

# Introduction

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## North Indian Cities and the Hindi Novel

THIS BOOK TRACES THE changing configurations of urban lives as represented in eight Hindi novels set in six different North Indian cities: Agra, Allahabad, Banaras, Delhi, Lahore, and Lucknow. It begins with the emergence of a specific variety of middle-class speakers of a self-consciously Hindu Hindi in the second half of the nineteenth century, and ends in the last years of the Nehruvian era. The colonial and the post-colonial are thus viewed as integrally connected—culturally, socially, and politically. For, if the uprising of 1857 provides a cataclysmic end to one order and the beginning of another, Independence in 1947 would seem to provide another cataclysmic end and yet another beginning. However, to end the book in 1947 would mean accepting the nationalist myth that Independence really did achieve freedom, and that after it India began an entirely new era. Independence was won, as we know, at the price of Partition and the struggle of vast masses to find new locations, personally and professionally, making their lives look very much like the continuation of an older colonial story. The logical end of the book is for my purposes the early 1960s, when the illusion of Independence as a newly gilded age, and the idealism coupled with it, finally ceased to frame lives in North India.

It was in 1964 that Nehru, the chief remaining embodiment of Indian political hope, died, leaving in his wake a vacuum that his successors soon distilled into a political cynicism and larger moral decline

that marked the real break from the nationalist idealism that had begun fifty years earlier, with Jallianwallabagh and Gandhi's arrival. And it was in 1968 that the 'three language formula', presaged by the foundation of linguistic states, was promulgated, making Hindi merely one of three languages taught in schools, putting paid to what had over the nationalist period been cast as a major objective of nationhood—Hindi as the sole national language of the country. There were furious anti-Hindi riots in 1966 across both North and South India, many of them bloody and destructive, the end result being the tacit acceptance and codification into a policy of the general preference for English in the upper echelons of society. It is for these reasons, then, that this book looks at the urban intellectual and cultural life of North India in the century or so that preceded the end of Nehruvian India.

Why urban North India and why the Hindi novel, when Hindi fiction is associated more with novels about peasants, particularly those of Premchand (1880–1936), now regarded as *the* classic Hindi author? For one, modernization took place at a greater and more discernible pace in cities than in the countryside. To focus on the city is to be able to look more clearly at the process of modernization. For another, the story of the rather more spectacular modernity of the Presidency towns—Bombay and Madras, and Calcutta in particular, the capital of British India from 1858 till 1911—has been told and retold. Generations of Bengali scholars have pioneered the study of colonial modernity and taught us to read it through *bhadralok* culture, particularly through the novels of Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore. The North, west of Bengal, has generally been regarded as lagging, provincial, and late on the literary scene. Leaving others to judge whether this was really so, it seems possible to outline several reasons why its story seems worth telling.

Unlike Bengal, which had *the* great urban centre, Calcutta, founded by the British and developed as the capital of British India, the North had a number of scattered cities, all of them older and with distinct histories of their own. In these cities, there was already an identifiable elite culture in place, one that 1857 disrupted and

shattered. The modernization that followed thereafter also had, then, other foundations than those to be found in Calcutta and the Presidency towns, and an important intellectual aspect of these was the Hindi literature that emerged within them. Modern Hindi was born in these cities of North India, where Urdu and Persian still prevailed, out of the need within an emergent Hindu middle class to find cultural and political expression. It was in these cities that this middle class faced the need to modernize, to accommodate and evolve social change, and where it received intellectual stimulation. This invigoration came from various encounters, through education in the new colleges in the cities, founded from the late nineteenth century on by the elite; from Western intellectual discourse as available through print—missionary tracts, newspapers, books; and through dealings with Western institutions of governance, the municipality and law court amongst others.

I start with a brief recapitulation of the novel as a genre, and its role in partly creating, partly anticipating the story of middle-class modernity and modernism. In the essays that follow, I do not necessarily circle back to the cities once I have located the novels concerned in their midst; much more, I use a description of their space and time to set the scene for the emergence of the characters in the story. I devote a fair amount of space to the narratives themselves, since they are largely unknown to English readers and likely to remain so until the availability of attractive translations, so that in some ways this book can also be regarded as a story of stories.

