in colonized India.

Shekhar is candid in his discomfort with English and Westernization. Early in the novel he reminisced about how uncomfortable he felt even as a boy in the Westernized home of a young girl he had met, and who had introduced herself in the "English fashion" as Miss Pratibha Lal. He could not bear the table manners expected of him in their home, and felt humiliated. English thus serves as metonym for social snobbery. As he is only a child, he can hardly articulate his emotions to himself. Even when he discerns the cause of that shame to be "English culture," he responds by the strange behavior of refusing to speak in English in front of his

father—linguistic shame is displaced onto his father, providing another layer to their already vexed relationship with languages.

Shekhar's rebelliousness began early and for a long time it was inchoate, only coming out in startling bursts of anger. This may be expected from a child, yet neither of his siblings, nor any of his friends seem this way. A clear solitariness already marks the child-boy, though it is something that maybe only the narrator in the jail cell, in Shekhar's retrospective mode, can identify and isolate. For the child-boy it is simply manifest as a rage against any conventionality, including God. Consequently, nothing is taboo and Sekhar is intemperate in his urge to learn everything—even about subjects like death and sex—which no one in his traditional family was willing to discuss.

The very perception that the child has, painterly and vivid, is something that holds him apart. In much of Agyeya's later work too, there is this search for an absolutized concept of beauty—and it is a quest overtly expressed as such in the second volume of *Shekhar*. When he moves from one beautiful hill-station to another (Kashmir to Ootacamund in the Nilgiri Hills in South India) he seems intensely aware, for a child, of the beauty of the physical and natural world. Or is this, as one must always ask in this novel, only the retrospective vision of the young revolutionary about to be hanged—one who is intensely aware and articulate of past beauty as a profound sense of finitude gives earthly life an acute sense of beauty. Thus the rich articulation of this beauty in sonorous Sanskrit is being made by the young man trapped and condemned to death in a cell, endowing those early memories with salvific power. It is this versatility and observation that sets him apart from his bookish father, whose sense of beauty, though strong, seems steeped only in the sound and imagery of ancient classical Sanskrit—the father seems relatively indifferent to the natural beauty all around him. Is it modern Hindi then that can better represent the beauty of nature, rather than the tired Sanskrit phrases, or even medieval Braj—this was definitely the polemical claim of many Hindi poets of the nineteen twenties, most famously Sumitranandan Pant (1900-1977) in the introduction to his famous collection *Pallav* (New Leaf), published in 1926. Language served in different ways as the beginning of a political consciousness—Bhagat Singh's early essay on language discussed in the second chapter is an indication of the significance this issue had for this revolutionary cohort. The issue of language gave Shekhar a sense of the deep social hierarchies that embed language, and are embedded in language. The conflicts between Sanskrit, English, Urdu, Hindi and even the problems of an India with many regional languages spoke to different registers of the child's grasp of the world of the political. The issues with language captured his sense of the claustrophobia of filial and social, as well as wider trans-regional and trans-linguistic demands.

The explicit norms of self-politicization for Shekhar take place in the great urban centers of, first Madras, and later and more significantly, Lahore. As soon as the youth Shekhar arrives to study in Madras, he is immediately placed in a college hostel meant exclusively for Brahmins—here caste clearly trumps region and language. This hostel is an alienating place. The bare fact of being a Brahmin is insufficient as a stimulant for Shekhar. There is little desire for socialization in such a solitary youth as Shekhar, who is leaving home for the first extended period of time. His only close friendship in the Madras college where he is studying is with someone named Kumar, a name that does not give anything away by way of caste, at least initially. There is a strong homo-social element in their friendship, and the siting of the intimacy takes place alongside the aestheticized spaces found at the margins of the urban—in long walks

in the moonlight on the seashore. As it becomes clear that Kumar does indeed belong to one of the lower castes, Shekhar feels even more strongly drawn to him, with sympathy and also as a reaction to the strong repulsion he felt against the Brahmin dominated Madras colleges. This is true especially at this highly politicized time of the nineteen twenties where the anti-Brahminism of the Justice Party (established in 1917, and formed to protest excessive Brahminical representation in colonial employment) is at its peak, and the reaction by the Brahmins to this anti-Brahminism.

This period is a key moment in Shekhar's politicization—and it is important to note that it takes place in the context of caste, rather than more directly in the theater of a pure pan-national anti-colonialism. Shekhar does perceive the heterogeneity, indeed the incommensurability of the many caste, religion, and linguistic groupings within India—the same question that agitated Bhagat Singh when he wrote his essay on language and wondered if the Madrasi would ever learn Hindustani. The nineteen twenties were a time of major upheavals in the dynamics of lower caste questioning and challenging of Brahminic norms not only in Madras or the Punjab, but all over India. In the Bombay Presidency, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), launched a major campaign in Mahad, Maharashtra in 1927 against caste oppression.

However, the relationship between Sekhar and Kumar does sour over the question of money. Though Kumar does not return some money Shekhar lent him, this does not much affect Shekhar's overall estimation of the situation. He is still grateful to Kumar for this opening of his social conscience, but something in the friendship alters. Shekhar then begins to develop relationships with new individuals, based on common interests his new friend is a Tamil Brahmin named Raghavan. Raghavan too is an idealist, and together, full of youthful enthusiasm, Shekhar and Raghavan are keen to impact the life of slum children by building a school for them in an impoverished area of the city. Such an ethic in the nineteen twenties may easily be understood as Gandhian, or Ambedkarite, or in the general tradition of social reform since the last half of the nineteenth century. But it was also common to the literary gestures of several figures in the novels of Premchand, Jainendra, Sharatchandra, most especially in the last pages of many of the novels, as a final, unquestionable moralism. Characters in novels discussed earlier—*Rangbhumi*, *Parakh*, *Pather Dabi*—testify to the pervasiveness of this gesture in the nineteen twenties. It is as if most novelists and political thinkers cannot think beyond this social piety. It would take a little more time within the novel before Shekhar's imagination extends beyond this mode of social service.

At the other end of the spectrum from such transparent social merit, and more in keeping with the intellectual innovation in Shekhar's thought, Shekhar finds himself continuing with his intellectual interests. He starts a club called the Antigonum club, and the name is revealing, both for its Classicism, and its lack of hostility to European intellectual traditions. This is indicative that Shekhar's journey is not over, and indeed it is not. It is the second novel that takes Shekhar beyond the pale of traditional ethics and forces him to confront new, taboo, and risky experiences.

## NATIONALIST INTERIORITIES: *SHEKHAR, VOLUME 2*

The second volume of *Shekhar* begins with his transfer to the city of Lahore in the Punjab. In this city, curiously, a different and more radical angle of political and later, sexual politics, is experienced. Agyeya always maintained that he had written a third volume of *Shekhar,* but it remained unpublished in his lifetime. Perhaps this is just as well as it would have been difficult to pick up the thread from the very powerful and moving end of the second volume. In a sense then, his next novel, *Nadi ke Dvīp,* published in 1951, continues the theme of taboo sexuality, and may in some sense be seen as continuous to the latter parts of *Shekhar*'s controversial second volume.[5]

The initial sections of the second volume continue the theme of personal growth and politicization. The protagonist finds himself in college in Lahore early in the second volume of *Shekhar*. In Lahore, what conscientizes him is not so much caste, but rather the surrogate westernization of some of his college mates. Significantly, this feeling of excessive westernization is enacted through gender, as it was in his youth with Miss Pratibha Lal. The chief object of his first strong negative reaction as an adult is his encounter with a young woman called Manika in Lahore, who has just returned from Oxford. Apart from the moment of Shekhar's own childhood with Miss Lal, an inter-textual literary reference may be drawn to Premchand's character in his final novel *Godan* (The Gift of a Cow) published in 1936.[6] There, the educated, youthful, and extroverted physician, Malti, threatens the simpler male moral calculus of the chief protagonist, the philosophy professor Mr. Mehta.

It is in Lahore that Shekhar visits Shashi, the person who becomes arguably the chief protagonist of the novel—seeming to overpower Shekhar himself, the eponymous and first person narrator. It is Shashi's death and life that is to many readers the most powerful aspect of the novel, often eclipsing Shekhar's quest. Shashi stands on the threshold of the narrative, wrestling and exceeding its central conceptions. Arguably, in *Nadi ke dvip* too, the chief female character exceeds the courage and reach of the central male character. In all this Agyeya is perhaps consciously, perhaps unconsciously, following Jainendra's lead in the formulation of impressive and bold female characters who quite literally steal the plot from the men. It is the relationships between these women and men that are responsible for the generalization of the figure of the male revolutionary of the nineteen twenties to the more dispersed and pervasive symbolization of the revolutionary in the erstwhile taboo domains of the social, the sexual, the filial, and the affective.

The exact filial relationship of Shekhar to Shashi is left somewhat unclear, likely deliberately—at times it is indicated that she is his cousin. The estranged relationship to his family and his attempts to break away from their grip is perversely reversed, and invoked, in Shekhar's quasi-incestuous relationship. It is stated that it was the first time that he was meeting her since their childhood. At that point they had been linked by their filial ties, but in the second volume they meet as young adults. Moreover, he meets her on the symbolically weighted occasion of her father's death—his mind too was especially receptive as he had just returned from a trip to the Himalayas and had been moved again by nature's beauty and power. He enters Shashi's life seemingly in the required role of a paternalistic and concerned male family

[5] Agyeya, *Nadi ke Dvīp* (Delhi: Mayur Paperbacks, [1951] 1997).
[6] Premchand, *Godān* (Delhi: Vishv Vijay Pvt. Ltd., [1936] 2011).

member—yet in truth Shekhar is still a rebellious child-man just beginning to grow into manhood. It is little wonder that it is at this confused and uncertain time in his life that he enlists as a volunteer at the Lahore Congress Session, where the first call for a full independence (*pūrna swarāj*) from Britain was sounded by the rising star, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1963), who was then still known as his famous political father Motilal Nehru's (1861-1931) son. The vexed theme of father-son inheritance was being played out even in history just as it was being played out in the literary narrative within *Shekhar*.

Below the optic of the high nationalism that the Nehru family represented there was much that went on in Congress nationalism that shamed Shekhar. It made him question the integrity of mainstream nationalism. In the Congress camp in which he volunteered, he was outraged at the lack of dedication and care of most of the rank and file. Shekhar responded by doubling his voluntary responsibilities at the camp and standing for several extra hours on sentry duty amidst pouring rain at night. As it turned out, all this achieved was his arrest—the Congress camp had been easily penetrated, and on every level, by several government intelligence officers. One of these officers arrested Shekhar in a case of mistaken identity, and Shekhar ended up spending almost a year in jail.

As has been remarked in several autobiographies of the nationalist age, including Jawaharlal Nehru's, the jail became a site for new and unexpected socialities, learnings, and personal insights to emerge. The second chapter of this dissertation discussed Bhagat Singh's intense reading and study during the period of his imprisonment. Indeed, jail was a time and place where one could discover oneself—both as a political intellectual, and as a social one, amidst the wide diversities of class, region, language and age that comprised the promiscuous and vague category of the "political prisoner." The jail months are thus, unsurprisingly, a pivotal moment for Shekhar—it is here that he meets prisoners of different ages and faiths, who give him a historical and existential perspective of their struggle, which in turn helps him put his own life into perspective. It is also in prison that much of his learning takes place. In the shadow of incarceration he debates fellow prisoners on anger as being occasionally a social ideal, a duty, and source of pride; on moral violence as healing, in the way surgery can be.

When Shekhar finally comes out of jail, far from being hailed as a noble patriot, he finds himself ignored by even the intelligentsia who he had expected would know better and show more empathy. This too is a common theme in the writing of many of the revolutionaries of the period—it happens to the protagonist Puri in the writer Yashpal's (1903-1976) major work, *Jhūṭha Sach* (The False Truth).[7] *Jhutha Sach* was published in the later decade of the nineteen fifties and recalled the same period of the nineteen twenties and thirties and the same city of Lahore as *Shekhar*. However, Shekhar persists in trying to be a part of the politico-literary intelligentsia as a Hindi writer even as this group largely rejects him. It does seem that he is not concerned at this point about instrumentalizing literature to purely social ends. In historical actuality Agyeya was in later times to resist this subordination of writing to ideological dogmatisms. But what is significant in *Shekhar* is that the novel seems to be working at two separable levels—internal to the protagonist's thoughts and actions—he seems naive in his sacrifice of literature to a narrow version of political thought. This is even as, at the meta level of the author, and at the level of the consciousness of the protagonist in moments of self reflection and memory, the writing is indeed of an order, that is clearly not subordinable to the somewhat

[7] Yashpal, *Jhūtha Sach; Volumes 1 and 2* (Lucknow: Viplav Publications, 1960).

lax political thinking that the protagonist Shekhar sometimes seems prey to. Indeed the writing is in a deeply affective, painterly style informed and immersed in engaging the sounds and imagery of Sanskrit poetry.

Shekhar does realize at some level however that writing to propagate radical social change is not personally redemptive or satisfying enough—and he is unsuccessful even in his compromised state. These moments of the novel capture him at a particularly low point in his psychological state—he even attempts suicide. It is Shashi who grew close to him when she visited him in jail and who saves him again by staying with him through the night despite great social censure. Neither the act of writing, nor any of his political or literary friends, could match this love and sacrifice. As soon as he is partially recovered, Shekhar again tries to publish some of his propagandist writing only to be rebuffed again. Finally, a young revolutionary appears magically in his life and offers to provide him and Shashi a home if Shekhar is willing to write what seems like propaganda again. Shekhar seems to be in a semi-conscious daze as he decides to re-enter politics through writing. This time however the risks have unconscionably increased—it is not from the relatively safe vantage point of agitationalist Congress and Gandhian politics, but rather at risk to his and Shashi's life. Shashi's life is now twinned with his as she is effectively outcast from society for her intimacy with Shekhar.

There is the inevitable enactment of the melodramatic *topos* of the revolutionaries on the run with the police fast at his heel. The might of the state is now weighted against so hapless an adversary as this young couple—it is the very symbolism of this enormously unjust encounter that is leveraged by revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh and turned into a powerful moment of political martyrdom that is intended to galvanize a more public participation and revolution. What image can signal the depth of injustice more than the panoply of the colonial state against small groups of people—often with the women serving as further rhetorical emblems of innocent prey. Yashpal's novels too, as will be discussed in the next chapter, continually generate and transmit this dramatic core. Yet the power of the police lies in their control of public representation—Shekhar will not be allowed to aggrandize himself as a political figure. If he were to be killed by the police, it would hardly make the newspaper—a feted legend like Bhagat Singh is an inexplicable rarity. Most revolutionaries are fated to die unknown, an unclaimed corpse floating in a river—just as Shekhar had visualized in the opening pages of the first volume of the novel.

Indeed the foredoomed and perhaps inevitable martyrdom of Shashi scrupulously plays out this scripted fate. Having been injured by a jealous and furious husband over her relationship with Shekhar, she tried to adapt to the hardship of a life on the run from the police. She found herself increasingly uneasy with Shekhar's coerced and helpless dependence on the revolutionaries who had hired him. This moral unease is narratively legitimized by being registered on her wounded and deteriorating body. Finally, she dies, in what is one of the most moving episodes in Hindi literature. The novel returns to the opening moment of Shekhar in jail awaiting death by hanging. It is unclear how or why Shekhar was arrested the second time—it seems as if the promise of death with which the first volume begins is fulfilled not by his but by Shashi's death. It is she who through the moral rhetoric of death, transmutes herself into the novel's central personage.

