NARRATING THE PAST

Vrindavanlal Verma's Idea of History

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the award of the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

AKASH BHATTACHARYA

CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

NEW DELHI – 110067

2013

Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi 110 067, India

Date: 27.07.13.

Declaration

I declare that the dissertation entitled,
NARRATING THE PAST: VRINDAVANLAL VERMA'S IDEA OF HISTORY
submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosphy from Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

(Name and Signature of Candidate)
[AKASH BHATTACHARYA]

Certificate

We recommend that the dissertation be place before the examiners for evaluation.

Chairperson

(Prof. Bhagwan Josh)

Chairperson
Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067, (India)

Supervisor

(Prof. M.S.S.Pandian)

Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067, (India)

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing the 'acknowledgements' is quite humbling an experience. It is time to realize how different things might have been without the presence of so many wonderful people around me for so long. I must start from where it all began – De Nobili School in Dhanbad. I thank all the teachers who helped me to develop as a student and as a person. I learnt a lot from Mrs. N. Vora, Mrs. Sharmila Ghosh and Mr. Shukhomoy Bhattacharya. Mrs. Sharmila Ghosh, my history teacher, deserves a special mention for all that she did for me.

I am grateful to all the teachers and the amazing peer-group who made St. Stephen's College a wonderful experience. Dr. Rohit Wanchoo's confidence in my abilities meant a lot in particular. I owe to St. Stephen's, above all, two of the most joyous years of my life so far. I was lucky to have a wonderful class during my M.A.; I learnt as much from them – Aviroop, Uponita, Baishakh, Parnisha, Om, Aakshi, Pavel, Aashique, Umar – as I did from the teachers. My seniors, Kaustabh Mani Sengupta, Anwesha Sengupta and Pratyay Nath helped me to settle down in JNU. They, along with Aviroop and Uponita, have been with me through all ups and downs in my four years here. Jeena has been a wonderful friend for a long time now. Gaurav, Preeti and Kanupriya have also given me moments to savor in JNU. I would like to thank Mrs. Shubhra Chakrabarti for looking after me during bouts of serious illness and for the many 'Bengali' dinners at her place! Dr. Vishalaskshi Menon, Mr. Anthony Thomas and Aveek and Pallavi Bhose have been generous relatives in the scorched environs of Delhi. .

It has been an honor to learn from the scholars at CHS. I thank professors M.S.S. Pandian, Janaki Nair, Tanika Sarkar, Neeladri Bhattacharya, Radhika Singha, Sangeeta

Dasgupta, Kunal Chakrabarti, Kumkum Roy and Rajat Datta for giving me the space to develop intellectually over the past four years. Prof. M.S.S. Pandian has been a wonderful supervisor. Life at CHS is incomplete without the resourceful, charming and helpful presence of Ashish-da at the photocopy shop. I am also grateful to the scholars at CSSS, Kolkata, for selecting my paper for the Cultural Studies Workshop 2013. The workshop was pivotal in giving the dissertation the shape it has taken. I especially thank professors Prachi Dehspande, P.K. Datta and Shibaji Bandopadhyay for incisive comments during the workshop. I also thank the commentators at the JNU-Cambridge Workshop 2012, and the Indian History Congress 2012.

The staff of Jhansi District Library, Jhansi Museum, and the family of Vrindavanlal Verma at Jhansi, Mr. Madhur Verma in particular, made a good field-trip possible. Cherri helped me to get in touch with him. In an earlier field-trip, professors Vinay Chandra Pandey and Sushil Srivastava at Allahabad University patiently heard me out and helped me to sharpen the yet-incoherent ideas. Abhishek's last minute lessons on literary theory have proved invaluable. In the way he read my chapters, he showed the seriousness of a supervisor! Sujit, Shreya, Ankan, along with Pratyay and Jeena have provided critical last-minute help in putting the dissertation in shape. I thank them all.

How to thank my parents? They have been the perfect regulatory authorities – striking an appropriate balance between surveillance and autonomy. My sister's immense faith in me is always an inspiration. I must end with the mention of my dear comrades, Arya, Anshita, Subhashini, Nayanjyoti, Parag and of course Amit. They, more than anyone else, have given my life shape and direction over the past few years. This dissertation, though having little to do

with our politics on the surface, is a part of the collective thinking on the meaning of life in modern times and ways to change it for the better.

1. Introduction: Predicaments of the Present

1.1. In Search of the 'Popular'

> In reality, *itihas* is all that is there to the life of a *jati* or a *desh*. A *jati* becomes lifeless if her history is destroyed. She spends her time enchained in slavery and unaware of her rights.[1]

Thus writes Vikas Vaibhav Singh in the introduction to a pamphlet on the history of the 'Khangars', a community which claims to have been the rulers at Kundar, (an area close to modern-day Jhansi) from 1192 to 1288.[2] They affirm that they had been defeated by the Bundelas in 1288 and increasingly relegated to a low caste position since then. They formed a

[1] Quoted lines obtained from an untitled pamphlet in circulation among the Khangar community at Orchha, Madhya Pradesh. I obtained it from a Khangar leader at Orchha, Bhan Singh Khangar, in December 2012.

[2] The Khangars are not a monolithic community. During an interview that I took on 18 Decmeber 2012, the Khangar leaders at Orchha claimed that the community has been in a splintered state since they were defeated by the Bundelas back in the thirteenth century. They said that many fled from Kundar and many deny their Khangar identity till today. History-writing is looked upon by them as an important way of reconstituting the community. The 'Khangar' identity therefore remains unstable even as we speak about it. For a recent example of histories written by Khangars of their own community see Ram Avatar Singh Khangar, *Bundelkhand mein Khangar Rajya,* Banda: Jagiya Devi Smarak Nyas, 2003.

caste association under the leadership of Babu Chetram in 1915/16 and over a period of time claimed a higher caste status on the basis of the historical memory of Kshatriya kingship.[3]

The story of the Khangars is similar to that of many caste groups which sought upward mobility within the framework of the colonial state.[4] Vikas Vaibhav Singh's pamphlet, however, does not belong to the early twentieth century. It was written in 2007. The author claims that his book is part of the project of re-establishing a high social status of the Khangars. He deems a written history, aspiring to be modern, scientific and objective, to be essential to this project.[5] I asked Bhan Singh Khangar, one of their community leaders at Orchha, 'Do the historians in the local history departments at Jhansi and Gwalior take interest in writing your history?' 'They don't,' he replied, and complained:

> These historians are only concerned about hero-worshiping Lakshmibai and we are still considered lowers castes and our history is ignored. They also claim that we cannot write correct histories. You will see that we have

[3] Information obtained from the pamphlet referred to in fn. 1. The information was also confirmed in personal communication with Bhan Singh Khangar at Orchha in December 2012.

[4] The Namasudras in Bengal is another example. See Shekhar Bandopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namashudras of Bengal, 1882-1947*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997, and Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001.

[5] By present academic standards, their histories would fall short of being objective and scientific. The Khangar histories represent one of the varied appropriations of the protocols of modern scientific history. See Khangar, *Bundelkhand mein Khangar Rajya.*

> referred to many written documents in our books. We do not write whatever comes to our mind.[6]

In voicing his displeasure, Bhan Singh Khangar was pointing to the hierarchy of knowledge that an institution like the history department tends to constitute. Yet, Vikas Vaibhav Singh accepts historians' standards in his pamphlet while allowing the historical memory of Khangar kingship to influence his approach. What may appear to be an appropriation of modern, scientific history reveals a different story. It reminds us that modern science and objectivity have led varied lives across different layers of society, and so has 'modern scientific history'.[7] What is often referred to within the academia as 'popular histories' are perhaps nothing but those diverse

---

[6] Interview of Bhan Singh Khangar and his family members, taken on 18 December, 2012, at Orchha.

[7] The word 'history' itself involves a play. It means both, the past itself and narratives of the past. I have used the term in both senses. When using it to refer to the past as a different time, I do not imply modern teleological time of Western statist histories. That is a specific understanding of time past and is referred to as 'History' (with a capital H) in this dissertation. As far as narratives are concerned, I have not called historical novels, plays and poetry with historical themes 'history'. The word refers to a specific discursive prose narrative that is adopted in modern scientific history writing. At the same time, my use of the word 'history' carries no methodological luggage. It refers to varied appropriations of the ideas of objectivity and facticity, as long as they are written as discursive prose. I use the term 'modern scientific history' or '(modern) scholarly works' to refer to works that would be considered a part of the historiographical cannon today. In Ranajot Guha's opinion, appropriation of the term *itihas* into the framework of Hegelian world-'history' marks an important step in the subordination of indigenous knowledge in the colony. I have not translated it as 'history' but left the word *itihas* intact in quotes. Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World History*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.

strands of history-writing that never found a place within the academia? The 'popular', in other words, signifies the 'other' of 'academic history'.

The popular life of history has been the object of attention of academic historians for over more than a decade. Partha Chatterjee, in the introduction to *History and the Present*, has taken a close look at the life of the 'popular'. He writes that the professionalization of history in India in the 1950s produced a hierarchy of knowledge. The modern scientific history that now enjoyed scholarly prestige established itself by breaking away from the 'old social history' that was now seen as too enmeshed in contentious sectarian, caste, linguistic, and other forms of cultural politics of the late colonial period; and hence would not qualify as proper material for the new scientific history. This 'old social history' however lived on outside the academy, sustaining itself by drawing upon popular memories and passions.[8] What we have here is a rather complicated picture of the worlds of history writing. Neither the 'academic' nor the 'popular' are monolithic categories; the questioning of this binary is necessary if professional historians have to understand what has caused the popular to attack the academic discipline repeatedly over the last two decades.[9]

---

[8] Partha Chaterjee and Anjan Ghosh ed., *History and the Present,* Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002, p.1-23.

[9] In India, politics of the Hindu Right has targeted the so-called 'secular' historians, accusing them of anti-Hindu bias. The element of faith involved in the campaign for the Ram temple at Ayodhya, over and above the historicity of the temple, has been an important source of such pressure. Dipesh Chakrabarty has highlighted a world-wide trend of privileging 'experiential' narratives of the past as opposed to 'objective' histories. He has argued that in the period of decolonization, the spread of anti-colonial rhetoric back into the former colonies gave rise to a broad consensus that some marginal and oppressed social groups owed their present situation to

My urge to engage with what I initially saw as 'popular' led me to the historical novel. Its history in India goes back to the colonial times when the historical novel had been a much celebrated literary form. Some of the most prominent nineteenth century intellectuals like Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) and Hari Narayan Apte (1864-1919) wrote historical novels.[10] Sudipta Kaviraj has pointed out that under the duress of colonialism, history itself was seen as 'a way of talking about the collective self, and bringing it into existence'[11] and the historical novel as a form, alongside poetry and play, was believed to be particularly apt for the purpose. As a form of writing the past, it existed in engagement with modern scholarly works on history that were developing within and outside the academia since late nineteenth century; though it differed significantly in its stylistic choices and approach to historical sources.

In the course of the colonial period, the boundaries of modern scientific history increasingly hardened. Yet throughout this time, well-known writers of poetry and prose intervened in the construction of the nation's history in their own right, and writers of modern,

---

discrimination and oppression suffered in the past. It has led to a 'politics of recognition' and a privileging of the 'experiential'. Such groups include Dalits in India, indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zeland and Canada. Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'History and the Politics of Recognition', in Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, Alan Munslow ed., *Manifestos for History,* London/New York: Routledge, 2007.

[10] *Chandragupt*, *Kalkoot*, *Ushakal*, are some of Apte's famous historical novels, while Bankim wrote *Anandamath*, *Rajsingha*, and others. Another contemporary of theirs, Romesh Chandra Dutt wrote *Maharashtra Jivan Parbat* and *Rajput Jivan Sandhya.*

[11] Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 108.

scientific history could also be writers of fiction.[12] The suitability of different literary forms – novel, poetry, play, for writing the past was thoroughly debated in the print world.[13] The question of factual correctness was central to the debates. Suspicions about the possible distortions of Indian history at the hands of medieval Muslim and modern British historians inspired a quest for authenticity even when authors adopted forms like the novel, poetry and play. At the same time, the need for a poetic evocation of the past to generate nationalist inspiration provided the impulse to go beyond a rigid adherence to facticity. The historian Jadunath Sarkar wrote in his preface to Bankimchnadra Chatterjee's *Anandamanth* that a successful work of art could contain *chirasatya* or the eternal truth which transcends the demands of the merely historical. He said that Bankim's historical novels, though factually

[12] Sudipta Kaviraj has argued that this was enabled by the way colonial intellectuals understood history. History meant much to them because it showed a world in the making, in its contingency, in its open probabilistic form. It showed not only how the social world became the way it was but also how close at times it was to being quite different. It was in this margin of historical possibility that fictional consciousness could thrive. *Ibid.*

[13] Like 'history', 'past', too becomes a debatable term. The 'past' refers to both, a time that is past as well as to the past as an idea. The Hindi literary scene that I survey was buzzing with the debate about what constituted the past in the first place. So the meaning of the word partially depends on the context in which it is used in the dissertation. When I invoke my authorial voice in using the word 'past' in the context of colonialism, it refers to a time before colonialism. As far as periodization is concerned, I do not stick to the ancient/medieval/modern framework. In line with the idea suggested by the 'History in the Vernacular' project, I see an early modern preceding the colonial modern. Partha Chatterjee and Raziuddin Aquil ed., *History in the Vernacular*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2008.

inaccurate at times, contained the eternal truth as they painted 'man's living picture'.[14] Rosinka Chaudhuri argues that for Sarkar, the great validity of Bankimchandra's project lay not merely in the realms of creativity (for creativity's sake), but also in the morally unimpeachable impulse towards patriotism and national integration that was behind Bankim's impulse in his historical novels.[15] Though the boundaries of modern scientific history hardened within the post-colonial academic set-up, the debate on formal choices for writing the past never disappeared from Indian public life. It remains pertinent to date.

The historical novel therefore becomes an important part of the history of writing the past in India. It is a field that still awaits the attention that it deserves. I locate my work on Vrindavanlal Verma (1889-1969), a prominent historical novelist in Hindi, within this field. I shall now go on to place my work in the historiography of Indian history, before introducing the reader to Vrindavanlal Verma, the protagonist of this dissertation.

1.2. A Historiographical Survey

1.2.1. History and the Historical Novel

My research on the historical novel is rooted in the self-reflexive turn in the discipline of history in India. This turn has to be located in twin impulses – the critique of history's truth

[14] Jadunath Sarkar, 'Historical Introduction', in Brajendranath Bandopadhyay and Sajanikanta Das *Anandamath*, Calcutta: Bangiya Shahitya Parishat, 1938.

[15] Rosinka Chaudhuri, 'History in Poetry: Nabinchandra Sen's Palashir Yuddha and the Question of Truth', in Chatterjee and Aquil ed., *History in the Vernacular,* 2008, p. 391-418.

claims as put forward by the 'critical turn' in the social sciences as well as the pressures exerted by cultural tensions in post-colonial India on the discipline. It is perhaps the later, especially the violence unleashed by the Hindutva forces in the name of history, that has added a sense of urgency to the historians' search for the 'popular'. Neeladri Bhattacharya, in his 'Predicaments of Secular Histories', has alerted us to the pitfalls of presuming that people cannot believe in the authority of professional historians and in 'hallowed traditions' at the same time and thereby undercut the power of the former.[16] Research on this area has taken many routes and I have selectively drawn upon different works based on India and other places, while locating my research on Vrindavanlal Verma generally within Partha Chatterjee's framework of what he calls 'history in the vernacular'.[17]

In South Asian history, memory has been employed to highlight popular visions of the past that subvert dominant, official commemorations. Shail Mayaram has looked at myths and oral narratives as resources employed by marginalized communities to write their pasts.[18] Prachi Deshpande's work on Maratha historical memory has looked at memory as a modern phenomenon itself, constructed through cultural practices.[19] These works are part of a vast

---

[16] Neeladri Bhattacharya, 'Predicaments of Secular History', *Public Culture* (henceforth *PC*) 20(1), 2008.

[17] Chatterjee and Aquil ed., *History in the Vernacular,* 2008.

[18] Mayaram has shown how Meo myths became sites of resistance to the colonial and medieval states ruling from Delhi. Shail Mayaram, *Against History, Against State: Counterperspectives from the Margins*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.

[19] Engaging with the social and cultural practices that produced visions of the past in colonial Maharashtra, Deshpande firmly locates the study of historical memory as a part of the study

corpus on memory and its relation to history based on locations in India and outside, which too have aided me in envisioning this project.[20] Another strand of research has looked into the life of modern teleological time in the colony. Ajay Skaria has studied the *goth*, a narrative prevalent among the Bhil and Konkani tribals in the Dang areas of Gujarat that articulates a very

---

of the colonial modern. Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700-1960*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007.

[20] The relationship between memory and history has been a matter of debate. One major school of thought, Pierre Nora being its most famous advocate, understands 'memory' in contrast with 'history' – the acceleration of 'history', understood as a more critical, rational and scientific understanding of the past, is supposed to have superseded more spontaneous connections with the past. 'Tradition, the silence of custom, receptions of the ancestral' are seen as the sites of memory. Memory signifies a continuity with the past, while 'history' distances the past, making it an object of study. Another school of thought deals with memory in its collective and more public sense. The model for this approach is that of Maurice Halbwachs who argued that collective memory evokes the presence of the past. As a living imagination, collective memory is continually reshaped by the social contexts into which it is received. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, drawing upon Halbwachs, put a heavy emphasis on the strategies of commemoration through which late-nineteenth century European statesmen had fabricated artificial traditions to bolster the prestige and authority of the nation-state. They analyzed the way myth and ritual had been used to create a public memory in which citizens were meant to believe. Invented traditions molded images of the past to suit present needs. The book by Hobsbawm and Ranger has inspired a host of like studies of the subject which underscored Hobsbawm and Ranger's point that collective memory is constructed and that the key to its influence is political power. In this dissertation I follow Prachi Deshpande in understanding memory; I see it as something constituted by discourses and practices of the present, including history. Patrick H. Hutton, 'Recent Scholarship on Memory and History', *The History Teacher*, Vol. 33, No. 4, Aug. 2000, Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire', *Representations*, 26, 1998, and Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

distinctive non-linear temporality and makes sense of colonialism within such a temporal frame.[21] Prathama Bannerjee has explored how the Bengali Bhadralok's claim to modernity and to history necessitated the denial of the same to the Santals.[22] Sumit Sarkar, in his essay 'The Many Worlds of Indian History', has drawn our attention to the intersections of linear and cyclical time in the colonial modern. Beyond India, Reinhart Koselleck's work has been singularly useful in understanding the relations between the past and the present.[23]

A varied ensemble of scholarly works on intellectual history of colonial India and the constitution of colonial and postcolonial subjectivities have also helped me to conceptualize my project. A few of them may be mentioned here. Thomas Metcalf, in *Ideologies of the Raj*, has shown how colonial knowledge about India sought to fashion metropolitan as well as colonial subjectivities.[24] Ranajit Guha, in *Dominance Without Hegemony*, explained the selective appropriation of European categories by the Indians and the subsequent denial of hegemonic status to European knowledge. Education was central to the formation of the colonial subject's sense of self.[25] Gauri Vishwanathan's *Masks of Conquest* talks about the ideological

---

[21] Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers, Wilderness in Western India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.

[22] Prathama Bannerji, *Politics of Time*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006.

[23] Koselleck, Reinhart, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Trans. Keith Tribe, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, and *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, Trans. Todd Samuel Pressner and others, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

[24] Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[25] Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

underpinnings of 'English' education in the colony, thereby throwing light upon the life of the discipline itself.[26] Nigel Crook's edited volume, *Transmission of Knowledge in Colonial South Asia,* sheds light on the process of change from traditional to modern education.[27] David Lelyveld's *Aligarh's First Generation*, is a study of a space of modern education as envisioned by colonial subjects: the Aligarh Muslim University. It tells us how institutional practices shaped the space and what intellectual ideas thrived in it.[28] Life-writings help us to understand the process of individuation in society. Edited volumes on life-writings by David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn, and by Vijaya Ramaswamy and Yogesh Sharma, provides rich ideas about modes of self-fashioning in the colony.[29] Moving away from Western normative models of individuation, the sets of essays explore the diverse ways in which subjects define and articulate their subjectivities.