#### THE NOVEL AS A GENRE AND THE NOVEL IN HINDI

The novel's distinction as a genre is that it is capacious, and therefore best suited to show up the multiplicity of voices of a given era. Bakhtin defined it as

a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages

of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific socio-political purpose of the day, even of the hour . . . this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre.<sup>1</sup>

In the case of the Hindi novel, its tone and content changed radically every half decade or so, as we will see when we discuss the novels in the first section of this book, particularly the two novels by Premchand, written after a gap between them of several years. This articulation of the diversity of actual speech types is far more visible in the modern Hindi novel than in English, the latter being more the language of elites and which came later on the scene as a widely accepted literary language. Hindi was the language of resistance in North India, but also of assertion *vis-à-vis* the holders of power. The novels written in our timespan bear witness to the fact that the processes of modernization were best registered in Hindi, as well as to the fact that the most public and most intimate moments were expressed in Hindi—in short, the language most acutely encapsulating and articulating North India's processes of social, cultural, and political change. There is no equivalent of Premchand and Yashpal in the Indian English novels of the time, their representation of the diverse classes of people, of the conversations within the family and between spouses that were imagined and recorded in their pages.

Such was the cultural authority of the genre that the novel grew to become the site to which people resorted for information regarding matters of emotional life, and when needing help in, as much as naming, emotions. So, the adolescent Shekhar in the first part of Agyeya's novel *Shekhar: Ek Jivani* (*Shekhar: A Life*; 1941–4) turns to his novelistic knowledge (*aupanyasik gyan*) for recognition of his feeling when experiencing a deep oneness with his own state of being, which is in fact a state of non-being (*shunyatvamaya anubhuti*),

<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin 1981: 262.

an extrasensory feeling (*atinindriya*). It is with literary help from the realm of novels that he tentatively recognizes what he feels for Sharada—the young woman he meets in the southern mountainous region of the Nilgiris—as ‘love’.<sup>2</sup> We are speaking of the late 1920s in an unusually progressive household. The possibility of falling in love, or even of finding one’s own marital partner, is just beginning to glimmer on the horizon. Novels help, in the circumstances of this period, not only as tools to recognize particular emotions, but also to assess a person’s character.

The uses to which the novel, and prose narratives in general, can be put are thus manifold. The Japanese novelist Kikuchi Kan, writing in 1926 in a country known for its adherence to decorum as much as for its own variant on the segregation of the sexes, says:

Women don’t know what kind of a man will make a good husband, and men don’t know what to look for in a wife; and so they set themselves up for disappointment in life and disaster in marriage. But do they teach how to choose a mate in school? If a man wants to learn the truth of human life, he can’t very well go out and conduct research on women; and women can’t draw too close to men unless they want to invite trouble. But if it is through literature, one can come to know countless men and women, proper love, and all about married life. And it’s all so very simple to do. Moreover, absolutely no danger is involved. Put another way, literature is life’s laboratory—a completely risk-free guide to the facts of life.<sup>3</sup>

There are parallels with Europe, where, at least since the seventeenth century, as Luhmann has shown, novels had assumed ‘the role of providing instruction and orientation in affairs of the heart . . .’<sup>4</sup> Luhmann sees the behaviour of characters in novels as animating rather than expanding the current social code, but there are also well-known examples in Europe of novels anticipating and setting a code. A spate of suicides followed the publication of Goethe’s epistolary

<sup>2</sup> Agyeya 1966: 165.

<sup>3</sup> Ai 2014: 193. I am grateful to Francesca Orsini for bringing this work to my attention.

<sup>4</sup> Luhmann 1998: 11.

novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*,<sup>5</sup> in which the protagonist, hopelessly in love, takes his own life. ‘Literature acts upon cultural models which in turn act upon “real life” and transform it.’<sup>6</sup> Thus we have ‘the mediation of literary model as form of experience, model of perception and elaboration of reality itself.’<sup>7</sup> Genre, in this case the novel, can be regarded as a generative matrix in more senses than one. ‘What we should avoid is thinking of reality naturalistically, as though it were a simple datum,’ Conte adds.<sup>8</sup> Thus, ‘if the literary genre shares properties with something else, then it does so not with empirical reality but with the cultural model according to which it is perceived.’<sup>9</sup> Novels often portray changes in these very cultural models, with the generation of older folk often regarding them as threatening for the morals of the young and impressionable. In the world of Hindi, too, novels were often considered dangerous for the power they could exercise on the imagination of the young. As one commentator puts it, ‘Reading is linked to desire, and there is a strident denunciation of the temptations reading induces.’<sup>10</sup>

True to the form, the novels considered in this book often go beyond the socially possible, anticipating behaviour that would become widely acceptable only several decades later. The early Hindi novels are sometimes roughly hewn, but, their formal unevenness notwithstanding, things that are not possible elsewhere in literature are anticipated and often made to come to fruition by imagining, by allowing for transgressions and giving them space, and by the sheer act of making possible in narrative form what is not yet socially permissible. As has been pointed out, ‘the novel antedated—was indeed

<sup>5</sup> It appeared first in 1774.