The first volume seemed to promise a clear narrative heirarchization—what might the circumstances be that lead an educated young man, clearly privileged in many ways as is evident

from his diction, to come so young to death's door? The demand to resolve this question is strong and the novel plunges into the childhood of the young man. However, the reader soon enough realizes that the narrative is not going to be a straightforward tale of a youth's fall from grace into horrific punishment. Rather, the reader will be taken through long detours and remembrances all of which may only in cumulative fashion gesture to the moment of condemnation.

The novel thus breaks with simple teleological explanations of why and how this protagonist finds himself in a cell. Though much of the reminiscence can be described as psychologistic, this latter term does not entirely explain the development either. A certain genre of the *bildungs roman* is already foreclosed by the novel ending not in bourgeois and respectable success, but in the ultimate ignominy of incarceration. The sketches reveal many imagistic flashes of subjectivity but do not necessarily seem to add up to a whole or recognizable character. This seeming lack of coherence is at least partly due to the intense lyrical richness of the style which gives the narrative a hallucinatory quality, made easier by the fact that so much of the first volume is concerned with childhood and early boyhood with their heightened perceptual universe.

However, one may argue that there is a chronological development of the protagonist in the first novel, and that it does follow him in his filial, geographic, and educational contexts. His subjectivity is being defined against various figures (and almost exclusively against, for it is hardly through positive identifications). These figures include Shekhar's erudite but distant father, his petty mother, his siblings (who have little effect on him), the young women he befriends but only seems to have unsuccessful or tragic encounters with, and finally, Kumar and Raghavan his college-mates in Madras. The second volume does away entirely with any possibility of a simple narrative of bourgeois (or even artistic) development. In other words, *Shekhar* is neither *bildungsroman*, nor even the portrait of the artist—*Kuenstlerroman*. Strangely, part of the reason for this is that the primary subjectivity of the novel in the second volume is usurped by someone other than Sekhar, the eponymous protagonist. This usurper is his partner Shashi. Perhaps this was the hermeneutic structure of the novel from the beginning. Agyeya had written of his admiration for Luigi Pirandello's (1867-1936) play, first performed in 1921—*Six Characters in Search of an Author* in the Introduction to *Shekhar*.[8] Such an interpretation of course has significant narrative implication. It is a profound exploration of the meaning of the modernist novel in terms of this central question of the development of subjectivity. Who controls the narrative if it is neither the author nor the protagonist? Is this loss/surrender of control—the embodiment of the disempowerment—that both the prisoner and the man of letters feels in the face of colonialism? Why is the most agential character in the novel a marginalized and wounded woman? How are these women (Shashi and Mrinal) simultaneously agential and tragic?

In not being able to achieve respectability at the end, indeed in seeming to presage, if not promise, his ignominious death, the protagonist Shekhar seems to abdicate the novel, with an unascertainable degree of willingness, to Shashi. Shashi's education is not dwelt on much in contrast to the well-read Sunita in Jainendra's novel *Sunita*. Yet Shashi seems to be certain in her moral clarity in many ways, including being disapproving of Shekhar's involvement with the revolutionaries and the use of violence. This questioning reminds one of the similarly

[8] Agyeya, *Shekhar*, vii.

marginalized Bharati confronting the Doctor-revolutionary in Saratchandra's *Pather Dabi*. But the central gesture Shashi makes that stakes her claim to be the true center of the novel is her renunciation of the most key element of bourgeois respectability—marriage. It is this radicality that doubles her moral credit—she may be a reluctant revolutionary, uncertain of its aims and means, but she is clear in her resolute courage in doing what she thinks is right, even if such an act costs her marriage and respectability. Her moral clarity is far superior to Shekhar's—yet it is represented differently, in actions rather than the more self-conscious images, words, and moods of Shekhar. For Shekhar, self-consciousness, however developed, does not lead to insight, resolution, or action.

This subversion of centralized male subjectivity by a woman is perhaps not what the protagonist Shekhar set out to call attention to when he began his narration in the cell. It may be wondered what exactly the relationship of the protagonist is to the author in terms of the protagonist's autonomy. And yet the protagonist's autonomy is bounded by two horizons—the author's, and Shashi's. However one interprets the author/protagonist distinction, it seems certainly the case in the first volume that Shekhar is free to construct his own self-understanding—for the first volume is all about Shekhar and his family and friends. Yet, by the end of the second volume, Shashi's martyrdom steals the novel—and perhaps aborts the unwritten third. The novel does return to Shekhar in his cell, but it does not attempt to complete his narrative or explain his motives—the reader, at the end, is left with the memorable image of the dying Shashi. Her death is clearly the dramatic summit, gathering in its wake both volumes. As Agyeya indicated in citing Pirandello, the puppets make their own dance—and perhaps, unexpectedly, one particular puppet takes charge of the others.

However, there is also much in common between Shekhar and Shashi—there is the shared pathos of the seemingly wasted life and death of these two intelligent youths, each barely out of their teenage years. Shashi's death is as gratuitous as Shekhar's punishment. Shashi dies due to the wounds she sustained when her husband throws her out of the house for spending the night with Shekhar—she had done so to prevent a relapse of his despairing effort at suicide. The injury is exacerbated by having to be continually on the run, with Shekhar and the gang of revolutionaries, from the colonial police and intelligence officials. Her decision to spend the night with Shekhar—clearly an act that she knew would likely put her beyond the pale of a conservative society—was a willed act. She seemed prepared to face whatever consequences might follow. And yet, so much happens in a haze of overwhelming, fast-paced, chaos over which no one seems to have any control, including perhaps the author. For Agyeya does not seek to control narrative in the way a Premchand, a student of Russian realism, might have.

Sekhar's sudden and perhaps impulsive effort at suicide forces Shashi's hand and mind, hardly giving her much time to consider her choices. Even if she had willingly decided to suffer the stigma of one cast out of her marital household she would hardly have known that she would be so seriously physically wounded. She could not have known either that she would have to spend the next phase of her life fleeing the police and depriving herself of any medical attention, or be involved in a politics she had not been asked her opinion on. For a woman like her, with a history of sacrifice and action, it might have almost seemed like a betrayal that the revolutionaries cared as little for her opinion as her husband had. Yet all this has to be inferred for the narrative never really allows direct access to her mind through a device like the extended monologue or letter.

Though the plotting of the novel is skillful in interweaving contingency and the random cruelties and demands of the criminalized life lived on the run, it still remains largely seen and sensed through Shekhar's lens. Shashi's mind is only derivable from her action—just as Mrinal's was in Jainendra's *Tyagpatra*. Reflective language remains an educated male preserve—and yet it is the silent moral performance of a Mrinal or Shashi that is the driver, imagination and pleasure, and pain, of the plot. Perhaps neither Shekhar the criminal, nor Judge Pramod Dayal of *Tyagpatra,* fully fathomed the role of the women in their lives even though they feared the woman's judgment and censure. Yet these women's mute but powerful actions seem to steal the novel from the traditional trope of the male quest for self-understanding. This quest for self-understanding now seems exposed as disembodied, abstract, and remote from the more intensely lived experience of the female characters. This is reminiscent of Bharati gently exposing the pretensions to grandiosity of the Doctor in Saratchandra's *Pather Dabi.* Though Shekhar is admittedly much more self-doubting than the Doctor, a similar narrative dialectic is at work. It is a question that demands at least an exploratory heuristic. Why is it that in so many of the novels written by men during this period of the nineteen twenties to the forties—especially those dealing with anti-colonial revolutionaries—it is the woman character who centralizes the chief dramatic interest? This is in spite of the male protagonists being the ones given the rights of narration and thus the ability to mould the story as in *Tyagpatra* and *Shekhar.*

## SEXUALITY AS A HORIZON FOR NATIONAL ONTOLOGY

Agyeya's second novel was published in 1951; *Nadi ke dvip*, foregrounds the problem of subjectivation because it is narrated by four different characters—sometimes through letters to each other. Much of the novel is a composite intersubjectivity, tenuously formed by the interaction of these four characters, rather than the genre of the first person memoir that *Shekhar* was. Two of these figures are male, two female—and they are all young adults navigating the newly emerging India. This novel, published five years after 1947 when the British left India, already generates characters who seem far from the idealism that animated the nationalist movement. Yet there is a further temporal split—for while the novel was published after Independence, it takes place during an earlier time. The epilogue refers to 1942, the time of the Second World War—the character Bhuvan, the one closest to being the protagonist of the novel—is fighting the Japanese, rather like Agyeya himself did. This mood of war weariness pervades the book, and is a commentary on the last phase of the nationalist struggle—where even the prospect of Independence seemed already internally undermined by a skepticism regarding how much the newly independent India can shake off the inequalities and corruptions of the old.

The most overtly skeptical character is embodied by the journalist Chandramadhav—though it could be said that his skepticism is less reflective, and more a goad and alibi for an amoral life, where the only values of the emerging citizen are those of power and self-aggrandizement. Perhaps this is an indirect comment by Agyeya on the rise of journalism itself with reference to the novel-form—even though Agyeya himself had to turn to journalism (radio and print) several times in his life for money, he was unhappy at the daily compromises he had to make. Perhaps journalism was to him a competitor and diluter of the novel-form, even as it was a necessarily sensationalist medium of the new times. There was already a skepticism of the

nationalist project and the workaday world it brought into being—especially by the young middle class which already found itself struggling for respectable jobs. This sentiment was present even before Independence was finally achieved. This is significant, as traditionally the credit for the recognition of the limitation of national governance (with its implication of widespread and mundane corruption, the black market and so on) is given only to the *Nayi Kahani* (New Story movement) of the decade of the mid to late nineteen fifties.

Chandramadhav embodied this opportunism—he was the sort of entrepreneur who already seemed to be the one most likely to profit from the regime of postcolonial India. Chandramadhav is a very recognizable crisis of narrative and historical morality. He is both a symptom and an accelerant cause of an increasingly corrupt India, which had forsworn the idealism of the past few decades—the recent past of the nationalist struggle that was already so quickly appearing remote and faraway. Nevertheless, it is this Chandramadhav who introduces the troubled conscience of the novel, Bhuvan, to the youthful chief female protagonist Rekha. Perhaps one needs the opportunist, if only for what he makes possible, for Chandramadhav alone is fluent in the new historical era and moves easily within its various social classes. Bhuvan learns that Rekha is married but separated, and that she is something of a drifter in and out of professional employment. Chandramadhav seems relatively insentient of the fact that Bhuvan might harbor feelings for Rekha, and insists that Bhuvan be a chaperone when he invites Rekha to a vacation. Bhuvan thus has to stay guarantor to Chandramadhav's attempt at seduction. Chandramadhav had caused Rekha to lose one of her jobs without her knowing it—yet he perversely declares his love to her. Rekha is however unwilling to requite his affections, and indeed she is full of negative feelings with regard to Chandramadhav. Perhaps this causes her in some way to feel closer to Bhuvan. Bhuvan and Rekha go on a journey to the Himalayas. In the atmosphere of the Himalayas, especially Kumaon (beloved to Agyeya for it is present in *Shekhar* too, and which he had declared in *Shekhar* to be the embodiment of his quest for absolute beauty), she offers herself sexually to Bhuvan. He refuses, perhaps because of this notion of the profundity of the Himalayas with reference to the relatively smaller pursuit of human sexual affection—this is even as he is deeply touched by Rekha's love. However, a little later on in the novel, Bhuvan goes to Kashmir and Rekha too reaches there on her own initiative, and this time, perhaps in a paradoxical but deepening sense of an appreciation of the beauty of Kashmir's mountainous lakes, Bhuvan and Rekha do make love. Later, she learns that she is pregnant. The novel has thus gone further in the literal instantiation of sexuality than *Shekhar*—the protagonist is still associated with a married woman (though she is not related to him this time), but in this novel there is an addition of both sexual consummation and a resultant pregnancy. The sexual and filial stakes are thus turned up higher, though again, there is little declaration of an interest in, or responsibility of, fatherhood on Bhuvan's part. The new middle-class in India is bolder—Rekha is a self-conscious woman aware and legitimizing of her desires, unlike Shashi, who seemed destined for martyrdom and ostracism. Rekha is unwilling to suffer unnecessarily, though here too the situation remains largely in the hands of the male in terms of the question of whether Bhuvan will step up to his responsibility. Bhuvan too is different from Shekhar—he is older and does not have the alibi or responsibility of extremist politics now that the country seems guaranteed freedom. The responsibility of romance and fatherhood is a more routinized, mundane male-ness than the iconicity of the revolutionary-figure that Shekhar emblematized.

Rekha's boldness in seeking Bhuvan's love has a reason—her husband who was living with his paramour in Malaya is finally attempting to divorce her. But the devious Chandramadhav, who learns of Rekha's pregnancy, reports it to her husband. When Rekha in turn learns of her husband's knowledge, her worry at involving Bhuvan causes her to abort the baby. This abortion comes close to killing her. Bhuvan arrives at the hospital to help her recover—he offers her marriage. Ironically, the divorce with her husband had come through even as she worried about being a married woman impregnated by one not her husband. However, Rekha refuses, not wanting to tie Bhuvan down to bourgeois social norms. This does seem a rather neat and convenient narrative resolution for Bhuvan, and an avoidance of confronting the demands of fatherhood and of being a husband. It may be wondered here if the woman is conveniently made to state those feelings, in the name of freedom, that might actually be only the freedom of the man. Is this ending very different from *Shekhar*—which also climaxes with the narrative disappearance of the woman?

The other female character of the book also seems subordinate, existing largely as a *deus-ex-machina*. Gauri is a young music student, trying to break away from her parent's insistence on an arranged marriage. She becomes enamored of Bhuvan. After the Rekha episode, and with Rekha's knowledge and approval, Bhuvan finally proposes to Gauri. Fortuitously, Rekha too finds love in the doctor who had performed the abortion. Chandramadhav continues developing his sifting sense of character by, among other things, marrying an actress and embracing Communism. As the hardy, unsentimental opportunist, he remains focused on the future and the power and wealth it might bring, in contrast to Bhuvan risking his life in war fighting fascism.

These bare contours of the plot reveal distinct similarities to *Shekhar*. Here again, the dramatic center of the novel is the woman-in-pain—one might say even a woman who has to be narratively martyred. Unlike Shashi however, Rekha does not die—though she does come very close. There is at least the surrogate destruction of the woman through her child, the child representing the future-that-cannot-be of the couple. The protagonist male is rendered a mute witness, both parasitic on female dramatic victim-hood, as well as perhaps subtly fostering it. The marriages at the end of *Nadi ke dvip* are anti-climactic, even sometimes bathetic—and the central un-requital of love seems forced. What exactly prevents a union between Rekha and Bhuvan? It may be suspected that there is a profound difficulty associated with women who have the strength of Rekha (or Shashi), a strength that seems to positively un-man the men. For narrative coherence and sanity to be maintained, these women have to be tamed—by their death, by their (unwilled and involuntary, but narratively forced) martyrdom, or, at the very least, by their being married safely elsewhere into domesticity. The men hover, learn from these women, profit from their solicitations and esteem—but, at the end, leave them. This might be the meaning of the unclaimed corpse in the river that is never explicated in *Shekhar*. This pattern of fear of the strong women is set in Agyeya's work long before the *Nayi Kahani* movement—the movement that was so focused on sexual relations.

