IDEALISM, ENCHANTMENT AND DISENCHANTMENT: CHANGING IDEAS OF FREEDOM IN THE INDIAN POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT

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Worldwide, Colonial and Postcolonial Literature has represented processes of nation-formation and concepts of nationalism through experiments with forms of representation. Such experiments were quite predominant in the novel form, with its ability to incorporate vast spatial and temporal realities. Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (2008) is a seminal volume discussing the innovations in the Twentieth Century Novel through a Postcolonial perspective and understanding these changes through the idea of National Literatures. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Neil Lazarus) and *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (Bill Ashcroft et al) present extensive discussions on the relationship between the politics of nation-formation and forms of fiction. In this article I offer a brief introduction to the evolution of the Hindi novel (1940s-1980s) with reference to the freedom movement and nationalist struggle in India.

Benedict Anderson's formulation regarding the significance of the genre of the novel in the process of nation-formation and Timothy Brennan's concept of 'The National Longing for Form' published in *Nation and Narration* also establishes the novel as a genre representing, as well as creating, the Nation. Brennan writes

> It was the *novel* that historically accompanied the rise of the nations by objectifying the 'one, yet many' of the national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles… Its manner of presentation allowed people to imagine the special community that was the nation (Brennan, 2008: 49).

Postcolonial theories have focussed on the relationship between realism and nationalism within the genre of the novel. This article seeks to draw attention towards the inextricable and discursive

relationship of the formalistic experiments in the Hindi novel with the growth of the Postcolonial Nation, called India.[1]

I. The Hindi Novel: Narrative Intersection of Freedom, Postcolonialism, Nationalism and Nation-Formation

The post-Premchand Hindi novel participates critically in the discourse of formulating concepts of postcolonialism, nationalism and nation-formation. It contributes towards people's understanding of, what Brennan calls, the 'special community that was the nation' (Bhabha, 2008: 49) by engaging with the modern political definitions of a nation-space, but more importantly, by representing alternative definitions of it, as well. It creates an 'imagination' of the nation through its civilisational past, its multiple regional cultures, its ancient philosophy, communal memory and its postcolonial and self-conscious individual's identity formation. Even as it represents modern institutions of governance and identity-formation, it places them within a larger, precolonial, colonial and postcolonial, history of a civilisational space. The 'nation', therefore, is presented as a discursive-imaginative space, rather than a geo-political boundary, through varied techniques of representation that depict it multifariously: through an individual's perspective; through a region's cultural memory; through a community's lament; through the ubiquity of corruption and; through the predominance of alienation and emptiness.

Hindi novels often reflect an influence of the kind of European Realism that focused on the representation of an industrialised, capitalist and urban national space but the postcolonial situation makes them more diverse. They re-constitute the form of the novel, as they represent the lingering influence of the colonial experience, which needs to be simultaneously represented and challenged, and the postcolonial situation as a combination of multiple spatial and temporal realities—both precolonial and colonial. They engage with questions of modernity and progress as part of the colonial experience and its legacies and present the postcolonial situation as a scar, as well as an opportunity; a break in the civilisational space's history, as well as a link in it that cannot be completely severed. They present the postcolonial nation as an abstraction as much as a reality in its nascent stages; each novel provides a fresh perspective on the coming together of an abstract idea with lived communal realities. As Raymond Williams writes

'Nation' as a term is radically connected with 'native'. We are *born* into relationships which are typically settled in a place. This form of primary and 'placeable' bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance. Yet the jump from that to anything like the modern nation-state is entirely artificial (quoted in Bhabha, 2008: 45).

Hindi novels emphasise on revealing the contact with a broad native regional history, one that was independent of the colonial situation but was intercepted by the colonial experience, and hence, can be represented only through an acknowledgement of the impact of colonisation. Authors create forms of representation which show a combination of the past, present and future, and of the linear history of National progress and the circular history of civilisational moments. They engage with the major concerns addressed by Premchand during the last phase of his life and writing (late 1930s), which was expressed quite strongly in his lecture at the first meeting of the All-India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA) on 9-10 April, 1936. His last novel, *Godan* (1936), arguably the best Hindi novel, expressed those concerns in the Ideal-oriented Critical Realism outlined in his lecture. Hindi novelists broaden the framework of realism by combining native forms of storytelling which do not necessarily lay claims to representing their contemporary reality, and modern forms of historicising stories, based in their contemporary conflicts. They bring together experiential realities of the land and abstracted truths of the nation to broaden the definitions of nationalism which were restricted to anti-colonialism. They use historical dates, names and events related to the postcolonial situation but place them in imaginative narratives of memory. Benedict Anderson provides an insight into such a broad understanding of nationalism thus

Nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being. (Anderson, 2006: 12)

Debates around 'forms' of fiction were intensifying, as the fictional representation of social issues was becoming increasingly 'politicised', in the modern postcolonial-nationalist sense of the term. Prem Singh elaborates upon the *politicisation* of the Hindi novel in *Kranti ka Vichaar aur Hindi Upanyaas* (The Thought of Revolution and the Hindi novel) and states that the Hindi novel had not been 'political' before Premchand, the first author to recognise, and explore, the political potential of Critical Realism. AIPWA meetings encouraged authors to formulate new and more direct forms of

presenting the politicised social reality of India. The question of politicisation was not as much related to a specific political ideology, as with an engagement with Nationalistic politics and its impact on the concept of 'reality'. Authors geared up their efforts to represent the tense and awkward relationship between modern nationalist politics and possibilities of freedom. Novels reveal the gap between Independence and freedom, nationalism and the imagination of a Nation, colonial modernity and postcolonial progress. Brennan writes