Moving into the Hindi world(s) of the colonial and early postcolonial period, we encounter the works of Vasudha Dalmia and Francesca Orsini, which explore the elite as well as

---

[26] Gauri Vishwanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

[27] Nigel Crook ed., *The Transmission of Knowledge in Colonial South Asia: Essays on Education, Religion, History and Politics*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.

[28] David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978.

[29] Vijaya Ramaswamy and Yogesh Sharma ed., *Biography as History: Indian Perspectives,* Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009, and David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn ed., *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography and Life History.* Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.

subterranean cultures of the region.[30] Vasudha Dalmia has studied the nascent Hindi public sphere of the late nineteenth century, through the figure of Bhartendu Harishchandra – often valorized as a pioneering figure of modern Hindi literature.[31] Orsini has surveyed the Hindi print world in the 'age of nationalism', highlighting its diversities and over-arching tendencies.[32] Dr. Nagendra, Gopal Ray, and above all, Ram Vilas Sharma, provide the literary critic's view of modern Hindi literature and society.[33] These, along with others, comprise a set of works that has helped me to grasp the milieu that produced Vrindavanlal Verma.

I also locate my work in the stimulus provided by the late Subaltern Studies towards exploring the epistemological foundations of the ideas of history in the colonial modern. I see two strands in this project, one guided by Dipesh Chakrabarty and the other by Partha Chatterjee. In *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty summarizes the colonial and postcolonial discontents with European knowledge, including the modernist project of history, and persuasively argues

---

[30] When I speak of the Hindi literary world/sphere/scene in singular, it is all with the caveat that the region and the language were socially and culturally plural during my period of study (and even afterwards of course), and that speaking of them in singular in no way implies an agreement with the politics of erasing that plurality.

[31] Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhartendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

[32] Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-40: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002.

[33] I have referred to Nagendra, *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas,* Delhi: National Publishing House, 1973, Ramvilas Sharma, *Premchand aur Unka Yug*, New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2008, and *Bhartendu Yug aur Hindi Navjagaran ke Samsyanen,* New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1953, and Gopal Ray, *Hindi Upanyas ka Itihas*, New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2002.

that European thought is 'both indispensable and inadequate in helping us think through the various life practices that constitute the political and the historical in India.'[34] However, his emphasis on the indispensability of European thought has recently led him to conceive the project of unpacking the historiography of India from the vantage point of modern scientific history. Deeply suspicious of the challenges to the discipline of history by discourses 'seemingly privileging experiential access to the past',[35] Chakrabarty has gone on to tacitly celebrate the work of Jadunath Sarkar, whom he sees as the embodiment of the practice of 'universal history' and of the possibility of a privileged access to historical truth that the 'ascetic historian' might have.[36] Chakrabarty is clearly aware, however, of the pitfalls of Jadunath Sarkar's universal history. He writes:

> Closely tied with universal pretensions of states and empires, they had to go to make room for the pasts of those who had lived on the margins of history. Besides, an idea of historical truth that was accessible only to those who could practice a degree of asceticism with regard to their own partisan passions of the present – an intellectual aristocracy in Weber's terms – was clearly too elitist and exclusive if history, as a discipline, was going to be central to identity-formations and to the formulations of popular demands for various

[34] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001.

[35] Chakrabarty, 'History and the Politics of Recognition', in *Manifestos for History,* 2007.

[36] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Empire, Ethics and the Calling of History: Knowledge in the Postcolony', in Sebastian Jobs, Alf Lutdke ed., *Unsettling History: Archiving and Narrating in Historiography*, Frankfurt/ New York: Campus Verlag, 2010.

> kinds of rights and autonomy in a post-imperial that came into being in the nineteen-fiftieth.[37]

In the passing of the 'age of universal histories', Chakrabarty identifies a loss and laments the present instability of the terrain of 'objective' history under political pressures, Hindutva politics being as example. In my opinion, if the historian has to deal with these pressures, first and foremost s/he has to see this instability as reflective of diversities, not decline, of objective history. Vrindavanlal Verma was no academic historian, yet his use of sources in historical novels represents a specific engagement with objective history, a specific 'popular' appropriation of the protocols of objective history in as much as he claimed the historical novel as a way of writing the past.

I find, as mentioned earlier, Partha Chatterjee's views on 'history in the vernacular' a productive framework for engaging with the popular. He defines the 'vernacular' as the space where disciplinary practices of modern historiography and pre-modern discursive formations intermingled to form hybrids. Understood as a broad field not limited to any specific language, the vernacular becomes a terrain where modern scientific history could be critiqued from different subject positions but also selectively appropriated. Calling for the inclusion of genres like the historical novel within this category of vernacular histories, Chatterjee writes:

> Vernacular histories exist in their difference from the authorized forms of modern [colonial and postcolonial] academic history. The generic form of academic history in South Asia is that of discursive prose written, for the most part though not exclusively, in the English language. Vernacular histories may, as we have seen, mark their difference from academic history even when they adopt the discursive prose form of the essay or monograph. But

[37] *Ibid*, p.79.

> vernacular histories frequently use other literary genres, such as the novel, drama, autobiography, and even poetry.[38]

The importance of diverse literary genres in writing the past has been emphasized by Sudipta Kaviraj in his work on Bankimchandra Chatterjee. He has pointed out that different forms of writing the past enabled the self-fashioning of colonial subjects in different ways — the historical novel, by blurring the boundary between fact and fiction, could show that while British political conquest of India was a fact, the British empire's claim to cultural hegemony on the basis of 'History' was a fiction.[39]

1.2.2. The Historical Novel and History

The historical novel has led a perilous existence as an art form across cultures. The influential English critic F.R. Leavis aligned the historical novel with the opposite of 'serious' art and left it out of the English literary cannon.[40] The division between 'serious' and 'non-serious' art crept into the genre of the historical novel over-time. Avrom Fleishman, writing in 1971, ignored 'popular' historical novels as mere escapism and refused to admit them into the literary cannon.[41] In Russia, the genre was attacked at the height of its popularity in 1833 by the prominent journalist Osip Senkovsky:

---

[38] Chatterjee and Aquil ed., *History in the Vernacular,* 2008, p.19.

[39] Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, 1995, c.4.

[40] F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, London: Penguin, 1948.

[41] Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: From Sir Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf,* Baltimore/London: John Hopkins Press, 1971. The reference to both Leavis and Fleishman is

> I don't like historical novels. I prefer morals. It offends me to take a bastard in my hands: the historical novel is, in my opinion, a bastard son without family or tribe, the fruit of history's flagrant adultery with imagination. I insist on purity of morals and would rather deal with the legitimate children of either history or imagination. The historical novel...is a false form of art. Yes! It is a false form of art![42]

Anxiety about unbridled fantasy entering the genre in the name of history and destabilizing it, has been expressed by historical novelists themselves. Leon Feuchtwanger, an influential historical novelist of his times, wrote in his 1935 essay, 'On the Sense and Nonsense of the Historical Novel': 'The label "historical novel' itself conjures for us depressing associations. We immediately picture to ourselves adventures, intrigues, costumes, gaudy, garish colors, bombastic chatter, a jumble of politics and love.'[43]

Feminist critics like Diana Wallace have pointed out that historical novels written by women have been marginalized within the genre. Women's historical novels in particular have been associated with romance and stigmatized as escapist. She has voiced the need to reassess both the assumption that historical novels are necessarily escapist because they are set in the past, and that escapism is per se a 'bad thing'. She has celebrated women's historical novels as

---

partially based on the discussion of the historical novel as a genre in Diana Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000*, Hampshire/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

[42] Quoted in Dan Ungurianu, *Plotting History: The Russian Historical Novel in the Imperial Age*, London/Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007, p.3.

[43] *Ibid.*

imaginative reconstructions of maternal genealogies that have been suppressed in Western culture.[44]

The defining features of the genre have been a matter of debate. Georg Lukacs, in his seminal work *The Historical Novel*, has treated Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814) as the first 'classical' historical novel. He has argued for the centrality of the historical novel in the development of the realist novel. What is lacking in the 'so-called historical novel' before Scott, Lukacs argues, is 'precisely the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of the characters from the historical peculiarity of the age'.[45] The French Revolution, the revolutionary wars, and the rise and fall of Napoleon created a new historical consciousness on a mass scale as history itself became a 'mass experience'. Out of this milieu emerged the classical historical novel in which, the location of the individual in specific time and place and an understanding of history as a pre-history of the present, were central. Lukacs also drew attention to the involvement of politics and ideology in formal and compositional choices.

The nature of the relationship between the past and the present in the historical novel has been a subject of disagreement among critics. The proportion of historical facts and imagination, and the reason behind a turn to the past have been put forward as important questions to the genre. I shall summarize a few positions on these issues here.

---

[44] Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel*, 2005.

[45]Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel*, Trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983, c.1, quoted text on p.19.

Avrom Fleishman has pointed out three key-elements in his definition of the historical novel: that the novel is set in the past 'beyond an arbitrary number of years, say 40-60 (two generations)'; that the plot includes 'a number of "historical" events, particularly those in the public sphere (war, politics, economic change, etc.) mingled with and affecting the personal fortunes of the characters'; and that it includes at least one 'real' personage.[46] If one has to write the history of the genre in the colony, the number of years suggested by Fleishman would act as a constraint – the first generation of English-educated Indians experienced a massive social and cultural change within a space of one generation itself; within the space of one generation, aspects of their society and culture had gained a past-ness of being. More useful is Diana Wallace's assumption that a novel is 'historical' if it deals with a period set before the birth of the author, that is, a period she has not experienced herself but must reconstruct through (usually textual) evidence.

Feminist critics have argued against privileging the public sphere over the private.[47] Women's relationship with 'real solemn history' – that catalogue of kings and popes and battles lost and won – has been ambivalent. Modern scientific history has often marginalized the female voice due to, among other things, a focus on public events. Bonnie G. Smith has suggested that it is precisely the difficulty of creating a space for women within such conventional histories which has led some women writers to write historical novels instead of history.[48] The inclusion of one

[46] Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel*, 1971.

[47] Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel*, 2005 and Bonnie G. Smith, 'The Contribution of Women to Historiography in Great Britain, France and U.S.', *American Historical Review* (henceforth *AHR*), 89.

[48] Smith, 'The Contribution of Women to Historiography', AHR, 89.

'real' personage is also problematic: the presence of the past in a novel as entirely a site of fantasy, devoid of any 'real' person or event, may reflect a veiled critique of the present in which women could not fulfill their desires. All the issues raised by Feminist critics are highly relevant for the colonial historical novel. If European women were marginalized in the grand-narrative of progress, so were the 'natives'. The desire to discursively project an 'inner' private realm as free from colonial domination was prevalent among Indian nationalists.[49] So we can neither take the idea of progress or the presence of 'real' personages as defining features of historical novels in the colonial context.

Like Diana Wallace, I find Umberto Eco's broader definition of the historical novel useful. He argues that there are three ways of 'narrating the past': the romance where the past is 'scenery, pretext, fairy-tale construction, to allow the imagination to rove freely'; the swashbuckling novel which 'chooses a "real" and recognizable past' and peoples it with both 'characters already found in the encyclopedia' and invented characters; and finally, the historical novel which uses made-up events and characters, yet tells us things about a period which history books do not.[50] All three possible types pointed out by Eco had different implications in colonial India. The romance often fulfilled the aesthetic desires of the nineteenth century colonial literati. Naro Sadashiv Risbud emphasized this in the introduction to his Marathi novel *Manjughòsha* (1868):

---

[49] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986.

[50] Umberto Eco, *Postscript to the Name of the Rose*, Trans. William Leaver, San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984.

> Because of our attitude to marriage, and for several other reasons, one finds in the lives of us Hindus neither interesting vices nor virtues, and this is the difficulty which we find in trying to write novels. If we write about the things we experience daily, there would be nothing enthralling about them, so that if we set out to write an interesting book we are forced to take up with the marvelous.[51]

Eco's 'swashbuckling novel' would include the 'realist' tendency in historical novels which became important in Hindi literature with the realist turn the 1920s.[52] The third type implied an artistic invocation of the past without a rigid adherence to facticity – an artistic act that became central to nationalist politics.

If we turn to Hindi literary criticism, we find that early critics like Ramchandra Shukla were rather dismissive of the 'popular' novels of the period before Munshi Premchand.[53] Colonial intellectuals were plagued by the concern of the distortion of Indian history at the hands of the British, and of medieval Muslim historians; many of them considered adherence to facts as important. Practitioners of the genre like Rahul Sanksrtyayan (1893-1963) and Hazari Prasad Dwivedi (1907-1979) considered the realist historical novel as the pure form of the historical

---

[51] Quoted in Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985, p.7.

[52] Rahul Sankrtyayan defined realism in the historical novel in terms of the historical grounding of the characters and elimination of anachronisms. Rahul Sankrtyayan, 'Aitihasik Upanyas', in Madhuresh ed. *Banbhatta ki Atmakatha: Path aur Punarpath*, Panchkula: Aadhar Prakashan, 2007.

[53] Ramchandra Shukla, *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas,* Varanasi: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1986.

novel.[54] Over the past forty years however the boundaries of the genre has been loosened. Despite a discomfort with the historical romance and a tendency to celebrate the realist historical novel, the romance is not left out of the genre altogether. Though criticized for their 'prejudiced' take on Indian history, Kishorilal Goswami's historical romances have been given the status of early historical novels by Dr. Nagendra as well as Gopal Ray.[55] Jagadish Gupta has outlined a varied set of reasons as to why a novelist may turn to history: (a) to escape from a defeat inflicted in the present, (b) to re-capture the past because it is better than the present, (c) to appropriate material from the past to make the present more powerful, (d) to do justice to certain historical characters, (e) to be submerged in *itihas-rasa*, (f) to create a patriotic ideal, and (g) to present a new explanation of life. He has argued that each of these could lead to different kinds of historical novels.[56]

Satyapal Chugh has come up with four typologies of the historical novel depending on the balance of fact and imagination:

(a) Novelistic history (history written in novel form): It is a history oriented novel where all important characters are historical and there is maximum emphasis on historical research.

---

[54] Rahul Sankrtyayan, 'Aitihasik Upanyas' in Madhuresh ed., Banbhatta ki Atmakatha, 2007, and Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, 'Aitihasik Upanyas Kya Hai?' in Govindji ed., *Aitihasik Upanyas: Prakriti evam Swaroop*, Sahityavani: Allahabad, 1970.

[55] Nagendra, *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas*, 1973, and Ray, *Hindi Upanyas ka Itihas*, 2002.

[56] Jagadish Gupta, 'Itihas aur Aitihasik Upanyaskar', in Madhuresh ed., Banbhatta ki Atmakatha, 2007.

(b) Mixed historical novel: This contains fact and imagination in almost equal proportion. Some characters are historical while others are imagined. Their success depends on how well history and imagination are integrated.

(c) Imagination based historical novel: Only a few characters, or may be none, are historical here and there is a very thin use of historical facts.

(d) *Itihasbhashi* (history as background) historical novel: Here history is merely the backdrop and the plot and the character are imagined.[57]

The existing critical literature on the historical novel has helped me to arrive at the assumption that forms the basis of this work: that the historical novel can be considered as a specific genre despite its uncertain boundaries. As mentioned earlier, I find Umberto Eco's classification of ways of writing the past useful, and take the three typologies that he presents as three forms of the historical novel. The historical novel as a form is central to Vrindavanlal Verma's idea of history. I explore how he used his formal choice to produce a relationship between the past and the present – a relationship that was next to absent in the present in his opinion.

1.3. LOCATING VRINDAVANLAL VERMA

1.3.1. Vermaji: A Biographical Sketch[58]

[57] Satyapal Chugh, *Hindi Aitihasik Upanyas: Pratiman evam Vikasetihas*, Delhi: Konark Prakashan, 1978, p.35-37.

Vrindavanlal Verma was born in a Kayastha family of Mauranipur near Jhansi in 1889. He was the great grandson of a former *jagirdar* of the Jhansi state who had died during the revolt of 1857. His father was a registrar *qanungo* earning thirty rupees a month. The family was more or less affluent and well clear of poverty. After starting his education at a village *pathshala*, he became the first in his family to go into modern education. The entry into modern education had important consequences. It deprived him of the Persian learning that Kayastha families were known for. Instead of Persian or Urdu, he learnt Hindi while in school. On the whole the school (McDonnell High School, Jhansi), college (Victoria College, Gwalior) and university (Agra University) exposed him to the world of European learning and he took a keen interest in English literature, history, anthropology, psychology, and law, among other subjects. He seems to have happily taken to the disciplinary regime in these institutions as well.

In his childhood, his grandmothers told him tales about the bravery of Lakshmibai and his great-grandfather's valiant death at the hands of the British during the revolt of 1857. Bundelkhand was replete with legends of Rajput valor and their fight against the (Muslim) rulers of Delhi. The thrilling legends that he heard would have created a sense of sharp contrast, for all around him there were signs of decline of Rajput families. Their political sovereignty was of course long gone. In the midst of signs of a 'glorious' Rajput past, stood the young Vrindavanlal, a Kayastha with *jagirdari* ancestry. It was a social location right next to that of the Rajput families in decadence but not quite the same as theirs. That perhaps enabled a critical distance

[58] This section is based on Vrindavanlal Verma, *Apni Kahani*, Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2001, Rajeev Saxena, *Vrindavanlal Verma*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982, and a discussion with grandsons of Vrinvdavanlal Verma, Mr. Ramakant Verma and Mr. Lakshmikant Verma at Jhansi in December, 2012.

with the 'glorious' bygone age, a distance that is considered to be a hallmark of the historians' craft.

Verma's childhood and adolescence were not atypical of other Hindi intellectuals of his generation.[59] They often began their education in the traditional mode and later became the first in their families to acquire European knowledge in colleges and universities. Financially stretched, they often dropped out of the university without completing the degree, as the author/critic Hazari Prasad Dwivedi did. Yet the space of the university, with its library and a vibrant intellectual community, exercised a significant influence on their lives. It also made them sharply aware of the marginalization of traditional knowledge systems in the colonial modern. Though he too faced financial difficulties, Verma did not have to drop out of his law degree in Agra and was admitted to the bar in 1916.

Gwalior and Agra exposed him to diverse intellectual tendencies of the times. He had inherited Vaishnavism from his family, which he was temporarily ready to discard under the influence of Arya Samaj. He toyed with the idea of atheism too. His appetite for books took him to frontiers of knowledge beyond the pale of the educational institutions. He familiarized himself with Occultism and Theosophy. Above all, it was at Agra that he became a part of literary circles that were at the forefront of consolidation of modern Hindi literature.

Verma's dialogue with Hindi had begun in his childhood. Bundeli, that later came to be known as a dialect of Hindi, was the popular language in the region of Jhansi. It is not clear though whether Bundeli was spoken at his home. His family belonged to the socio-cultural strata

[59] See Orsini, the Hindi Public Sphere, 2002, Appendix, p.384-452.

that took to the emerging elite Hindi literary culture in the late nineteenth century. His home had a copy of Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* – the child of the lithograph.[60] His uncle, Biharilal, was a connoisseur of Hindi literature and introduced Verma to the plays of Bhartendu Harishchandra. Biharilal was a playwright himself and Verma, during schooldays, completed a play *Ram Vanvas*, left unfinished by him at the time of his death. Yet both Biharilal and his nephew were fond of the theatre that lay outside the pale of the gradually emergent elitist Hindi literary culture; a culture that was later to define what Alok Rai terms 'Hindi' as opposed to Hindi.[61]

Agra opened up a new world of Hindi literature and journalism to him. He got to know young writers and journalists many of whom were to acquire fame later: the editor and writer Badrinath Bhatt (1891-1934), the versatile writer Mannan Dwivedi (1885-1921), activist-journalists like Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi (1890-1931), Banarasidas Chaturvedi (1892-1981) and Krishnadutt Paliwal (1895-1968). Verma had already met Maithilisharan Gupta (1886-1964), a prominent poet of the Dwivedi circle, while at Jhansi.[62] He became a journalist with *Pratap,* one

[60] The lithographic press was vital in the circulation of Hindi print in the nineteenth century and *Ramcharitmanas* was one of the texts that were circulated most widely. Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India,* Ranikhet: Permanent Black, p.10-20.

[61] Alok Rai opines that while Hindi was the language of the common people of the United Provinces, it was a Sanskritized version of the language, detached from the popular tongue that staked its claim to be the national language in the 1920s. He calls the Sanskritized version 'Hindi'. Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2000.