Chandramadhav acts as the alibi for the conscience of Bhuvan, but it is in interrogating Bhuvan's conscience and politics of gender and responsibility that one may derive the most insight and discomfort. In depicting the opportunist Chandramadhav, Agyeya seems to be suggesting that in the last phase of the nationalist movement, there is not just the sense of failure of a consummatory nationalism, but also, a positive decrement of nationalism, a downward self-feeding spiral of failure and uncertainty that the emerging middle class is subject to. However,

the pain of such failure falls unequally amongst the protagonists, privileging the prone figure of the bleeding, aborted woman—in contrast, the speculator and success in the new age is the more typically male Chandramadhav. This does not mean that the persistence of a certain sublimation of the sexualized woman does not exist. In *Nadi ke dvip* it exists in the persona of Gauri. Gauri is younger to Rekha in both age and experience in romantic and marital relations. She is thus more innocent of male cruelty and can exist in that idealized island of female virtue and purity that Agyeya is, in other ways in the novel, most especially in the characterization of Rekha, seeming to dismantle. Gauri relates to Rekha in her untested virtuousness just as the sensitive but morally ambivalent Bhuvan relates to the enterprising and aggressive Chandramadhav. Bhuvan can only attempt to redeem himself by externalizing his morality into the outer world and plunging himself into an international war that has a moral clarity that his personal life no longer has.

## *NADI KE DVIP* AS A COMMENTARY ON LATE NATIONALIST SUBJECTIVITY

Different historical and biographical factors are at play in *Nadi ke dvip* and *Sekhar*, given that the second volume of the latter was written seven years earlier in 1944. This section discusses the fate of revolutionary subjectivity in *Nadi ke dvip*—for it is oddly set in the years that *Shekhar* was written, just as *Shekhar* reflected an older historical and biographical period for Agyeya—the late nineteen twenties and early nineteen thirties. Agyeya has aged, and perhaps more significantly, *Nadi ke dvip* was written in independent India, post Partition, and post the second World War that Agyeya had served in as an army officer. Though it is when he served as an officer that he wrote the second volume of *Shekhar*, it is more in *Nadi ke dvip* that he discusses something of his war experience. Some commentators have questioned Agyeya's decision to enroll in the British Army, especially as he had spent much of his life in British jails fighting colonial authority. Agyeya defended his decision by speaking of the necessity of taking responsibility and action in a situation of global crisis, rather than just discussing idealized conceptions of perfect nationalist or revolutionary action. This section asks how narratives might construct a sense of action or mood when the key external determinant of pervasive colonial authority is being replaced by a native state authority that still has many of the social traits of the old colonial authoritarianism.

Unlike the younger generation of the *Nayi Kahani* writers like Nirmal Verma (1929-2005), Kamleshwar (1932-2007), Rajendra Yadav (born 1929), and Mannu Bhandari (born 1931) who were perhaps too young to participate self consciously in the nationalist struggle and came of age as writers only in the nineteen fifties, Agyeya did not disavow in the fifties in simple fashion the overt political stance of his earlier pre-Independence works like *Shekhar*. The *Nayi Kahani* generation shifted themes from explicit political ethics to themes of the urban, of male and female relationships, of sexuality and housing for the most part in the newly minted city of Delhi. Many of these themes are prefigured in *Nadi ke dvip*, most especially the questions of sexuality and the inter-subjectivity of male and female protagonists. The fact remains that the literary subjectivity of nineteen fifties India retained significant traces of the earlier decades of the thirties and the forties. The oeuvre of Agyeya (and his peers like Jainendra) engaged the literary horizon from the late thirties onward and had formulated and invoked many of the key

issues of the urban Indian sexuality of the nineteen fifties—they still had more than a few tricks to show the younger generation.

*Nadi ke dvip* begins by delivering its protagonists in *media res* at a turning point of their life. Very early on in the novel, there is an attempt to distinguish clearly the life of the professional or middle-class intellectual. Bhuvan is a professional scientist, studying stars—this quest for knowledge has an unspecifiable, but insistent nobility, and distinguishes him from the purveyor of the everyday. This is in contrast to the journalist Chandramadhav, one who need to be kept permanently caffeinated even as he covers contemporary political affairs that ought to be highly stimulating in and of itself. Chandramadhav already represents an early, and chasmal, postcolonial ennui—be he located in the time of the novel of the late nineteen thirties, or the time of publication—the early fifties. Even the fact that Chandramadhav is unhappily married, and so has violated at least one of the requisite bourgeois codes, is not enough to redeem him. Indeed he misses whatever redemptive chance he might have had by being actively cruel to his wife and children. He is the easy foil to Bhuvan's lofty and extra-mundane quest in the stars. It is clear that the defensiveness of his character only serves as an inverse mirror to the splendorous solitude of Bhuvan. It is as important (and perhaps much easier) to delineate what Bhuvan is not (i.e. not-Chandramadhav) than what he is. This function of the mirror serves to preempt criticism of Bhuvan, especially in relation to Rekha, for it is equally central to the novel that the relationship between Rekha and Bhuvan be kept pure from any baseness—this baseness being banished to Chandramadhav's heavy handed attempt at seducing Rekha. It is not just that Chandramadhav is married, but also that he is so direct in his articulation of desire. In contrast, the construction of the Bhuvan-Rekha romance must be mired in a lofty lyricism that must not speak of desire.

When the Bhuvan-Rekha marriage cannot take place, it is narratively necessary that the marriage of Bhuvan and Gaura must be seen in terms that approach a benign and affectionate paternalism devoid of any overt desire. Bhuvan is much older than Gaura, he is a friend of her father, and he was her tutor. Gaura looked up to him in all these roles—all of which only seem to aid her falling in love with him. His love for her too seems born of this paternalism, even though the only real paternalism we see is imbricated in the bourgeois domesticity that is so despised in the novel. Again, this despised bourgeois domesticity is externalized into the foil of Chandramadhav in the cameo scene where he admits to loathing his wife, precisely because she is so pliant to his unloving sexual desire, and in the ironic fertility of her always turning pregnant even unto the end of the novel. This is even as he periodically, and almost in frustrated despair, takes his anger out on her by raping her. In contrast to this fertility there is the abortion of the child of Rekha and Bhuvan, a child conceived in passion and love, and on whom the parents had fantasized much, dreaming of turning him into a perfect mixture of the musician Rekha and the scientist Bhuvan—they had dreamt of a "surgeon-violinist" child.

Still, even if formulated as lofty and sensitive and lyrical, a difficulty is discernible in the formulation of Bhuvan—his cause does not directly offer itself as heroic as the character of the young revolutionary Shekhar would. Post Independence, what might be a foundational cause capable of immediate and explicit moral legitimacy and intelligibility? The strength of *Nadi ke dvip* might be in its refusal to be forced to answer, or to offer a ready-made cause. Bhuvan cannot clearly articulate what his malaise with the contemporary historical moment is. His detachment is not a spiritual disinterestedness, with its assumption of superiority to

worldliness—a formulation available in the revolutionary tradition from *Anand Math* onward with the long line of revolutionaries capable of disinterested action for a cause larger than oneself, this cause most emblematically being nationhood. Yet even the novels of Jainendra and earlier in Agyeya's oeuvre, *Shekhar*, had begun to question this gesture of easy spiritual and moral superiority. But in *Nadi ke dvip*, Bhuvan arguably commits himself to worldliness in the most literal fashion impossible, by fathering a child, and later by marrying Gaura and serving as her surrogate paternal figure. Yet his unease at his life does not ebb. His self-reflection does not ever coagulate into authoritative self-knowledge, and indeed, what most connects *Nadi ke dvip* to *Shekhar* is the pervading heaviness of a glutinous melancholia. This melancholia is yet one that is rich and generative of the widest range of moods, both bourgeois and revolutionary, it is tender in its love, as well as abrupt in its divorces and withdrawals from relationships. At its extreme, this sentiment even leads, in Rekha's case, to a seemingly unnecessary self-sabotage, an abortion that speaks to both a personally intrinsic, and socially inadmissible, desire for freedom. This speaks to the dilemmas in the moral universe of the last phase of nationalism and the early phase of post-colonial political and social life.

The delicacy of the relationship between Rekha and Bhuvan is contrasted to the boorishness and hedonism of Chandramadhav, a sexual as well as ideological predator, the opportunist entrepreneur of the new and grubby industrial India. But *Nadi ke dvip* also demonstrates its finesse by not just decrying this new country by contrasting it with the world of Bhuvan and Rekha, but also juxtaposing it with the openness with which the youthful Gaura embraces her future. A future Gaura idealizes as universal in its scope—and this makes her proximate to the youthful idealism of the revolutionaries of the first half of the twentieth century. Gaura is, perhaps unbeknownst to her, but certainly to Bhuvan, memorably the heir of that earlier generation—hence perhaps his attraction to her. And in the fact of her being a woman, and not the angry young man of the earlier decades, there is a further seed of optimism—the plight of the revolutionary woman need not always be that of a Shashi or Mrinal. It is the light and lightness that she brings to the novel that helps to partially offset the melancholy of those who were needlessly martyred so that a later generation may shed its chrysalis. For the needlessly martyred included not only a historical figure like Bhagat Singh but also the numberless dying woman of the Hindi literary landscape— *Shekhar's* Shashi, or Jainendra Kumar's *Bua*. Indeed, as Agyeya was to write in the Introduction to his translation of *Tyagpatra*: "Jainendra Kumar is deeply concerned with the potentialities of non-resistance to evil as a positive spiritual force."[9] Unlike what happened to Mrinal however, in Gauri's case this Gandhian affirmation of life played itself out well.

The achievement of this occasional, successful intimacy is through free conversation between middle-class, educated men and women, a freedom of conversation that was not quite possible, or easily representable in Premchand's oeuvre. Yet the strains and limitations of such easeful conversation show. For often the conversation must be indirect, metaphorical, and cosmic as it is uncertain what this intimacy really entails in the relationship as the social experience of such intimacy is so new that the boundaries that would keep men and women together or apart have not yet been drawn. And consequently, in a blur of the prose, warm but uncertain, there is the lovemaking between Rekha and Bhuvan, and the sequela of pregnancy—all the language bathed in lambency. The abortion and its blood is reserved for later, for it cannot

[9] Agyeya, *Introduction to The Resignation*, vii

afford to sully the quasi-mysticism of the act. It may be seen how much struggle there is in describing intimacy and desire, how vigilant the prose must be to distinguish itself from the bluntness of Chandramadhav's casual and frankly open lust. In the novel, sex is so close to death—the child is aborted, and Rekha's life is critically endangered in those days of hushed and almost criminalized abortions. Shashi's shadow must lie heavy on Rekha. The male protagonist must live with his guilt, occasionally by idealizing the woman and the acts of love, but as often, by plunging and fleeing from that very unbending intimacy with death that the wounded (and thus wronged) woman's body offers. It is at this level that the novel is all melancholia and proclaims the exorbitant price of sexual freedom. Even at the end of the novel, notwithstanding the narratively coherizing marriage of Bhuvan and Gauri, there is no celebration, or even sign, of pregnancy, of a new child triumphing over the earlier partitioning of the woman's body. The abortion cannot but evoke a male culpability forged as a consequence of the move away from the woman into a new woman's life. Perhaps there is a disingenuousness about the objective scientist male being unable to quite understand Rekha's desire. The adult scientist, in his befuddlement, seems like a child, and it is this that might have led to the eventual quasi-parental marriage resolution with Gauri. At other times the elder Bhuvan is the paternal figure. The reversibility of parental love seems more tenable than the equality that the new working-woman Rekha (or Premchand's Malati, or Jainendra's Bua) desired. While it is true again that the *Nayi Kahani* movement explored the complex inequalities of male and female desire more exhaustively and persistently, it is also true that Agyeya's work had cleared the path.

Despite the dreamy and indirect lyricism, Bhuvan clearly initiates the seduction of Rekha. For once, early in the novel, the wonted detachment falters—though Bhuvan is more accused of this detachment rather than being one who self-proclaims it. Yet a type of detachment, even a numbness and inanimacy persists in the lovemaking—perhaps as it is shot through with the fear that he is destroying something. It causes him to plead that he wishes to at least try to protect her from himself—is this a displacement, a fear for himself that he is projecting on to her—for what is it that he wishes to protect her from, and how, and why? And why is her desire tacitly but thus rudely questioned?

Though one has to read between the lines of Rekha's responses to Bhuvan, her frustration is discernible. The conversation between them constitutes one of the longest and most explicit discussion of sexuality in Hindi literature until the nineteen fifties. It is clear that this collapse of masculinity at the peak of desire is a recurring motif—to recall just one similar moment, there is Sunita in the forest with her revolutionary lover. The theme of broken masculinity is expressly stated toward the end of the novel—masculinity's failure lying not only in its implosion, but perhaps more significantly in its failure to relate and articulate a moment of inter-subjective union. Toward the end, there is only the flight, and it is here that Agyeya makes use of his World War experience, and displaces the narrative to Java. It is from the safety of Java that discussions of the legitimacy of the world war, and indeed the moral clarity of the War seems to bring relief to Bhuvan from the chaos of his personal life. There are resonances of Shekhar's plunge into politics—revolutionary politics or war serving Shekhar and Bhuvan respectively as both relief from the domestic, as well as a risk-laden and reflective experience that may bring their own insights and clarities into the confusion of their personal life.

A similar indirectness and sabotaged opportunity presents itself in the correspondence between Gauri and Rekha—though this too is narratively and literally sabotaged as the letters are

crumpled and un-delivered. The subjective substance of the novel is greater than is available to any of the characters—this is not just to add to the pathos of miscommunication, but rather to point to the necessary breaking points of conversation, and even to the limitations of the female *communitas* that might have been achieved in the book.

The tragic figure of Rekha haunts the book—in time, her dissociativeness, unlike Bhuvan's more Olympian (or Himalayan) one, takes a more concrete toll, becoming something akin to a derangement. These moments might be the tragic high point of the novel—her sense of having to choose to abort her child. Indeed, she clearly does not buy into the illusion that she chooses this fate—notwithstanding the *deus ex machina* of her agreeing to marry the surgeon who performed the healing surgery many months after the abortion. Though Bhuvan ostensibly is ready to stand by her having the child, his support seems curiously weightless, even vacuous. He stands helplessly watching a fate, that seems completely external to him, swallow his lover—much as Shekhar was forced to watch Shashi die. Shekhar is left to suffer alone as Shashi dies, and Bhuvan is isolated from the living Rekha, likely forever, by the event of the abortion. The relationship between two free individuals is ultimately no more narratively sustainable in *Nadi ke dvip* than it was in *Shekhar*.