> The 'nation' is precisely what Foucault has called a 'discursive formation'—not simply an allegory or imaginative vision, but a gestative political structure which the Third World artist is consciously building or suffering the lack of. (Bhabha, 2008: 46)

Postcolonial Hindi narratives present modern politics—with its concept of a representative government, located far from the social spaces it seeks to govern—as a new phenomenon, separate from feudal-local politics that was based within specific social locations. This gap informs the *form* of the Hindi novel, that separates the 'political' (modern) from the 'social' (conventional), and public from the private, before revealing their complicated interaction. Premchand's development of an Ideal-oriented Critical Realism is followed by a development of Psychological Realism and the Novel of Intellectual reality (1940s). Early Independence Hindi novel is marked by its *aanchalikta* and representation of Regional reality (1950s). It is succeeded by a phase of Satirical Realism and the Novel of Ironical Lament, representing the distance from, and disenchantment with, the moment of Independence (1960s). The final phase marks a return to the form of Psychological Realism, with a focus on identity in absentia (1970s-80s). Namvar Singh, Ashok Vajpayee, Manager Pandey and most major Hindi critics have acknowledged the significance of these individual experiments within their specific political times and as beginnings of new techniques of representation in Hindi fiction.

This article places these formalistic developments within the overlapping curve of idealism, enchantment and disenchantment with the idea of 'Freedom' to understand the continuities and breaks in the Hindi novel's form. The demand and expectation of freedom that energised the modern political imagination of India was also guiding the development of the Hindi novel, with its focus on the implications of Political Independence on the larger idea of freedom. Moving on from narratives of colonial oppression and the

gap between the indigenous and the foreign, the Hindi novel begins to concentrate on other, allied conflicts—between tradition and modernity; individual and society; region and Nation and; between socio-cultural and politico-economic governance. Novels depict the movement between colonial and postcolonial imagination as a complex one which embodies all these conflicts and hence, complicates the assumptions about freedom. Movements in the Hindi novel are characterised, in their tone and style, by an idealistic fascination with freedom and a bitter disillusionment with its realisation. The narratives represent philosophical ideas of individual and social freedoms as the inspiration for imagining new realities, as well as manifestations of freedom, as indicative of the breakdown of conventional experiential realities. Each successive novel represents the intensification of disenchantment — from moments of anger and rage (till the 1950s), leading to an engagement with the idea of freedom, to experiences of detachment and alienation, preventing any association with the concept of freedom itself. Freedom, therefore, is constructed as an aspiration, a dream or a philosophical concept that needs to be constantly developed; a political goal (*Purna Swaraj*); an ideal, that can be embodied in the personal life (Gandhi's concept of *Swa-raj*) and; an achievement (independence from colonisation), that remains consistently incomplete.

The trajectory of the Hindi novel is marked by this chequered movement of politics from its local-feudal manifestations to its modern-national face. The entry of modern politics into private spaces (discussed in great detail in Nikhil Govind's *Between Love and Freedom*) was both enabling and disabling. Even as it contributed to the beginnings of an awareness regarding progressive ideas of organising life during the 1940s (posing challenges to conventional Indian institutions like marriage, religion and family), it also eventually contributed to a reverse reaction. The spirit of modernity stood in stark opposition to the traditions of organising life in various regions. Novelists present 'modernisation' and 'development' as intentionally 'political' projects that were posing a challenge to established systems and values of life. Anticolonial politics, that was supposed to bring each individual and region together to formulate a Nation, is soon shown to turn into the politics of exclusivity. The enthusiasm regarding freedom is shown to fade away, as novelists focus on the vast difference between Modern National Politics of Development and Nationalisation and traditional regional politics of local exchange and life. National governance, based on colonial institutions, like the Parliament and Constitution, did not find

resonance in the small, distant regions, which depended on loose, caste-based and communal[2] definitions for social laws of governance. The narrativisation of this gap defines the varying forms of the Hindi novel, as it negotiates with a conflicted and ever-changing Nation-state. The authors depict the continuance of colonial legacy and memory as well as the lack of an indigenous form of organising the Nation called India. Each of these novels, coming from different regions of North India, and written in varied dialects and registers of Hindi, speak to each other as narratives depicting this movement from enchantment to disenchantment and from idealism to 'realism'. It is ironic that Hindi was being heralded as the National Language of India and was finally accorded the status in Article 343 of the Constitution of India (along with the passing of the Linguistic Plurality Act, later) wheras in the Hindi novel you find a heterogeneous Hindi. One of the major reasons for focussing on the Hindi novel for representations of India's freedom lay in this complex position that the Hindi language occupied. While political debates about the representative language of India focussed on modern Hindi developing during the Twentieth Century (a Sanskritised form of Hindi, written in the Devanagari script) as the official language of the Union of India, the Hindi novels represent various versions of the language communicating with each other, sometimes in the same regional space and sometimes in multiple regions.

Twentieth Century debates around the prominence of specific languages, especially the Hindi-Urdu conflict, was largely related to the political power associated with the National Language, the language representing India's reality in Postcolonial history. The eventual establishment of Hindi as the National Language is often associated with its establishment as the language of power in the National space being carved politically. The Hindi Literary sphere, ironically, destabilises this idea of a uniform Hindi that could be made the language of power. Authors of Hindi novels often include different dialects of the language within the same text; an act that not only depicts the variety in Hindi but also the political legitimacy of its multi-dimensionality. There is no uniform, urban, language of realism in the Hindi novel as it conveys different linguistic ways of embodying, understanding and imagining reality. Language, in itself, is represented as a living organism that changes with the evolution of societies and politics. It is depicted as a tool that could be used to create/represent new realities, as well as a mark that could be self-consciously embodied to express transitions in identity.