[62] Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (1864-1938) was at the forefront of the standardization of Khari Boli as modern Sanskritized Hindi. The literary figures that he gathered around him, like Maithilisharan Gupta, Nathuram Sharma 'Shankar', Ramnaresh Tripathi, and many others, constituted the 'Dwivedi circle'. Ganesh Shankar vidyarthi, the editor of *Pratap* had started

of the premier political journals of the time, and befriended its Gandhian editor Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi. *Pratap's* nationalism included a focus on the question of peasants and laborers and also articulated a powerful critique of British rule instead of celebrating colonialism as the harbinger of liberation from Muslim rule. In 1913-14, Vrindavanlal Verma, along with Badrinath Bhatt and Mannan Dwivedi, wrote a series of satirical pieces on contemporary society under the title *Golmalkarini Sabha* (Troublemakers' Association') in *Pratap*. They were written under the respective pen-names Golmalanand, Garbaranand and Gitpitanand.

Verma had had an appetite for writing since his younger days; one that was definitely vetted during his time in Agra. He had written a few unpublished plays before he turned twenty. In 1908, he came up with a play titled *Senapati Udal* (Commander Udal) in which he implicitly sympathized with the revolutionary terrorists. It was published by Naval Kishore Press of Lucknow, but was banned by the government. In the same year, he wrote *Mahatma Buddha ki Jeevan Charit* (Jeevan Charit of Mahatma Buddha) in which he critically appreciated Buddha as a great figure with immense knowledge and a sincere wish to serve humanity. Yet he voiced his discontent with what he saw as Buddha's pessimism towards life. He published a few plays in *Saraswati* soon after and contributed to *Pratap* while at Kanpur. His literary career would, however, have to wait for several years before it could take-off.

After being admitted to the bar in August 1916 he spent a few years trying to find his feet in the profession at Jhansi. In those years, he was drawn towards liberal politics and established a close friendship with C.Y. Chintamani, editor of the daily *Leader*. These were years of Verma's

---

his career in journalism as assistant to Dwivedi. Nagendra, *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas*, 1973, p.485-527,

political activism. He campaigned for Chintamani in the Legislative Council election of 1923 in Jhansi and became active in the Credit Cooperative Movement in Jhansi in the late 1920s.[63] He contested for and won the post of Chairman of Jhansi Municipality in 1936. In the course of this period, he increasingly grew disillusioned with Gandhian politics. Strangely though, despite throwing his lot with the Liberals, he appears to have retained a fascination and distant faith in the revolutionary terrorists! His political career came to an end with defeat in the Lok Sabha election in 1952, though he remained active in the movement for the propagation of Hindi as the national language.

Verma's literary career had made halting beginnings in the 1920s. He wrote his first historical novels *Garh Kundar* in 1927, following it up by a series of social novels and plays. In those days he was tied down to his legal profession due to a heavy burden of debt that he had incurred through investment on a farm in Shyamsi village near Jhansi. It is roughly after 1945 that he became a prolific novelist, with most of his historical novels written between 1946 (*Jhansi ki Rani*) and 1960 (*Maharani Durgavati*). He continued writing till the very end, and his autobiography, *Apni Kahani*, was written in 1969, the year of his death.[64] He was awarded the

[63] The genesis of the cooperatives lay in the problem of indebtedness of agriculturists to moneylenders in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the absence of any institutional mechanism to provide agricultural finance. In 1899, the Nicholson Committee advised the setting up of cooperatives on the model of Germany's Raiffeisen Cooperatives, and recommended state support for cooperatives. Gandhiji upheld the plan when it was mooted again in the 1920s. The Royal Commission on Agriculture (1928) provided a renewed thrust to the project. Biswa Swarup Misra, *Credit Cooperatives in India: Past, Present and Future*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

[64] The date of writing and publication of all novels is based on the list in the appendix to Saxena, *Vrindavanlal Verma*, 1982.

Padmabhushan in 1965 but rejected it citing the government's 'betrayal' of Hindi's cause as the sole national language as the reason.

1.3.2. Reading Vrindavanlal Verma

Vrindavanlal Verma lived and worked through tumultuous times and had his say in the making of history. As a Hindi intellectual, he was part of the vast array of figures that made the question of Hindi central to post-colonial India's political and cultural life. His life witnessed Hindi, refigured as 'Hindi', stake a powerful claim to be the sole national language of independent India, and finally succumb to a stunning and bitter defeat by 1967. His being as an 'author' has to be seen in the context of this politics of cultural nationalism. Francesca Orsini argues that in the period of mass nationalism after 1920, Hindi writers saw themselves as serving the national movement by wielding the pen. Literature, journalism and politics were seen as a continuum – a joint effort to liberate the country.[65] Championed largely by upper-caste Hindu men, it was a nationalism that often went hand in hand with the belief that Hindi was the national language, *rashtrabhasha*, making the role of Hindi authors ever more important in their own eyes. Despite emphasis on communal unity, the nationalism often had an underlying Hindu idiom; the Hindu somehow became more natural subjects of the nation than Muslims. Geetanjali Pandey has pointed out that even Premchand, the icon of Hindi progressive literature, was not completely devoid of this tendency.[66]

---

[65] Orsini, The Hindi Public Sphere, 2002, c.1,2,5.

[66] Geetanjali Pandey, 'North Indian Intelligentsia and Hindu-Muslim Question: A Study of Premchand's Writings', *Economic and Political Weekly* (henceforth *EPW*), 19 (38).

Vrindavanlal Verma, as a product of this age, has to be read as an upper-caste Hindu male Hindi intellectual; one for whom authorship was a means to serve society. Yet the above epithet, rather than being presumed, must be seen in its gradual development over time. Verma's upper caste/class-ness was shot through by a powerful concern for the peasantry and the lower castes, which produced seemingly radical moments in his novels, only for them to disappear rather soon. His idea of nation was animated by a concern for the region; his championing of Hindi by an appreciation for its dialects. He produced Bundelkhand as a region in his historical novels and upheld Bundeli as a local variant of Hindi.

Verma's interest in history appears to fit into the colonial Hindi intellectuals' search for a 'national' past. It is difficult to determine in what way his interest in history impacted his views on Hindi literature. In his autobiography, he claims that his turn to historical novels was inspired as much by his fascination for Bundelkhand's past as by his desire to be a Hindi writer. One cannot essentialize his Hindi self; Verma needs to be read as a *Hindi* author in as much as that was what he became and not what he was meant to be.

As an intellectual with an over-riding concern for history and an appetite for experimentation with forms, he occupied a specific subject position. In his time, he was one of the few authors in elite Hindi literary circles to identify himself as an author of historical novels above anything else.[67] He was in some ways, then, a unique Hindi intellectual. Yet in his choice of historical novels as a way of writing the past, he was one among many in colonial India. He

[67] Other practitioners of the genre during Verma's time include Hazari Prasad Dwivedi (1907-1979), Rahul Sankrtyayan (1893-1963), Yashpal (1903-1976), and Rangeya Raghav (1923-1962).

had luminous predecessors in Hari Narayan Apte (1864-1919) in Marathi, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) and Romesh Chandra Dutt (1848-1909) in Bengali, and outstanding contemporaries in Kanhaiyalal Maneklal Munshi (1887-1971) in Gujarati/Hindi and Sharadindu Bandopadhyay (1899-1970) in Bengali. Like Sharadindu Bandopadhyay, Verma offer us insights into the life of writings on the past outside the four walls of the post-colonial academia. His autobiography, in which he identifies himself as first and foremost a historical novelist, was written deep into the post-colonial period (1969).

Vrindavanlal Verma is a figure through whom we can explore the life of Hindi as well the life of history. My primary interest is in history but I look at the point where the two intersected in his life, for Hindi and history were intricately inter-woven in his work and in the milieu that produced and sustained him. *Vrindavanlal Verma's Idea of History* is a study of an author who chose the historical novel as the form through which he could engage with the past. In as much as the author was steeped in the politics of Hindi cultural nationalism of his times, it is a study of a Hindi author's idea of history. I look at his historical novels, followed by his autobiography, to explore how he engages with the past. These works do not fully exhaust Verma's *ouvre*. He also wrote plays, social novels and short-stories. The decision to exclude these forms has been taken in a mood of experimentation. Verma's autobiography was the first book by him that I read. I decided to provisionally accept his claim that he was above all a historical novelist, and see whether we can trace a coherent understanding of history in that claim.

The first chapter provides a glimpse of the literary milieu that Vrindavanlal Verma entered into a dialogue with. The literary scene from 1910 to 1930 was enkindled by a sensibility

of 'the past'. The idea of Hindi literature in the age of nationalism was itself a dialogue between the past and the present. The time of the present, and therefore of the past, were matters of debate which I explore through Maithilisharan Gupta's poem *Bharat Bharati* (1911). I then take up poetry, novel and biography, to see how the past was produced across different genres. The chapter ends with a look at the scholarly historical works in Hindi during this period, with a focus on the subject of history-writing and the emergence of nationalist historiographical cannon. Through this survey I point out that certain tendencies that emerged in Hindi literature between 1910 and 1930 which enabled Vrindavanlal Verma's project: (a) a sense of the present as a new time, (b) the idea of history as useful knowledge, (c) inter-linage between social concerns and aesthetics in literature (d) concrete historical location of characters and assertion of their individuality in literature, (e) flurry of scholarly works on Indian history and the emergence of conventions of source-criticism, and (f) the idea of the author as an activist and a public intellectual. These were of course mere tendencies and did not define the milieu in a comprehensive way.

The second chapter discusses the idea of history advanced, through dialogue with the milieu discussed in the first chapter, in the historical novels of Vrindavanlal Verma. History, for Verma, was the romantic story of the people's (of the nation) survival in the period of 'fall' from the ancient 'golden' period. He was concerned with the period of the fall and the ancient period, though 'golden', was a past that lay beyond the reach of the present. In the period of fall, survival involved fighting against the external enemy to protect the sovereignty of the nation-space and struggle against internal inadequacies in order to practice an ethical life. The idea was developed in close engagement with the nationalist historiographical cannon and involved a will to factual correctness in the novels. Despite the will to factual accuracy, Verma did not emplot

the novels within the bounds of the historically real, but within the limits of the historically possible – a freedom that the form of the novel enabled. However, the limits of the historically possible were determined by the idea of struggle mentioned above. That idea comes to function as a metahistorical fact, subsuming all empirical facts within it and producing the historically possible as the historically real. It is the metahistorical fact that constitutes, for him, the idea of history in the novels and marks a specific resolution of the contemporary debates on Indian history for him.

The third chapter looks at Vrindavanlal Verma's autobiography, *Apni Kahani*. The autobiography produces the present, on either side of 1947, as part of the metahistorical process of struggle. The text negotiates between different identities of the protagonist and ascribes primacy to his identity as an author of Hindi historical novels. The ethical self of the protagonist reaches completion upon his birth as this specific author-subject. Such an author has to perform three functions in the present: (a) negotiate heterotopias, (b) re-produce the past as affective knowledge which would push people towards an ethical life in the present, (c) bridge the gap between the past and the present. The task of the author is essentially to strive towards the completion of ethical life of society in the present. He can do so by brining the present closer to the past, which lies beyond the present. The present can then selectively appropriate certain aspects of the life in the past. The desire for completion of the project implies a striving for a time when the past and the present would have the perfect interface. That in turn implies a time when the author would cease to have the specific function that the protagonist performs as an author in the present. The future therefore becomes a time when the author-subject (of historical novels) would be happily dead, while the present is a time when he is central to ethical life in

society. The dissertation concludes with a summary of Verma's idea of history and a discussion on how professional historians may read Vrindavanlal Verma today.

2. Literature and History: 1910-1930[1]

> In it [Khari Boli] are footprints of the present, warnings from the past, hope of the future, a compendium of new creation for a new age. In it there are new suggestions, new sensations, new dreams, new laughter, new tears, new delights – in it are the new cuckoos for a new spring.[2]

Writing in 1926, poet Sumitranandan Pant (1900-1977) affirmed that Braj Bhasha, despite its poetic qualities, had become 'out of date'. In the opinion of many Hindi intellectuals of his times, Khari Boli had to take its place if Hindi had to develop a style and sensibility that would render it suitable to be the *rashtrabhasha*. Hindi had to incorporate the concerns of a new age since the progress of one's language was often considered the root of all progress. The idea of progress was central to the debates on Hindi language and literature since the late nineteenth century. The 'progress' of Hindi to a modern national language involved a dialogue between the past and the present.

The subject of the discourse of progress was the *rashtra*, which stood for 'nation' in a political sense, and *jati*, which indicated a common cultural identity. Talking about the past was a way of bringing these two entities into existence in the first place. By the turn of the century, Hindi had positioned itself sharply against Urdu, and the 'we' of the *rashtra* and the *jati* had become largely Hindu. Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi's literary journal *Saraswati*, launched in 1903, was at the forefront of the standardization of Khari Boli Hindi by eliminating 'foreign' Urdu

---

[1] I have relied a lot on Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 2002, for background information in this chapter.

[2] Quoted in Rai, *Hindi Nationalism*, 2000, p.110.

words and replacing them with Sanskrit ones. He called Khari Boli Hindi the 'mother-tongue' of the Hindus and took upon the project of converting Urdu-literate Hindus to it and inspiring English-literate Hindus to help improve their own tongue, the *nij bhasha*. The 'mother' metaphor helped identification between mother tongue and motherland. Dwivedi argued that Hindi was the real language of the province and that it was one language despite many regional variants. Hindi's claim to recognition as such was put forward as a historical necessity; Urdu's position as the court language was the result of a political privilege that had ceased to exist. Dwivedi's view on Hindi produced a literary history summarized by Christopher King in the following words:

> Hindi has existed as long ago as the reign of Raja Bhoja (XI century), but since no works had come from that time to the present, the *Prithviraj Raso* (XII Century) served to mark the origin of Hindi...the Muslim invasion of India, which came just about the time of the creation of this work, prevented further progress of Hindi. Muslims, seeing that they could not settle in India unless they knew Hindi, and realizing that Sanskrit-mixed Hindi presented difficulties, created Persian-mixed Urdu. Though Hindi poetry flourished even after the beginning of Muslim rule and the rise of Urdu, and was sometimes patronized even by Muslim rulers, Hindi prose language languished because it was considered to be of little significance. Sanskrit continued to be the most important language of prose. A few books on subjects such as religion, medicine, astrology and the like appeared during this period, but their language was either Braj Bhasha or such a bad Hindi that they could not even be consider literature. Prose received greater attention with the coming of English, however, and Lallu Lal created some of the first works in Hindi prose (such as Prem Sagar) under Dr. Gilchrist.[3]

[3] Quoted in Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 2002, p.131.

This literary history of Hindi got interwoven with history of the *rashtra* itself. Orientalist scholarship helped create an image of ancient India as the 'golden' period of the Aryan idyll, when the Hindus enjoyed political sovereignty, social harmony and cultural refinement.[4] The idea of the Aryan idyll, combined with the historical fact of Islamic invasions, provoked a set of questions that were significant for colonial Hindi intellectuals: (a) Why and when did decadence set in after the 'golden' age?; (b) Was decadence the result of Muslim invasion or of inner weaknesses that had set in the Hindu society from before?; (c) What happened after the loss of political sovereignty to the Muslims?; (d) Was political defeat absolute?; (e) Did the Hindu society continue its practices in the social and cultural spheres?; (f) Did the Muslim conquest mark a break in Indian history or did British colonialism do?; and (g) Was the present a continuation of the 'dark' period of colonialism that started with the advent of the Turks? Or was it a new period of freedom, marked by liberation from Muslim rule? Or did the present mark the height of decline, with a loss even of positive features of society that existed in the medieval period? By the 1920s, as the claim of Hindi as *rashtrabhasha* acquired a definite political charge, these questions featured prominently in literature.

In this chapter, I go through some aspects of the literary scene during the years 1910-1930 in order to provide flashes of the discourse of history in literature and scholarly historical works.[5] I look at the poem *Bharat Bharati* to explore the complex dialogue between linear,

[4] Ibid, p.181-192.

[5] As we shall see later in the chapter, history was often considered as good literature in the Hindi world at this time. I have treated literature and history separately so as to make the analytical distinction between history on one hand and narration of the past in plays, novels and poetry on the other.

cyclical and paradigmatic notions of time, which took place due to an urge to determine the quality of the past and of the present. I then discuss the way the past was evoked in the genres of poetry, novel and biography and the emergent author-function of a historical novelist. The chapter ends with a survey of the development of history writing in Hindi, the birth of nationalist historiographical cannon and conventions of source criticism. In the course of the survey, I point out a few ideological and literary tendencies that emerged during this period that were crucial in enabling the historical novel as produced by Vrindavanlal Verma.

2.1. The Time of the Present

In the colonial times, history became the principal instrument of for inculcating the stereotypical dichotomy between the backward, immobile Orient as contrasted with the dynamic Christian and/or scientific West, writes Sumit Sarkar.[6] The ensuing tension between the understandings of time in the two cultures produced a text by Bhartendu Harishchandra called *Kaalchakra,* referring to the cycle (chakra) of time.[7] He was experimenting with the possibility of the Christian and Puranic temporal frames coexisting within one calendar. Writing in 1884, Harishchandra did not finish the piece in his life-time; it was completed by a friend and published by Khadgvilas Press soon after Bhartendu's death.

---

[6] Sumit Sarkar, 'The Many Worlds of Indian History' in Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987.

[7] Mithilesh Pandya ed., *Bhartendu Granthavali*, Vol. 3, New Delhi: Naman Prakashan, 2008, p.237-250.

The title *Kaalchakra* refers to cyclical time and the piece represents an attempt to assimilate Indian history into world history by putting all great events of the world into one time-scale. It starts with the beginning of creation as per Hebrew, Christian and Hindu knowledge systems, recounts the birth of kings and saints of India, and wars in its history, and includes events from Islamic and English histories. Although the Christian era and the dates put forward by William Jones for Indian history are followed for a primary ordering, dates followed in other traditions such as of the Puranas and of Hebrew scriptures are mentioned after converting them to the Christian frame. A (mythical) event like the birth of Yudhishthira, the eldest Pandava in the Mahabharata, is therefore a part of the calendar and has five possible dates – 3102 B.C. as per the Puranas, 576 B.C. as per Bentley, 1430 B.C. as per Wilford, 1391 B.C. as per Davis, and 1180 B.C. as per William Jones and Colebrook.[8] Although creation is initially dated to 1972947101 years before Christ as per 'Aryan opinion', there is another entry for creation after the period of Swayambhumanu dated at 4006 B.C. Here four dates of creation are mentioned – 4004 B.C. as per Hebrew Scriptures, 5872 B.C. as per 'other scholars', 4700 B.C. as per Samartin (?), and 4710 as per the Julian calendar. We can observe here that the Christian and the Puranic times could be made to coexist only if one could be converted to the other before being admitted into the calendar. It is significant that to bring together important events of world history, Harishchandra chose to convert Puranic time into Christian time and not the other way around, indicating the subordinate position of indigenous knowledge vis-à-vis European knowledge.

[8] Harishchandra here seems to refer to the Orientalist scholars William Jones (1746-1794), H.T. Coelbrook (1765-1837), Samuel Davis (1760-1819), John Bentley (d. 1824) and Francis Wilford (1761-1822).

Roughly two decades later, Maithilisharan Gupta's poem *Bharat-Bharati*, published in *Saraswati* in 1912, presented a highly nuanced exposition of the relation between the past, present and the future. The poem deals with the historical questions current in the Hindi world at that time and was highly influential in the Hindi public sphere during the high noon of colonialism.[9] It was one of the first poems in Khari Boli to attain wide popularity, though its poetic qualities were questioned by later-day critics. R.S. McGregor has suggested that it has little poetic quality and should be seen as an example of the use of verse for social and political discussion.[10] Lucy Rosenstein claims that its aesthetic qualities are secondary. She writes, 'Imagination, originality, poetic sensibility and expression are wanting, the metre is restrictive and idiom clumsy.'[11] I follow Francesca Orsini in looking at its content in order to get a sense of the attitudes towards the past that were developing in Hindi literature at that time. Of course, the poem in no way gives us a comprehensive picture of the same, in what was a rather diverse world of Hindi literature.