<sup>6</sup> Conte 1986: 111.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.: 112.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.: 125.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.: 110.

<sup>10</sup> Govind 2014: 98–9. The reference is to Jainendra Kumar’s novel *Tyagpatra* (Letter of Resignation; 1937), in which the heroine Mrinal’s characteristically narrow-minded husband has deemed her novel-reading evil.

necessarily antecedent to—the way of life it represented.<sup>11</sup> The portrayal of such anticipations, whether realized in life or not, is not a phenomenon to be found elsewhere. Functioning, as Bakhtin says, in ‘the zone of maximal contact with the present’, the novel includes extra-literary forms, such as extracts from newspapers, as well as some of the genres named above, such as letters and diaries.<sup>12</sup> And the new subjectivity, visible in Hindi literature from the 1920s particularly in *chhayavadi* (the Romanticist) lyric,<sup>13</sup> also finds its voice in the novel of the period, which charts, if at times falteringly, the process of modernization as lived by young women and men, both in their relationship to each other as much as in their own lives.

The novels chosen for depiction and analysis in this book all have secure positions and enduring reputations in the Hindi literary canon, so I see this present project as no part of a struggle to reinsert them into literary history from putative margins. Nor am I trying, in selecting these particular eight novels, to construct a canon of fiction for modern Hindi; they do not together comprise a ‘great tradition’.<sup>14</sup> I regret that I found none by women authors that fitted my categories, though many of those chosen are centred on powerful women figures. Three reasons determined the choosing of these specific works.

First, their urban location, which entailed reading the Hindi literary tradition against the grain, since the tradition has been known largely for the great peasant novels of the vast agricultural countryside which made up most of the North. Various urban locations began to interest me when I realized that over the past two centuries, from the time of the great uprising in 1857, no single urban location in the North could be identified as the epicentre of the region’s cultural activity, or at least not such as that epitomised by Paris and London, and nearer home by Calcutta for Bengal, Bombay for Western India, and Madras for the South. The British chose to deliberately play down

<sup>11</sup> Armstrong 1987: 9.

<sup>12</sup> Bakhtin 1981: 11.

<sup>13</sup> See Schomer 1998 for the best survey of this age in English.

<sup>14</sup> In the style of F.R. Leavis’ famous *The Great Tradition* (1948).

the importance of Delhi and Agra, seeing them as too powerfully connected to Mughal power and the authority radiated by the regime they were replacing, and so developed Lahore and Allahabad instead as regional administrative centres. However, the older cultural capitals refused to fade away. They became like some of the other cities of the North, with their own cultural and political histories, their older, often walled, cities cohabiting with newer residential areas—the military cantonments and the civil lines developed by the British.

When tracing the narrative of modernization in the North, then, my story shows a geographical topography and spread, with multiple urban centres and multiple beginnings within them. The novels are deeply rooted in these once-culturally vibrant cities of the northern hinterland, charting the path of the modernity on which the North embarked in the mid-nineteenth century, after the final overthrow of the Mughals.<sup>15</sup>

My second criterion of selection was the focus on young people, on those who were often in the later novels—at least from the 1930s on—university students, or characters striving to stabilize themselves in some social position, or in some suitable profession or the other, sometimes struggling in the process against what the older generation had laid out for them.<sup>16</sup> The university campus brought young people in touch with new ideas and new currents, throwing them together with other young people similarly moved. Their attitude to life, their ambitions, and their trajectories thereafter were determined by these new ideas, as was their romantic and marital life.

The third criterion for selection, which came about almost inadvertently but then became a determining factor, was the novel's depiction of the political climate of the era. The role played by

<sup>15</sup> I save discussion of the beginning of the novel in Hindi for this book's first chapter, which is centred on *Pariksha Guru* (1882), the earliest novel of note in Hindi.