The Hindi novel's critique of formation of a linguistic Nation-state is reflected in its rejection of the idea of a standardised Hindi that could represent a postcolonial imagination or embody the concept of 'freedom'.

The centralisation of power through linguistic dominance is resisted from within the Hindi Literary Sphere through the employment of various forms of Hindi, as well as through very self-conscious reflections upon the question of linguistic formulation of identity (especially in novels like *Aadha Gaon*). The Hindi that these authors use, and their characters speak, does not automatically provide a consciousness of National identity. In fact, local registers of Hindi depict the uneasy relationship with modern linguistic forms of identity formation. Like the uneasy and incomplete transition from the regional to the National, exists the complicated, and often partial, transition from local linguistic identities to the language of national identity. Bakhtin says,

> …[In] modern times, the flourishing of the novel is always connected with the decomposition of stable verbal and ideological systems, and on the other hand, to the reinforcement of linguistic heterology and to its impregnation by intentions, within the literary dialect as well as outside of it (quoted in Bhabha, 2008: 54).

The primary texts employed to explain this trajectory are Sachidanand Hiranand Vatsayayan Agyeya's *Shekhar: Ek Jivani* (1941, 44), Bhagwati Charan Verma's *Tedhe Medhe Raaste* (1946), Phanishwar Nath Renu's *Maila Aanchal* (1954), Yashpal's *Jhootha Sach* (1958, 60), Rahi Masoom Raza's *Aadha Gaon* (1966), Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari* (1968) and Nirmal Verma's *Raat ka Reporter* (1989). These specific texts have all been path-breaking in terms of modes of representing this evolving and transitional phase of Indian political history. All of these texts have been considered controversial because of the immense appreciation and strong criticism directed at them and yet, they have also been included in most Literary Histories of the Hindi novel and have been given canonical status over time. These texts were harbingers of new literary movements, and sometimes, were texts standing in isolation within the individual author's corpus of work and within Hindi Literary Histories.

This common factor of 'newness' or 'innovation' does not necessarily isolate them from each other; it rather shows their contribution to the evolution of the Hindi novel as benchmarks that are connected to each to other through their concern for the political role of the Hindi novel and its contribution to the

creation of freedom. Each of these innovations are connected to each other by three major factors: (a) the potential to move beyond set parameters and forms of expression; (b) the ability to continue with common concerns of subject and nation formation despite formalistic departures and; (c) an engagement with the continuities and breaks within the process of Nation-formation to show its various forms from within. Even as these specific texts move beyond their earlier phases of representational techniques, they take the erstwhile issues forward and reflect their complex evolution in political history through formalistic novelty. Each successive text departs from the influence of a realism based in colonial reality while it becomes a significant moment in the representation and critique of the evolution of National Political History.

Hindi novels around the mid-Twentieth Century formulate an important field of study in postcolonial fiction that ruptures, re-creates and takes ahead the conceptualisation of 'Nation' through its novelty of form. They destabilise the conceptualisation of the National homogeneous empty time (Anderson) even as they try to imagine and incorporate it into their narratives. The self-conscious political efforts at creating the Indian Nation are put into perspective by these novels, which depict the shortcomings of the idea of a Nation based in Capitalist industrialising economy, Centralised Democratic politics and the rhetoric of linear progress. Brennan writes

> The novel implicitly answers these questions in its very form by objectifying the nation's *composite* nature: a hotch potch of the ostensibly separate 'levels of style' corresponding to class; a jumble of poetry, drama, newspaper report, memoir, and speech; a mixture of the jargons of race and ethnicity (Bhabha, 2008: 51).

The colonial, postcolonial and sometimes, even pre-colonial, experiential realities and ideational philosophies that the Hindi authors bring into the narrative space of the Hindi novel decentre this seamless conceptualisation of the Indian Nation as a unified politico-economic space. It represents its contemporary political reality through the perspective of subjectivities, consciously trying to reject the recurring influence of colonial experience in Nationalistic representations, and to organise individual identity and social organisms through indigenous methods. The next section presents a discussion of the specific politico-literary phases to reveal the details of the evolution of Hindi novel's form.

II. Evolution of the Hindi novel (1940s-1970s):
Literary Narratives of Freedom

The early phase of post-Premchand Hindi novels is marked by a conscious move away from the Ideal-oriented Social Realism practised by Premchand, especially in his last complete novel, *Godan*. The 1940s present a major phase of flux in forms of representation, as Premchand's literary style inspires varied interpretations of realism in the novel form and hence, his influence contributes to the evolution of the Hindi novel, even as his style is challenged or ignored by some authors. The meetings of AIPWA gave this trend a stronger impetus and provided the writers with a fresh platform to discuss literature, society, politics and revolution. Authors like Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala', Sumitranandan Pant, Makhanlal Chaturvedi, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, Ashq, Agyeya and many more associated themselves with the Progressive Movement with much enthusiasm, initially. A common national and literary agenda was being formulated and writers were trying to contribute to it in their own ways. During this initial phase, majority of the Hindi writers agreed with the Progressive Manifesto, which called for literature to focus on representation of peasants, farmers, working classes and an exposure of those who exploit them; a literature that inspires the masses to fight against pessimism and oppression; represents an active participation in modern politics; opens debates about the place of literature in society and; establishes a direct contact with the masses.