> O *lekhani* [pen], write on the heart's leaf,
> Immerse yourself in ink, and keep writing.
> Be self-assured while you make your *prastav* [proposal],
> Let your words awaken the dormant *bhav* [passion/feeling]![12]

---

[9] Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere,* 2002, p.192-207.

[10] Discussion in Lucy Rosenstein ed. and trans., *New Poetry in Hindi: Nayi Kavita, An Anthology,* London: Anthem Press, 2003, p.1-15.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Krishnadatt Paliwal, *Maithilisharan Gupta Granthavali,* New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2008, p.321-459.

In the very first stanza of the 'preface', *upakramanika*, Maithilisharan Gupta clarifies the aim of the poem: the dormant *bhav* of the Indians – the lofty sentiment of nationalism – had to be awakened. It has to be done through the *lekhani* – the instrument of writing. The poem itself is a *prastav*, a proposal to the nation about how to bring about a national awakening. It is a 702 stanza-long poem, divided into three parts – *ateet khand*, *vartman khand* and *bhavisya khand* – telling the story of the past, the present and the future of the nation chronologically. The poem proclaimed the existence of an ancient 'golden age' of India, marked by a harmonious caste society, high literary and cultural achievements and global fame, tried to account for the decline from that age and explored the possibilities of a regeneration in the present.[13] It announced that a matrix of values had to be selectively appropriated from that 'golden age' in order to build the selves of the colonized subjects in the present.

The project was fraught with a constant tension between three notions of time – cyclical, linear and paradigmatic. In the poem, the possible linearity of time, and therefore irreversibility of the decline from a glorious past to a fallen present, is counteracted by affirming that decline is part of a vast cyclical process. A verisimilitude of the cycle of human time with nature's time is repeatedly emphasized. The poet asks (*Ateet khand*, stanza 3), 'Is there anyone in this

[13] Utilitarian thinkers had claimed the opposite for India. James Mill, following Bentham, had proposed that the Hindus had never possessed a 'high state of civilization'. John Stuart Mill elaborated and modified that position, acknowledging that the Inca state of Peru, together with the societies of Egypt, China and India, had risen from 'savage independence' to 'paternal despotism' after which they had stagnated due to a lack of mental liberty and individuality which were prime requisites for improvement along the 'scale of civilization'. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 1998, c.2.

samsara [world] whose times remain the same forever? / It moves between wealth and calamity through days and nights.'

Through the rhetorical question, the naturalness of a reversal of fortunes is announced in the very third stanza of the poem. If time was merely nature's cycle, would humans have any agency in determining its movement? We have here a tension between the naturalness of events and human agency, which is sought to be resolved by stating that the chief cause of concern is not the naturalness of the fall but the duration of the period of decline which stretches to the present, indicating the depths to which the nation had fallen. Since the time of the fall, the pace of the downward movement was exponential. Such a fall stretching over so long a period is deemed as unnatural by the poet. He seeks to bring the acceleration itself within the idea of a temporal cycle by distinguishing between a normal and an abnormal speed of fall.

The poem exhorts Indians to exercise human agency in restoring nature's cycle. The inevitability of the decline is repeatedly emphasized. It claims, (*Ateet khand*, stanza 195):

> In this way, once our *purna unnati* [complete progress/reform] had happened in this world,
> We had taken all the roads to *pragati* [progress] that could be taken,
> What else could happen then but a downturn of our *chakra* [wheel]
> The way we had risen up, we fell in exactly the same fashion.

Human agency could not have prevented the fall. But the longer and deeper the fall was, the more unnatural it was, the more it lessened the capability of Indians to reverse the situation. So while chiding the Indians for not having woken up so far, the poet also defends them by claiming how difficult it must be to wake up from such a long and drastic slumber (equated with

the fall). What then created the possibility of awakening in the present? He calls out (*Bhavisya khand*, stanza 3):

> Wake up now, there is time still –
> The world exhorts you, strengthen your will.
> Powerless perhaps you are, but you aren't yet dead,
> Awake, a new life's to be gained in the road that lay ahead.

The possibility of awakening is located in the present time. Clearly this is the moment of colonialism; and British rule appears in the poem as the paradox of modernity. On one hand, it is the avenue of progress and opportunity, marked by the arrival of civic amenities, rail, telegraph, hospitals, schools, good administration and safety. On the other hand, it is a continuation of the period of decline. This duality creates a tension between the newness of the present time and its links with the old. What leads to a somewhat irreconcilable conflict with cyclical time is the language in which newness is articulated. In the *bhavisya khand*, the poet writes (stanza 39):

> All around an *apoorv yug* [unprecedented era] is being born,
> Look, science is expanding everywhere.
> Come on now, awake, what are you busy thinking?
> You can't survive in this world without *shram* [labor].

A new *yug*, a new epoch, is being born, and this stretches the limits of cyclical time. It is yet another *yug*, but it is *apoorv* – something that has not been witnessed before. The need to appreciate what is new is emphasized and the reader is warned against adhering to *rudhri vaad*, obscurantisms, of any kind (stanza 37): 'Times keep changing, not all of it is harmful / Many of today's *baat* [thoughts/words] come of no use tomorrow.' Yet in the very next couplet this

process is cast within a natural frame (stanza 37): 'The moot point being: the way nature's colors change / Our deeds must also be of similar nature.'

Does this reference to natural time take us a back into the cyclical framework? By referring to change in nature's colors does the poet imply that ideas useful in the past, useless in the present, might be useful in the future again? Is there cyclicality in the emergence of newness? It is difficult to answer these questions because his futuristic imagination stops with the restoration of India's glory in an *apoorv* manner. No light is shed on the possibility of a decline setting in again as part of a natural cycle and the emergence of yet another streak of newness. Apart from the above-mentioned stanzas, there is no other reference to the need for embracing newness. His one mention of the present *yug* being *apoorv* is an acknowledgement of the tensions accumulated in his desperate effort to counteract linearity by cyclicality. It leads him to state clearly that the present *yug* may be one that had never happened before. That would in turn imply the impossibility of a nationalist imagination within the framework of purely cyclical time.

The impossibility of basing a past-present relationship on either pure linearity or pure cyclicality creates a space for a third understanding of time – paradigmatic time. Explaining the idea of paradigmatic time in Rabbinic Judaism, Jacob Neusner has pointed out that it was a very different way of thinking about the past. It kept all time – past, present, and future – within a single framework.[14] A model was constructed, consisting of selected events held to form a pattern that imposed order and meaning on what happened, whether past or present or future.

[14] Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of History in Rabbinic Judaism,* Leiden: Brill, 2004.

This model/pattern was repeated across time, thereby obliterating distinctions between past, present and future. All events were made sense of only within this pattern, and history was nothing but a repetition of events within this pattern. The past participated in the present, the present recapitulated the past, and the future itself was predetermined by the pattern. The narrative form consisted of anecdotes only, which helped create the repetitive pattern. Since events made sense only within this pattern, whatever did not fall within it weren't matters of concern and was not brought to language.

The concept of paradigmatic time is not quite applicable to the understanding of time that took shape in the Hindi public sphere in the wake of *Bharat-Bharati*, though it helps us to understand the milieu better. In the poem itself, the poet merely blurs the past/present/future distinction and does not eradicate it, as we have already seen in his acceptance of a possibly radical newness of the colonial times. We do see a pattern in some of the ideas of history prevalent at the time, like that of change within indigenous tradition across time, or the struggle to preserve the social and cultural fabric of Hindu society in an extended period of fall in the medieval and the modern period. These patterns could however coexist with linear time, often contributing to a synchronic yet linear rather than paradigmatic view of history. Within this synchronic pattern, the past could be a source of paradigmatic values. That aside, it was not the case that whatever would not fit the pattern would be written out of discursive frameworks of Hindi literature. The burgeoning historical scholarship stretched the patterns by unearthing facts that sat uncomfortably with them. Such facts were acknowledged as part of the process of the birth of the present. To counteract them, literary works took the liberty to leap into specific time/spaces of the past which could represent paradigmatic values and make them stand for the past itself.

What we have therefore is a complex dialogue between linear, cyclical and paradigmatic time in the effort to understand the present. Time was grudgingly granted linearity even as the poet in *Bharat Bharati* wished a cyclical return of the ancient 'golden' period. In this view of time, society moved towards a peak of glory in the ancient period, only to fall from it and settle into a synchronic pattern stretching into the present. The present contained the possibility of the radically new although both the periods of 'glory' and 'fall' could provide paradigmatic values as society embraced the newness.

2.2. Authors Invoke the Past

What did authors have to do with the past? Everything, Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi would answer. His journal *Saraswati*, launched in 1903, intended to propagate 'useful knowledge' and 'useful literature'. History was 'useful knowledge' and an integral part of 'useful literature', *Bharat Bharati* being a typical example. Dwivedi influenced poets such as Maithilisharan Gupta, Nathuram Sharma 'Shankar', Ramcharit Upadhyay, Ramnaresh Tripathi among others.[15] *Pratap* dated 13 April 1914, contained an anonymous piece on desirable literature. History, 'written by reliable historians', featured right on top, while the reader was advised to avoid novels. Those were the times of *tilismi* and detective novels, of which we shall see further down the chapter. Considered undesirable forms of entertainment, they were a major target of attack in the literary criticism developed by Dwivedi and his associates. Poems on historical themes were a trademark cultural product of the 'Dwivedi yug' and continued even after 1920.

[15] Nagendra, *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas*, 1973, p.485-527.

A new idea of 'usefulness' of literature emerged over the next couple of decades. Speaking of literature as an art-form, Munshi Premchand said in his Presidential speech at the first Progressive Writers' Conference:

> I have no hesitation in saying that I weigh art on the same scales of usefulness as I do with other things. Undoubtedly, the aim of art is to strengthen our sense of beauty, and art is the key to our spiritual happiness, but there is no mental and spiritual happiness one can achieve through taste which does not also have a useful aspect. Happiness is naturally allied with usefulness, and a useful thing can give us both pleasure and pain.[16]

In other words, literature need not be didactic in order to be useful. It could combine aesthetic and social sensibilities.[17] Premchand's take on the role of literature in society, as articulated in the speech, offered a new mould for calling upon the past in literature. Historical novels need not be didactic, it could be entertaining, while at the same time evoke the past in way that was socially useful in the present.

Conjuring the past in a socially useful manner could in turn constitute an act of *sewa* for the author; a service to the nation. As stated before (section 1.3.2), literature, journalism and politics were seen as a continuum – a joint effort to liberate the country.[18] It was this complex

---

[16] Munshi Pemchand, 'The Aim of Literature', Trans. Francesca Orsini, in Premchand, *The Oxford India Series*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.

[17] The pleasurable aspect of literature had been highlighted earlier by Harishchandra. He had proposed a new aesthetic category, *ananda*, which was pleasure derived from good literature. Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, 1997, p.273.

[18] Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 2002, c.1,2,5.

inter-relation between the three realms that produced, to use Michel Foucault's coinage, 'a certain being of reason that we call "author".'[19] The 'being of reason' created here was the figure of the author as an activist and a public intellectual. This particular figure was defined by his political and aesthetic functions. As a patriotic being, s/he was supposed to participate in the nationalist imagination through her/his writing. S/he could get involved in journalism, literature and politics at the same time, and many did. As an aesthetician s/he was supposed to deliver 'good entertainment' so as to counter 'popular', 'vulgar' forms which included popular fiction like *tilismi* novels. Writers of historical novels could then perform a specific *sewa* to the nation by presenting to the people their past.

As the above-mentioned author-function was coming into being, writers in different genres were invoking the past in varied manner which enabled different relations between the past and the present.[20]

---

[19] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in Donald F. Bouchard, *Language, Counter-Memory and Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews (of Michel Focuault)*, Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977.

[20] Though I have not included a separate section on plays, the point needs to be made that plays with historical themes were very important in this period. On one hand there were popular theatrical traditions like the Parsi theatre, Nautanki and Svang, which abound in historical and mythical characters and stories of Rajput chivalry. At the same time, the plays written in elite Hindi literary circles too witnessed a strong presence of history. For example, Jaishankar Prasad, the Chhayavadi poet, wrote several historical plays. Out of thirteen plays that he wrote, eight were historical, and three dealt with mythological themes. His historical plays included *Rajyashree* (1915), *Vishakh* (1921), *Ajatshatru*, *Janmejaya ka Nagayajna* (1925-26), *Skandagupta* (1928), *Chandragupta* (1931), *Dhruvaswamini* (1933). Nagendra ed., *Jayshankar Prasad: His Mind and Art,* Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 1989, Birendra Narayan, *Hindi Drama and Stage*. Delhi: Bansal and

2.2.1. Poetry[21]

In *Bharat Bharati*, Maithilisharan Gupta celebrated the power of poetry in awakening dormant minds and inspiring world-historical changes:

> How many revolutions has poetry brought about in the world!
> As if injecting withered minds with an electric charge;
> The inner world is blind without a poet's light,
> Goodness cannot survive without poetry.
> Only poets revive a dead nation with the nectar of *rasa*.[22]

The past as an idea was indeed an important signifier in the poetry of the period. In the hands of poets of the Dwivedi circle and outside, the ancient past came to mean a time of glory contrary to the present: the fallen state of the present could be highlighted sharply by talking about such pasts. In turn, one could look to the past in search of the glory that was absent in the present and thereby suppress the break in time created by the fall. Balkrishna Sharma 'Naveen', in his poem *Parajay Geet*, claimed that the present was marked by the sign of military defeat:

> The sharp edge of the sword is hesitant
> The quiver has turned empty,
> The emblem of victory stands downcast,
> The arrows know no direction...[23]

Co., 1981, Kathryn Hansen, *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India.* New Delhi: Manohar, 1992.

[21] In this section I have quoted a few poems that were published a little after 1930, but are good representatives of poetic evocations of the past that gained huge popularity between 1910 and 1930.

[22] Trans. Francesca Orsini, in Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 2002, p.196.

The poet pleads with *itihas* not to interfere, for it can't: the die is cast and he is on his way to defeat.

Since the turn of the century, the Aryan idyll had provided a powerful image of the 'glorious' past. In the hour of defeat, the Aryan past was often summoned to provide the coordinates of the nation in the present, thereby countering its past-ness. That is what Makhanlal Chaturvedi did in his poem *Hinduon ka Rangeet.* Published in 1913, the poem presents a picture of free India. In the poet's vision, it would be a country whose Hindutva would be respected by the whole world, whose inhabitants won't have any vile instincts, where injustice, violence and misbehavior would not be tolerated, and a country that would always profess bravery and friendship, fight against its enemies, and teach all humanity the essential unity of all mankind. The poem begins with an invocation of the Aryan past: 'The skies resounded with the call of the battle drums, chivalry dashed ahead.../The flag flew high and proclaimed the *arya niti* [Aryan ethics], '*swadharma* [(the protection of) one's own *dharma*], *swatantra* [(the protection of) one's sovereignty], *swadesh-sewa* [service to one's country]'...'[24]

Appropriating Orientalist scholarship, the Hindi intellectuals often claimed that India was the original cradle of civilization. Ramnaresh Tripathi wrote,

> Which country is that?

---

[23] Nareshchandra Chaturvedi, *Balkrishna Sharma 'Naveen' Kavya Rachnavali,* Part I, New Delhi: Prakashan Sansthan, 2009, p.45.

[24] Shrikant Joshi ed., *Makhanlal Chaturvedi Rachnavali*, Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1983, p.35.

The first to claim civilization and glory?
God's own son he is: which *desh*?
The one to first awaken the world's inhabitants,
The first to educate them: which *desh*?[25]

Specific times and places of the past came to exemplify what should be the future nation. Siyaram Sharan Gupta's poem *Maurya Vijay* (1914) celebrated the rule of Chadragupta Maurya on a patriotic note. It is a short poem in three parts. The first part is about good administration during the rule of Chandragupta through which the poet tries to show what a good kingdom ought to be. The emperor himself possessed all good qualities and power, and in his entire kingdom, there was happiness: 'India's' sky of fortune was clear and blissful/times were good and prosperous and food plentiful.' The second part describes the military camp and war between Chandragupta and Selucus and the decisive victory of Chandragupta: 'Come brave ones further your country's fame/raise in the eyes of the world your motherland's proud head.' It is a call to the reader to serve the country in war against the enemy. The third part talks about Chandragupta's love for Ethna, the daughter of Selucus. Ethna is shown to be an admirer of India. In the play, the two are married and the poem ends with wishful sentiments of patriotism: 'Oh, the world, sing once more of the victory of India.' This is recited again and again.[26]

Specific figures of became symbols of nationalist bravery. Subhadra Kumari Chauhan saluted Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi:

---

[25] Indarraj Vaid 'Adhir', *Ramnaresh Tripathi*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1987, p.102-03.

[26] Trans. Tapati Chowdhurie, in Premshankar, *Siyaram Sharan Gupta*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002, p.26-27.

The throne shook, the royalty looked startled,
Aged India witnessed a new youthfulness,
All had realized the worth of their lost freedom,
All had resolved to get rid of British rule,

They glittered again in 1857,
Those old jaded swords.
The mouths of the Bundela *harbolas*,
Told us that story.
How she fought – that *mardani* [mannish woman],
The queen of Jhansi.[27]

The poet ends with a critique of *itihas*:

You may have gone Rani; we grateful *bharatvasis* [inhabitants of India]
will remember you
Your sacrifice will kindle an indestructible desire for freedom
Even if *itihas* is silent, even if the truth is hanged,
Even if they dash to victory, even if they bomb down Jhansi.

You are the one who has written your *smarak* [epitaph],
You were an ineffaceable trace.
The mouths of the Bundela *harbolas*,
Told us that story.
How she fought – that *mardani*,
The queen of Jhansi.

[27] Sudha Chauhan, *Subhadra Kumari Chauhan*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982, p.80-87.

Itihas, probably a reference to British historiography, had been silent, but the folk singers of the region, the *harbolas*, recounted the tale. The poet could undo the historical wrong and keep her memory alive.

The Chhayavad poets were not to turn away from history, definitely not Jayshankar Prasad.[28] Karine Schomer points out that the new valuation of the individual self that Chhayavad offered flowed into poems about famous historical personages.[29] Jaishankar Prasad had a great interest in figures of history. He was not content with merely reciting the deeds of his heroes; instead, he explored their inner feelings, and the subjective, personal meaning of their public deeds. In his poem *Pralay ki Chhaya*, he depicted the tormented spirit of Kamala Devi, the thirteenth century Rajput queen of Gujarat who was captured by the Muslim conqueror Ala-ud-din Khilji and became one of his favorite wives. The poem traces in her a double psychological process of self-deception, from the initial conceit that she would seduce the Sultan by her beauty and then kill him, to a cowardly acceptance of the value of life at any price and, finally, a dawning, guilty pride in her new status:

> Beauty made me queen of Gujarat,
> Now that same beauty

---

[28] 'Chhayavad' is a term often used to describe the Romantic Movement in Hindi poetry heralded by Jayshankar Prasad (1889-1937), Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala' (1896-1961), Sumitranandan Pant (1900-1977) and Mahadevi Verma (1907-1987) in the 1920s.

[29] The discussion on the fate of history at the hands of Chhayavadi poets is based on Karine Schomer, *Mahadevi Verma and the Chhayavad Age of Modern Hindi Poetry*, London/Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. Translation of *Pralay ki Chhaya* is by Schomer while of *Shersinh ka Astra Sasamarpan* is mine. Both were published in the poetry collection *Lahar* (1935).

Has driven me
To become *bharateshwari* [empress of India]
Revenge turned to ambition,
I think to myself:
You're the victor now,
And the sultan
Lies conquered at your feet.

Likewise, in *Shersinh ka Astra Samarpan*, a poem dealing with the final British victory over the Sikhs, Prasad does not describe the dramatic events of the Sikh wars or indulge in loud, rhetorical lamentations over the fate of the brave Sikhs. He delicately probes the thoughts going through the mind of the Sikh leader Sher Singh during the surrender:

Panchnad [the land of five rivers: the Punjab] is desolate now.
I do not beg
For these lives today
For whoever takes those lives,
He protects them too, *mahakaal* [another name of Shiva/literally means 'great swathes of time'],
The tiger of *panchnad* the *praveen* [aged/proficient] Ranjit Singh,
Is dying today, look
Panchnad is in stupor due to that sorrow.
Take this sword
Take it, it is tired now.[30]

The coming of Chhayavad did not put an end to the other kinds of poetry on historical themes discussed before. They existed simultaneously into the high period of the freedom struggle, creating a world of poetry replete with varied traces of the past.