<sup>16</sup> This became particularly clear to me in a conversation held on 14 October 2012, with the late Rajendra Yadav. I owe him thanks; sadly, he is no longer here to receive them.



politics in the lives of the protagonists in these novels was in fact all-pervasive, propelling them, affecting their identity and self-definition, and at times shaping their very existence. Private lives were touched and formed, and relationships forged, nurtured, or destroyed by the momentum these political moments generated. In some of the novels chosen here, nationalism is all-pervasive. It includes the social reforms of the early twentieth century that were seen as part of the nationalist agitation; the politics of municipalities and law courts, which were first set up and began to play a role in civic life in the colonial period; the Gandhian satyagraha against untouchability; World War II and its meaning for the Indian intelligentsia; Hindu and Muslim communalism, particularly at the time of the partition of the subcontinent; the moment of Independence in 1947 and the Nehruvian vision of progress; right-wing Hindutva; and, finally, the ruthless politics of the Cold War as it touched the lives of artists and performers, particularly in the national capital.

Nonetheless, to narrow the choice to just eight was difficult, given the variety and range of material available. As Gopal Ray has shown in his exhaustive history of the Hindi novel, the writing of prose narratives began in the early nineteenth century and has continued unabated to the present.<sup>17</sup> In order to locate the novels selected here in the larger frame that Gopal Ray offers, I will outline the very innovative periodization that he has set up.

The writing of novels in the vernacular happened at the behest of the British, who were eager to put together pedagogical material in Hindi for the initiation into Indian life of their administrators. Gopal Ray called this first period, which he saw as beginning in 1803 and lasting all the way till 1869, as a 'knocking on the door' (*darwaze par dastak*). He sees the next period, the second, with the time span stretching from 1870 to 1890, as a part of 'the new awakening in the North' (*nav jagaran aur Hindi upanyas*). Next, we have 1891 to 1917 as the third period, which he designates as belonging to

<sup>17</sup> Gopal Ray [2002] 2005.

romance, readership formation, and the novel (*romans, pathak aur upanyas*). Following this, the 1918–47 period, the fourth, is that of ‘the new voices of realism’ (*yatharth ke naye svar*), divisible into two sub-periods: the first, 1918–36, with ‘the peasant as the focus’, and the second, 1937–47, as ‘a search for new directions’. Finally, Gopal Ray sees 1948 to 1980 as a fifth period, this one being of ‘new horizons of discourse’ (*vimarsh ke naye kshetitij*).<sup>18</sup> I do not follow him beyond this point since my analysis does not go beyond the Nehruvian period ending in the mid 1960s.

My eight novels follow a rough chronology and fall naturally into two groups, the modern and the modernist. The periods delineated by Gopal Ray are represented in them, with two exceptions: the first period because the novels written in it seemed too slight, too incipient to bear extensive analysis; and the third period, which dwelt largely in the realm of the fantastic and produced no work to satisfy the criteria set up here.

The year of publication does not always determine where my novels are sequentially positioned or in relationship to each other. Their order has more to do with the periods they cover, their style and approach, and the general tone adopted within them. The modernist novel of the second section is more self-reflexive and self-doubting, and with unclear, open endings.

All such selections are necessarily subjective; it could be argued that other novels could as well have been included here. But their inclusion would conceivably have also been deemed insufficient and would, in any case, have required a longer and altogether different book.



The first novel discussed is *Pariksha Guru* (The Tutelage of Trial; 1882) by Lala Shrinivasdas (1850–87). Set in post-Mughal Delhi, it belongs squarely in Gopal Ray’s second period, ‘the new awakening’. It is a not altogether successful attempt to write in the new genre but

<sup>18</sup> Gopal Ray [2002] 2005: x–xi.

its very groping for form betrays its time of composition and interests. Didactic in the extreme, it also struggles to maintain an interesting storyline, while its uncritically nationalist tone reflects many of the concerns of the late nineteenth century. Similar didactic novels abound in the period, most of them much shorter, others destined to remain fragments, serialized in the countless short-lived journals that sprang up at the time and abandoned before they could be concluded.

It took a while for the novel to stabilize as a genre, and most of all to gain a serious readership. As Orsini has shown, it was the *tilismi* (fantastic) novel—foremost the voluminous and wildly popular *Chandrakanta* ([1887] 1891) and its sequels by Devakinandan Khatri (1861–1913), as also detective fiction,<sup>19</sup> primarily that of Gopalram Gahmari (1866–1946) that followed fast upon it—which made the novel a popular genre and Hindi itself widely accessible. People are said to have learnt the Nagari script in order to be able to read *Chandrakanta*. This is Gopal Ray's third period, which he sees as that of romance, readership, and the novel. I found no fiction of note in this period for my purposes.