This euphoria encouraged authors to go beyond the scope of AIPWA's programmes and broaden the concept of Progressivism. Agyeya, Jainendra, Pant, Dinkar, all dissociated from the AIPWA but continued their debates about the necessity of a 'Progressive literature' and the possible shapes it could take. Initially, Premchand's *Hans* was the primary journal presenting the developments in AIPWA and the debates around Progressivism, not only in Hindi, but other languages as well. Within a span of five years, a number of other journals were also published. Some of them continued for a long while but some closed within one-two years of their first production. This mushrooming of journals is only a slight indication of the intensity with which the debates around Progressivism in literature were being pursued. Pant and Narendra Sharma started the publication of *Rupaabh* in July 1938. Amritlal Nagar started *Chakallas* in 1938 which directed irony and satire at the dissenters of AIPWA. Narottam Nagar's *Uchrinkal*, Shivdaan Singh Chauhan's *Prabha*, Ramvriksha Benipuri's *Janta*, Acharya Narendra Dev's *Sangharsh* and

Yashpal's *Viplav* were all journals supporting the Progressive Writer's Movement and publishing 'Progressive' works (Chauhan,1998: 34-37). These journals were significant because the authors wanted to spread their ideas on Progressivism to a large audience.

Authors like Agyeya, Dharmvir Bharti, Ilachandra Joshi and Bhagwaticharan Verma were also negotiating with the relationship between society, politics and literature through the prism of 'Progressivism'. Their concept of 'Progressive' literature was more Modernist, as it included experimentation with various forms in literature, like Psychological Realism, Freudianism and Individualism. Like Progressivism, 'Realism' had also become a conflicted and controversial form. This sort of independent experimentation and exploration was not possible with the dominance of any singular politico-literary ideology. These authors believed that truth in art was not about capitalism, egalitarianism or any form of 'isms', but about 'art for art's sake'. They wished to develop a literary philosophy which could protect literature from the overriding influence of modern Party politics. They did not wish to make art or literature completely removed from socio-political engagement, but they did not want to make it dependent on a politics narrowed down by public, national or Party concerns, either. Theirs was a different kind of radical politics (or Progressivism), which sought to liberate the individual from bounds of social convention in both private and public life.

> …A solitary hero is juxtaposed to a socioscape described in careful, general detail (Anderson, Benedict (2006) p. 32).

The official Progressive idea of active participation in the national political space was not completely acceptable to them because they believed that such an involvement would never let the individual think independently. In 1943, Agyeya called "Pragativad" (Progressivism) 'a political tag', which is dead. Upendranath Ashq considered any literature that is new, experimental, different from the usual, that analyses its context in depth, attacks the problems of the society and that helps in reaching an understanding about its context 'Progressive' (Awasthi (2012) p. 34).

Despite the significant presence of official Progressive writing in the Hindi literary space, texts like Agyeya's *Shekhar: Ek Jivani* have caught the attention of critics and literary historians. Such pre-Independence 'experimental' novels have been included as texts representative of the movement of the Hindi novel into explorations of a first person narrative based in an individual's psychological dilemmas. While Agyeya's novel has been included in most literary histories of the Hindi novel, *Tedhe Medhe Raaste* found only marginal

mention, while Bhagwati Charan Verma's other novels have been given more prominence, although it is indeed a significant novel, within the context of the 1940s, as well as within Verma's individual oeuvre. It is the first novel where Verma moves away from a representation of Ancient or Medieval phases of Indian history and engages with his contemporary historical phase. This engagement contributes to his creation of a realism based in the validity of subjective, psycho-intellectual dilemmas regarding nationalistic politics and moral values rather than his early form of realism fixated on establishing the truth value of binary moral structures.

Both these texts are representations of the early engagement with the modern, ever-evolving individual in the Hindi novel, an exploration of realism organised through the individual's psyche and the idea of an unqualified freedom that goes beyond nationalism. The protagonists of this phase are invariably and consciously involved in the process of formulation of identities, both national as well as individual. Khilnani writes that

> British domination helped to create the opportunities for Indians to acquire a modern self, a political identity guaranteed by a state…In the twentieth century Indians have taken that opportunity and have invented themselves, and they have kept that inventiveness alive (Khilnani, 2004: 194).

During the 1940s, authors moved beyond a representation of the colonial subject of early twentieth century to a more confident individual whose subject formation is related to his context but not dependent upon it. Nationalistic political leaders were formulating a new nation-space with great enthusiasm, while the Hindi novelists of this phase were creating the individual, who could embody, as well as challenge, this nation-space. Shekhar and the three brothers in *Tedhe Medhe Raaste* are all perceptive individuals whose subjectivity is constantly in a state of flux and conflict with their context. The basis of individuality is located neither in social morality nor in nationalistic politics but in the ability of humans to stand apart from these influences through their rational-emotional, intellectual-intuitive faculties. They present the relationship between individual and society as a dynamic one, as the individuals are shown to be simultaneously shaping a postcolonial reality and being shaped by its possibilities. The protagonists of this phase embody a sharply intellectual focus on the conscious creation of identity rather than a sentimental identification with already existing references for identity formation.