# CHAPTER V

## YASHPAL'S NOVELS: REVOLUTIONARIES, THEIR SOCIAL RELATIONS, AND THE RECONSOLIDATION OF THE REALIST FORM

Yashpal was born at the very beginning of the twentieth century in 1903 in Ferozepur in the Punjab. His was the generation that was most keenly affected by the work of the *Arya Samaj* (Society of the Nobles) reform movement in the Punjab in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The *Arya Samaj* was founded by Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), it was a reaction to colonial modernity and took the form of a return to the values of supposedly pristine Hindu texts, especially the most ancient of them, the Vedas.[1] In practice, the movement thrived as it built up several educational institutes especially in western India and the Punjab. Due to his mother's beliefs in the *Arya Samaj* movement, Yashpal went to an Arya Samaj educational institution near Hardwar, a pilgrimage town near the source of the Ganges chosen for its sacred significance. In his multi-volume, uncompleted autobiographical work *Siṃhavalokan* (The Hero Introspects), Yashpal writes of the importance of his mother in the evolution of his values.[2] He was moved by her insistence on his education, as she had to move from the hills of Kangra to the lowly paid work of being a teacher in an *Arya Samaj* school for girls. The educational system of his childhood was of the *Gurukul* model of traditional education that the *Arya Samaj* favored. This *Gurukul* model involved his being sent away from his mother to live in the school as a young child aged just seven. He was to stay in that residential single-sex school system for seven years. The model of education and life chiefly consisted of living with the teacher, in a state of strict physical discipline, practicing vegetarianism, and learning as much from proximity as he learned from the more explicit and formal ways of the transfer of knowledge and experience.[3] When Yashpal finally left school, he worked as a Congress volunteer, attended college, and simultaneously read Marx and Lenin. His mother had wished him to be a lawyer, but nevertheless supported him when his ideals led him to rebel against the lawyerly values of the Congress constitutionalists. The college Yashpal attended was the National College in Lahore founded by the prominent *Arya Samaj* and nationalist leader Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928). It was here that he met Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev—for the National College was a seed-bed of political extremism in the nineteen twenties. His mother continued to support him even as his ideas became increasingly radicalized, and even when he finally entered prison.

In college and later, Yashpal was to turn vehemently against his school upbringing—he warned against the fetishizing of the traditional forms of Hindu knowledge as it only engendered sexual repression. In one of his short stories *Dharm Raksha* (Protecting The Moral Order), published in 1959, a teacher living in such a traditional school ends up on the verge of raping his

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[1] The authority on the Arya Samaj in Punjab is Kenneth Jones. See especially Kenneth Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
[2] Yashpal, *Siṃhavalokan: Volumes 1-4* (Allahabad: Lokbharati Publications, 1994).
[3] Heimsath, Charles. *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 296-297.

own kin due to the prolonged and enforced frustration of his sexual desires.[4] While the teacher's training required him to repeat to himself, daily and innumerable times, that all women were kin—this compulsive, sexual self-repression only led him to sexualize his kin rather than desexualize all women.

Yashpal's substantive education seems to have begun in the National College at Lahore, where he was a member of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army and his colleagues were Bhagvati Charan Vohra, Bhagat Singh, and Sukhdev. The most extensive description of these years are to be found in his memoir *Simhavalokan* (The Hero Introspects), whose volumes were published respectively in 1951, 1952 and 1955 (he was working on an uncompleted fourth volume at the time of his death). With reference to Bhagat Singh, he writes in *Simhavalokan*:

> The hearts of the people were filled with intense hatred toward the foreign government. As a result, people spread stories about the cruelties which were inflicted on Bhagat Singh and his companions and of the courage with which they faced the gallows. To show their hatred and anger towards the government and their reverence for the martyrs, people would exaggerate these stories, and those who heard them would add something more, and that is how these stories gained currency [he was referring especially to widespread and varied allegations such as the fact that the British violated the bodies of the martyrs, did not perform the required last rites appropriately which latter required Brahmin and Sikh priests, or that they did not return the bodies to the families as promised so that the families may honor them, or that the authorities even deceived people including Bhagat Singh's sister Amarkaur as to the time and site of execution][5]

After the capture of Bhagat Singh by the colonial police, Yashpal tried to continue assassinating colonial officers. There was an attempted bombing by Yashpal and Chandrasekhar Azad of the Viceroy Lord Irwin's special train en route to Delhi to negotiate with Gandhi. Though the Viceroy's dining car exploded, the Viceroy himself was unhurt. The police began an intensive search for the perpetrators—Chandrasekhar Azad was eventually assassinated by the police in Allahabad in February 1931. Yashpal too was eventually captured in Punjab in January 1932. He was sentenced to fourteen years of hard labor, and was not released even during the general amnesty of July 1937 under the legislative government of the Indian National Congress. This was partly because Yashpal refused to concede that the chief aim of the revolutionaries was violence. He was finally released at the age of thirty-five, partly due to his health, and perhaps largely due to the indefatigable efforts of his wife (Prakashvati, a dentist) in March 1938.

On returning to civilian life, he began the journal *Viplav* (Revolution), one that both he and his wife were to be associated with until his death in 1976. He had met his wife during his revolutionary days, and had married her when still in prison. In prison he taught himself some French, Russian and Italian, and this was one of the sources of inspiration for his writing. In his short stores, dating from the nineteen thirties and forties, he began to write an account of his prison days and experience. One of Yashpal's great strengths as a writer was to never overstate the heroism of his colleagues and himself; instead, he offers a very clear-eyed, even dry, account. In one of his earlier short stories *Sāg* (the leafy greens often served in Indian cuisine), he writes of the naive surprise of the revolutionaries upon realizing how much of the colonial establishment was "Indian" in racial composition:

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[4] Yashpal, *Short Stories of Yashpal*, trans. Corrine Friend (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969).
[5] Yashpal, *Autobiography*, trans. Corrine Friend (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

> Whenever the English Civil Surgeon had to pass their cells, his face contorted with loathing. All he could do was snarl "Murderers!" And spit. Taking their cue from the sahib, the Indian jailer and all the other officials and guards treated these vicious criminals even more harshly. No other prisoner was allowed to step within the shadow of their cells. When the guards themselves walked past the cells, they went by with faces blank and hard as stone. Visheshar Prasad and Rahman Khan [two revolutionaries] realized the gravity of their crime. They had no hope of pardon. But in despair they wondered—why did all the Indians hate and fear them? They had been fighting the Government of the English, but the Englishmen of that Government were few and rarely seen. The Government was run by Indians like these. If the country is to be freed, then from whom?[6]

Though Yashpal was affiliated with the Communist Party of India, he was unpopular with the Party, especially for his bold depictions of Indian women. For example, *Divya* (1944), ostensibly set in the first Century of the Common Era, is actually a comment on contemporary Indian womanhood.[7] Here he seems to speak approvingly of the life of a courtesan—if only because the protagonist is constrained to be such by the patriarchal and artificially religious society. These themes persisted in his novels even after Independence, as Independence seemed to have brought little material change in the situation of women. His 1956 novel *Amita* similarly uses the historical setting of classical India to put forward the very contemporary theme of war-like male domination over both the polity as well as the domestic sphere.[8] Yashpal, like Agyeya and Jainendra, use sexuality as a tool for socio-narrative commentary. Though Yashpal had a less personal relationship with Premchand in comparison to Jainendra, perhaps in one sense he was a more comprehensive inheritor and student of Premchand's social realist method and broad canvas. Yet, though he reiterated the realist narrative, his novels also often function as a dialectic between the sexual and the historical-social in the manner less of Premchand's oeuvre than that of Jainendra and Agyeya. What he shares with Jainendra and Agyeya, and what brings them together as Hindi writers in this dissertation, is their heuristic use of sexuality as a horizon for asking larger questions about the general state of revolutionary nationalist ontology.

## A CONTEMPORARY SKETCH OF YASHPAL AND THE LITERARY PUBLIC SPHERE IN THE LATE 1920S

In his memoirs *Kya Bhulūṇ, Kya Yaad Karūṇ* (What Should I Remember, What Should I Forget) the Hindi poet and novelist Harivansh Rai Bachchan (1907-2003) recalled meeting a Punjabi youth in 1929 called Shrikrishna.[9] Shrikrishna was to introduce Harivansh Rai to members of the revolutionary movement including Yashpal. Shrikrishna's family was highly political, and this sort of background was new to Harivansh Rai, and it gives an idea of what the political concretely meant in the late nineteen twenties. Harivansh Rai describes Shrikrishna's

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[6] Yashpal, *Short Stories of Yashpal*, trans. Corrine Friend (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), 49.
[7] Yashpal, *Divya* (Lucknow: Viplav Pustakmala, 1967).
[8] Yashpal, *Amita* (Lucknow: Viplav Publications, 1965).
[9] Bachchan, Harivanshrai. *Kyā Bhulūṇ, Kya Yād Karūṇ*, trans. Rupert Snell (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998). All translations are from Snell.

family and the revolutionaries they were intimate with, and the general atmosphere of risk and chance:

> His family was Arya Samaji, but liberal, and took an active interest in literature, the arts and the nationalist movement; his mother Atmadevi Suri had spent time in jail during the Satyagraha campaign, and family sympathies extended even to the revolutionary wing of the movement… Chandrasekhar Azad may also have stayed with me—when I read Yashpal's novel *Dada Comrade*, I felt sure that if that book was a portrayal of Azad, then it was he who had been a guest in my house. Shrikrishna had given my address to Yashpal himself when he was leaving Shrikrishna's Delhi house for Allahabad as a fugitive, but Yashpal had ended up at the house of an Irish woman who called herself Savitri Devi and who had rooms above the Krishna Press on Hewett Road. It was at that address that Yashpal was arrested the same night. If he had come to stay at my house and had been arrested from there, how differently my own history would have turned out.[10]

It may be seen how contingent, and on the verge of entropy and terror, the historical moment was—and how much of the world of the younger Hindi writers was enmeshed in the high stakes of militant anti-colonialism. Shrikrishna then tells Harivansh Rai that he must protect "Prakasho" who is another terrorist on the run. Harivansh Rai was excited—he had heard much of Prakasho, though he believed that this was likely not her real name—she was the brave, beautiful, bomb-making woman who had cut off all ties with her family to take to the streets and safe-houses in the cause of the revolutionaries. It had also been suggested that she had planned to marry Yashpal—but Yashpal had been arrested, and was likely to be incarcerated for several years.

Even to Harivansh Rai, there was more to Shrikrishna's interest in Prakasho than "dry duty." As Bachchan puts it:

> Shrikrishna referred to Yashpal as Bhaiya, brother, on the basis that Yashpal was supposedly betrothed to Prakasho, thereby establishing Prakasho as his sister-in-law; this conveniently deflected the critical glance of a society intolerant of unauthorized relationships between young men and women. And the relationship between brother-in-law and sister-in-law is famously flexible in Indian society (146).

There is a sense of the scandal of unsupervised young men and women, changing names and appearance, and interacting freely with each other in a manner that was certainly not likely to win the consent or approval of elders. It did not matter that the nationalist cause was widely held to be lofty—in practice, if this meant a fluid *communitas* many elders would have none of it. An incarcerated man only provided a further, complicating spectral presence. As he returns from seeing Prakasho (or Rani as she was called at that moment), Bachchan reflected on the strange turn of events, as if life was already taking on a novelistic dimension. Initially, it had been Shrikrishna and Rani who had been spending all of their time together—at least partly due to the fact that she was escaping from the government and had no one to turn to but him. Later, Rani was arrested but then mysteriously released—but not before society spilt much ink speaking of the drama of a young, attractively dressed woman caught as an anti-colonial terrorist. Soon, for reasons that neither Shrikrishna nor Prakasho/Rani explained, she decided to live with Harivansh Rai in the latter's home as Harivansh Rai tended to his increasingly ill wife Shyama. Here, the ever intriguing Prakasho/Rani transforms herself seemingly effortlessly into amiable and

[10] Bachchan, *Kya Bhulun, Kya Yaad Karun*, 129-145.

soothing domesticity, charming Harivansh Rai, his parents, and apparently even Shyama, with her energetic help with all the household chores. The significant point here is that this freedom of allowing a strange, unmarried woman to live in a house with a young man was only possible due to the aura of Prakasho/Rani's nationalism, especially for Harivansh Rai's father. Hence, nationalist activity, in the eyes of some elders at least, gave social relations a certain margin of freedom. Perhaps inevitably then, the strained Harivansh Rai with his ill wife and financial troubles was drawn strongly to the serenely superhuman Prakasho/Rani. Again, this is made more tenable by the fact that "if Rani was not such a woman (who would take such bold initiative), she could scarcely have worked alongside male activists" (154). Even in their relationship, it was he, a married man, who was acutely uncomfortable being seen with her in public, while Prakasho/Rani seemed utterly insouciant.

However, when Rani fell ill a few months later, she insisted that Harivansh Rai call Shrikrishna. Soon she seemed to become closer to Shrikrishna, finally even leaving Harivansh Rai to live in a new house with Shrikrishna. She nonchalantly took furnishings from Harivansh Rai's house and this made Harivansh Rai bitterly jealous. Nevertheless, he continued to lend them money from his meager school-teacher salary, even supplementing it by taking on additional work. Finally, however, he could do no more, and even his attempts at getting them gainfully employed failed, as they remained unresponsive to his counsel. A dissatisfied Harivansh Rai mocked their supposed high nationalist idealism in his memoir: "It was surprising, very surprising that a young man and a young woman, sound in mind and body, could not together do some honest work that would make them self reliant" (158). Here all youthful idealism seemed to bleed when it cut against the rock of hard financial reality; the stress of the survival of the revolutionaries against the police is present in simulacrum in the struggles between Shrikrishna, Prakasho/Rani and Harivansh. Perhaps that very despair contributed to the mock tragi-comedy that followed—Shrikrishna and Prakasho/Rani threaten to kill themselves, whereupon Harivansh Rai threatens suicide too—but luckily they changed their minds, and manage to save Harivansh Rai as well. What may be seen in all of this is both the absurdity of such melodramatic young love, but also the actuality and consequences of a life lived with such strain on the margins of both political and financial existence. There are frank statements of intense emotional pain, and near suicidality—they mirror Shekhar's suicidal ideations and Bhagat Singh's long discussions on the theme of suicide with Sukhdev.

In some contrast, perhaps the one man who seemed obstinate in his self-belief was Yashpal. He retained a true and steadfast conviction of his ideals. This may be interpreted negatively—in both his oeuvre's relative lack of interiority *vis a vis* Jainendra, Agyeya, Bachchan, and to a lesser extent perhaps even Bhagat Singh and Gandhi. Yet this self-confidence must have also made him unique and attractive. It is no surprise that Prakasho/Rani eventually returned to him (as perhaps she had always intended). Bachchan writes: "Rani's practical nature and capacity for work, repressed by contact with Shrikrishna's idle and fatalistic ways, blossomed again through association with the resolute and industrious Yashpal, the self-confident artist" (160).