[30] Jayshankar Prasad, *Prasad Rachnavali*, Part 4, Delhi: Barat Pustak Bhandar, 2010, p.121.

2.2.2. Biography

Poetic invocations aside, exemplary figures – kings, warriors, litterateurs and saints – as 'great men', became the subject of numerous biographical pieces. Essays, novels, anecdotes and poems on such figures were produced in numbers by the turn of the century. Turning our sights a little back, we find Bhartendu Harishchandra experimenting with the genre. His work reflects a great influence of the hagiographic tradition. The biography of Shankaracharya, the ninth century proponent of Advaita Vedanta, written sometime between 1871 and 1880, gives a good idea about the nature of historicization of these individuals in Harishchandra's work.

> Glory be to God, the one who can create human beings of such *adbhuta* [wonderful/marvelous] power, and through them change the way men behave. After some time he creates another such man, and through him does the same thing, and thus continues his unending acts of creativity.[31]

On this eulogistic note Harishchandra begins his biographical essay on Shankaracharya. In Shankaracharya's a birth, he observes a pattern that transcends historical time – that of the arrival of great men for great deeds. Shankaracharya's great deed was rescuing Vedic religion from the clutches of Buddhism and restoring peoples' confidence in it. After stating this as his major achievement, the essay narrates his life-history chronologically, mentioning how he progressed from being a prodigious young scholar of the *shastras* to realizing that he was an avatar of Siva. The realization is described using *dues ex machina* – Shakaracharya was facing a crisis of purpose in his life when the realization happened as if by divine intervention. There is

[31] Pandya ed., *Bhartendu Granthavali*, Vol. 3, 2008, p.25-26.

no detailed discussion about his family tree, unlike many of the other biographies, particularly of rulers.

Although the first few paragraphs talk about the times in which he lived before going on to a narration of his life, his life is hardly contextualized historically. The essay begins with a eulogy to God's greatness in creating a pattern of birth of great men. The discussion of Shankaracharya's times is geared towards explaining his life as an episode in that pattern. The narration of his life-story as a succession of events then fits into the pattern and does not call for a historical explanation of his success in championing the cause of Vedic religion. In fact, in other essays like that on the king Vikram, the individual's life is not even narrated at any great length. His greatness is assumed and the purpose of the essay is to celebrate it by throwing light on his origin, family tree and specific achievements. Harishchandra wrote biographical essays on Vikram, the poet Kalidas, Ramanuj, Shakaracharya, Jaidev, Vallabhacharya, Surdas, Sukrat, Napoleon, Judge Dwarkanath Mishra, Sri Rajaram Shastri, Lord Lawrence, Lord Mayo, Tsar Alexander II of Russia and the 'five pious souls' (Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Hussein).[32] The corpus thus included Hindu kings and saints as well as world-historical Islamic figures like Mohammed, Hasan and Hussain.

The biographical subject became more distinctively Hindu in the biographical essays of Kartik Prasad Khattri (1851-1904), an important author of biographies in the late nineteenth

[32] In this ensemble, Vikram refers to king Vikramaditya, the Western Chalukya king, who is the subject of Bilhana's *Vikramankadevacharita*, Alexander refers to the ruler of Russia between 1885 and 1881, Ramanuj is the propagator of Vishishtadvait, Jaidev the author of Geet Govind, Vallabhacharya the sixteenth century proponent of Pushti Marg, Surdas the fifteenth century blind Krishna-devotee poet, and Sukrat refers to Socrates.

century.[33] He wrote biographies of Ahalyabai (1887), Chhatrapati Shivaji (1890), Maharaj Vikramaditya (1893), Edward VII (1903), and Queen Alexandria (1903). In the biography of Chhatrapati Shivaji, the nationalist hero, is lauded for fighting against Muslims and salvaging Hindu pride. It is more detailed than Harishchandra's biographies in terms of the description of events; a detailing geared towards animating Shivaji as a Hindu icon and calling for a revival of Hindu pride in the present.

Shivaji's biography is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is a description of Maratha country and of Shivaji's *vamsahvali.* The second chapter talks about his birth and his young days, the third describes the occupation of Pailangarh fort, his differences with his father, and his subsequent reunion with him. The fourth chapter discusses the battles he fought and how he came to occupy the throne, and the last outlines his administrative policies as a ruler. The issues highlighted – his auspicious birth, his battles, and his so-called just administration -- were precisely the ones the author was looking for in order to construct a Hindu icon. Yet again, by virtue of Shivaji's suitability for this model, he becomes a specific case within a pattern that transcends history; in this case, it is the pattern of the arrival of great men and women to fight for the cause of Hinduism.

The biography of Ahalyabai Holkar too fits into the pattern. She is pictured as a *virangana* whose arrival also follows a set pattern.[34] Combining the image of the dutiful mother

---

[33] The section on Kartik Prasad Khatri is based on the discussion of his work in Vaibhav Singh, *Itihas aur Rashtravad,* Panchkula: Aadhar Prakashan, 2007, p.206-11.

[34] Kathryn Hansen, 'The Virangana in North Indian History and Culture', *EPW,* 23 (18), 1988. Women across time feature in this model – Durgavati (fifteenth century), Ahalyabai

and wife with that of the warrior-in-times-of-necessity, she often came onto the stage of history to address a lack – of a male figure who could perform the actions required in those times. Invoking Ahalyabai as a model of womanhood for the present, Khattri directly compared her with women in the present:

> Ahalyabai was not educated like some of today's women. But she read and heard the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagvad Gita* and considered Brahmans as equals of god. She never moved away from the path shown by the ancestors, and was determined to follow the Vedic *sanatana dharma* [the ancient religion] diligently.[35]

With a wider interest in Indian history by the turn of the century, we can observe a greater emphasis on historicization of historical figures in biographical writings, though the subject often remained great Hindu men and *viranganas* of the past. In *Pratap* dated 13 November 1913, we find an article by one Satyendra on historical biographies that give us a sense of this change. Satyendra considered biographies high up in the list of educative material for children and youth, since example was better than precept. According to him, the purpose of biographies was telling the lives of great men so as to motivate people to act in the present. In this article, history continues to be an exemplar and the terrain of the repetition of a pattern of great deeds by great men unconstrained by the historicity of place and time. However, in his discussion of the biography as a form, the importance of historicizing the lives of great men becomes evident. He said of the subject of biographies:

(eighteenth century), Lakshmibai (nineteenth century), and the *virangana* seems to stand outside historical time.

[35] Quoted in Singh, *Itihas aur Rashtravad,* 2007, p.206.

> Who were they? What conditions were they born into, and what conditions produced them as great people? If they were born into a wealthy background then how and to what extent they stayed away from the vices, laziness, vanity and luxury associated with wealth. If they were born in poor conditions then how they inculcated enthusiasm, patience and commitment to duty from that state; and of course how did they transcend that state? How did they cross so many barriers and chart out their own path? What virtues did nature adorn them with? And how did the influence of their parents and teachers work on them? How did *adhyayan* [study] and *anubhava* [experience] aid in the development of their virtues, or did they retard the same? What kind of ideals made a place for themselves in their hearts? What difficulties did they have to face in translating those ideas into action? How successful were they in their endeavors? All throughout the period of hard work, what was their attitude to their relatives, to women, wealth, fame, infamy, success and failure? We desire to know the answers to these questions.[36]

Satyendra concludes the essay by pointing out two necessary qualities of a biographer – he must have in-depth knowledge about the place and time in which the protagonist lived. He must also have the maximum possible knowledge about the emotional, personal, and public life of the protagonist. After all, '*Jeevan charitra* [writing of the life and character of a person/ biography] is only a part of history, it is not history itself.' He ends with a warning that while we study the lives of great men we must not reduce history to them, as history is made by 'common people' as much as by great men. The article thus points to an understanding of secular causation in life-histories and an attempt to understand the past through the lives of historically grounded individuals.

[36] *Pratap*, 13 November, 1913, NMML.

2.2.3. Novel[37]

The past had an abiding presence in the late nineteenth century vernacular Indian novel. It may have been for a wide variety of reasons, as Jagadish Gupta tells us: to escape from the present, to re-capture the past because it was perceived better than the present, to appropriate the past in the present, to do justice to certain historical characters, to be submerged in *itihas-rasa*, or to present a new explanation of life. He has argued that each of these could lead to different kinds of historical novels.[38] The historical novel emerged in the Hindi literary scene with Kishorilal Goswami at the turn of the century, though the past was invoked in other novels too. By the 1920s, historical time appears to have made inroads into the chronotope of the historical novel which in its early years were often dominated by adventure-time.[39] At the same time, with the coming of Premchand, the location of individuals in concrete time and place became an important feature of the Hindi novels. The genre also admitted common people – peasants, untouchable, and prostitutes – into it and allowed them to assert their autonomy. The social concern that now entered the novel spread to other literary genres including the historical novel.

---

[37] This section is based entirely on the critical literature on Hindi novels.

[38] Gupta, 'Itihas aur Aitihasik Upanyaskar', in Madhuresh ed., *Banbhatta ki Atmakatha* 2007.

[39] Bakhtin gives the name 'chronotope', literally time/space, to 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'. Michael Holquist ed., M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984, p.84-258.

The turn to realism in the historical novel seems to have been a result of its own mutation as well of the realism in the social novel.

The first Hindi novels were arguably didactic in nature, *Sau Anjaan aur ek Sujan* (1892) by Ambikadutt Vyas being an example. R.S. McGregor points out that although Vyas attempts his scenes in specific time and place, and introduces his characters within them, yet he seems to be doing it out of obligation, having little real interest in creating elaborate, realistic settings. The introductory passages are often set in cyclical and not linear time. Following quite quickly on the first chapter is the end of the monsoon, we find other chapters set in the cold and the hot season, and by the end of the book we have reached and passed the beginning of the next monsoon. These different time-settings have no particular motivation in the story, but they link up easily with the descriptive tradition of the *barahmasa* in older Hindi poetry, in which changing seasons mark the heroine's changing emotions.[40]

The publication of Devakinandan Khatri's *Chandrakanta* in 1892 marked a break in the history of the Hindi novel. It started a period of the *tilismi* novel, which R.S. McGregor classifies as romance, and Meenakshi Mukherjee calls the fantasy novel.[41] These were adventure novels always set around a *tilisma* (charm), 'which the chivalrous hero, in perennial, pugnacious conflict with ribaldry and falsehood, would eventually break, obtaining thus,

[40] R.S. McGregor, 'The Rise of Standard Hindi and Early Hindi Prose Fiction', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, ¾, 1967.

[41] Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality*, 1985.

besides riches and glory, the hand of the enchanting lady of the manor.'[42] Meenakshi Mukherjee suggests that in such novels the form was novelistic but the ambience was medieval without any specific reference to time in the book.[43] Devakinadan Khatri writes in his preface, of the magicians of the royal courts who could:

> ...change their form, deal in magic potions, sing, play, discharge commissions, bear arms, spy, and had many arts besides. When war broke out they would bring it to an end with their cunning, and not allow blood to be spilt and the lives of soldiers wasted. They enjoyed great respect. Up till now no Hindi book has given an account of these magicians. If readers of Hindi would take note of their amazing deeds they would be advantaged in several ways. The chief of these is that the reader of such stories will not easily let anyone deceive him. Bearing all this in mind I have written this novel *Candrakanta*.[44]

This was rather a playful invocation of the past. At the same time, Khatri seemed to give his readers a series of heroes and heroines belonging to a time past whom the readers could ideally identify themselves with. Accordingly, he furnished them with a detailed account of the heroine Chandrakanta's feminine virtues and her fiancé Virendranath's virile qualities.

Gopalram Gahmari's detective stories, yet another genre that emerged at the turn of the century, though similar to the adventure novel, often laid emphasis on the verisimilitude of the

---

[42] Laxman Prasad Misra, 'Forms and Themes in Early Hindi Novels', *East and West*, Vol. 23, No. ½, 1973, p.181.

[43] Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality*, 1985, p.65.

[44] Quoted in McGregor, 'The Rise of Standard Hindi', in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, 1967, p.120.

story rather than a mythical setting. He even affirmed that 'if the readers regarded these novels as mere imagery, fruits of their author's idle fantasy, bearing no relation to everyday life, I would indeed consider all my labor gone in vain'.[45] One of his major novels, *Cakkardar Chori*, is set in Mewar Udaipur at the end of the Mughal period. In setting his scene in time and place, the author comments on the past and present condition of India. Of the Mewars, he says, '...one should not be surprised that before the English came, they could run their affairs without supervision. Marwaris and Mewaris have always been famous for this.'[46]And he describes the late Mughal period as a time, '...when Hindustan was in anarchy, and the English, French, Maratthas and Sikhs were trying to seize it. And the Afghans would come like mountain rats from the north-west, gather up whatever they could find in Bharat, and take it back across the Punjab.'[47] Elsewhere in his introduction, the author has the following comment to make on an artifact in the palace at Udaipur: 'Now, with no customers, the Indian craftsmen, potters, smiths, goldsmiths, weavers, and the like have given up their trade and accepted slavery. Foreign workmen give us boxes, chests, locks, keys, and cloth to relieve our want and shame.'[48] Here then we see a shift to a historical setting articulated concretely in a language of contemporary politics, with the setting itself being one located on the uncomfortable fault-line between the

[45] Quoted in Misra, 'Forms and Themes in Early Hindi Novels', *East and West*, 1973, p.183.

[46] Quoted in McGregor, 'The Rise of Standard Hindi', in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society,* 1967, p.126.

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] *Ibid.*

past and the present. However Gahmari's emphasis on historical verisimilitude does not seem to have created a trend in that direction at the time.

The first historical novels emerged with Kishorilal Goswami at the turn of the century. In the words of Francesca Orsini, they were 'little more than costume drama, where black-and-white characters, heroism, fervid imagination, and diffuse nationalist pride took the place of local traditions or historical verisimilitude.'[49] Yet they weren't playful invocations of the past; they articulated an engagement with history. In *Tara va Kshatrakulakamalini* (1910), Kishorilal Gosvami consciously forsook history for the sake of imagination citing the biased nature of the histories written in Muslim courts. He claimed that by taking recourse to those histories, the 'true' picture of Hindu oppression at the hands of Muslims could never be brought forth. He therefore had to write a novel and not history:

> In my novels, I have given precedence to imagination over history; at places, the history has been altogether set aside for the benefit of the imagination. Therefore my reader should understand my intention clearly; it is a novel, not history.[50]

Elsewhere though, in *Kusum Kumari* for example, he said that the central figures were historical and the events of the novel actually took place around 1840. The novel is set in a small state of Bihar ruled by Karna Singh; Kusum Kumari is her daughter. The story revolves around the fate

[49] Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere,* 2002, p.208.

[50] Quoted in Ray, *Hindi Upanyas ka Itihas,* 2002, p.82.

of Kusum Kumari: at the age of six months she was given away to a temple because by doing that the king hoped to get a son and was sold by the *pandas* to prostitution.[51]

One representative of the set of novels that used the past as a colorful backdrop was *Jaya* by Kartik Prasad Khattri. The heroine of his novel is a betrothed Rajput princess who is coveted by the Muslim suzerain Ala-ud-din. The narrative of some 150 pages details her various adventures as the prize of the ensuing Rajput-Muslim struggle, and concludes with her happy marriage to her Rajput fiancé. In his analysis of the novel, R.S. McGregor points out that the events described in the story are not historical, and the historical background against which they are set is very generalized and of little intrinsic importance for the development of the narrative. However, the plot-structure is compact and the author's overriding interest is in the sequence of the incidents which form his narrative. We read comparatively little about either characters or historical background which does not bear directly on advancing the plot.[52] Satyapal Chugh marks out Brajnandan Sahay's *Lalchin* (1916), a story based on the struggle between the fourteenth century Bahmani ruler Ghiyas-ud-din and his Turkish slave Lalchin, as one of the earliest historical novels largely devoid of the *tilismi* ambiance with the historical setting itself being an integral part of the plot. However, he locates the full flowering of this tendency in the influence of Munshi Premchand on the Hindi novel in general.[53]

---

[51] Discussion in Madhuresh, 'Hindi Aitihasik Upanyas ki Upalabdhiyan', in Madhuresh ed. *Banbhatta ki Atmakatha*, 2007, p.31.

[52] McGregor, 'The Rise of Standard Hindi', in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society,* 1967, p.122-23.

[53] Chugh, *Hindi Aitihasik Upanyas,* 1978, p.60-64.

I shall not go into a discussion of the well-known development of the novel form at the hands of Premchand. Rather I shall briefly mention the social content of his novels, for the social concern that lay at the heart of this development flowed into the historical novel as well. Ramvilas Sharma lists four specific features of contemporary society that Premchand highlighted:

(a) At a time when remarriage of widows was considered a revolutionary development, he critiqued the feudal base of the problem of prostitution and painted a much broader picture of women's oppression.

(b) He brought the peasants to the centre-stage of literature, highlighted peasant life with its exploitation and oppression by the British and their collaborators.

(c) He called for unity between the educated youth and the oppressed peasantry and specified the role of moneylenders in the poor plight of the peasantry.

(d) At a time when temple-entry was considered the most important step towards resolving the problem of untouchability, he drew attention to the land question of the untouchable peasantry and agricultural laborers and specified their freedom from bonded labor as the main issue.[54]

We see in the work of Premchand and others, a set of tensions between different models of individuation.[55] They are signs of the times and reflect the anxieties in determining the model

[54] Ramvilas Sharma, *Premchand aur unka Yug*, New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1987, p.149-151.

[55] Later-day scholars have pointed out that prevailing ideas about caste, community, gender and religion limited his radicalism across his work, including novels. Geetanjali Pandey has argued that despite a sharp understanding of social reality, the peasants in Premchand's

of society desired by Hindi intellectuals, which in turn would determine the matrix of values that had to be appropriated from the past. It would in turn define the meaning of history.

2.3. Writing History

History writing had started in Hindi long before history became prominent in the literary scene as 'useful literature'. It was in fact the assemblage of already-existing historical works

---

novels seem unable to initiate radical change on their own. As a result, the typical peasant individual in his work is one who is able to grasp the materiality of his exploitation but shows 'submissive patience occasionally disturbed by ineffectual impetuosity'. Pandey has also noted that Premchand's understanding of society was not free of the idea of Hindu greatness, and despite going to great lengths to include Muslims within the Indian nation, on occasions patriotism emerged as more natural for Hindus than Muslims. The identity of the patriotic individual was trapped in this ambivalence, though not in an obvious way. Charu Gupta has observed four different models for women in Premchand's stories – (a) the ideal woman; a combination of 'sacrifice, care and purity', (b) the counter-model of woman; 'the so-called apparently modern Western woman', (c) the suffering women; 'the woman trapped in a society dominated by obsolete customs', and (d) the woman who protests, becomes 'subjects of agitation in their own right'. Of this set, Charu Gupta argues, Premchand is prejudiced against the 'so-called apparently modern Western woman'. Charu Gupta, 'Portrayal of Women in Premchand's Stories: A Critique', *Social Scientist*, 19 (5/6), 1991, Geetanjali Pandey, 'Premchand and the Peasantry: Constrained Radicalism', *EPW*, 18 (26), 1983, 'North Indian Intelligentsia and Hindu-Muslim Question: A Study of Premchand's Writings', *EPW*, 19 (38), 1984, 'How Equal?: Women in Premchand's Writings', *EPW*, 21 (50), 1986.

that enabled literature to draw substantially upon history. Raja Sivaprasad Sitar-e-Hind's (1823-95) *Itihas Timiranashak* (1864), which literally means 'that which destroys the darkness in/about history' is popularly known as the first Hindi 'nationalist' history textbook. In the introduction to the book, the author had candidly admitted the difficulties he had faced while writing it.