The focus of the authors is on representing the conflicts around

and evolution of, the concept of postcoloniality, rather than on representing an established socio-political context of anti-colonialism. Authors who had diverged from organisational politics represent the major political streams of this phase without favouring one over the other and formulate individuals and narratives that embody creative possibilities in politics. The individuals here are, therefore, 'rebels' who challenge the available social and political formations like family, marriage, heteronormative sexuality, organisational politics and hierarchies of caste and class. They offer fresh definitions of the 'nation' as a multi-dimensional collective that feeds off of individual rebellion as much as collective revolution. Along with offering critiques of specific political ideologies, they also offer a critique of conceptualising nation as a mere geo-political entity by directing attention towards individual aspirations and collective affinities that cannot be necessarily assimilated within the rhetoric of anti-colonialism. They direct attention towards a philosophical idea of politics that allows individuals and smaller social collectives to interact with the 'Government of India Acts', negotiations of geographical spaces, imposition of Religious identities and Institutional Law and Governance and nurtures their potential for freedom rather than circumscribing it within a polarised nationalism. The individual psyche of the protagonist is presented as the site for the interaction of these two interpretations of political engagement, one based in ideological politics and the other in intellectual-interpretational politics. Their personal lives and their ethical choices are also grounded in this conflict of the politics of identity and the politics of association. Their 'anti-organisational' politics is shown to be stemming from personal rebellions against traditions as well as from their identification with a profound Human collective, inspired from ancient Indian philosophy as well as from modern Internationalism. The individual locates himself within the nation, which is further located within an international space located within Nature. He imagines both the individual and the national as small but representative parts of a larger Human history and Nature.

The authors explored techniques for representing this subjective imagination by moving beyond its representation through social history and experimenting with the representation of reality through psychological narratives of memory and ideological conflicts. Fictional narratives of this phase are often structured around a first person narrator's subjective perspective rather than a third person omniscient narrator's objective representation of socio-political transition. The vigour of the political movements of this

phase was directed at the figure of the individual who needed to re-cast his/her 'self' in order to define and be defined by the new 'nation(s)'. The self-conscious process of creating identity, national and individual, is both celebrated and critiqued as authors direct attention towards the immense possibilities of such a process and the failure in realising these possibilities. While individuals rebel against everything they find to be rotten, they do not achieve an ultimate success. Their individual failures, though, are presented as part of a much larger journey of rebellion and freedom. Authors adapted Western Modernist forms of Psychological Realism to the Indian context and, in the process, took those forms ahead in terms of their representation of time, space and social history. They critique the obsession with chronological progress and a fixed individuality by employing the Western Modernist forms of psychological narratives that dismantle chronology in consonance with the Indian concepts of civilisational history that often overlaps in terms of time, and the ancient Indian concept of subjectivity that is based in nature and not just society. The narratives are a mix of the past and the present, the indigenous and the foreign, the individual and the social, and the social and the political. Postcoloniality and nationalism are, therefore, presented as symbolic markers of a wider spirit of freedom that the individual needs to recognise and achieve.

Despite their immense reach, the texts have been rigorously critiqued for their apparent political and aesthetic insulation and elitism. Quite often, these critiques came from quarters that were trying to define the criteria for an active political aesthetics as that which is more direct and objective in approaching its context. Nevertheless, quite a few of these 'experimental Modernist novels' have sustained an engaged interest and maintained a consistent stature for themselves in the history of the Hindi novel because of their ability to challenge dominant concepts of politics and art. Authors involved in this 'independent', often individualised experimentation, often fell short in terms of representing ideological politics. Some of these experiments and ideas need to be critiqued for their empty idealism, short-sightedness or confusion with regard to political maturity. Yet, critical approaches need to understand the form of these 'apolitical aesthetic experiments' as an ever-evolving one. Its incompleteness and tangential nature indicates its efforts to depict the constant evolution of ideas rather than depicting their material manifestations in their contemporary context. Their approach to context is based more in their philosophical interpretations of it rather than an eye for its detail. They deploy their specific context to

depict the fluidity of contextual politics and the need to understand and use that fluidity while thinking of a national identity.

Even as they are located in the very particular time and space of India of the 1940s, they embody its varied and conflicted past and envision its multifarious future. They do not offer definitive formulations of concepts, like nationalism, precisely because they make these contingent during a phase when both the Nation and the Individual was being created afresh. Their apparent superficiality does not indicate a lack of detail but the rejection of the fixity of socio-political detail that can obstruct one's vision of the future. They projected *possibilities* (for the Individual and the National) that were *only partially realised* in the eventual phases of literature and politics. Their strength and significance lies in the imaginative re-creation of philosophical as well as experiential realities. It is only in the next phase of (partitioned) India's political history that the questions raised by these authors and novels are provided some tentative answers.

The political and literary focus on defining Individuality in relation to Nationalism found clearer manifestations in the 1950s with the efforts at formulating common norms and understandings regarding the two. The political zone, primarily dominated by the Nehruvian vision, was defining Nation, and by extension its citizens, through the Constitution of India, Economic Laws and social contracts among various regions. *Maila Aanchal* and *Jhootha Sach* are seminal narratives that provide the alternative side to this effort by representing smaller regions of the nation and delineating an individuality defined by particular contexts but aspiring towards the more general nationalist identity. These novels explore the representation of closely-knit but expanding regions' (Maryganj and a small mohalla of Lahore) engagement with nationalism and the impact of this interaction on the question of freedom. Nehru's vision, often categorised as a Socialist one, was focussed on a modernisation project with Constitutional Democracy, which created a singular political identity for individuals who would *become* 'citizens' of India. The drawing up of boundary lines during discussions on Partition, the imposition of land reforms, the development of Public Sector industries and the composition of a strong political bureaucracy were measures aimed at removing feudal or colonial socio-economic hierarchies and creating a Nation of competitive individuals who could evolve from their erstwhile social positions by participating in a partially capitalist political economy. According to Sudipto Kaviraj,

The logic of industrial development and the logic of democratic citizenship were both to work as a combined logic of individuation, dissolving primordial identities like caste and religion (Kaviraj, 2013: 88).