After his meetings with these activists, Harivansh Rai slowly felt himself getting increasing politically invested. Gandhi's Salt March to Dandi in 1930 had roused the nation, and Harivansh Rai took to writing nationalist ditties to be sung on procession. He was even commended by Jawaharlal Nehru for his efforts at mobilizing Nehru's Khadi Promotion Team

(135-136). This was also the time Harivansh Rai worked at the influential journal *Chaṃd*—which had just published the famous *Phaṃsi Ank* (Special Issue on Hanging). This large issue was devoted to revolutionaries and their punishments and martyrdoms, but Harivansh Rai's encounter with the editor Ramrakh Singh Sehgal was unpleasant, as, according to Harivansh Rai, the editor had poor literary judgment and ethics over employee remuneration. The context and some elements of the *Phamsi Ank* are discussed below to give the distinctive flavor of the surcharged literary public sphere that enveloped the young Yashpal—who was soon to turn both revolutionary and litterateur.

In November 1928, on the occasion of *Deepāvali* (the Hindu festival of lights celebrating the Lord Ram), the *Phamsi Ank* of the prominent Hindi magazine, *Chamd* (Moon) was published.[11] *Chamd* was a monthly that had been in print from Allahabad since the Deepavali of 1922 under the proprietorship of Ram Sehgal and the editorship of Chatursen Shastri. By 1928, *Chamd* had established itself firmly in the nationalist camp—yet its issues also consisted of a wide variety of subjects including many apolitical articles. The *Phamsi Ank*, a one-time special issue was over three hundred pages long and had writings from many revolutionaries including Bhagat Singh in his own name, and, it is believed, under the names of Doctor Mathur Singh and Balwant Singh.[12]

What strikes the reader about this special issue of *Chamd* is how universal, perhaps even eclectic, it is in its gallery of heroes and heroines—many are revolutionary figures from France, Scotland, Austria, and Classical Rome. The two outstanding historical events remain the French Revolution and the 1857 "War of Independence" which the British authorities, attempting to downplay its spread, fervor, and political valence, persisted in calling a Sepoy Mutiny. The issue makes its impassioned case against hanging by appealing to both a universal sense of justice and to more elaborated arguments about ideal polities and their strained and hard won historical evolution. In the train of the *Phamsi Ank*, there was a January 1930 edition of Calcutta's *Hindu Panch*; this similarly themed "Sacrifice Edition" had a roll call of martyrs from ancient India to the present day—this too was immediately confiscated by the authorities.

In the Introduction to the *Phamsi Ank,* the editor Chatursen Shastri speaks in perhaps a slightly overwrought cosmological language of forces like *mahamāya* (the great illusion) and *mrityu-sundari* (literally death-beauty), dancing upon the land of ignorance, slavery and darkness where the multitudes including the editor and the contributors stand naked and cowering. He then asks, when will the people awaken, and rhetorically answers that the day of awakening is near. It is significant to note that this sort of mystical-theological language was central to the elucidations of nationalism. The religious here figures less as sectarian and more as a zone of intensity. This dissertation has discussed Bhagat Singh's formulations of atheism, as well as the many discussion on God (for example that in Agyeya's *Shekhar*), and the moral order, especially in its negative imperative of human guilt and sin. This is especially the case in the opening sections of Jainendra Kumar's *Tyagpatr*. The non-sectarian religious idiom often saturated nationalism. It may be argued that what was moving in Bhagat Singh's repudiation of religion was the overwhelming sense one gets of the power of religion to dominate thoughts of the afterlife and the moral order. This was perhaps the analogue in India of the many Christian

[11] Shastri, Chatursen. (ed.), *Chaṃd: Phaṃsi Ank* (Delhi: Radhakrishn Publications, [1930] 1988).

[12] Chaturvedi, Nareshchandra. *Chaṃd: Phaṃsi Ank* (Radhakrishn Publications, 1988), unpaginated Introduction.

Socialisms of Europe, which tried to marry social, this-worldly justice with the normative justice of the afterlife.

As the edition of *Chamd* shows, religious imagery was pervasive, and was the dominant mode by which the martyrs were understood. The editorial text proclaimed that the *mrityunjay* (the victor over death) is at hand—the *mahā mrityunjaya* mantra is as old as the seventh mandala of the *Rg Veda* and is the oldest extant collection of hymns of the Hindu religion.[13] Yet the imperative to act, and the moral urgency and legitimacy to do so, was firmly rooted in the historical present. This was the exhortation by the editor Shastri to the two hundred thousand contemporary readers of *Chamd*. For example, the very first poem *Prāndanḍ* (Life Sentence) declares that as God has created all humans, no one person has the right to take another's life, and that indeed taking life is taking enmity with God. Other poems, for example, *Phamsi* (Hanging, 15) seem to romanticize the act of martyrdom by speaking of death as a bride, while some, like *Sandesh* (Message, 40) speak of leaving the earthly bride, or alternatively, as *Mrityu mein jīvan* (Life in Death, 27) suggests, to take the revolution to heaven itself.

The photographs tell their own story—Tantiya Bheel, a dreaded dacoit who was nevertheless regarded as India's "Robin Hood of the Central Provinces" by the *New York Times* (November 10th, 1889), is shown standing with his captors who had imprisoned him by treachery; there are photographs of still living and respected aged men like Baba Jagat Singh who had seen the war/mutiny of 1857; photographs of police stations and hanging-grounds; there are photographs of the painfully young boy-martyr Khudiram Bose (1889-1908) who seems to be posing in the very gestures of a gratuitous tragedy; photographs of earlier Bengali political activists like Satyendrakumar Basu and high school-teacher-revolutionaries like Master Amirchand who had tried to assassinate the Viceroy Harding in December 1912. Indeed the last seventy-five pages of the special issue are an extraordinary roll call of martyrs, of various revolutionary movements, assassination-attempts, regions and religions. It demonstrates the depth and reach of the revolutionary struggle from 1857, but especially from the turn of the century and in the present day. The featured figures are mostly from Bengal, the Punjab, and the Hindustani speaking areas. Many of the photographs are extraordinarily moving—mostly being merely frontal face shots likely from police records, some are however embroidered in verse (sometimes in the Urdu script as in the case of Rajendranath Lahiri and Ashfaqullah Khan), while some are shown (seemingly serene) in death with flowers strewn on their body such as the body of Roshan Singh. Still others are grainy faces behind bars such as Babu Harnam Singh, some with their baby daughters such as Balwant Singh, and some imperiously posing such as Bhai Balmukund. More than any text, these photographs of grainy texture and of spectral black and white demonstrate the pathological fecundity with which revolutionaries were being generated under the colonial regime. The photographs are accompanied by short notes describing the political activity of the given revolutionary and the circumstances of his martyrdom. The photographed persons in this special issue happen to be all male though there are prominent women in other sections—furthermore, all the male faces, bodies and postures are unmarked, and not represented as degraded by torture. It is against the background of the sparseness and meagerness of these short notes that the achievement of the fully fleshed out novels and memoirs of Jainendra, Yashpal, and Agyeya can be measured. They helped move the revolutionary from a

[13] Shastri (ed.), *Chamd: Phamsi Ank*, 1930

figure, numerous in number and yet perhaps likely to be forgotten for that reason in the blurred, crowded minutia of prison records, to singular, wholly fleshed out, live and reflective Subjects grounded in, and interacting with, their historical and moral situation.

Some excerpts from their trial documents and statements are also given—for example, Master Amirchand was accused of stating in a pamphlet: "We are so many that we can seize and snatch from them their cannons…Reforms will not do. Revolution and general massacre of all the foreigners, especially the English will alone serve our purpose" (243). Madanlal Dingra is supposed to have said:

> The only lesson that India requires today is how to die and the only way to teach it is by dying ourselves. And therefore I die; and glory to my martyrdom. The battle shall continue till both the Nations, English and Hindoos, live and their present unnatural relations continue. My only prayer to God is that I may return to the same Mother and die for the same cause, till the Mother is freed for the service of humanity and the glory of God. *Bandemātaram* [Praise to the Mother]. (242)

There are many references to how even the British officers were impressed at the calm courage of the revolutionaries—and this was a trait that went back to at least 1857. There is a quotation from Charles Balls' 1858 work, *The History of the Indian Mutiny: Giving a Detailed Account of the Sepoy Insurrection in India*, Volume 2, where Balls remarks:

> Batch upon batch of natives mounted the scaffold. The calmness of mind and nobility of demeanor which some of the revolutionaries showed at the time of death was such as would do credit to those who martyred themselves for devotion to a principle… Without the least agitation he [an unnamed revolutionary] mounted the scaffold even as a *yogi* [renunciant] enters *samādhi* [Sanskrit word for a mystical, enlightened, or liberated state]. (156)

Yet the issue is not parochial. Though far less impressive or poignant, there are illustrations that demonstrate a familiarity and a willingness to learn from the great liberatory events of world history. The gallery of historical world events include a large, illustrated article on the French Revolution and its aftermath, an article on Saint Joan of Arc, another on Mary Queen of Scots, an important one on the events of 1857, and still others including the British Civil War of the Seventeenth Century with the hanging of King Charles, the story of Lincoln, as well as another detailed informational piece on the various manners of hanging, execution and torture in various periods of history and culture.

Yashpal came of age as a revolutionary in a decade that was obsessed with that very figure. This was an age obsessed both with the revolutionary's ideals and legitimacy, as well as in the strange workings of a cavitary universe of a rationalized penal system that swallowed the revolutionary whole into its endlessly inventive chambers of horror before spitting out either a martyred body or a deeply damaged life. It is a true testament to Yashpal that he survived to produce, over time, an oeuvre, monumental not only in its breadth but also in its clear-eyed judgment and almost lacking in personal bitterness and animosity. The following sections analyze two early novels—*Dada Comrade* (approximately translatable as Respected Elder Comrade) and *Desh Drohi* (Enemy of the State)—both published near contemporaneously in the nineteen forties at the time Agyeya's *Shekhar* was also being published.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY AS HETEROGENEISING NATIONALIST IDEALS

*Dada Comrade* was published in 1941 when Yashpal was nearly forty years old.[14] He had already led an active political life from his youth, and the novel, though looking to future and more sustained revolutions, was also a retrospective glance at the choices, both ideological and personal, of his youth. The chief narrative strand concerns the travails of the protagonist, mostly called Harish. On the run from colonial authorities, Harish has to keep changing names and identities. As the novel is discussed it will become clear, again echoing other novels discussed in the dissertation such as Agyeya's *Shekhar*, that there might be some doubt as to who the chief protagonist really is—perhaps the position of this chief protagonist is equally shared by Harish's lively and feisty lover, Shailbala, mostly referred to as the diminutive, Shail. The novel is named after his erstwhile chief (who in the novel is mentioned not by his name but as simply Dada Comrade) who is an important and conflicted elder male, moral figure in the novel.

The novel begins in a pattern that is similar to Jainendra Kumar's *Sunita,* published in 1935. Indeed the blurb in several Hindi editions of *Dada Comrade* explicitly makes the comparison to both *Sunita* and Saratchandra Chatterjee's controversial novel *Pather Debi* discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. The middle-class bourgeois household of the woman/wife Yashoda is rudely disturbed one night by the appearance of a youth on the run. It turns out that the youth is a revolutionary. In sympathy for his nationalist cause, Yashoda allows him to stay the night in safety. The next morning's public sphere of daylight contains a long open debate on politics by Yashoda's husband and his neighbor—the nocturnal visitor Harish had left by then to perform his more secret and dangerous politics. Yashoda's husband and his neighbor argue over which was the more effective and moral path—the minutiae of accretive, popular non-violent Gandhian social reform or the seemingly equally pointless obstructiveness of the few "firecrackers" of bombs that a few revolutionaries might throw in the immature hope of bringing down a mightily armed empire. Yashpal is unflinchingly candid and open in his descriptions of the supposed limitations of the revolutionaries—this is one of the greatest strengths of the novel, and a chief measure of its political maturity.

The novel involves dramatic changes of locale. At a scene in a gymnasium in a poor neighborhood in Kanpur in northern India a group of young men discuss the making and storing of weaponry. This is where the party, or at least the fragmented faction Harish belongs to, base themselves in their attempt to evade the police. The political conversation, regarding the effectiveness of the revolutionary method in relation to mainstream Congress and Gandhian methods is largely familiar, having been laid bare in the previous chapter. The focus of this dissertation chapter is not on matters of policy, but on the more chilling question of personal betrayal and risk. It is believed that Yashpal had, like Harish, been similarly pursued by sections of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army in its later phases. Any organization on the run from the police is under enormous pressure with regard to survival—the question of betrayal is automatically a question of survival as the stakes consist of life and death. Tensions are thus already very high as the group meets to discuss alleged infractions of the group's code by Harish —most especially the allegation of Harish's ostentatious living and his relationship with his

[14] Yashpal, *Dada Comrade* (Delhi: Hind Pocket Books [1941] 1967).

female friend Shailbala. It is openly wondered if this relationship might compromise the faction's survival.

Perhaps this allegation betrays some larger divisions in the group. The group is clearly uneasy at certain ideas that are afloat, perhaps under Harish's influence. The chief question is one of the very meaning and usefulness of violence as central to the revolutionary's aims—and here again, Yashpal had intimated these questions earlier in the conversations Yashoda's husband had with their neighbor. As Harish opines: "This pistol, revolver and bomb is on one side not only an obstruction in our path, but is consuming us… We are losing the support of the people … we should change our technique…beyond only martyrdom" (55). The embattled leader of the group Dada, replies (and here he speaks for an entire older generation grown up on an equally fierce but rawer sense of social injustice): "I know to kill and be killed… Now big people have come to the party with new fangled ideas… forgive me, I have not understood any of these new ideas… I have nothing to do with all this…I am a soldier… I have little to do with these arguments and opinions (57-65). It is to Dada's credit that, unlike many others of his generation, he nevertheless retains his love for, and faith in, Harish. At the end of the novel, after Harish's hanging, it is to Dada that Shailbala trustingly turns. Other members, as it turns out, think Harish is an untrustworthy heretic, and eventually plot to kill him.

Harish eventually reaches Lahore where he is to meet the Punjab members including Akhtar, a manual worker. Akhtar also wishes to move the party in a more working-class oriented direction. He thinks the party's energy should be deployed against the managerial staff of industry. The industry has its hated appendicles of "jobbers"—those who recruit under conditions that exploit the redundancies of labor and thus further exacerbate rural indebtedness. There are also other assorted financial middlemen who lend rural credit at exorbitant rates. Again, Akhtar can only sarcastically remark on the dated ideal of violence and martyrdom, as such already-archaic notions of simple martyrdom cannot take into account the systemic nature of the expropriation of destitute labor.

This echoes some of the points of Yashoda's Congressman husband, Amarnath. Amarnath had a better understanding of the new needs of labor and made note of the fact that in Russia each laborer had an insurance policy. Later on in the novel there are explicit debates regarding the manner and priorities of nationalist and working class mobilization. Some felt it best to mobilize on broader nationalist grounds than the more "partisan" ground of factory labor. There was the complicating factor of the Second World War and thus the question of the relationship between the Indian struggle and the War. It must be remembered that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R) was initially aligned with the Germans against the British Empire. All of these larger global debates had not been satisfactorily discussed by Harish's faction, which had dissolved into internecine egotistical and personal squabble. After meeting with Akhtar, Harish returns to Delhi with at least some doubts allayed and on the whole feeling much more assured and educated about the political needs of the day—but by now he is clearly straying far from the factional line.