> When I had promised to write a brief history of Hindustan in Hindi and Urdu for the *dehati* schools, little did I know how difficult the task would be. I knew that the histories written in *desi* [non-English] languages so far were quite incomplete and filled with errors, but I had no clue that even alert historians like Elphinstone had made glaring factual mistakes, like calling Ferozeshah (Tughlaq), Mohd. (bin) Tughlaq's cousin... Since I found no English books good enough for the task at hand, I turned to Persian texts.[56]

The lack of nationalist historiographical cannon and of conventions of source criticism lay at the heart of his difficulties. The next fifty years would witness a development of the nationalist historiographical cannon, in the hands of European writers like James Todd who were believed to be less prejudiced, or perhaps not at all, against Indians, and Indian historians like Rajendra Lal Mitra, R.C. Dutt and Jadunath Sarkar. Among Hindi authors, Sivaprasad and Bhartendu Harishchandra were the initial figures in this story while by the turn of the century, Deviprasad Munsiff and Gaurishankar Hirahchand Ojha joined them. Conventions of source criticism also developed, which involved a dependence on the emergent nationalist

[56] Veer Bharat Talwar ed., *Raja Shivaprasad 'Sitarehind': Pratinidhi Sankalan,* New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2004, p.21.

historiographical cannon, celebration of pre-modern Sanskrit texts as containers of true facts, suspicion of as well as dependence on medieval Islamic and modern British authors, and suspicion of oral traditions. Over this time, historians writing in Hindi increasingly widened the range of their interest beyond specific figures and places that could stand for the nation to customs, trade, material culture and other areas; the subjects of history-writing thereby widened. Along with the wide interest grew a tendency to write *total histories*, encompassing the all aspects of the life of the 'nation' as it was deemed to have existed over time.[57] Beyond history, while there was an urge to be authentic in writings on the past across literary genres; authenticity was also considered a constraint to affective evocations of the past.

2.3.1. Subjects of History

Although the first known work of Indian history in Hindi attempted a total history, the next half a century witnessed a different trend – towards writings histories of fragments, i.e. of figures, caste groups and spaces inspired by a search of the selves of specific communities (including the nation), as we shall see in the work of Bhartendu Harishchandra and Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha. Bhartendu Harishchandra's writings on history appeared in his journals over the years primarily and consisted of biographies, histories of places, caste histories, chronologies and studies of inscriptions. The following table gives an inventory of his writings about the past.

Table 1: The Work of Bhartendu Harishchandra

[57] I use the term 'total history' to refer to histories that seek to provide a generalized view of large swathes of time or spaces as compared to histories of fragments: specific figures and geographically narrow spaces, specific identities.

Category	Harishchandra's Work
Biographies (of)	Vikram, Kalidas, Ramanuj, Shankaracharya, Jaidev, Vallabhacharya, Surdas, Napoleon, Maharaj Jangbahadur, Judge Dwarkanath Mishra, Sri Rajaran Shastri, Lord Mayo, Lord Lawrence, Tsar Alexander II 'Five Pious Souls' – Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hasan, Husain
Janmkundalis (of)	Francis I King of France, Charles V Emperor of Germany, Napoleon II Emperor of France, Frederic William V Emperor of Germany, Tipu Sultan, Sikandar, Ravana, Malhar Rao Holkar
Caste Histories	*Aggarwalon ki Utpatti* ('Origin of the Aggarwalas') *Kshatriyon ki Utpatti* ('Origin of the Kshatriyas')
Histories of Spaces	*Maharashtra Desh ka Itihas* ('History of Maharashtra Desh') *Udaipuroday* ('The Rise of Udaipur') *Boondi ka Rajvansh* ('The Royal Dynasty of Boondi') *Kashmirkusum* ('The Flower of Kashmir')
Chronology	*Kaalchakra* ('The Cycle of Time')
Source Criticism	*Ramayana ka Samay* ('The Time of the Ramayana')
Others	*Badshahdarpan* ('The Times, the Birth etc. of the Mussalman Badshahs of Hindustan')

Great men – kings, poets and saints – and specific places emerge here as the most important subjects of history writing. While biographies, as we have already seen, were heavily influenced by the hagiographic tradition, the *janamkundalis* of historical figures were meant to confirm that they were born to be great. Caste groups and places became subjects of history in as much as they had a political, social or cultural charge in the present. The essay *Aggarwalon ki Utpatti* was an effort to locate Harishchandra's individual self in the history of the community, in the same way that some of the biographical essays located the individual in the history of the nation. It is in a way a biography of the Aggarwal community itself. This essay first discusses the geographical distribution and culture of the community at that time, then goes on to talk about the possible sources of origin, before coming back to the present condition. Its structure mirrors that of the emerging modern historical consciousness of the colonial subject – the present inspiring a glimpse at the past in order to rebuild the present.

Kshatriyon ki Utpatti has a similar structure but the reason to write the history of Kshatriyas comes across as different from the case of the Aggarwals:

> Many *jatis* (referring to castes here) are keen to exhibit their *unnati* [progress/improvement/upward mobility] these days. The Tusars (their Vaishya-ness is suspect, for they remarry their widows) for example call themselves Brahmins, Kayasthas are calling themselves Kshatriyas. My Jat friend, the Raja of Benswa Thakur Giriprasad Singh, has also decided that they are Kshatriyas. In such a condition it is important that origin and past history of the Kshatriyas be looked into.[58]

[58] Pandya ed., Bhartendu Granthavali, 2008, p.150.

In this case, the peep into the past had to do with forces unleashed by the colonial encounter that enabled a flux in society whereby lower caste groups could claim a high caste status.

In the histories of places, the selection of places is worth a close look at. In the first paragraph of *Udaipuroday*, he writes:

> ...It is this dynasty [the Sisodias – rulers at Udaipur] that is the most ancient and respected in Bharatkhand. It is in this dynasty that great rulers like Mahatma Mandhata, Sagar, Dilip, Bhagirath, Harishchandra, Raghu were born. Ramachandra descended as an avatar in this very dynasty. This dynasty has provided the subject matter to authors like Kalidas, Bhavabhuti, Vyas, Valmiki whose works are considered jewels of Indian literature even today. This is the only dynasty in Hindustan whose rulers have occupied the throne since the Satya yug in an unbroken chain. Udaipur is the kingdom that has taken British royal maidens for wives but has never given their daughters to the Muslims.[59]

Udaipur thereby became a metonym for the nation – it had an unbroken relationship to the 'glorious' ancient past, it was an integral part of the Hindu cultural heritage, and it had a sense of self vis-à-vis the 'other' – the British and the Muslim. Maharashtra, Boondi and Kashmir too had a historical significance which, Harishchandra claimed, necessitated the writing of their histories. Boondi was a land of the Rajputs, who had already created a space for themselves in the nationalist imagination with James Todd's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan. Maharashtra Desh ka Itihas* was a history of the Marathas from the time of Shivaji onwards, while *Kashmirkusum* vouched for the existence of historical writing in pre-British India through a glorification of *Rajatarangini* in the essay itself.

[59] *Ibid*, p.130.

Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha emerged as a major historian in the Hindi language at the turn of the century. He wrote extensively on the history of Rajasthan and various Rajput states. This is so because, in his opinion, Rajasthan's history was India's pride and there was enough material to write its history. It reflects a significant influence on him of Col. James Todd whose brief biography was one of Ojha's earliest works. His titles on the history of Rajasthan included *Solankiyon ka itihas* ('History of the Solankis, 1907), *Sirohi ka itihas* (History of Sirohi, 1911) and *Rajputane ka itihas* (History of Rajputana, 1924). The focus on specific figures and places continued with Deviprasad Munsiff, a historian junior to Ojha but equally significant in the early twentieth century. His titles include *Mansingh Kachhwale Amir ka Jeevan Charit* (*Jeevan Charit* of Mansingh Kachhwale Amir, 1889), *Sindh ka Itihas* (History of Sind, 1909), *Aurangzebnama* (1909), and *Yavanraj Vamsahvali* (Muslim Dynaties, 1909). However, his view on Indian interest in Indian history, written in *Yavanraj Vamshavali*, is a pointer to a widening of public interest in history beyond specific figures and places:

> These days Hindus have begun to take interest in history – not only of their own country but also of other countries and *jatis*. Earlier, due to the influence of the Puranas, they were never interested in the history of anything other than great figures like Rama, Krishna and the Pandavas. So many kings and brave men who died protecting our cows and women have been forgotten! But after studying history among other things in English schools, they have started looking for their own history and started asking questions.[60]

Munsiff notes a shift away from the figures venerated in Hindu religion to a broader corpus of figures and to a vaguely defined 'broader set of questions'. Over the years more

[60] Singh, *Itihas aur Rashtravad*, 2007, p. 213.

information about Indian history had been unearthed, and the subjects of interest had widened to include customs, practices and material culture as a part of 'national' history. For example, Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi's writings on history included essays on sea-faring in ancient India. In a 1916 essay titled *Pracheen Bharat mein Jahaz*, he lauded the seafaring culture of ancient India as one of the earliest in the world, as a proof of India's claim originality in ship-building and as a sign of India's integration with the rest of the world in the ancient age:

> The Vedas contain enough evidence of a seafaring culture among the Vedic Indian Aryans. They went into the sea for exchange and trade purposes. Indians did not learn the art of ship-building from foreigners. At a time when inhabitants of other countries were *asabhya* and *barbar* [unmarked by civilization], Indians had reached the peak of civilization. They had proved to all other *jatis* that they were indeed the best. They reached a variety of trade articles to different parts of the country by boats and ships. At the same time, the ventured into the sea in order to reach people of other countries.[61]

On the back of the historiographical practices of the past fifty years, there was yet again a major thrust towards writing total histories. Dr. Nagendra notes that maximum good quality history-writing in Hindi happened during 1920-40. He gives a list of titles of major books published during the period.[62]

---

[61] Bharat Yayavar ed., *Mahavirprasad Dwivedi Rachna Sanchayan*, New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 2006, p.462.

[62] Nagendra, *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas*, 1973, p. 600-01.

Table 2: Titles of Major History Books in Hindi (1920-40)

Author	Date of Publication	Title
Misrabandhu	1919	*Bharatvarsh ka Itihas* (History of India)
Jaychandra Vidyalankar	1924	*Bharatiya Itihas ka Maulik Adhar* (The Fundamental Basis of Indian History)
	1931	*Bharatbhumi aur Uske Nivasi* (The Land of India and its Inhabitants)
	1934	*Bharatiya Itihas ki Rooprekha* (The Contours of Indian History)
	1938	*Itihas Pravesh* (Entering History)
Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha	1923	*Ashok ki Dharmalipiyan* (Ashokan Inscriptions)
	1928	*Madhyakalin Bharatiya Sanskriti* (Medieval Indian Culture)
Arya Muni	1925	*Vaidik Kaal ka Itihas* (History of the Vedic Period)
Janardan Bhatt	1926	*Bauddhakaleen Bharat* (India at the Time of the Buddha)
Beni Prasad	1931	*Hindustan ki Purani Sabhyata* (The Old Civilization of India)
Mahadev Shastri Diwekar	1931	*Arya Sanskriti ka Utkarshaprakash* (The Progress of Aryan Civilization)
Rahul Sankrityayan	1937	*Puratatva Nibandhabali* (Essays on Archaeology)
Mannan Dwivedi	1920	*Musalmani Rajya ka Itihas* (History of the Muslim Kingdom)
Parmatmasharan	1934	*Madhyakalin Bharat*

		(Medieval India)
Indra Vidyavachaspati	1938	*Mughal Samrajya ka Khay aur Uska Karan* (The Decay of the Mughal Empire and Its Reason)
Gangaprasad Mishra	1920	*Bharatvarsha mein British Samrajya* (British Empire in India)
Surajmal Jain	1922	*Maratha aur Angrez* (The Marathas and the English)
Ishwari Prasad Sharma	1924	*San Sattavan ka Ghadar* (The Mutiny of 1857)
Vishweshvarnath Reu	1919	*Kshatrap Vansh ka Itihas* (History of the Kshatrap Dynasty)
	1926	*Bharat mein Prachin Rajvansh* (Ancient Dynasties in India)
Gopal Damodar Tamaskar	1931	*Marathon ka Utthan aur Patan* (The Rise and Fall of the Marathas)
Ayodhya Prasad Goyalia	1930	*Jain Veeron ka Itihas* (History of Jain Heroes)
Bhadant Anand Kausalyayan	1937	*Buddha aur Unke Anuchar* (Buddha and His Associates)
Deviprasad Munshi	1921	*Sindh ka Itihas* (History of Sind)
Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha	1925	*Rajputana ka Itihas* (History of Rajputana)
Jagdishchandra Gehlot	1925	*Marwar Rajya ka Itihas* (History of the Marwar State)
Shankar Rao Joshi	1921	*Rome Samrajya* (The Roman Empire)
Pyarelal Gupta	1923	*Greece ka Itihas* (History of Grece)
Ramashankar Avasthi	1920	*Russia ki Rajyakranti* (The Revolution in the Russian

		State)
Sampurnanand	?	*China ki Rajyakranti* (The Revolution in the Chinese State)

The titles suggest that alongside histories of specific places and events, there emerged a trend of writing histories of 'India' or of vast swathes of time in Indian history like the *Vaidik Kaal*. Such projects had an important role in constituting specific periods, or *Bharat*, as it were, as unified entities defined by singular historical processes. They were signs of metahistorical imaginations of Indian history.[63] The metahistorical imagination that underlay much of *Bharat Bharati* was articulated by a prominent Hindi historian Jayachandra Vidyalankar in his presidential speech to the History and Social Sciences section of the annual Hindi Sahitya Sammelan meeting held in Nagpur in 1936. Talking about questions of periodization, he said:

> If we look at the progress of our national life, *jatiya jeevan*, over time, we can see that our history can be split into *pracheen* [ancient], *madhya* [middle], and *arvacheen* [contemporary]. In the ancient period we can notice continuous flow and progress in all aspects of the life of our jati. Deep down the surface of our civilization, sand accumulated and slowed down our flow, till it stopped altogether. The ancient period came to an

[63] I use the term 'metahistory' to refer to the 'modes of historical consciousness', the 'dominant tropological mode' and the 'linguistic protocol' that shape works of history. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe,* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975.

> end when the stream came to a halt. That is when the middle period starts. Yashovarman's reign marks the dividing line between the two periods.[64]

Vidyalankar was challenging the periodization put forward in the 'bounded volumes emanating from Cambridge University', especially an abridged version titled *Cambridge Shorter History*. He was critical of what he calls an 'artificial' framework. The book divided Indian history into the time of the Hindus, Muslims and the Europeans, with one overlapping with the other. Vedic age to the end of Vijaynangar kingdom was called the period of the Hindus, the rule of Ibn-Karim in Sind to that of Bahadur Shah Zafar was called the period of the Muslims, and the arrival of Vasco da Gama initiated the period of the Europeans. Instead of that, Vidyalankar proposed a more 'natural' model. The ancient was a time of progress and the end of progress marked the end of the period. The end had nothing to do with invasions. Rather, the inner weaknesses prompted the defeats at the hands of the Shakas, Kushanas and later the Muslims. Over this period, Indians had sunk into a morass and the contemporary period began when Indians were shaken out of it by a new contact with the world. The contemporary is defined by British rule and is a time of new possibilities:

> Today's revolutionary thoughts have initiated a new period, *nayi yug* [new epoch], since the beginning of the twentieth century. The introduction to the new period suggests that life in it will be like it has never been since the end of the Gupta period.[65]

---

[64] Jaychandra Vidyalankar, 'Itihas Lekhan aur Kaal Vibhajan ki Samasya' in Gangasagar Tiwari ed., *Bharatiya Itihas, Sanskriti aur Samaj,* Prayag: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1986, p.47-48.

[65] *Ibid*, p.53.

The world of history-writing thus tells us a story of conflicts over metahistorical imaginations that were as fed into by historical facts as it was the other way round.

2.3.2. Sourcing the Story

Let me now turn to the conventions of source criticism emerging over this period. The quest for an authentic history of India lay at the heart of the nationalist imagination. At an annual meeting of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan held in Dehradun in 1924, the nationalist millionaire Sivaprasad Gupta advanced a resolution on the need of an Indian history of India.

> The nation which does not have an authentic history of its own is not a living nation... The history textbooks which are taught in Indian schools and colleges are extremely misleading and unreliable. Our heroes like Shivaji are called 'looters'! Our Vedas are called ballads of herdsmen and peasants! Can such books be called histories? Can any scholar and dispassionate historian say that such historical books contain a true picture of life in ancient India?[66]

The apparent lack of written histories in the pre-colonial period, and the possibility of distortion of Indian history by European scholars as well as medieval Muslim historians were central concerns of Indian intellectuals – the ones in the Hindi area being no exceptions. This lack was acknowledged in the standard English history books used in schools and colleges. Vincent Smith, whose *Oxford History of India* (1904) and *The Oxford Students' History of India* (1908) were the standard reference books when Sivaprasad Gupta had proposed the above resolution, had set the beginning of Indian history in the Buddhist period. Alexander's

[66] Quoted in Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere,* 2002, p.182.

campaign and the time of Indo-Bactrian and Indo-Parthian states were noted as one when the first 'historical' (i.e. Greek) sources on India could be found. *The History of India* by Lala Lajpat Rai, written especially for the national schools during the time of Non-Cooperation, had closely followed Smith's chronology and classification. Jayachandra Vidyalankar, a historian belonging to the Arya Samaj, condemned the book in the following words,

> For European scholars, Rama and Sita, Krsna and Dushyanta are mythological figures – does Lalaji think so, too? When does the history of India begin; did Dusyanta and Bharata, Rama and Lakshmana, Krsna and Arjuna, exist historically or not? These are very important questions for our nation *(jati)* and our history.[67]

The possibility of a factually inaccurate representation of the Indian past was a cause of anxiety for the Hindi intellectuals. The tension generated by the perception that first Muslims and then the Europeans had distorted the Indian past led the native Hindu intellectuals towards building a nationalist archive of Indian history. I shall look closely at how this anxiety was dealt with at three moments of historical production – that of fact creation, fact assembly, and fact retrieval.[68]

---

[67] *Ibid*, p.183.

[68] Here I am using Michel-Rolph Trouillot's taxonomy of the moments that constitute history-writing. He points to the overlap between history as a process and history as narrative and locates the overlap at four moments in the process of historical production: the moment of fact creation (the making of the sources), the moment of fact assembly (the making of the archives), the moment of the fact retrieval (the making of the narratives), and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance). He argues that it is in these moments that power enters the process of historical production – certain voices are silenced and the production of certain narratives made impossible. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History,* Boston: Beacon Press, 1995, p.23.

The moment of fact creation held up a significant question: could Indian sources, other than Islamic histories written in Persian, be used to unearth India's history? Col. James Todd, whose *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* had a seminal influence in the Hindi world, answered the question in the affirmative.[69] He wrote in the introduction to his work that although 'regular and legitimate historical records' were absent, Puranic chronicles, bardic narratives and land and temple grants were repositories of facts that could be unearthed.[70] James Todd's affirmation offered a new possibility of fact-creation that had a significant influence on Hindi intellectuals. Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha, wrote a biography of Todd, hailing him for his sympathy for the Rajputs and his ability to become one with them, and thereby raising himself above European prejudice against India. Todd explained the lack of sources as the result of the destruction and instability caused by Muslim rule:

> After eight centuries of galling subjection to conquerors totally ignorant of the classical language of the Hindus; after almost every capital city had been repeatedly stormed and sacked by barbarous, bigoted, and exasperated foes; it is too much to expect that the literature of the country should not have sustained, in common with other important interests, irretrievable losses. My own animadversions upon the defective condition of the annals of Rajwarra have more than once been checked by a very just remark: "when our princes were in exile, driven from hold to hold,

---

[69] The first book Ojha wrote in his career was a biography of James Todd. See Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha, *Suprasiddh Itihaskar Colonel James Todd ka Jeevan Charitra*, Jodhpur: Rajasthani Granthagar, 2002.

[70] James Todd, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or The Central Western Rajpoot States of India*, Vol. I, Calcutta: Indian Publications Society, 1898.

> and compelled to dwell in the clefts of the mountains, often doubtful whether they would not be forced abandon the very meal preparing for them, was that a time to think of historical records?"[71]

Todd made it clear that facts could be unearthed from Puranic, bardic and epigraphic sources only by 'the hands of a skilful and patient investigator'. Facts therefore had to be carefully sieved out of these sources at the moments of fact assembly and fact retrieval. These were contentious moments, as the possibility of colonial prejudice creeping in was considered high by the Hindi intellectuals. Bhartendu Harishchandra's essay called *Ramayan ka Samay,* gives us an idea about how this anxiety came to be negotiated in the late nineteenth century.[72]

The essay was written with the avowed aim of debunking 'prevalent beliefs' of the day about the time of the *Ramayana*. Though the exact dates referred to are not mentioned in the essay, the *Ramayana* is clearly seen as a text written at one time, and not as a continuously evolving textual and oral tradition. The 'prevalent beliefs' that he wanted to challenge are not stated but his assertions are clearly to claim roots of things modern in Indian antiquity and to challenge what he felt were wrong claims made by colonial historians as well as by reform movements like the Arya Samaj.