It is thereafter with the advent of Premchand (1880–1936) that a realistic portrayal of middle- and lower-middle-class urban life enters the novel. In fact, Gopal Ray begins his period centred on 'new voices of realism' (*yatharth ke naye svar*) with the publication of the novel I deal with in my second essay, Premchand's *Sevasadan* (The House of Service; 1918). This was the novel that originally shot Premchand to fame. Set in the inner lanes of Banaras, it is centred on the life of the courtesan, and its great success considerably helped the process of creating a wider readership and enhancing social respectability for the novel. Successful courtesan novels, including Ruswa's famous *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899), had till then been written in Urdu; in Hindi they were a novelty. And even the ones in Urdu had been written

<sup>19</sup> Orsini 2009: particularly chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 7 deals with Khatri's detective fiction and its particularities *vis-à-vis* the Bengali (226–72).

not with a psychological focus on the life of a young woman, one who is unsuccessful as a wife but successful as a courtesan and who then abandons her profession for the nationalist cause. With its attention on the wider social fabric of the city and its concern with municipal debates on the removal of the courtesan quarter to the outskirts of the city—debates which became sharply polarized and communalized—*Sevasadan* is the outstanding novel of the second decade of the twentieth century. In its conclusion Premchand resorts to the idealistic realism (*adharshvadi yatharth*) that was his express purpose in writing his tales, deftly tying up all the loose ends of the narrative in order to achieve what became his hallmark: a morally satisfying conclusion.

Premchand's subsequent novels often turned with passionate intensity and intimate knowledge to the cause of the heavily taxed and exploited peasant, locating him on a wide social canvas and creating unforgettable characters in the process. This is especially true of his last and most famous novel, *Godan* (The Gift of a Cow; 1936), whose peasant protagonists, Hori and Dhaniam, initially prosperous and hard working, are caught in the Depression that sets in at the conclusion of the 1920s as much as in the vicious circle of exploitation by moneylenders and tax collectors. They die in poverty and pitiful anonymity but leave behind an indelible literary image of their life and struggles. On account of my focus on the urban, I have bypassed this and other agrarian novels.

Two other noteworthy novelists of the period who also wrote about the countryside and on occasion about the city, Jayshankar Prasad (1890–1937) and Suryakant Tripathi Nirala (1896–1961), were primarily poets.<sup>20</sup> Alongside Mahadevi Verma (1907–87) and Sumitranandan Pant (1900–77), they provided Hindi with new individualist, romantic lyrics that had no precedent in the language. Known as *chhayavad* (lit. shadowism), this movement in poetry evolved a language of subjectivity which could express an experiential

<sup>20</sup> For a short summary and assessment of their novels, see Gopal Ray [2002] 2005: 151–3.

intensity that also worked its way into the novel. The novels of Prasad and Nirala, particularly of Prasad, were well known and popular in their time, but none had the power, urgency, and ambition of Premchand's fiction.<sup>21</sup>

Nearly two decades after his first novel, Premchand wrote a second city novel, his penultimate, also set in Banaras. The action of *Karmabhumi* (Field of Action; 1932), the third novel I focus on, takes place primarily in the inner part of a modernizing Banaras, though it also moves between country and city. The politics of the time are formative not only for the two protagonists, a husband and wife, but also for their relationship with each other. They participate in a series of nationalist agitations—which serves to expand the narrative across a wide social and political spectrum—but are also involved in a power struggle with each other that is for them as existential as the political causes they espouse.

Jainendra (1905–88) was the most experimental and innovative novelist of the 1930s. His *Sunita* (1935) is known for its subtle depiction of a woman's interiority. Set in Delhi, it is also eminently political and deals with an underground revolutionary. Its urban setting provides no more than a frame for the plot, however, as does his second noteworthy novel of the period, *Tyagpatra* (Letter of Resignation; 1937). Considered a classic, the latter is set less in a specific urban site or specific political scenario and more within the inner self of a judge who chooses, ultimately, to resign from his position. This happens because he has been the helpless observer of a great social injustice to his young aunt who, having transgressed the moral strictures of her world, has fallen down the social ladder into oblivion and eventually to a poverty-stricken death.<sup>22</sup> This is symbolic of the general trend Gopal Ray calls 'seeking new directions'.

<sup>21</sup> The other popular novelist of note in this period who espoused nationalism and social causes but portrayed them with an often jarring directness was Pandey Bechan Sharma 'Ugra' (1900–67). See Orsini (1998).

<sup>22</sup> Nikhil Govind offers extensive analysis of Jainendra's work, as also of Yashpal's novel *Dada Kamared* (1941) about the socially daring and politically underground terrorist's life. See Govind 2014.