[U]nder Nehru, a strong central government co-existed with strong states and powerful state leaders in a mutual bargaining situation in which ultimate authority existed in Delhi (Brass, 2012: 37).

Hindi narratives of this phase exhibit an idealistic engagement with this vision along with revealing regional identities and local experiential hierarchies and histories that needed to contribute to the fulfilment of this vision but could not be seamlessly accommodated into it. Authors reflect upon the concrete shape taken by the aspirations of freedom and re-negotiate the position of the individual within this process of concretisation. They depict this as a transitional phase where the imposition of modern National structures of politico-economic life led to a decimation of the erstwhile structures of social relationships, held dear by many regions. While the individual of the 1940s was represented as a free rebel who could imaginatively create possibilities of identity formation, the individual subjects of the 1950s are shown to be absorbing the new National structures and defining themselves through the conflicted relationship between the regional and the National. The free-flowing individual of the 1940s needed this grounding, or he could have been swept by the tide of a homogenising Nationalism. Sudipta Kaviraj writes about this National endeavour to define tradition thus

 It seemed preferable to define tradition as a set of rules of social practice which adapted to historically altered conditions through a surreptitious adaptability, so that although they changed, they also typically tried to conceal the evidence, by an ideological rhetoric of immutability (Kaviraj, 2013: 5).

Maila Aanchal and *Jhootha Sach* critically analyse the question of 'adaptability' of regional traditions within the National space. They reveal the 'evidence' of transition and change that was being constantly concealed in the rhetoric of nationalism. While regional individuality came out of existing collectives and experiential reality (spaces like Bhola Pandhe gali in *Jhootha Sach* and the village of Maryganj in *Maila Aanchal*), the efforts at carving a new individuality are shown to be based in an abstraction called the Nation. Its collectiveness is not based in experience or memory, but in an intellectual re-creation of colonial models of governance. Authors present the choice between 'regional' (*aanchalik, watan*) and

'national' (*desh*) definitions of identity as a necessary but difficult one. They represent the migration of the survivors of Partition, the displacement of labouring, farming, tribal classes, and the idealistic re-location of educated youth in small regions (voluntary and involuntary) as symbolic of this larger choice between traditional and modern formulations of identity. These two means of identity-formation are embodied in bewildered but hopeful individuals and the authors do not resolve this dilemma. "The Constitution conferred on them a new possibility of identity-making which they seized with great enthusiasm" (Kaviraj, 2013: 9). Both Renu and Yashpal give optimistic closures to their respective novels with reference to the politics of new identities, but the optimism remains restricted to the literary space and the liberty of the author. The idealism regarding freedom of choice is residual and misplaced as revealed through the larger body of these novels. Even though the *aanchalik*[3] dominates their perspective of representation, it remains a fading political possibility and the novels betray this truth through the failure of erstwhile collectives in sustaining themselves.

The transitional nature of this phase is embodied quite significantly in its adaptation of the novel form to the regional context where reality is comprised of myths, legends, imaginative re-collection of history and contemporary experience. Authors adapt forms of oral narratives, regional folklore, myths and legends in their novels to intercept the chronological and vague narrative of 'Nationalisation' that could not have included such varied traditions. Hindi novelists organise narratives around regional rituals and songs of seasonal and historical associations, often disrupted by the narrative of linear progress, but standing as symbols of those conventional social structures that could not be represented in the narrative of Nationalisation. Social history is represented through a palimpsest of memory where modern forms of identity are also presented as one phase in a much deeper narrative. Even as narratives move forward in terms of representational time, they are consistently taken back to a past that cannot be left behind. Sometimes, the National is assimilated into the *aanchalik* despite the political effort to do the reverse. The postcoloniality of these narratives is defined more strongly by their regional affiliations rather than their enthusiasm for definitions of the national.

Authors represent this miscegenation through language as well, which is neither absolutely localised nor completely standardised. They employ multiple linguistic registers and write in dialects of Hindi to represent the complicated manner in which the individual

of the 1950s understands his/her world linguistically; defined by regional metaphors and symbols but constantly re-defined by the rhetoric of Nationalism. The negotiation of these two forms of politico-economic existence keeps the individual grounded in very specific contexts but also allows him/her the possibility of idealistically embodying this transition. While the authors depict the beginnings of a disenchantment with the limited nature of these possibilities and the pressure to make a choice, they reflect some idealism about the eventual realisation of these choices. The multiplicity and colour of the narratives could be maintained till the end and narrative resolutions are not shown as finalities.

> If the problematic 'closure' of textuality questions the 'totalisation' of national culture, then its positive value lies in displaying the wide dissemination through which we construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life (Bhabha, 2008: 3).

The idealism of these resolutions/closures is ironically qualified by narratives from the 1960s. The cutting irony and satirical tone of these narratives represent a sense of finality, with reference to idealism, experienced during the 1960s, by the end of the Nehruvian era. Erstwhile choices are shown to turn into rigid determinations and transitional atmosphere gives way to a concretisation of a shallow National collective based on superficial connections, like the rhetoric of all pervasive corruption. Individuality is now constructed through the manipulation of both regional and National identities in favour of vested interests. The ever-evolving individuality of the 1940s and the rooted regional individuality of the 1950s is shown to move into a phase where individuality is consciously marked by an absence of specificity. Identity is presented as an element that helps in making people invisible rather than visible.