Harishchandra reads the texts in two ways. He mostly picks out words and plays on their meanings. For example, he cites the existence of the word *yantra* (machine) to claim the existence of machines in ancient India. At times, he also tries to relate the text to the context, for example in claiming the existence of good roads at that time. He writes:

---

[71] *Ibid*, p. xiv.

[72] Pandya ed., *Bhartendu Granthavali*, Vol. 3, 2008, p. 253-260.

> Rama thus describes the journey to the forest: After leaving Ayodhya we stooped at the banks of Tamasa [meaning Tons]. After that we crossed Vedasruti, Gomati, Syandika, and Ganga, we reached Prayag and then Chitrakoot [which is 10 *kos* as per the Ramayana]. They covered the entire route in 5 days. Sumant reached them there and travelled back from Sringverpur, meaning Singramau, to Ayodhya in 2 days. The first point tells us that the measure of 1 kos was quite long, and the second point tells us that roads were very good and *pucca* those days or else travelling such a long distance in such short time would be impossible.[73]

The essay affirms, among other things, (a) use of military technology, (b) the existence of Jains, (c) the worship of Sri Krishna, (d) that the saints did not consume meat at that time, (e) existence of good roads, (f) the prevalence of idol-worship, (g) the use of pen and paper for writing, (h) the use of balloon as an aerial vehicle, (i) the prevalence of naval warfare, (j) the popularity of *Manusamhita*—an established authoritative text, and (k) the existence of English-style bungalows in Lanka, at the time of the Ramayana.

It was a time when the Hindi nationalist historiographical cannon were not yet available – the archives were themselves in the making. Over the next fifty years, a cannon would come into being; it would consist of things accepted as 'objective' enough by historians like Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha, Jaychandra Vidyalanakar (1898-?), Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928), R.C. Dutt (1848-1909), Jadunath Sarkar (1870-1958), and G.S. Sardesai (1865-1959). The set clearly included professional historians (Jadunath Sarkar) as well as armature historians (G.H. Ojha). The ensemble becomes all the more interesting as it often included British historians who too were 'objective' enough not to 'distort' India's past. William Jones, James Todd, Vincent

[73] *Ibid*, p. 255.

Smith, Rhys Davids, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and Lord Macaulay, were the European names cited in an anonymous piece on recommended historical works in *Pratap* dated 13 April 1914.

Alongside the cannon emerged a set of conventions. Sivaprasad Gupta's resolution at the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in 1924 points to an important tendency: to treat pre-modern, especially ancient Sanskrit texts, as containers of the true facts of history. Gupta had voiced a feeling of insult at the Vedas being called 'ballads of herdsmen' as it meant a denial of its status as a text that could be trusted to 'reveal a true picture of life in ancient India'. No such privilege was granted to medieval Persian texts, especially court histories of Muslim kings. While they were to be read against the grain in order to unearth the 'true' history of the Hindus, their exaggerated descriptions of wars and conquests had also to be seen through.[74] The utilization of oral sources was a contentious issue. James Todd did not rate bardic narratives of Rajasthan very highly, but did not dismiss them fully either:

> The poets are the chief, though not the sole historians of Western India; neither is any deficiency of them, though they speak in a peculiar tongue, which requires to be translated into the sober language of probability. To compensate for their magniloquence and obscurity, their pen is free: the despotism of the Rajpoot princes does not extend to the poet's lay, which flows unconfined except by the shackles of the chund bhojoonga, or 'serpetine stanza'; no slight restraint, it must be confessed, upon the freedom of the historic muse. On the other hand, there is a sort of compact or understanding between the bard and the prince, a barter of "solid pudding against empty praise," whereby the fidelity of the poetic chronicle is somewhat impaired. This sale of "fame," as the bards termed it, by the court-laureates and historiographers of Rajasthan, will continue until there shall arise in

[74] Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 2002, p. 186-189.

> the community a class sufficiently enlightened and independent, to look for no other recompense for literary labor than public distinction. [75]

Despite the uncertainty about their truth claims, the bards did 'dare utter truths, sometimes most unpalatable to their masters', truths that had to be retrieved through careful examination. This meant that whenever drawing upon bardic narratives, corroboration with other sources was necessary. Todd himself followed that method and so did Ojha in his three works on Rajasthan. In addition to the treatment of the oral narratives as sources, romanticism about the bards is also evident in the above lines by Todd. Ojha's references to the bards are mostly devoid of this romanticism: he limits his footnotes and discussion of oral sources to an assessment of the truth claims in his works on Rajasthan.

Coins, inscriptions and archaeological sources were also part of the archives. G.H. Ojha's first work, *Bharat ki Prachin Lipimala* (1894) dealing with the history of the written scripts of India, marked an attempt to add to the archive. He made the purpose of the book clear in a later piece of writing:

> Till 1893 there was no single book that a scholar could use to learn to read inscriptions from the Himalaya to Kanyakumari, and from Dwarka to Orissa. It is to fill that gap that I came out with this short book in 1894 that scholars here and those in Europe found have found useful. They have all given great respect to the book by calling it the first of its kind. The book deals with the ancient history of the written script in India. It describes various scripts, their development and how to read them –

[75] Todd, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan,* 1898, p. xv.

> Brahmi, Kharosthi, Gupta, Kutil, Nagari, Sharda, Bangalpashchimi, Madhyapradeshiya, Telegu, Kannada, Kalinga, Tamil, and others.[76]

Ojha used epigraphic sources extensively in his work. In a 1923 article published in *Sarawati*, titled *Puratatva ka Poorvetihas* Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi paid tribute to the Archeological Survey of India:

> No institution has as much to preserve the ancient achievements of Indians as it [Archaeological Survey of India] has done. Thanks to it, the *stupas*, temples, mosques and historical buildings have been saved. Had this institution not come into existence, the names of hundreds of kings would never have been heard and the existence of many ancient dynasties would never have been known.[77]

The question of source criticism – the interpretation of sources to make the historical narratives – brings us to the moment of fact-retrieval. Jaychandra Vidyalankar, in his presidential speech to the History and Social Science section of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan meeting in 1936 paid tribute to the contribution of British scholars in the making of the archive but denied their claim to plausible fact-retrieval:

> We have started to recognize our history again. We are indebted to the European scholars for that. Over the last hundred and fifty years, the sources of Indian history have been rescued bit by bit. That work has been going on for some time and will continue. But no comprehensive history of India has been written on the basis of that so far. Whichever English

[76] Sohanlal Patni, *Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha*, Udaipur: Rajasthan Sahitya Akademi, 1988, p.38.

[77] Yayavar ed., Dwivedi Rachana Sanchayan, 2006, p. 445.

scholar has attempted such a history has failed miserably. Writing our history is not an Englishman's task.[78]

The moment of fact-retrieval was a liminal one; it posed a danger to the metahistorical imaginations of nationalist scholars. The danger had become real in the *Cambridge Shorter History,* compelling Vidyalankar to spend time in refuting it in course of his speech in the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan meeting in 1936. I shall however move away from the historian in studying the moment of fact-retrieval. I shall return to *Bharat Bharati* in order to examine what the moment meant to a poet; one who had at his disposal the same nationalist historiographical cannon as the historian and a similar urge to be authentic in writings about the past. The fact that a poem, which even celebrated the power of poetry to 'revive a dead nation', repeatedly resorted to footnotes in order to cite historical data reflects the immense importance attached to authenticity in historical representation in the literary world. The citations are quite revealing of the possibility of source-criticism in 'non-historical' writings about the past.

The first footnote that one encounters in the poem is in the sixteenth stanza of *ateet khand,* to substantiate the claim that India was the original home of humans. In the footnote four sources are cited in the following order,

(a) It is clear from the Puranas that it was in Bhrahmavarta that Brahma, the creator, began his act of creation.

(b) Todd has written on one occasion that there is no evidence of the beginning of creation anywhere other than Aryavarta. It is not doubtable therefore that creation began here.

---

[78] Vidyalankar, 'Itihas Lekhan aur Kaal Vibhajan ki Samasya' in Tiwari ed., *Bharatiya Itihas, Sanskriti aur Samaj,* 1986, p. 45.

(c) Injil (?) and the Quran also state the Adam and Eve descended from the Garden of Eden and came to India.

(d) Sir Walter Raleigh has written, in his world history book, that after the great flood and the associated upheavals, it was in India that plant and human life originated.[79]

A few points stand out. Firstly, Sanskrit texts and works of 'reliable' European historians are put side by side and are treated as equals as far as containing 'correct' facts are concerned. They corroborate each other. Secondly, the Puranic texts are hardly read against the grain and their claims are taken at face-value. Thirdly, the exact reference in terms of page number, verse number, or print edition is not given for texts written by authoritative figures; mere reference to them is considered good enough. Other authors and texts referred to with similar veneration in the poem include the Upanishads and Puranas, classical Sanskrit texts like *Manusmriti*, *Abhigyanshakuntalam*, *Raghuvamsa*, *Mudrarakshasa*, *Srimadbhagvat* and figures like Vashishta and Valmiki, philosophers like Immanuel Kant and Schopenhauer and Orientalist authors like William Jones and Max Weber, travelers like Megasthenes and Al-beruni, and a few others like Col. Sleeman, Mounstuart Elphinstone and Lord Macaulay. For other texts, like a *Hindi Granthamala* (published in May 1908), the page number and the full name of the book and the date of publication are given.[80]

As far as European sources are considered, a distinction is made between 'prejudiced' and 'un-prejudiced' Englishmen – the ones labeled 'unprejudiced', like Orientalist scholars, are more or less accepted at face value. Those labeled 'prejudiced' are accepted when they say

[79] Paliwal ed., *Maithilisharan Gupta Granthavali*, Vol. 1, 2008, p.324.

[80] *Ibid.* p. 384.

something positive about India. The fact that even a prejudiced person could say something positive is in fact taken a proof of its validity. For example, while claiming that Indians were original scholars of philosophy, it is written in a footnote, 'Lathbridge *sahib* has shown a lot of prejudice against the Hindus in his works on history. But even he has had to accept that the Hindus are the original scholars of philosophy.'[81] Most importantly, not all historical claims are cited. Footnotes are there for most nationalist claims that were not beyond doubt or to explain myths and legends. The claims which involve citations include the affirmation of European scholars' that Hindu customs like burial of the dead and ban on marriage within the same *gotra* are beneficial, and India's claim to originality in the study of grammar, philosophy, religion, science and mathematics.

While the poet clearly engages in dialogue with the nationalist historiographical cannon, the poetry form enabled a different dialogue with the sources; one that the historian would struggle to undertake. If we compare the citations in *Bharat Bharati* with those in the books by the contemporary historian G.H. Ojha, we see that the poet felt far less compelled than the historian to cite sources for historical claims. We may draw upon Rosinka Chaudhuri to say that literary forms that involved a certain amount of imagination, like poetry or historical novel, had hit upon a specific function – their purpose was not to dispel false facts about the past, they were concerned with endowing reality with a different meaning enabled by the power of creativity. It is a meaning that only literature and art, by virtue of their cultural authority, could

[81] *Ibid*, p. 342.

endow.[82] Ranajit Guha has explained that in the truth-claims about the past made on the basis of the authority of literature, the understanding of facticity is not limited by the 'object-historical conventions of historiography.' Guha quotes from Heidegger to explicate this alternate notion of facticity, which 'implies that an "inner-worldly" being has being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with the being of those beings which it encounters in its own world.'[83]

2.4. Writing the Historical Novel

What we have here is a set of partially disparate tendencies that seems to have emerged roughly between 1910-1930, in the Hindi world of Hindi literature and history-writing. As I have already stated, the tendencies do not define the period, as the realm was a largely diverse ones. These are however tendencies that would flow into the work of Vrindavanlal Verma, among others. Verma was not the pioneer of the Hindi historical novel. However with the flowering of these tendencies in his work, the genre did undergo shifts. Here let me summarize the tendencies that I have highlighted in this chapter.

Under the duress of colonialism, Hindi intellectuals like their contemporaries in other languages of India, developed nostalgia for the past. Yet it was not clear which time period of the past could be called a different time: was the present a continuation of the 'dark' days of Islamic rule or was it different from the same in any way? How ancient was the 'ancient' golden

[82] Chaudhuri, 'History in Poetry' in Chatterjee and Aquil ed., *History in the Vernacular,* 2008.

[83] Guha, *History at the Limit of World History,* 2003, p.79.

age? The answers to these questions involved a complex dialogue between linear, cyclical and paradigmatic notions of time. Despite a desire for the past, there was recognition of the present as a new time, distinct from the past, though the past could be a source of paradigmatic values. The recognition was vital and newness could have both positive and negative connotations. In addition, it suggested the possibility that colonialism, and not Islamic invasions, was the narrative break in Indian history that intellectuals should be more concerned with.

In literature, history, often narrated in a didactic manner, was seen as 'useful knowledge' for society, even as social concerns got integrated with an aesthetic imagination of literature in the hands of Premchand. The author emerged as an activist and a public intellectual, serving the nation by wielding the pen. The milieu enabled the historical novelist to provide a specific service to the nation as a public intellectual by re-awakening 'useful' elements of the past while producing the historical novel as an aesthetic artifact. The past was invoked in different ways across genres, which in turn constituted specific times as past. The historical novel moved from treating the medieval past as a backdrop for adventure stories and romances to a more realistic treatment of the past: giving real figures and events greater agency in the plot. Poets of the Dwivedi circle looked to the past in order to inspire patriotism and moral values in the present. In the hands of the Chhayavadi poets, the past provided idioms and metaphors, and figures of the past asserted their individuality. Biography, an important genre in this period, gradually shed the influence of the hagiographic tradition and began to see individuals as historically located. The urge to ground characters in specific time and place in the historical novel also came from the realist novels of Munshi Premchand.

The emergence of nationalist historiographical cannon with conventions of source criticism inspired and aided a realistic depiction of the past, while affective evocations of the past cringed at rigid adherence to authenticity. The tension made it possible for the historical novelist to be selective in being historically authentic and to roam freely within the boundaries of the historically possible rather than the historically authentic. The birth of the nationalist historiographical cannon itself went hand in hand with a widening of interest in history as the subject of history-writing expanded from specific times and places to include customs, material culture and other aspects of the past.

3. The Past in the Present: The Historical Novels of Vrindavanlal Verma

> I decided to write a novel, a novel that would be in consonance with the *rang-resh* [color and fiber] of *itihas* and would be situated in its context. To furnish the skeleton of history with flesh and blood, novel seemed to me the best instrument.[1]

The historical novel, according to Vrindavanlal Verma, had to be true to the color and fiber of history and had to be historically contextualized. The color and fiber, as it were, lay outside the historical novel; it had to be brought into it by the author. That, along with an in-depth knowledge of the context, could be provided by scholarly works. Extending the frontiers of historical knowledge by unearthing more facts was not the novelist's task. His task was different – he had to take on board the color and fiber as well as the context and give a different spin to them; he had to embellish an already existing body with flesh and blood. Like his contemporaries, he felt a lack of total histories. He located the lack not in the absence of historical facts but in the empirical nature of the facts; they did not reveal enough, he felt.

The question of facticity has been central to the debates on the historical novel in Hindi literature. The nature of comingling of fact and imagination has been an important basis of classification of historical novels. However one cannot classify Verma's novels just on this basis. The question of facticity is intricately linked with that of emplotment in his

[1] Vrindavanlal Verma, *Jhansi Ki Rani*, Prabhat Prakashan: New Delhi, 1993, p.8. The book is henceforth referred to as JKR in the footnotes.

novels. The thirteen historical novels that he had published during his life-time straddle a variety of themes and modes of emplotment, commingling empirical facts and imagination. Categorization of the novels, though difficult, is necessary in order to look into the novels for his idea of history.

Going by Umberto Eco's typology of historical novels, Verma would perhaps have called himself a writer of the historical novel 'which uses made-up events and characters, yet tells us things about a period which history books do not.'[2] Eco's definition of the 'swashbuckling novel' may also be recalled for understanding Verma: a novel which 'chooses a "real" and recognizable past' and peoples it with both 'characters already found in the encyclopedia' and invented characters. Verma's project appears to be located mid-way between the 'swashbuckling novel' and the 'historical novel'. He certainly wanted to tell the story of the past that history books did not; nevertheless he worked within the broad parameters of a 'recognizable past': the past that witnessed a 'Hindu' civilization combat its enemies within and without and survive the ravages of time in the period of fall from the ancient glory. Such a metahistorical imagination was, as we have seen, prevalent in the Hindi literary world that Verma was a part of. He often played on the margins of historical possibility enabled by it, adding imaginary characters and events, and embellishing, reinforcing and fine-tuning it in the process.

The form and themes of Verma's historical novels often overlap with that of three novelistic sub-genres of his time – social novel, psychological novel, and historical

[2] Eco, *Postscript to the Name of the Rose*, 1984.

romance.[3] His novels cannot be neatly categorized on this basis; most novels fall within the textual world of more than one sub-genre. *Garh Kundar* (1928) narrates three intersecting love-stories against the background of caste conflict, in the face of an imminent invasion of Kundar by the Delhi Sultans in the thirteenth century; combining themes popular in the historical romance as well as the social novel. *Kachnar* (1948) explores the psychological world of Kachnar, a royal maiden in the house of Raj Gonds of Dhamoni, Dalip Singh, the king of Dhamoni, and his brother, Man Singh, as love unfolds between Dalip Singh and Kachnar.[4] The biographical tradition of the time too had a major influence on Verma. He wrote six novels which were centered on the life of historically significant characters: *Ahalyabai* (1955), *Madhavji Sindhia* (1957), *Maharani Durgavati* (1964), *Jhansi ki Rani*

[3] While love stories in a historical setting characterized the historical romance (section 2.2.3), social issues of the times related to caste and gender questions in particular, were major themes in the social novel, as seen in the work of Premchand. The 'psychological novel', of which Ilachandra Joshi (b. 1902) was a leading exponent, depicted the psychological world of its protagonists. It was influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis.

[4] The Raj Gonds were the ruling group in the Gond kingdom at Garh that existed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, stretching across the Malwa plateau, Vindhya plateau, Narmada–Sone river valley, Satpura range, Maikal range, Bundelkhand plateau, and the present-day Chhattisgarh region. It is not clear whether they were called Raj Gonds after they assumed power or whether they were an upper caste among Gonds in earlier times as well. Suresh Mishra, *Tribal Ascendancy in Central India: The Gond Kingdom of Garha,* New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2007.

(1946) and *Ramgarh ki Rani* (1961).[5] In a few others, like *Bhuvanvikram* (1957), *Mriganayani* (1950), *Virata ki Padmini* (1936) and *Kachnar*, the titles suggest an attempt to set the novel in the biographical time of the chief protagonist, though the texts do contain a few stories autonomous of his/her life. In all, it seems that the biographical novel may be called a clearly-identifiable sub-genre in Verma's work. The modes of emplotment are less diverse with romance and tragedy featuring more often.

In this chapter, I have selected five historical novels across space/time setting, theme, mode of emplotment, and the time of writing, in order to help explore the past that was textually produced by Verma. They are *Garh Kundar*,[6] *Jhansi ki Rani*,[7] *Kachnar*,[8]

---

[5] They are based respectively on the lives of Ahalyabai Holkar, the queen of Indore (1767-95), Madhavji Sindha, the king of Gwalior (1781-1802), Durgavati, the Chandel queen of the Gonds in the late sixteenth century, Rani Lakshmibai, and Avantibai, the Lodhi queen of Ramgarh in the years preceding the revolt of 1857.

[6] *Garh Kundar* is a satirical tragedy set in Kundar in the modern-day Tikamgarh district, thirty miles from Jhansi, and also in the nearby Bharatpura fort, Devra, Karera, Andaghat, and Sarol. It is set in the thirteenth century when the Khangars are believed to have been rulers at the fort of Kundar, also controlling the greater part of Bundelkhand. The novel begins with an imminent threat from the fledgling Delhi Sultanate on Kundar. The Bundelas, led by Sohanpal, are suspicious of the ability of the Khangars to lead the war against the Muslims. They also want the support of the Khangar ruler in their claim to Mahoni fort against Sohanpal's brother. Above all, they do not recognize the Khangars to be of Kshatriya descent. As tensions between various Kshatriya lineages of Bundelkhand unfold in dramatic fashion, three intersecting love-stories take center-stage.