Jainendra's novels have both subtlety and depth but lack the 'diversity of social speech types and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized' that Bakhtin spoke of when defining the novel, and which functioned as a criterion for my own selection.

I turn instead to a novel dealing with the 1940s, the epic *Jhutha Sach* (False Truth; 1958, 1960) by Yashpal (1903–76), serialized in the weekly *Dharmayug* and then published in two volumes. In his matter-of-fact tone and faithfulness to observed reality, Yashpal is closer to Premchand than to the novelists in the second section of the present book.<sup>23</sup> His adherence to history is such that he gives the exact dates of the political events which propel his characters, making his work seem akin to a chronicle. The first volume of *Jhutha Sach* is set in the inner city of pre-Partition Lahore, the second largely in the overcrowded old city but also in the Civil Lines of post-Independence Delhi. The three main protagonists are highly politicized, caught in the vicissitudes of Partition violence and the sundering of families, but also able to rebuild their lives and marital relationships—the period in which the novel is set allows such choices. Ironically, the political volatility ensuing from the creation of two nation-states also allows for social mobility of various kinds.

All these four novels have an omniscient narrator, though with each successive novel the narrator tends to recede and the focus is increasingly provided by the protagonists.

Novel writing sought new horizons from the late 1940s. Gopal Ray has, as noted, seen this as the period exploring new horizons of discourse (*vimarsh ke naye kshitij*). My second set of novels falls squarely within this period. The works I have picked are more modernist than modern, beginning with Agyeya's (1911–87) *Nadi ke Dvip* (Islands in the Stream; [1948] 1952), set in the early 1940s of

<sup>23</sup> Another novelist whose work I initially considered for inclusion was Upendranath Ashk (1910–96), who also explores lower-middle-class urban life in the Punjab of these years. His celebrated *Girti Diwarem* (Falling Walls; 1946) is also set in Lahore. However, the narrative is fragmented and inconclusive and I felt it would not repay closer analysis.

Delhi and Lucknow, and ending with World War II and the Japanese incursion into India.<sup>24</sup> Rekha and Bhuvan, the novel's two main characters, meet in the modernized section of the cities and find each other in the hills of Kumaon, outside city life with its compulsions and conventions. *Nadi ke Dvip* explores interiorities, intertwining poetry with a prose that is also lyrical and self-reflexive. Its lilting prose and the beauty of its speech rhythms surely owe something to the author's poetic sensibility. Agyeya was one of the leading voices in the *Nai Kavita* (New Poetry) movement, inaugurated in the early 1940s with the publication of *Tar Saptak* (Strings of a Septet; 1942), an anthology, the first of a series of three which he edited. The group of seven poets whose work was represented in these anthologies later split into two warring camps much affected by the Cold War: the *Prayogvadi* (Experimentalists), and the *Pragativadi* (Progressives) who were left oriented.<sup>25</sup> Agyeya himself was seen as belonging to the first group. The split also had a bearing on other novelists of the period, as we will see.

Lyricism also pervades the poet, novelist, and dramatist Dharamavir Bharati's (1926–97) *Gunahom ka Devata* (The God of Vice; 1949), which was to become a cult novel for several generations of youthful readers. Bharati belonged to the younger generation of the *Tar Saptak* poets. The novel was written as a rejoinder to the political split of the Hindi literary world into polarized camps in the wake of the Cold War. *Gunahom ka Devata* is Bharati's attempt to demonstrate that one can be progressive and left wing, yet speak of romantic love and even tend towards spirituality. The work is set largely in a Civil Lines bungalow in mid 1940s Allahabad. Written at a very young age by

<sup>24</sup> As far as the narrative is concerned, *Nadi ke Dvip* is less experimental than the author's *Shekhar: Ek Jivani* (Shekhar: A Life; 1941, 1944) referred to above, which moves through a series of sites, most of them non-urban, and therefore has not been considered here. Nikhil Govind (2014) offers a sensitive and insightful reading of the novel.

<sup>25</sup> This also had a bearing for other novelists of the period, as we will see.

Bharati as the love story of Sudha and Chander, it is a novel of youth, hope, and suffering. Though focalized through Chander, it revolves around the sorrow and distress of Sudha, his beloved, married to another man while grieving to be with him. Can sex, love, and marriage coalesce in a single union of two people is the question the novel asks and leaves largely unanswered. It ends with Independence for the country, Sudha's death, Chander's move to Delhi, and farewell to life in the bungalow.