> The continuing neglect of agriculture, efforts to introduce new agricultural strategies without providing adequate resources for the widespread and equitable dissemination of the new technologies associated with them, the inefficiencies and corruption associated with the distribution of new agricultural inputs and credit, and the like have contributed to a rising tide of disaffection among the most dynamic middle sectors of the peasantry and to their increasing politicisation (Brass, 2012: 359).

Similarly, social collectives are shown to be formulated or maintained neither on the basis of a shared past nor for a collectively imagined National future. They are artificially linked to an abstract past represented in interpretations of scriptures and routinisation

of rituals. Authors record social history primarily through petty conflicts that are given a National character in the bid to 'belong' to the contemporary National history without contributing to it as independent regions. Assimilation of various social spaces is therefore shown to be done politically, through the logic of National unity. Authors represent these spaces as not only lacking an individual character but also happily transmuting themselves into clones of a random National character. Nation is created as an intellectual space that one owes an allegiance to, but only in the hope for personal returns and not for the creation of a formidable National collective.

> The post Independence structure of political-bureaucratic relationships has consequently been fundamentally transformed in the direction of a patrimonial regime in which the political leadership selects officers who are personally loyal, who serve their narrow political interests, and who expect reciprocal preferments in return (Brass, 2012: 55).

The novels of this phase focussed on exposing the causes of a routinised and standardised reality by constantly caricaturing its assumption of reality and showing it as the embarrassingly familiar but desirably distant reality. Authors direct the exposition of such a reality through satire and irony that bring out the worst details of what was being constantly presented as the acceptably real. Instead of focussing on a large social-regional or political-national space, authors present, in minute detail, a microcosmic representation of the miscegenation of these spaces. The sharp focus on very few individuals or families is used to direct attention towards their representative quality and their typicality. Contradictory as the terms *satire* and *realism* might seem, authors reveal the reality of this context as amenable to a consistently satirical representation. Since *reality* is embodied and assumed self-consciously, satirising it becomes even more significant, not only for its representation but also for its critique. Narrative voices and narratorial structure are as dishonest/ironical as the context they represent. Authors direct irony at not only the characters they represent in the texts but also at themselves and the readers who are complicit in this negative evolution of individuality and nation, given that they understand and identify with the narratives. Authors insert themselves into the texts to delineate their complicated and angular relationship with the context(s) they are trying to represent and evoke laughter that makes the reader as culpable as the characters from the narratives.

They implicate the authorial/narratorial voices to depict the overwhelming nature of socio-political changes which have lent a

sort of similarity to each distinct group. Most significantly, satire is directed at the increasingly politicised, individualised and self-conscious process of identity formation by showing it as a part of a larger process which makes all the individuals nearly identical to each other. Authors expose the emptiness of efforts at maintaining individual identities by placing them in a structure where all attempts at maintaining distinctiveness appear to be the same because they derive their energies from the same overarching structure. Irony that cuts across all possible angles is considered to be the only possible technique to present such a political culture where the power of identity formation further pushes individuals and regions into a structure of mundane similarity. It offers the cushion of near invisibility because it is all-encompassing and the self-conscious efforts at politicising one's identity are directed at inserting oneself into this pool of invisible or indistinguishable mass of people and concepts.

Authors employ tropes from regional-local past, myths, folklore and ancient scriptures to depict the end of their organic nature and the beginning of their status as empty rituals that are employed for effect in the developing political culture of petty negotiations. The definitive quality of these symbols, as depicted in the 1950s Hindi novel, is only represented through a lament of their loss during times when the exhibitionist quality of these symbols ensures political visibility and invisibility at the same time. Most of these symbols, like the Moharram ceremonies (*Aadha Gaon*), rituals related to farming (*Raag Darbari*) and so on are incorporated into more abstract structures like modern Religion or modern economic politics. Realism is given a shape where the reader can sheepishly identify with the context depicted within the novel(s) but is also put in a peculiar position where he would rather separate himself from that context. The consistently ironical structure of the narratives de-familiarises the familiar to show the ubiquity of malaise and yet pulls the readers and authors into it. The self-conscious but shallow politicisation inserts itself into techniques of representation as authors depict the 'bizarre' as the 'real' and position the authorial figures, the readers and the characters of the novels at a huge distance from each other to show their actual proximity as individuals implicated within the same structure. Narrative resolutions are presented as near finalities in a context where each effort at change or progress pulls one back into the same rut. The destinies of characters are shown to be dominated by a larger structure that they cannot escape and therefore, as sealed from the very beginning. Within the structure, they are given some

freedom to exercise their choices but that does not allow them to change the co-ordinates of the structure itself. Authors of this phase depict stasis through satirical realism that mocks this fixity because an evolutionary reality is no longer available. The only 'hope' is shown to lie in constant and self-conscious irony that visibilises the invisible but familiar.

The most damaging effect of this structural dominance became visible in the 1970s with Indira Gandhi's rise to power and her efforts at seizing those powers indefinitely with the imposition of National Emergency in 1974. The 1971 National Elections, the controversies and legal battle around them, and the drastic decision of imposing an Emergency on the entire nation-space, destroyed the faith in this last symbol of individual choice. The narratives depicting this phase carry this creation of psychosis in their tone and structure of depicting reality. The disenchantment that authors depicted through irony in the 1960s had become more widespread. It was not allowed to be expressed and could no longer be mocked. Authors depict its ubiquitous presence in not only external spaces but also in the psychological space. They show a return to the form of Psychological Realism but the individual psychology they depict is the exact opposite of the confident one of the 1940s. The individual is no longer shown to be capable of using his chequered memory for creatively re-formulating his identity and society. The psychological space is, in fact, depicted as a field for confusion and the breakdown of the belief in Individuality. Authors deploy Psychological Realism to show the ruptures in memory and identity created by the political vacuum of the Emergency.