In Delhi, Shailbala conveys to him the urgent message that Dada and another faction member B.M. are actively tracking him, perhaps with malign intent. Harish renews his life on the run—now from the B.M. and Dada combine, as well as the police. He is supported in this flight by two of Shailbala's friends—Robert, and Robert's sister Nancy. It is generally easy for the educated Harish, like Shailbala, to simulate respectability and avoid suspicion (as suspicion is

often class based). Indeed this ease with the elite was clearly a reason for B.M.'s suspicion and envy. The fluent conversations he ends up having with Robert testify to a familiarity with global social ideas that were certainly not available to the average working-class man or woman, or even the slightly more educated leadership of the extremist factions. Robert, finding in Harish a knowledgeable listener, engages him one night in an extensive self-narrativization that is only possible for one who is well read, and one who has come to value the very genre of self-representation. In this sense, Harish and Robert symbolize a fairly recent generation of intellectuals who could understand their life in terms of ratiocination. Robert's narrative is homologous to Harish's own journeys and questions, as well as those of extra-textual contemporaries like Agyeya's *Shekhar*, or Jainendra's Sir Pramod Dayal in *Tyagpatr*, or the three main characters in *Sunita*. Robert talks about his faith and loss of faith in varied idols and ideals—Christ, Gandhi, Hegel, Marx. Even more significantly for the question of narrativization, Robert demonstrates the contradictions these high ideals hold for everyday living in the India of the nineteen thirties and forties, and how such ideals subverted his formal education, his social standing, his employment and his marriage with its train of responsibilities, including possible parenthood. Robert began to consider all these archetypal bourgeois entailments—education, social status, employment, marriage and parenthood—as standing in the way of true freedom.

Later in the novel there are still more candid conversations on the sexual burdens of marriage, the need for widely available birth control due to among other things, over-population and the fact that the parents may be impoverished and hence unable to bring up the child well enough, especially if they had not desired it in the first place. What is extraordinary about this conversation is that all of these four young men and women (Harish, Robert, Nancy and Shailbala), who are on the run from the police are still growing as individuals, debating and making decisions. In this sense it is continuous with the strain of the revolutionary tradition investigated in this dissertation. A little more than a decade earlier Bhagat Singh and his colleagues had read much and discussed the meaning of their actions even as they performed them, and continued to do so in jail (as Gandhi did too). *Shekhar* also thrived intellectually in jail. It is the very mortal uncertainties of revolutionary life that make it possible for these four characters in *Dada Comrade* to be so free in their speculations and actions. During the nineteen thirties and forties the act of four unmarried young people traveling the country together would have caused hostile scandal. It is their deep instinct for freedom and knowledge that gives these revolutionaries their peculiar and emphatic signature.

Later in the novel Harish gets embroiled in a massive agitation over mill-worker's rights and demands; he had decided that the center of the anti-colonial agitation must involve the working-class. Antagonists of the strike, in awareness of the historical moment and mindful of how disparate groups might nevertheless converge, wondered variously if the instigators of the strike were Communists, or a breakaway Congress faction, or anarchic anti-capitalists, or agents of the Japanese. The suspicion extended to the Russians—at a time when the Russians were considered enemies because they had signed agreements of non-hostility with the enemy of the British, the German Chancellor Adolf Hitler. The strike laid bare the limitations of progressive voices—Shailbala's father was liberal in respect to his daughter's education but made clear his stand against the agitation. He told his daughter that the working-class could not steal the labor of generations of the capitalist class which had served the national cause by contributing financially to it, and moreover that the agitating strikers would not anyway know how to run the

mill. He made the candid observation that if he did not have the resources of his class he could not have patronized Shailbala's progressive ideas and education and that it would be more meaningful for him to donate money for hospitals and schools than relinquish control of his property. In clearly representing all these dilemmas and constraints, Yashpal is unflinchingly honest about the complicities that entangle political struggle and prevent it from being simple binaries of good and evil.

Harish finally realizes, even as he and Robert lose influence over the course of the strike, that the struggle itself needs money to survive, and that the patience of the workers had reached a breaking point, making it likely that in the heat of the moment they would commit acts of violence. This was exactly what the police were hoping for, so that they might then completely criminalize the struggle. The stress was also taking a toll on his relationship with Shailbala. The workers were on the verge of capitulation. Then, for what at the time seems fortuitous, some money appears, allowing the strikers to hold out longer and win better contracts for themselves.

The money was sent by Dada who had earned it the old fashioned way—by robbing and inadvertently killing a wealthy merchant. But the decision to send this money to the strikers did not come easily. Dada had to dissuade B.M. from his opposition to the strike—B.M. had argued tendentiously (like Shailbala's father) that the strike accomplished nothing, and instead only had an adverse effect on industrial production and was thus detrimental to the national cause. B.M wished to spread the claim that the strike had communistic origins and could thus invite special wrath at a time when there was much concern regarding the Soviet leader Josef Stalin's international ambitions. B.M also told Dada that they should offer themselves as armed vigilantes who would break the strike. But Dada disagreed and was indeed appalled at B.M.'s call for the betrayal of the impoverished and disempowered workers. Though Dada was of an older generation and thus skeptical of "a new theory everyday " (183), he retained his basic integrity in the fight for injustice and keenly felt the worker's anguish even as he appreciated Harish's courage in not going to the police when he knew that there was a plot by Dada's faction to kill him.

After deciding that he would rather trust Harish than B.M, Dada decided to help in the clearest way he knew—by looting a prominent shopkeeper for money. Unfortunately the shopkeeper gets killed, and it is this event that eventually costs Harish his life. The police, by tracking the stolen money of the shopkeeper reach Harish and then indict him for murder, even though their own intelligence were keeping watch on the strike knew that Harish was not at the site of the murder. It was convenient to sacrifice him to send a strong message to labor organizers. Thus, in terms of the narrative logic, an older generation, good intentions notwithstanding, ended up sacrificing a younger generation. It was more important for the British to have Harish hanged than the less dangerous Dada. By the time of the writing of the novel, in the nineteen forties, it was the incipient class-consciousness of the working-class that seemed more of a threat, especially in times of global conflict, rather than the older style militant nationalists of Dada's persuasion. According to Harish, the working-class movement had spread to Kanpur, Bombay and Ahmedabad. This type of politics was the wave of the future—Dada, even though he said he did not understand the communists and their incessant talk, conceded that it was perhaps their time to practice their type of revolution:

> How quickly time changes! It seems as if I had barely thrust the boat into the water, when the tides below shifted, and I remained on the sand... Harish is right, instead of trying to change the tide and bring it under the boat, one should rather push the boat into the tide (188).

The novel does serve up the final irony though—the very means of dacoity that Harish had clearly outgrown causes his hanging. The past history of violence cannot be laid aside that easily or innocently. In court he makes the case—in good conscience—that the way and age of violence had passed. Speeches at the cusp of hanging were an imagined tradition from the days of the 1915 Lahore conspiracy. But the oddity of the disjunction lies in the fact that this older style of fiercely nationalist historical thinking has given way to a far more skeptical and even morally abhorrent approach to violence. This is even as the means of colonial punitive action remained frozen; legislation on treason, first brought in times of emergency like the First World War, had not been removed from the books. Treason was still the nomenclature applied indifferently to a heterogeneous and evolving variety of political motivation and action.

The last long speech of Harish is a reflection at the verge of death—again this is consistent with his continuing evolution. It is like Bhagat Singh's voracious reading in jail and Shekhar's reverie on the deathbed that triggered the voluminous novel-memoir. Death, a closing of the circle, is a goad to a retrospectively deepened understanding—the philosophical question of whether hindsight is illusion is beside the point. In narratological terms there is a clear consolidation of the self that nevertheless leaves the self open to the uncertainty and fixity of death.

At the end of the novel Dada resolves to take care of a pregnant and resilient Shailbala—the older man finds new meaning for his life. Symbolically, an intermediate generation has been sacrificed, but there will be new birth and continuity. In the form of Dada, the paternalist resilience of the old that is willing to learn and give new meaning to its life is contrasted to the other self-protective paternalism of Shailbala's father who disapproves of his unmarried pregnant daughter and banishes her from his house. Dada's protection provides a passageway into the future with Shailbala in the new role of mother-to-be. Weighted though it is with tragedy and mourning irretrievable loss, it is in some ways a hopeful, defiant end when Shailbala resolves to continue life on the run with the elder Dada. As Shailbala concludes toward the end of the novel: "it is a wide world… I will keep Harish alive" (207).

In many of his works, Yashpal has been careful not to romanticize this vagrant life on the run—he does not underestimate how difficult it is for an educated, middle-class person to live as a criminal. Yet this life is understood in almost religious and existential terms. In a short story *Dukha-Dukhi* (Sorrowful Man, Sorrowful Woman) written in 1938, Yashpal describes how a political extremist must learn to be at ease in all areas, including in the varied brothel areas of different cities (Tibbi Bazaar in Lahore, Dalmandi in Benares, or Chaveri and the women who live proximate to Roshan Theater near Ajmeri Gate in Delhi).[15] This was because one day in his youth the protagonist had unexpectedly found himself in the backlanes of the *Jamā Masjid* and the Parade Ground in Delhi, when in the midst of acute hunger and ruminations on how his family would react to his shame, he felt a sudden liberation in turning the question on its head. As he began to beg, a destitute among destitutes, he said to himself:

[15] Yashpal, *Short Stories of Yashpal*, 1969.

> What's the sense of standing on false pride? Hundreds of people stretch out their hands to beg; so shall I. …From childhood, I had never asked anyone for anything, except my mother. She had told me: Son, stand on your own two feet. Never accept anything from anybody. I realized now that she spoke with the pride of a full stomach. (22)

Fleetingly, there is not just a curious knowledge, but also a certain kind of pride, truth, and power of insight in that hunted life.

In his 1943 novel *Deshdrohi* (The Enemy of the State), Yashpal again explores many of the themes familiar to readers of his 1941 novel *Dada Comrade*.[16] The latter novel begins dramatically with its protagonist Doctor Khanna being bound and kidnapped from Lahore by Afghans and taken to a distant part of the Afghanistan-Russian border. The beginning is dream-like. Doctor Khanna is in an extreme state of danger similar to the state Harish was often in in *Dada Comrade.* He has been kidnapped because he was an army doctor. He was useful to his kidnappers because he could medically treat people on that far border and could serve as a trophy-victim to scoff at unwanted British colonial authority. Though harrowed by his experience, he slowly comes to appreciate the beauty of the harsh landscape as well as the life and moral system of the Afghan people. These experiences help relativize his professional, middle-class life and teach him the varied customs of other peoples—and the rationality of those alternative forms of sociality. He grows attached to many of the people there, including some of the women. This makes him wonder at his marital life and his concepts of fidelity, companionship, and the attraction that the strange and distant might hold. Thus it is the Doctor who is educated by contact with distant people, rather than the other way around—this is consistent with Yashpal's belief in the nineteen forties that it is the urban, professional classes that have to learn from the margins. This attitude may be contrasted to the function of the Doctor-figure in some of the works of the nineteen fifties where the flow of knowledge seems to be clearly from the professional and scientific-urban to the rural. In the Hindi novelist Phanishwar Nath Renu's (1921-1977) novel *Maila Āṃchal* (The Soiled Border, 1954), the Doctor is a respected, powerful, and the preeminently Nehruvian rational symbol of the ameliorative benignity of modernity.[17] In Yashpal's novel, written approximately a decade earlier, the Doctor leaves little impact. He is mostly made fun of by the people, and is changed by and educated on politics and sexuality by his encounter with the borderland. He is less an agent of authoritative change than one who is chastised for his stereotypes of the margin.

Indeed, the strange *roman* of the Doctor is the theme of the novel. He eventually enters Russia (as the region was called at the time), and, in the midst of the doleful *weltlage* of the Second World War, undergoes another education of sorts, moving from a fairly apolitical, domesticated army Doctor to a believing Communist who supersedes his college friend Shivnath's tamer Congress-socialist politics. He is aware that there were many fables of Russian Communism. Often these rumors were believed even within the neighboring regions of Russia such as the Afghan regions. One such rumor was that even the poor in Russia live in mansions under Communism. But Doctor Khanna is a conscientious Communist, not so much disbelieving the fable, as believing in working toward it as a political ideal for India.

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[16] Yashpal, *Desh Drohi* (Lucknow: Viplav Pustakmala, [1943] 1967).
[17] Renu, Phanishwarnath. *Maila Ānchal* (Delhi: Rajkamal Publications, [1954] 2008).

He returns to India inspired and meets and argues with his old college colleague Shivnath. Though from an impoverished family with the responsibility of an unmarried sister, Shivnath had refused the fruits and benefits of education and social mobility and had instead gone into extremist agitationalist politics and served a four year term of rigorous solitary confinement, In this, he was rather like the author Yashpal. Shivnath had come out of imprisonment only to plunge into politics again—but this politics was of a different kind, more in open solidarity with disenfranchised sections. This move away from the violence of small scattered groups to more organizational mass level politics seems to represent Yashpal's evolution as a political thinker. There is a similar retrospective skepticism of the usefulness of assassinations as opposed to organizational politics in many discussions in *Dada Comrade.* Thus when Shivnath comes out of jail, instead of going back to the secret world of revolutionary politics he instead engineers a mill-worker strike. There are disagreements with his friend over the priorities of action. Shivnath believed, unlike Doctor Khanna, that the loyalty to the workers in India, and to the cause of Indian freedom from the British government (the Quit India movement had begun in 1942 in response to the failed Sir Stafford Cripps Mission of 1942) must supersede loyalty to the internationalist anti-fascist and anti-Japanese Communist cause. He strongly believed that the international situation had at least temporarily overtaken national issues. Yashpal largely avoided the difficult question of the earlier Russia-Germany Non Aggression Pact and Stalin's friendship with Nazi Germany up till Hitler's assault on Russian soil in December 1941. To Yashpal, as to other left-oriented writers of the time, Indian and Western, the situation in Russia was still conceived as an idealized Communism rather than authoritarian Stalinism. Clearly neither the deification nor the vilification of Stalin had yet consolidated itself in world consciousness.

Much of the talk centering on pure and abstracted politics takes place among men, chiefly Doctor Khanna, Shivnath, and Rajaram. Rajaram is Doctor Khanna's wife Raj's sister (Chanda's) husband. Rajaram is a part of the mill's managerial class and hence opposed to the ideas of Doctor Khanna and Shivnath. A fourth male interlocutor, largely Gandhian in outlook—is Badri Babu. Though he is not depicted without sympathy, the narrator's political preferences are clear. Yashpal, though often severely critical of Gandhi, as in his 1941 book *Gandhivad ki Shav-pariksha* (Postmortem of Gandhian Thought) was also capable of representing him movingly—as in scenes relating to Gandhi's last January 1948 fast in his 1960 novel *Jhoota Sach* (False Truth). In *Desh Drohi* however, for the most part Badri Babu is someone who rushes into conflict with little understanding of the issues involved. In the strike begun by the workers, he resolves to go on a hunger-fast on behalf of the workers. This is unsolicited and deflects attention away from the mill-workers' long standing suffering and demands—further, he demands to be made the sole representative of mill-worker's interests instead of the original planners of the strike such as Shivnath and his colleagues.