For my last two novels I turn to two writers, Mohan Rakesh (1925–72) and Rajendra Yadav (1929–2013), who belong to yet another prominent movement in Hindi literature, namely *Nai Kahani* (New Short Story), which evolved in the 1950s and 1960s, and which they themselves, along with Kamaleshwar (1932–2007), inaugurated. The novel was not necessarily their forté, yet with their heightened literary sensibilities, attuned to catching the nuances of social change, particularly as these affected personal relationships, they aimed to capture reality in a new way. Both were determined not to yield to the idealistic frames set up by Premchand—whom they nonetheless acknowledged as their forebear—or those by Yashpal and Agyeya. Mohan Rakesh and Rajendra Yadav dealt largely with narratives in urban settings. They probed the interiorities of men and women, of professionals living in the increasingly nuclear family and accosting each other without the mediating instance of other family members.<sup>26</sup> As Preetha Mani notes, ‘Uncertainty, disillusionment, self-doubt, skepticism, alienation, fragmentation, transitoriness—these were the compelling narrative tendencies that marked the quotidian lives of *nayi kahani* characters.’<sup>27</sup>

Several of the *Nai Kahani* writers’ novels could have been consi-

<sup>26</sup> The fictional work with urban settings had a powerful counterpart, the so-called *amchalik* (regional) movement, which also used dialect-inflected Hindi. The best-known example of this trend was Phanishwarnath Renu’s (1921–77) hauntingly beautiful novel *Maila Amchal* (Soiled Border; 1954).

<sup>27</sup> Mani 2016: 6.



dered for the kind of analysis attempted here, particularly those of Nirmal Verma (1929–2005), which were set in hill stations but also, very evocatively, in Delhi.<sup>28</sup> However, they did not have the diversity of speech that I was looking for and their publication dates fell outside my time span. This was also true of another major novel of the period, *Ap ka Banti* (1971) by Mannu Bhandari (1931–), which focused on the sensibility of a child of divorcing parents. I turned instead to the novels by Rajendra Yadav and Mohan Rakesh since they offered insights into two significant post-Independence cultural moments: first, the ultra-nationalist impulses which moved the Hindu Right; and second, Cold War politics as determining the direction of modernism, a movement which found at that time no sustained patronage from the Indian state.

With Rajendra Yadav's *Sara Akash* (The Entire Sky; [1951] 1960) we find ourselves in a haveli in the inner city of Agra in the early 1950s. The novel begins with the marriage of a young right-wing Hindu nationalist, Samar, his alienation, and eventual reunion with his educated wife Prabha. Their togetherness strains in the direction of a nuclear household and ends with Samar losing his bearings in increasingly hostile family and work environments.

Mohan Rakesh's *Amdhere Band Kamare* (Dark Closed Rooms; 1961) takes us back to Delhi, this time the Delhi of newly resettled refugee colonies, more specifically to the residential areas of New Delhi's Diplomatic Enclave and the residential areas of the city's South. The old city has been left behind, Mughal Delhi and the British are but a memory. The protagonists move and act within the political frame of the Cold War and the cultural insecurities of modern artists lacking clear-cut sources of patronage. Nilima and Harbans are a middle-class couple with ambitions in the arts and the narrator Madhusudan is a young reporter-narrator participating in their lives and struggles.

<sup>28</sup> Verma's *Ek Chithada Sukh* (A Ragged Happiness, 1979) and *Rat ka Reporter* (Night Reporter; 1989) are set in Delhi. Both fall outside the scope of the period delineated as Nehruvian.

## NORTH INDIAN CITY SPACES AFTER 1857

Turning now to the cities themselves, let me outline city geography as it figures in this book. Transferred to literature, city geography can refer to a study of literature in space, and/or space in literature:

In the first case, the dominant is a fictional one: Balzac's version of Paris, the Africa of colonial romances, Austen's redrawing of Britain. In the second case, it is real historical space: provincial libraries of Victorian Britain, or the European diffusion of *Don Quixote* and *Buddenbrooks*. The two spaces may occasionally (and interestingly) overlap, but they are essentially different and I will treat them as such: fictional space in the first two chapters of the book, and historical space in the third one.<sup>29</sup>