The narratives are un-structured with the use of gaps, silences and ellipses in language to represent the breakdown of not only linear time but also individual and collective memory, the lack of connection with any individual or collective past, and the emptiness of any residual rituals of social significance. The intervention of Centrist politics into the private and psychological lives of individuals is reflected through the disconnected individual narratives of characters which remain isolated from each other as well as the larger socio-political space that corners them. The narratives move between the psychological and social, the external and internal, the personal and political as warring factions rather than co-existing zones. The self-conscious nature of identity-creation of the 1960s is shown to have reached a phase where individuals are made to feel so self-conscious about assuming any kind of identity that they would rather not have an identity at all. Narratives are neither organised

around a narratorial voice nor an individual's psychology but around an individual's fear of an invisible, overarching structure that seeks to control the modes and content of representation. Individuals are shown to be engaged in an effort to hide and the narrative records these attempts at escape. Rumours and shocking revelations drive the narrative forward which otherwise stands quite still in an individual's psyche. The cause for Rishi's (*Raat ka Reporter*) inability to express himself and his sense of claustrophobia lies in the institutionalised effort of controlling his life, whether through Dayal Sahib's narrative of the remand room, his editor's efforts to send him out of town, or a doctor's efforts to negotiate his relationship with his wife. The effort in narrativisation, is therefore, not directed at an active mode of creation but at a passive mode of escaping definitions. Narratives are presented as failed efforts to reach the origin of Individual or National identity, both of which have been lost in the centralization of the processes of narrative formation. Their success lies in revealing this emptiness (Nirmal Verma calls it the 'Void') so that it can be challenged by new collectives formulated through the widespread experience of pain and disconnectedness. Timothy Brennan writes

> …In one strain of Third World writing the contradictory topoi of exile and nation are fused in a lament for the necessary and regrettable insistence of nation-forming, in which the writer proclaims his identity with a country whose artificiality and exclusiveness have driven him into a kind of exile—a simultaneous recognition of nationhood and an alienation from it (Brennan, 2008: 63).

The Hindi novel from the 1940s to the 1970s embodies in its technical innovations and experimentations this search for identity and also reflects the process of narrativising the Nation in Politics and Literature. It reflects a journey that starts from sketching an emotional-experiential perspective on reality and continuously moves towards an intensely intellectual analysis and re-formulation of the idea of reality. The various forms of social and individual consciousness and the modes of representing the evolving individual and national identities, in consonance and opposition to each other, in the Hindi novels of this historical time-frame present the socio-political transformation(s) of a Nation in the making.

> For the nation, as a form of cultural *elaboration* (in the Gramscian sense), is an agency of *ambivalent* narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for 'subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing, as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding' (Bhabha, 2008: 3).

In the process of depicting the political evolution of India through a robust idealism and intensely increasing degrees of disenchantment, the Hindi novel presents new modes of understanding the concepts of reality and realism. The authors' efforts at re-defining the genre of the novel are inextricably related to the political efforts at re-defining the social landscape of the Nation and its Imagination. Each phase in Indian political history influences the choices of techniques of representation and is in turn, critically evaluated through these. These narratives embodied dominant political history, critiqued it, and sometimes, offered alternatives to it as well. These narrative alternatives have to be considered as significant factors contributing to the process of imagining the Nation even if they did not get identically manifested in the political reality of the Nation. Each of the literary phases evolved and derived from its earlier literary and contemporary political phase, but, more significantly, helped in the development and definitions of their future literary and political phases. They reflected, for the readers, the shape that the Indian Nation was going to take in and after the years of their publication.

Notes

1. With reference to the Indian context and the Hindi novel, I use the term 'postcolonial' without a hyphen. I argue that the postcoloniality of these texts is not so much chronological or dependent upon the moment of political Independence of India, but on the imagination of a postcolonial space and reality. The editors to *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* write, "This field itself has become so heterogeneous that no collection of readings could encompass every theoretical position now giving itself the name 'postcolonial/post-colonial'. These terms themselves encapsulate an active and unresolved dispute between those who would see the postcolonial as designating an amorphous set of discursive practices, akin to postmodernism, and those who would see it as designating a more specific, and 'historically' located set of cultural strategies. Even this latter view is divided between those who believe that post-colonial refers only to the period after the colonies become independent and those who argue, as the editors of this book would, that it is best used to designate the totality of practices, in all their rich diversity, which characterise the societies of the post-colonial world from the moment of colonisation to the present day, since colonialism does not cease with the mere fact of political independence and continues in a neo-colonial mode to be active in many societies" (Ashcroft xv). I use the term with reference to the peculiarities of the Hindi novels' context and their imagining of it and try to define the texts' interpretation of postcoloniality as well as re-definitions of it.

2. I use the term 'communal' in its early and traditional form as indicating local community, and not in its contemporary form, denoting conflicts based on Religion. Communities, as depicted in these texts, were heterogeneous groups aligned through some common values. They were based on region, land, and

even caste, to some extent. But they are not shown to be based in Modern Religion..

3. The term '*aanchalik*' has loosely translated as 'regional' to refer to *aanchalik upanyaas* as 'regional novel' of the 1950s, but its definition is slightly more complex than its mere association with a particular geographical space. It encapsulates an entire way of life with its collective memory, its local dialect and its folk art forms that define its specificity. It also denotes the 'border' of the Indian Nation or Mother India, quite literally directing attention to the marginalised sections of the newly formed Nation.

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