Shivnath begins to wonder if Badri Babu is not serving the mill-owner's interest despite his (Badri Babu's) unquestioned personal courage, selflessness and sacrifice in contrast to the majority of purely self-interested and unreflective Congress worker-cadre. Badri Babu's role is further compromised when he seems unable to distinguish between different kinds of violence. On the one hand was the violence inflicted directly by the police themselves—ostensibly this was in response to the violence of the mill-workers. But the violence of the mill-workers was itself caused by the police who had, in civilian clothes, infiltrated the worker's movement. The

narrator holds Badri Babu's inability to distinguish all these strands—and simply condemn violence in generic terms—suspicious. At best it was naive, at worst it was pernicious and made the workers even more vulnerable than they were at the beginning of the strike. Yashpal is thus able to, in signature fashion, knot the live and meticulously represented political arguments with the narrative emplotment of the novel.

## THE MUTUAL ACTIVATION OF THE HOUSEHOLD CRISIS AND THE REVOLUTIONARY CRISIS

Equally, Yashpal is able to interweave the plotting of national political positions with the question the politics of the household. The household serves as the primary site and perspective whereby the morality of varied nationalist political arguments can be tested in their final form. Significantly *Dada Comrade* begins with the interruption of the household with the arrival of a revolutionary. It is through the moral perspective of Yashoda, under-girded by her status as a wife and mother, that provides the legitimating cues to the reader as to how to interpret the protagonists' criminal act of breaking into the household. If Yashoda, a name for the god Krishna's mother, can find sympathy for the youth, then even the conservative reader must be able to. This pattern of cuing reader response has been present in many of the other novels discussed in this dissertation—it is through Apurba's (and the policeman's) eyes that the Doctor's power and charisma is represented in *Pather Dabi*, through the lawyer Shrikant that Hariprasann is represented in *Sunita*, and through the Judge's eyes that Mrinal is represented in *Tyagpatra*. The morality of the violent revolutionary has to be fiercely defended and argued for against the onslaught of colonial, conservative, and Gandhian values.

Furthermore, though Yashpal allowed Yashoda's husband and neighbor to debate the usefulness or lack thereof of the revolutionaries' methods, a certain narrative bias is revealed when he enlists the neutral wife/mother figure of Yashoda to focalize consideration for the revolutionary cause. The narrative has Yashoda wondering if her husband has no sympathy for the revolutionaries at all—she overhears her husband's skepticism when he is immersed in an argument with his neighbor regarding the achievements and aims of the revolutionaries. By now the reader is cued more into her personal sympathies, values, and judgments than the more remote and intellectualized arguments that her husband and neighbor engage in. The reader is even more sympathetic when she confesses her self-doubt; she reveals that in terms of formal education she was Middle Pass, only literate enough to write letters to her parents. But the reader's sympathy is further consolidated when it is explained that she had taken care to personally supplement her education with readings of the Hindi novelist Premchand, and the Bengali novelist Saratchandra Chatterjee. She is less educated than other wives who are sympathetic to revolutionaries, such as Sunita in Jainendra's *Sunita.* She is also less educated than the unmarried Shailbala. But for the reader perhaps her judgment and sympathy is even more significant than the elite Shailbala's as she represents an almost archetypal household labor and locus of value:

> Her household work never ended…With regard to her reading, or of the play of letters, in making its connection to the wide world, there was no urgency in her mind. Her life was limited by Amarnathbabu's [her husband's] body and her household responsibilities… what else is there for a Hindustani woman?"[18]

Some instinct of Yashoda's, perhaps maternal, perhaps just sympathetic, allows this youth who to all appearances is on the run from the police, to stay overnight in her house till the early morning, when he disappears again, wearing the servant's clothes. As in *Sunita*, the protagonist-revolutionary interrupts in dramatic fashion the comfortable but staid and unquestioning life—in spite of Sunita's earlier reading of Indian and European literature. Yashoda, in *Dada Comrade*, does not have Sunita's background in private, absorbed reading, and this perhaps makes her intervention more remarkable and legitimating as her lack of education was certainly more typical of the Indian housewife of that era. The fact that her house, so seemingly remote from the violent world of politics, remains amenable to radical politicization, shows how pervasive the imaginary of the idealist-youth-on-the-run was by the second quarter of the twentieth century even in seemingly unaffected, or conservative, and apathetic segments of the urban population.

All it took for the runaway youth to win Yashoda's trust was to claim identity with her—he asked for her help "as a Hindustani" (8). He referred to a generic "revolutionary" party to which he belonged, and the criminal charges being pressed against him, clarifying all along that he was not a criminal ("thief or dacoit"), but rather fighting for the country's independence. Part of his appeal is to Yashoda as nation-loving citizen, and partly to her as maternal authority whom he, a youth, was willing to placate/convince by falling at her feet. She responded as maternal host, feeding him, and the tone of their interaction is resolutely non-sexual—this was not inevitable given that in age they are clearly both young people, even though she is a married mother. Yet her maternal hospitality, empathy and the formality of their conversation preclude her sexualization that indeed never happens in the novel. In this sense perhaps *Dada Comrade* is less radical than *Sunita*. Awakened sexuality is only granted to other female characters like Shailbala, and Nancy a friend of Shailbala, who too harbors a strong desire for Harish. The comparison to *Sunita* is continuous as there is a similar scene in *Dada Comrade* where the heroine undresses for the hero—though here Yashpal, perhaps as Shailbala is unmarried, does not have to saturate the scene with the sense of the woman almost sacrificially yielding as in *Sunita*. On the other hand Yashpal, perhaps taking his belief in a continuous free choice of partners for men and women to its logical limit, indicates implicitly that sexual desire may not be expected to survive the self-enclosing option of monogamous marriage. Hence desire is more likely to happen to unmarried, or not-yet-married characters.

Though Yashoda is formally educated only to a certain extent, she is not politically ignorant. The slogans of *Hindustan Zindābād* (Victory to Hindustan) and Bankimchandra's *Vande Mataram* (Praise to the Mother) and the extremist politics they entailed are familiar to her. So too are the names and values of historical figures who were a curious hybrid of conservatism (on the question of religion and traditional Hindu values) and radicalism (in their strong anti-colonialism)—figures such as Dayanand Saraswati, Balagangadhar Tilak and even Mohandas Gandhi. She was especially an admirer of the latter. Yet all this admiration is abstract and the domain of her household sees little of politics till the day she meets Harish and puts herself at

[18] Yashpal, *Dada Comrade*, 22-23.

risk. When she takes such a risk, she stood as representative for the many other citizen-families that were simultaneously pushing the household (the *oikos*) into, and thus in part generating that larger generality of the *polis*—the nation. This logic—the movement from the household to the public world—is perhaps fitting for a writer like Yashpal who believed in the primacy of economics (the word economics being derived from *oikos*) as the driver of world history. Yet, equally, the movement is bi-directional—the household and the nation radicalize each other in an accelerating spiral.

When confronted with Harish, Yashoda took the decision to allow him to stay the night in the house, without informing or asking the opinion of her more politically opinionated husband—and a husband to whom as a conservative wife she was expected to placate on all matters. Harish left early the next morning in the servant's crumpled clothes—revealing both his facility with disguise as well as his indifference to class. He leaves before the conservative, passive respectability of the household returned by the morning, with its rituals of newspapers, servants serving tea, and the prayers of sunrise. But all these silent actions are carefully observed and digested by Yashoda who learns and wonders much at all this.

The encounter with Harish kindled a connection to the wider world and Yashoda began to regularly, and eagerly, read the newspaper. A chain of events is soon precipitated—she gets to meet the novel's heroine, Shailbala, a young woman of means and a student in a Master of Arts program. Shailbala is the only daughter of the wealthy widower Lala Dhyanchand, and she walks with an air of self-possession, fashionably wearing *khādi* (coarse cotton that was popularized by Gandhi), swinging her purse, and holding books with titles like *Trapped Life* and *The Women of the World* that she lends Yashoda. Yashoda's mind opens wide upon reading them, and she begins to develop a rich inner life, separate from her husband's for the first time. Yashoda's household is indeed invaded and transformed by the ideas of the larger world. Shailbala asks her to become a Congress member, and when Yashoda indicates that it is enough that her husband is one, Shailbala replies that it is unconscionable that wives remain prisoners of the kitchen and children. All this talk and reading affects Yashoda so much that when she does meet Harish again in Shailbala's house, she finds herself, to Harish's surprise, unafraid, and willing to support their cause. Her decision is clearly intellectual and not emotionally fraught as was the case with Sunita or Shashi.

What amazes Yashoda even more than Harish or Shailbala's explicit political radicalism is the physical expression of affection between Harish and Shailbala as well as the constant exchange of sophisticated witty banter. Again, Yashoda's sympathy and learning continues to cue the reader into the life of the revolutionaries as not simply being thoughtless actors of violence but as having many other political ideas as well as ideas in different domains of life such as romantic relations and female autonomy. Harish and Shailbala discuss the rifts within the Party; some members wanted to inflict violence merely because they could, rather than through planned forethought. Harish and Shailbala also discussed how they were willing to work with Congress members if such members' ideas and actions were congenial to them. They also discussed the need for personal sacrifice from all sides of the anti-colonial spectrum and by both genders in different capacities. They spoke of their growing awareness of differences in senior party leadership policy and decision-making. This was especially with reference to the member called B.M. and the chief called Dada (Elder). Interspersed with these concerns is Shailbala's precarious position as a woman—on the one hand her father is trying to arrange her wedding,

and on the other, steeped in the Party though she may be, she nevertheless expresses distaste at the leadership's instruction that all woman have to be always associated with a single male member of the party. She believed that this is at best irrelevant, at worst pays scarce attention to any individual woman's desire for freedom, and indeed reproduces the traditional situation of the woman having nothing left over for herself after being paired with a man. She stated that even a so-called equal relationship in today's society is irretrievably tilted in favor of the male. Perhaps ironically, perhaps predictably, it is these opinions that make Harish ever more desirous of her, seeing her "not just as a machine of the party, but as a human being" (35). Such sentiments lay the foundations for a narrative ideal of a companionate relationship that is so pervasive a theme in Hindi literature throughout the nineteen thirties and beyond, and in this dissertation is discussed with reference to texts like Agyeya's *Shekhar*, and Jainendra Kumar's *Tyagpatr* and *Sunita*.

At the same time, the novel makes clear the wide, and perhaps unbridgeable, differences in social and financial positions between Yashoda and Shailbala. Undeniably, much of the freedom Shailbala enjoys is due to her good fortune at being the daughter of a wealthy, trusting, and to a large extent, progressive widower who believed in certain forms of nationalism such as the financial independence of native industry from British suzerainty. Apart from her formal education, her father encouraged her reading of diverse contemporary novels and was open minded enough to allow his daughter to freely invite men home and even into her room. Despite Yashoda's fascination with Shailbala, and even her (Yashoda's) willingness to risk her security like a brave revolutionary party member, many social constraints would remain that would not be bridged by immediate extremist politics, but only by very long-term transformations in the position of women in the *polis*. And it is clear from Shailbala's frustrations that the party is hardly concerned with women's issues beyond using them as labor (and in her case, finance) for the cause.

Shailbala's questions ring throughout the novel and reference a larger index of freedom for women than a character like Yashoda can pragmatically entertain. Unlike *Sunita's* Sunita, or even *Shekhar*'s Shashi, she (Shailbala) not only acts but openly and continually speaks and questions. Shailbala wonders at the prohibitions of monogamy, explicitly set not just by the social world at large but even within the supposed radical egalitarianism of Dada's and B.M's world. She asks how it would be possible to dedicate one's life to one person as it simply was not possible that all the virtues that she sought could be contained in any one man. In limited fashion, Shailbala's frankness infects others. Yashoda's husband finds himself distanced from Yashoda as she becomes increasingly politicized and takes to having strong opinions on Congress policy and then communicating these opinions in neighborhood public meetings to his chagrin. He is surprised and irritated both by the content of her speeches, as well as by her violation of the social norm that respectable women were not supposed to appear in public, let alone have forceful opinions.

In his next novel, *Desh Drohi* (Enemy of the State), the politicization of women is accompanied by a risky and hence more reflective claim to personal freedom and autonomy. The main female protagonist is Chanda, the wife of Rajaram. Rajaram is of the managerial class and takes the conservative position that mill-owners should act as protectors of labor's welfare. In the novel, the proprietors are called *mālik* (masters), and not the impersonal euphemism of Capital. In contrast to Rajaram's frozen outlook, Chanda's growth and politicization is dramatic. Rajaram

remembers how earlier she had been so conservative as to be horrified by something as relatively tame as widow remarriage. By the end of the novel, like Yashoda in *Dada Comrade*, she is a confirmed political radical. Chanda also questions the sacral domain of the household with its attendant marital and parental responsibilities. Rajaram watches with enraged but helpless horror as his wife becomes increasingly infatuated and attached to Doctor Khanna—attached to the Doctor both romantically, and for his ecumenical communism, which is in contrast to her rigid husband. Communism to Rajaram, at his most explicitly and abusively misogynist, is a dangerous, promiscuous concept of freedom from all patriarchal norms of shame that consolidate the institutions of capital-ownership and family. It is in this deeper sense that its espousers are the eponymous *deshdrohi*. And yet, the novel is keenly conscious of the near-impossibility of this ideal; at the end of the novel, one hears Doctor Khanna almost imploring that he is not an enemy. However the outlook for him remains poor, the police keep after him, and Rajaram wrests back his wife. It is important to recognize this tragic dimension of the revolutionary's fate. It rarely achieves the utopia of freedom except in the sense that freedom glimpsed from afar is an achievement in itself. Indeed, the promise of freedom seduces and then betrays. The novel is content to convey, with acuity, this sense of caution and bereavement, as much as possibility. This is what links Yashpal—Bachchan's "resolute and self-confident artist"—with the insistent theme of suffering and irreparable and irredeemable loss that are also found in the novels of Jainendra and Agyeya. This is not simple pessimism, but simply giving grief and sacrifice its due, and a memoration of the harsh payment that the revolutionary nationalist movement demanded from its adherents and martyrs. Who is to decide among the dead and the survivors if the price was not too high or beyond all endurance, justice, and meaningfullness?

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# CONCLUSION

## SELF-REFLECTIVE NATIONALISMS: TOWARD A LITERATURE-SENSITIZED INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF THE HINDI-SPEAKING REGION AND SOUTH ASIA MORE GENERALLY

***Much Shame Comes To Me***

*much shame comes to me that I*
*did not shed blood with you*
*With such agitation I rise from this tempestuous floor.*
*when the lanes from the fields and threshing-rooms*
*held such blood in such small wings that*
*became martyred in some unknown corner*
*no one survived*
*only stones remain to weep for you alone*

*in some*
*bleak village's*
*sandy remains' is the protective banyan tree's*
*foot's dust.*
*I put this on my forehead when I remember you*
*I see twilight*
*collect in that wide-expanse*
*Your blood alone is silent!!*
*there was so much blood in that tenderness of wing.*
*In those old yellowed leaves*
*that turned red with life*
*the mud of the fields and threshing-rooms*
*its hunger and thirst*
*preserved within*
*Which mud I seized taking your name out loud.*
*The nearby mountains and rocks*
*echo or utter*
*Speak of that conflagration of history of*
*human-freedom's fragrance!!*
*on hearing which*
*I feel much shame that I*
*did not shed blood with you!!*[1]

[1] Muktibodh, Gajanan Madhav. *Pratinidhi Kavitāyeṇ* (Delhi: Rajkamal Publications, 1984).