The present book is concerned with both. I begin by laying out historically the geography of the city space in question and the specific milieu represented by the author, which together produce a certain kind of sociality out of which grows a social person in the novel, to which he or she brings his or her individual traits and relationships. Thus in *Pariksha Guru* we have to do with Chandni Chowk, the city's main shopping centre, the merchant ethos within it, and two young men with two very different responses to it. In a later novel, the first part of *Jhutha Sach*, Tara and Jaydev Puri, two of the main characters, live and grow up in a lane (*gali*) of the historical city of Lahore, struggling against the lane's narrow mentality and the social bounds it places on them, aspiring for the freedom that other, more modern locations bring with them. The *gali* mentality determines the horizon and imagination of the older generation, which regards movement as transgression, while their youngers can imagine or at least dream of it. In *Sara Akash* the question is whether there can be a modern marriage in an old haveli in Agra. There is a vast gap between the old-fashioned expectations of Samar, which corresponds with that of his parents, and his wife Prabha's freer, more individualistic, modern vision. Thus, we shall have both to do with the actual history

<sup>29</sup> Moretti 1998: 3.

and geography of cities, and with their fictional representation. The fictional space within these novels grows out of actual city spaces and maps the fields of power contained therein, even as it draws out the social and personal tensions that produce and propel the narrative. The city thus provides the frame for the narrative, and each of the ensuing essays begins by laying out the where and the when. The history peculiar to North Indian cities, in brief, lays out the grounds for the story of modernity that I chart.

Towards the end of the long auctorial journey that he entitled his *Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru spoke evocatively of the region that lies at the heart of his book, and of which he himself was a product: ‘The United Provinces (including Delhi) are a curious amalgam, and in some ways, an epitome of India. They are the seat of the old Hindu culture as well as of the Persian culture that came in with Afghan and Mughal times, and hence the mixture of the two is most in evidence there, intermingled with the cultures of the West.’<sup>30</sup> This Indo-Persian culture of which Nehru speaks was particularly marked in the prime cities of the region: in Delhi, the seat of government of ever larger tracts of the subcontinent from at least the twelfth century; in Agra, the alternative Mughal capital of the region from the late fifteenth century; in Lahore, patronized by Jahangir; in Allahabad, where Akbar built a fort; and in Lucknow, which emerged in the post-Mughal era as the capital of the nawabs of the region. Large parts of these cities would be practically wiped off the map over the reprisals that came in the wake of the 1857 uprising. It took a while before they became politically and culturally ready to ‘intermingle’, or negotiate in any substantive way with the language and idiom of the British.<sup>31</sup> Lahore came into the Hindi scenario

<sup>30</sup> Nehru 1946: 396.

<sup>31</sup> ‘You can look at Sumit Sarkar, you can look at Bipan Chandra, you can look at the Cambridge School or the Subalterns and all schools of Indian history to know that modern Indian history begins after 1857.’ Farooqui 2010: ix. The fact that modern Indian history begins after 1857, not with 1857, which determined the turn that North Indian history took thereafter,

later, after the British conquest of Punjab in 1849, when Urdu (or Hindustani) became the language of the province, to be partially overlaid by the Hindi brought to the region by the Arya Samaj in the late nineteenth century. Literary Hindi writing would emerge in Punjab, particularly Lahore, towards the tail end of the 1930s, to die out again after Partition. Our sixth city, Banaras, where two of the eight novels discussed are set, was culturally different from the other cities of the North. It had been the centre of Sanskrit learning for many centuries and naturally formed the core of modern literary Hindi as it took shape from the late nineteenth century.<sup>32</sup>

The havoc caused by the post-1857 retributions and the ruthless British revamping of civic and administrative life in Delhi, and of Lucknow in particular, can be seen as paradigmatic of most North Indian cities. It is worth recalling the major details of the urban changes that, so to speak, swept these cities clean. Meticulously documented by Narayani Gupta and Veena Oldenburg, amongst others, the changes set the stage for the nature and pace of the modernization that followed.<sup>33</sup> The old order was largely swept away, to be gradually replaced by interactions with the new power and mediated access to their culture.

Among the features of urban change in the Hindi belt worth thinking about are, first, the vastness of the destruction of property and lives after the uprising, this being something that none of the Presidency towns experienced; second, the new frame in which the population, particularly of the towns and cities, lived, as well as the hitherto unknown municipalities and law courts which now ruled their lives; third, access to higher education made possible by the colleges built at private expense in the cities, and the culture of informed critique

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has of course to do with the complete wiping out of large tracts of the city, of which I trace some segments above, but also with the amnesia that followed, which was surely part necessary, given the sheer scale, brutality, and horror of Britain's vengeance.

<sup>32</sup> See Dalmia 1997 for a discussion of these developments.

<sup>33</sup> See Gupta [1981] 2002; Oldenburg [1984] 2001.