At its most schematic, one can treat revolutionary consciousness and normative nationalist consciousness as largely independent ontological entities that are only peripherally implicated in each other. Equally, one can posit that mainstream "mass" nationalism is of the same spectrum as extremist nationalism—they both sought to evict the British representatives of State power. This debate, over whether these modes are dual entities or part of the same spectrum might be a matter of semantics, of the privilege and practice of naming and labeling. The adversarial perspectives of "extremism" and "moderation" always need the other to define themselves and hence are dependent on each other's leverage. However, beyond mere verbal semantics what remains significant is a critical analysis of the historically enacted and embodied conflict.

Beyond the elementary instrumentality of the ousting of British rule, the moral and psychological motivations, achievements, affects, and personal stakes in the extremist nationalist struggle are contra-distinguishable from mainstream nationalism. What was at stake for the extremist nationalists was the elaborated articulation of a new modern subjectivity in India that encompassed the political and the personal, the household and the more abstracted norms, be they governmental, or "public" in the broader sense. While mainstream nationalism (contra Gandhi, as explained below) depended on the rigid separation of the political aim of the ouster of colonial authority and the "personal" domains of sexuality, sacrifice, and belief, extremist nationalism sought to construct a unifying and global ontology of freedom that admitted no rigid hierarchy between different political and personal needs. It is in this sense that the moment of August 15, 1947, seemed not only unfinished but deceptive. The end of British rule meant that issues that were till now played out in the wider public sphere—like the morally provocative ideals of the revolutionaries—were now pushed back into the closet in the name of a more narrowly defined notion of Nehruvian economic and scientific development. The problem of the revolutionaries was now reduced to a law and order cum developmental cum "private" problem and their questioning of sexual and political mores was to be largely ignored by the "native democratic" State.

This economistic perspective was arguably internalized by some of the Hindi novelists themselves. In Yashpals's 1960 two-volume novel *Jhoota Sach* (False Truth), a chief dramatic situation is that a protagonist Puri returns alive, though uncelebrated, from the colonial prison and has to immediately struggle to make ends meet for himself and his household. However, the powerful consolidation of the ideology of nationalist economic development only allowed the problematic of the revolutionaries to stay in indefinite remission. Arguably, the constant relapse of the State into so-called Naxalite or Maoist problems owes something to the genetic legacy of anti-colonial extremism—the elaboration and defense of this lineage in contemporary India is beyond the scope of this particular dissertation. However, it might be indicated that one of the tests for claiming that lineage would also be to examine if the abstracted rhetoric of purely political justice is linked to issues of reform of the household. If there is such a link then the lineage might be a valid claim—for what this dissertation attempts to demonstrate is that issues of the household were intimately linked with broader questions of public freedom and justice.

Gandhi plays an ambivalent role in this distinction of mainstream and revolutionary nationalism. His position of power within the Congress party prevented him from living the criminalized life of the revolutionaries; in the latter's case, new political and personal relationships were constantly being forged under conditions of extreme duress. Gandhi entered

Indian politics at the relatively elderly age of forty-five in 1915, and being married and with grown children could not entirely disentangle himself from the entailments of his consolidated household. Nevertheless what he does share with the revolutionaries is an imaginative moral politics sometimes at odds with the mainstream Congress. In his politics too, the moral basis lay in the very issues of asceticism, charisma, personal suffering, loss, and the forging of intense relations with other fellow *satyagrahis*—the *satyagrahis* remained an odd and personalized subset that could not be entirely subsumed under the generalized Congress party worker label. This is why despite seemingly different ideological positions on certain abstracted political points, Gandhi and the revolutionaries shared a similar passion for enlarging the domain of the political to include morality as a necessary ground. Gandhi truly was experimental as the title of his autobiography suggested, and he shared this trait with the revolutionaries who similarly railed against the stasis of a passive, everyday practice of interminable Congress negotiations with the British over minute concessions in governance. While the elements of their morality might differ and even contradict each other, the need for morality links them in contrast to the more utilitarian brand of Congress nationalism that had as its sole aim the removal of British officers. However, this left the State, at the level of constitutive legislation, and especially with reference to treason and extremist political opposition, largely intact.

Such problems—of the revolutionary consciousness being appeased by the August 15, 1947 Independence moment without the resulting deeper questioning of the forms of the polity—could not be entirely repressed and were to persist in intellectual and literary imagination. Was the linguistic nationalism that played a large role in India in the nineteen fifties, the birth of Andhra Pradesh, and later, the separation of Gujarat and Maharashtra in 1960, related to a revolutionary consciousness just because it involved language? Or to take the case of Hindi: though it was declared an official language in the 1950 Constitution of India, it was unable to take root as the sole language of communication in the central government due to protests, especially in the southern state of Tamil Nadu in the nineteen sixties. The passage of the Official Language Act in 1963 recognized the indefinite continuance of English.[2] Language continues to be an incendiary political issue in India. But many of these language nationalists do not base their claim to autonomous culture necessarily on literary or social merit but rather rely on demographics and region. For example, in contemporary India in the first decade of the twenty-first century, there is a resistance to Hindi-speaking migrants by some Marathi-speaking linguistic nationalists, as also a resistance to Hindi-speaking Biharis in Assam. The debate is thus no longer on literature but on language as synecdoche for geographic demographics. In this sense it is different from Bhagat Singh's essay on language discussed in this dissertation where literary merit was considered the soul, metonym, and grounding legitimacy of language. A shadow of this older debate is found in the less politically charged and economically invested question of classical languages—questions about whether Kannada should be given the status of a classical language on par with Tamil. But once again, the link to the revolutionary literary consciousness discussed here is lost, as it has become a purely political-regional nationalist issue which does not take up the many other searching issues over extremist nationalism that were involved in the novels of the Hindi writers discussed in this dissertation—such as representations of sexuality or self-narrativization.

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[2] Dasgupta, Jyotindra. *Language Conflict and National Development: Group Politics and Language Policy in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970)

The significance of literature, and the Hindi novel in particular, for this dissertation has been its quality as the most extended and elaborated self-reflection of extremist nationalist thought. The germinal awareness of such a reflection was articulated in fairly sophisticated fashion in Bengal by the late nineteenth century—the time of *Anand Math.* This self-reflection was embryonic—indeed *Anand Math* was an externally focused novel on justice in the world. Articulated through the moralist bodies of celibate warriors, true introspection was not present because the association of celibacy with moral justice was assumed and not argued for—Satyananda educates Mahendra Simha with little self-doubt. This assumption was not questioned even in *Pather Dabi*—it was taken for granted that a certain heroic and charismatic type was the necessary means for the establishment of a just order. However, in the person of Bharati, a skepticism toward this position was emerging. Perhaps Bharati continued in the vein of the more vulnerable Kalyani of *Anand Math* rather than the rigidly heroic Shanti, for Shanti like Satyananda, seems largely immune from self-doubt.

The development of this figure of the revolutionary in Bengali literature from the nineteen thirties onward is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It is distressingly under-researched in the North American academy, and to a certain extent impacts this dissertation. In a general sense, it is known that the post-Tagore and Saratchandra generation came under the influence of a sort of gritty social realism—the young writers of the *Kallol* (the sound of waves) group of the nineteen twenties are particularly significant in this aspect. Did this more collectivist understanding of history undermine the more individualistically heroic figure of the revolutionary? Was the figure of the revolutionary seen as dated, as belonging to the older generation alone? Tagore's interest in this question persisted, and his 1936 novel *Char Adhyay,* engages deeply with questions of revolutionary and sexual morality. The centrality of the figure of the revolutionary is not immediately apparent in the oeuvre of younger writers such as Manik Bandopadhyay (1908-1956) or Tarashankar Bandopadhyay (1898-1971). But this centrality was maintained in the post-Premchand Hindi novelistic generation of Jainendra, Agyeya and persistently, Yashpal. Just as more research needs to be done to link the Hindi and Bengali novels in various historical moments, there is an equal need to link the Hindi novel to Urdu, its other twin. Within the Urdu canon, Abdullah Hussein's 1963 novel *Udās Naslein* (Weary Generations) features its protagonist Naim in his youth as a revolutionary inspired by figures like Tilak.[3] Yet the novel's interest quickly turns away from this to become more an exploration of Naim's disenchantment with life. This disenchantment, which includes politics, seems strongly related to the loss of vibrancy in his romantic life. As in the Hindi novels discussed, politics and the household are semiotically conjoined. This linking of the romantic and the political is shared with the writers discussed in this dissertation—but more research needs to be performed to investigate if the revolutionary figure was as centrally modernizing to the Urdu novel as it was to the Hindi novel.

The relationship between the novels of the revolutionary in Hindi and Urdu also brings up the conceptual problem of the relationship of the novel of the revolutionary to the "Partition novel." Hussein's *Udaas Naslein* ends with Naim's death during Partition. But the more substantive interlocutor would be Yashpal whose monumental *Jhootha Sach* stands alongside his enduring memoirs of living the life of the political and social revolutionary. Agyeya wrote some

[3] Hussein, Abdullah. *Weary Generations* (London: Peter Owen, 1999).

significant short stories but did not engage with Partition as extensively in his novelistic work. The question of the relation of the revolutionary novel to Partition must minimally be posed on two axes—the political-romance (again, *Jhoota Sach* comes first to mind), but also in terms of the issue of form. Was the monumentality of Partition responsible for a seeming return in literary form to the tested power of realism? It is perhaps no surprise that the most realist of post-Premchand Hindi novelists, Yashpal, rather than Agyeya or Jainendra, took on the issue most extensively. This realism is largely true of the other novels on Partition like Rahi Masoom Raza's (1927-1992) 1966 novel *Ādha Gaon* (translated as Divided Village), and Bhisham Sahni's (1915-2003) 1974 novel *Tamas* (Darkness), just as much as Saadat Hasan Manto's (1912-1955) short stories.[4] In any event the representation of "big" historical events (the World War, Partition) in relation to formal and experimental inventiveness remains a question that can only be answered by multi-language comparative studies, or by deeper conceptualizations of the relation between levels of historical and literary self-representations.

This dissertation suggests the reformulation of self-named movements like the *Nayi Kahani* movement of the nineteen fifties. It argues that it was vital to recognize the debt owed to the freeing up of personal and inter-subjectivities by the work of an earlier generation of novelists like Jainendra and Agyeya. Agyeya, especially in his 1951 novel *Nadi ke dvip* can be said to be literally performing that very act of bridging generations, movements, and decades. Nevertheless, the exact modalities and pathways that link the writers of the *Nayi Kahani* movement to the writers of the revolutionary tradition need to be more diligently worked out. For example, what is the political significance of Nirmal Varma's many years spent in socialist Europe in relation to the writings of the left-leaning Yashpal? Further, what is the debt in the articulation of the city in these writers of the nineteen fifties that is derived from the articulation of the anonymous yet intense sociality of the site of the prison that is portrayed in the writings of Agyeya and Yashpal? The debt in terms of the re-articulation of sexual relations between young men and women in new non-filial spaces is perhaps the linkage that is easiest to establish. Tagore, in his 1910 novel *Gora* (which Agyeya translated), wrote that the character Binoy had "never known any womenfolk outside his own family circle"; this was a fairly common social fact for an upper-caste conservative Indian household at the turn of the century.[5] The challenge of enunciating sexual intimacy for Indian writers throughout the first half of the twentieth century was enormous as there were no clear models of intimacy within their own class in the real world. Hence, it is not hard to pose the question of whether the filial household is ever entirely transcended as the privileged site of intimacy—Mrinal is an aunt in Jainendra's *Tyagpatr*, Shashi is a "cousin" in Agyeya's *Shekhar*. Is this because the filial household links us to childhood with its elevated affect, and because the sense of violation and loss that can rhetorically accrue to childhood is more than any other time of life? Does the guilt and devastation that the revolutionary is socialized into require the monumentalization of childhood as the site of innocence and true pleasure and freedom? Or is childhood itself retrospectively contaminated? These questions speak to the difficulties of articulating social and personal intimacy. This is a realm beyond the more abstracted rhetoric of companionate marriage. For, even if one had the right to choose one's partner, it does not solve the problem of intimacy in one

[4] Raza, Rahi Massoom *Ādha Gaon* (Delhi: Rajkamal Publications, 2009); Bhisham Sahni, *Tamas* (Delhi: Penguin India, 2008).
[5] Tagore, Rabindranath. *Gora*, trans. Surendranath Tagore (Delhi: Rupa and Company, [1910] 2005), 2.

stroke. Jainendra's *Sunita* begins with the marital discontent of a modern couple who have chosen each other. It is one thing to demand intimacy with anyone as a socio-political right of the modern world, and another to be able to represent it as an autonomous, self-sustaining aesthetic. Perhaps it is no surprise that Yashpal—the one who most self-confidently articulated the right of strangers to be romantically linked if they so chose—was also the writer who succeeded much less than Jainendra and Agyeya in suffusing his work with deep romantic affect.

Perhaps due to its historical singularity by virtue of its enlodgement in the larger nationalist movement, even if it opposed many of the larger movement's principles, the life-cycle of the revolutionary in the Hindi novel is, like the martyred revolutionary herself, finite. Jainendra's *Sunita* may be said to introduce the problematic of the revolutionary, the polity, and household in full-fledged fashion. *Tyagpatr* then abstracts some of *Sunita*'s chief elements and grants true revolutionary agency to the woman-protagonist Mrinal to an even more dramatic degree than was possible in *Sunita*. Agyeya's *Shekhar* can be seen as a culmination of literary innovation of the elaboration of revolutionary subjectivity. And again, just as in Jainendra, Agyeya's second novel *Nadi ke dvip* abstracts elements from the first novel (*Shekhar*) of the revolutionary and grants freedom to a still greater degree to the woman-protagonist Rekha. It is in Yashpal however that this theme of the revolutionary (and his politics and loves) remains increasingly monumentalized, but less as contemporary fiction and more as memoir. Yashpal's politics in the nineteen fifties (as in novels like *Amita*) takes him in the more generic direction of international Cold War concerns like nuclear disarmament. But the very title of his memoirs, *Simhavalokan,* can stand in for the orientation and ambition of this dissertation—the *siṃha*, the lion, or hero, is a figure traceable to *Anand Math*. The last volume of *Simhavalokan*, though it engages with the historical narrative only up to 1938, engaged Yashpal till the time of his death in 1976 —nearly a hundred years after *Anand Math*. *Avalokan* (from *lok*, which means world in both the cosmological and everyday sense) is a rich Hindi-Sanskrit word that means both introspective and retrospective witnessing of that dual world. Thus the word *Simhavalokan* can stand for an attempted introspection and retrospection of a hundred year old history of the revolutionary nationalist in all her mutations. Even the revolutionary who is hanged young, and whom nationalist culture strives to keep alive in purely hagiographic terms, cannot in truth remain forever young. A critical but respectful analysis must thaw the image to nucleate again the true honor and grit of their most searching political and personal motivations and questionings.

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