The Khangar prince Nagdev falls for Sohanpal's daughter Hemavati, and is under the false impression that his love is reciprocated. At the same time, Nagdev's sister Manavati's love for Agnidutt Pandey, a Baniya's son, blossoms. While Hemavati neither knew of Nagdev's love for her, nor had any feelings for him, the match was rendered impossible in any case by

caste norms – the Bundelas would never marry their daughter to a Khangar. Hurmatsingh, Nagdev's father and king at Kundar, is adamant that the marriage should happen, and this tension now supersedes the question of political negotiations between the Khangars and the Bundelas. Manavati's mother finds out about the budding relationship between her daughter and Agnidutt and makes plans to marry her off while getting Agnidutt expelled from Kundar. In the meantime Diwakar, the son of Sudhakar, a Kayastha, falls for Agnidutt's sister Tara, but caste once again stands in their way. As the story proceeds, the mutual insult felt by the Khangars and the Bundela over the marriage affair becomes as important an issue as the negotiations between the Kshatriya clans regarding the defense of Bundelkhand. As the Bundelas plot against the Khangars, a disgruntled Agnidutt joins them. They conspire together and accept the marriage proposal, only to lure the Khangars into a trap and slaughter them all. Sohanpal becomes the ruler of Kundar and the Bundelas come to rule the greater part of Bundelkhand. Hari Chandel and Agnidutt both die in the conflict, even as Diwakar ponders upon the futility of fratricidal conflict in the face of the threat of invasion. In the end he survives, and so does Tara; but realizing that caste society would never tolerate their sexual union, they leave for the forests to live together as hermits. Invasion by the Delhi Sultanate is repelled too, as the Bundelas rule for some time.

All three love stories, as well the story of the Khangars, are emplotted in the tragic mode. Though the novel ends with the Bundelas inaugurating a period of prosperity in Bundelkhand, Verma in no way justifies the way they came to triumph over the Khangars. Verma does not make out the Bundelas to be villains, arguably in recognition of their contribution to peace and prosperity of Bundelkhand after they came to power; instead he satirizes the historical tendencies of a time when fratricidal caste conflict took precedence over the defense of the 'motherland'. Vrindavanlal Verma, *Garh Kundar*, New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2011, henceforth referred to as GK in the footnotes.

[7] *Jhansi ki Rani* is a romantic tragedy centered on the nationalist icon Lakshmibai of Jhansi. It is a story of the Rani – her birth, early signs of future greatness, marriage, widowhood, transformation into a *virangana*, and finally the battle against the British and her death as the tragic heroine. The novel describes how she integrated all sections of society and mobilized them for the war – Hindus, Muslims, lower castes, dacoit outcastes, and women. Ultimately, her efforts were not enough, the tides were flowing against her – her allies were steeped in feudal decadence and had not the stomach or ability for a fight. Although she died, what she

stood for did not. In her lifetime she stood as the ultimate symbol of the virtues of courage, patriotism, honesty, hard-work, companionate marriage, disavowal of the harsh caste norms, among others. In her death, she passed on the responsibility of upholding these virtues to the people. The tragic fate of Lakshmibai is also the romantic story of the ideals she stood for.

[8] *Kachnar* is a romantic comedy set in Dhamoni in modern day Sagar district. The time is the eighteenth century. The story revolves around five major characters: Dalip Singh – the Raj Gond king, his wife Kalavati, Kachnar – who had been sent as dowry for the marriage of Kalavati with Dalip Singh, Dalip Singh's brother Man Singh, and Achalpuri – the head of a band of wandering ascetics. The story begins with Kalavati's marriage to Dalip Singh. Kachnar comes to the royal palace at Dhamoni along with her. Man Singh and Dalip Singh are attracted to Kalavati and Kachnar both. Although marrying the women sent as dowry was a part of Raj Gond tradition, both Kalavati and Kachnar initially resent the double-game played by Dalip Singh, demanding to know which lady he is actually committed to? Kachnar however begins to develop a soft corner for Dalip Singh, though it hardly occupies her thoughts. In the meantime Dalip Singh is severely injured in battle and is presumed dead while he is not. When he is taken to the funeral site, a storm with heavy showers breaks out. Achalpuri and his associates rescue the still-alive Dalip Singh and take him to their camp.

The people at the palace presume Dalip Singh dead. Man Singh happily resumes the throne and marries Kalavati. However he begins to approach Kachnar too, and she gradually feels disgusted. When he is about to force her into marriage, she runs away seeks refuge at the camp of wandering ascetics. Achalpuri reluctantly admits her. That is where Dalip Singh had been kept too. Achalpuri had understood that Dalip Singh had suffered a loss of memory and had to be re-educated in all social habits as if he were a child. Over a period of time, Kachnar recognizes Dalip Singh and gets to know that he had been wrongly presumed dead. Achalpuri now decides to take advantage of the political confusion of the times to wage war on Dhamoni and install Dalip Singh as the king; one whom the ascetics could control and get what they badly needed in the given historical circumstances: a safe haven. During the battle Dalip Singh suffers a fall and gets his memory back. By then Kachnar had fallen in love with Dalip Singh and he repents and apologizes for his misdeeds as a ruler in his previous phase. Dalip Singh and Kachnar get married and the ascetics are thanked and rewarded. Vrindavanlal Verma, *Kachnar*, New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2011, henceforth referred to as KC in the footnotes.

Mriganayani[9] and *Bhuvanvikram*[10]. The other novels shall be referred to on and off but the focus will remain on these five novels. I show that through different stylistic devices like

[9] *Mriganayani*, set in late fifteenth and early sixteenth century Gwalior, is a romantic tale of survival – of a way of life, of 'national' virtues, in the face of invading enemies and internal tensions. The story narrates the lives of Mriganayani – a peasant woman and later the wife of king Man Singh Tomar of Gwalior, her brother Atal, and her childhood friend and later sister-in-law Lakhi. Through their lives the author wants to tell the story of the times that they lived in. The novel begins with Atal, Lakhi and Ninni's (Mriganayani's name before she became queen) life in their village Rai – their hard peasant life and Lakhi and Ninni's brave hunting exploits. As the fame of their bravery and beauty grow, Mahmud Bagharra of Gujarat and Ghiyas-ud-din Khilji of Malwa – two Muslim kings portrayed by Verma as singularly oppressive, lecherous and extravagant, plan to catch hold of the women and bring them to their harem. In the meantime Man Singh Tomar arrives at the village and marries Ninni. Atal and Lakhi's marriage is made difficult by caste norms as he is an Ahir and she Gujjar. The village priest Bodhan refuses to permit the marriage. They run away from the village and is almost trapped by a troupe of *nats* (actors/performers) to be taken to Mandu, the capital of Ghiyas-ud-din Khilji. Chance and the sheer intelligence of Lakhi save the day and she also saves Narwar fort from slipping into Ghiyas-ud-din Khilji's hands. Man Singh comes to know of it, brings them to Gwalior and arranges for their marriage. In the meantime Mriganayani establishes herself as the chief queen of Man Singh and helps him become the perfect sovereign – Man Singh gradually comes to pay equal attention to cultivating fine arts, delivering justice to the subject population and militarily strengthening the kingdom. After Atal and Lakhi's marriage, Lakhi is united with her childhood friend in Gwalior, before they are sent to the new fortress at Rai. Sikandar Lodi strikes at the fortress and Lakhi and Atal both die defending the fort, while Man Singh's benevolent rule continues. The story ends with Mriganayani willingly suggesting that Vikramaditya, Man Singh's eldest son and not her son becomes Man Singh's successor, calling it her duty to uphold the norms of primogeniture. Vrindavanlal Verma, *Mriganayani*, Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.2011, henceforth referred to as MN in the footnotes.

[10] Bhuvanvikram is a romantic comedy set in Ayodhya in the later Vedic age. The story centers on king Romak and his son Bhuvan. Romak's kingdom is the victim of a terrible famine and the people are losing faith in Romak: a king who cares for the people. In the

characterization, setting, mood, and others, the past is defined as a period of struggle against the 'external' enemy and a model for the practice of an ethical life in the present. The ethical life is defined by virtues that vary according to the social locations of the people but are linked together organically through the figure of the sovereign. Verma uses scholarly works, original texts as well as oral traditions to arrive at a set of 'correct' historical facts and thereby produce such a past. However, he chooses to play on the margins of the 'correct' facts and enters the realm of historical possibility casting empirical facts aside. There is a

---

meantime, his son Bhuvan is growing up as his father's spoilt child, hardly prepared to assume kingship at some stage in his life. Upon the advice of the Brahmin Som, Romak sends his son to Dhaumya *rishi's* hermitage for education. In the kingdom, Romak's enemies, bothered only about their vested interests, are busy conspiring to oust the king and his son. The essentially cruel nature of the king's enemies is highlighted through the plight of Kapinjal, a Shudra peasant who is brutally oppressed by Neel and his daughter Himani, the conspirators-in-chief. Kapinjal runs away from the kingdom and is blessed by Dhaumya to become a sage.

While living in the hermitage, Bhuvan meets Gauri in the forest. Gauri's family had migrated (she and her parents) from Ayodhya due to the famine. Love blossoms between them. The conspiracy against Romak and Bhuvan proceeds apace in the town and Neel plans to trap Bhuvan in marriage with Himani as a part of his plan. Romak, unaware of what is happening behind is back, agrees to the marriage upon completion of Bhuvan's education. When he goes to the forest to take Bhuvan back, rains arrive at last and good days seem to be around the corner for the king. The story now moves towards its climax – the marriage of Bhuvan and Himani, upon which Romak and Bhuvan are to be killed by the conspirators. Kapinjal and Gauri had however arrived at the town in time to get to know about Neel's plans. Gauri had survived a flood which had taken her parents away and then struggled her way through the forest. Kapinjal, with the help of Gauri foil the conspiracy. Bhuvan and Gauri get married as the famine ends with a heavy rainfall and Romak decides to retire to the forest along with his wife. Vrindavanlal Verma, *Bhuvanvikram,* New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2010, henceforth referred to as BV in the footnotes.

significant presence of adventure time, but events set in adventure time are sought to be fitted into the realm of the historically possible. The author chooses to function within the limits of the historically possible, as it enables him to produce the past as a period of struggle in defense of political sovereignty and a storehouse of paradigmatic values. Tautologically, the idea of the past as period of such struggle defines the boundaries of the historically possible for Verma. This idea of the past as a time of struggle thus acts as a metahistorical fact, subsuming all empirical facts within it and producing details about the ethical life of people as important historical facts.

3.1. The 'External' Enemy and Internal Coherence: Region, Language and the Nation

In a letter to Dr. Shivkumar Mishra in 1951, Vrindavanlal Verma wrote:

> If you had the opportunity of touring the interior of Bundelkhand, you would have noticed that our Bundelkhand, though poor, is glorious. We have no money, but we sing *phag* and *rachhare* [two forms of local folk songs], dance on the banks of our rivers and lakes, and enjoy the flights of our fancy. Recently we have had a poet Isuri by name. His *phags* are very popular. From cartmen, shepherds and boatmen to the princes, everybody sings the *phags* with great joy. Like the *dohas* [couplets] of the poet Bihari, his *phags* are very short. The language is simple but eloquent and emotive. Every *phag* builds a mood. That is why this green land of Bundelkhand, lying along rivers and lakes, amidst hills, serves me as a source of inspiration for my work.[11]

[11] Quoted in Saxena, *Vrindavanlal Verma*, 1982, p. 16.

The open avowal of Bundelkhand as the region that he wanted to write about came with the first historical novel *Garh Kundar*. Eight out of thirteen novels of Verma are set in areas that could fall under Bundelkhand, viz. *Garh Kundar*, *Virata ki Padmini*, *Musahibjoo*, *Jhansi ki Rani*, *Kachnar*, *Mriganayani*, *Maharani Durgavati*, and *Ramgarh ki Rani.*[12] The time period chosen belong to the medieval and the early modern. The choice of setting enabled a clear identification of the 'other' of the putative nation: the Muslim and the British. It also enabled the national space to be produced as historically, culturally and linguistically unified; one where the people exhibited Kshatriya behavior across caste and gender divisions. In *Garh Kundar*, keenly aware of the anachronism involved in talking about a 'Bundelkhand' in pre-Bundela periods, the author uses the name Jujhoti, which was also used to refer to the area. The name is derived from a pre-Bundela ruler (before the sixteenth century) of the area. In the introduction to *Garh Kundar*, he clearly mentions that Jujhoti is nothing but '*adhunik* [modern/contemporary] Bundelkhand'. The omniscient narrator, as well as the characters in the novels uses the word Jujhoti rather than Bundelkhand. The novels draw upon the identity signified by the word 'Bundelkhand' as much as they create it

[12] *Garh Kundar* is set in the modern-day Tikamgarh district of Madhya Pradesh (MP), *Virata ki Padmini* in Virata near Jhansi (Uttar Pradesh, UP) and Dalipnagar near Datia (MP), *Maharani Durgavati* in Garhakanta in Sagar district and Kalinjar Banda district (MP), *Musahibju* in Bharatgarh in Datia, *Kachnar* in Dhamoni which is part of Sagar district (MP), *Ramgarh ki Rani* in Ramgarh (MP), and *Mriganayani* in Gwalior. All these areas are part of the partially undefined entity that Bundelkhand has been in modern times. The Bundelkhand state that is being demanded, encompasses most of these areas.

The history of Bundelkhand as a *region* is rather complicated. The name of the region is of recent origin, and is taken after the dominant clan of local potentates – the Bundelas. They made their first appearance towards the mid-sixteenth century and remained the dominant political force till the nineteenth century. The British then recognized the princely states of the Bundelas which came to constitute the Bundelkhand Agency. Vincent Smith, writing in the *Indian Antiquary* in 1908, stated that the use of the word Bundelkhand was '...vague and indefinite. The only official recognition of it being the application of collective terms "Bundelkhand Agency" to a group of petty native states.'[13]

Bundelkhand's life as a concretely defined administrative region does not go back to more than three hundred years. In Mughal records, it is referred to as a small territory ruled by Bundela chiefs, with Orchha as its seat of governance. Namrita Sharma argues that it was only by the seventeenth century that it emerged as an extensive territory. The Bundela Rajputs of the region were prominent in the Mughal empire, with Bir Singh Bundela having a high *mansab* under Jahangir.[14] Sharma says that perhaps the powerful presence of the Bundelas, the unique topography consisting of rough and ragged terrain, hilly mountain and deep ravines, and isolation due to impenetrable jungles, had lent meaning to being Bundelkhand over the past couple of centuries.

The historical novels of Verma produced Bundelkhand primarily as a *historical* and *linguistic* region. The accent on locale and characters to convey the peculiarity of flora and

---

[13] Namrita Sharma, *The Making of Medieval Bundelkhand*, Unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1996.

[14] *Ibid*, c.2.

fauna, folk culture and other characteristics of the region bring his novels close to what later became popular as *anchlik* literature in the 1950s.[15] Bundelkhand's history, of martial traditions and struggle against powerful kingdoms of North India, and its supposedly 'timeless' culture that survived through the ages, was most significant for Verma. He used this history as a resource to inspire a politics of cultural nationalism in which Bundelkhand stood for Hindu civilization, and for the Indian nation, thereby producing the region and the nation simultaneously as mutually reinforcing concepts. Being a Hindi writer who believed Hindi to be the national language, Bundeli for him constituted a dialect of Hindi and Bundelkhand a specific linguistic region within the Hindi region. The use of literary devices like the setting, mood, diction, anthropomorphism, and use of tropes enable such production.

3.1.1. Bundeli Kingdoms in Crisis

Each of the novels based on Bundelkhand, except *Kachnar*, are set in moments of political crisis when the sovereignty of a Bundeli kingdom is under threat from 'external' enemies. It could be Muslims (for example in *Garh Kundar*, *Mriganayani*, *Maharani Durgavati*, *Virata ki Padmini*) or Britishers (for example *Jhansi ki Rani* and *Ramgarh ki Rani*); the 'other' in much of contemporary nationalist imagination.

The threat is given a heightened focus at times to build a mood of crisis and a tone of anxiety. *Garh Kundar* begins with Agnidutt Pandey and Nagdev on a visit to Bharatpura fort. There is suspense and anxiety in the air. Their names are initially not revealed to the reader –

[15] Phanishwarnath Renu (1907-1988) is known as the pioneer of this form. Rajeev Saxena has drawn the comparison between Vrindavanlal Verma and Renu. Saxena, *Vrindavanlal Verma*, 1982, p. 18.

only their looks are described. It is as if a couple of people are going to Bharatpura with dubious intentions. When they ask for the door to be opened, Arjun, the guard, sternly refuses and interrogates them. Arjun behaves as if there is an imminent danger of an enemy attack and after entering, Agnidutt and Nagdev congratulate Hari Chandel, the caretaker of the fort, for appointing a competent guard. That night, when everyone is asleep, a contingent of Muslim soldiers attacks the fort. Nagdev and Agnidutt's alertness saves the day and the attack is repulsed.

The threat is not merely to sovereignty, but to a way of life shown to be in danger. The epilogue of *Jhansi ki Rani* tells us that the people of Jhansi stopped celebrating Holi on the day after the Holi fire ceremony, in memory of Lakshmibai. The people of Gwalior celebrate Holi as they welcome normalcy back after yet another invasion by Sikandar Lodi. Yet it is not the same, as the narrator tells us: 'In some distant *yug*, it (Holi) was celebrated for a month; the burdens on life had reduced the festive period to five days. Now even one day would be a lot.'[16]

Love and war function together as tropes, that show some as competent and others as incompetent in handling the crisis. At a time when the attack on Kundar is imminent, Punyapal, the Panwar chief, meets Hemavati, the daughter of Sohanpal Bundela. Upon seeing him, she hides in a room and talks without revealing her countenance:

> (Punyapal said) I have come after a long time to do *juhar* [a form of greeting popular among Rajputs]. Won't I even get to see you? At one point of time we used to play around together. What has gone wrong?

[16] Verma, MN, 2011, p. 12-13.

Hemavati said in a firm voice, 'free Jujhoti first.'

Punyapal's voice was shaking, 'If I die in the process, and not see you even once before that, my heart will never be at peace with itself.'

(Hemavati replied) 'A Panwar fears death? Then don't lay your hands on what you call your trade!'

(Punyapal said) 'Fine. At least come in front of me and accept my *juhar*!'

(Hemavati replied) 'I have done the *namaskar* [greeting]. Do your duty. In such times, the Bundela is [as good as] a Panwar and the Panwar a Bundela. Is there anything better that can happen to you? Have you gathered your forces? I am surprised that you have time to indulge in such useless talk!'.....

.....(Punyapal asked) 'Would you like me to stay alive?'

(Hemavati replied) 'For the sake of Jujhoti's freedom!'[17]

Hemavati emerges as the brave woman who is ready to treat her romantic and sexual desires as secondary in such a time of crisis. Punyapal is not a coward but is not as focused on the war as he should be.

3.1.2. Local Festivals

The spatial setting of Bundelkhand allowed Verma to write local festivals into the novels. The festivals are often described at great length. We have the following description of Holi as celebrated by the Gonds from *Ramgarh ki Rani*:

> The Gonds played Holi as usual. Men and women leave their homes after midnight. Playing the drum, singing Holi songs, they reach their relatives in other villages. There was food, drink, banters and colors as per the old custom. It continued on the second day. Before evening they played the game which in some place is called

[17] Verma, GK, 2011, p.122-23.

jiriya ki holi, and *dage ki holi* in some other. A pot of jaggery was kept on a high wooden plank. Below that, men and women started a friendly fight with sticks – women carrying the longer ones and men, the shorter one. The women attacked and the men had to defend themselves. If they could not, they would get hurt – thanks to the women! In the meantime, as the beating continued, a man would try to reach the pot of jaggery and the women would beat him hard. If he could not stand the pain then he would come down, and if he could, the pot and the jaggery in it would be his! The beating would stop after that and all would enjoy the jaggery together.[18]

Many of the festivals described, like Holi, were not specific to Bundelkhand per se, though there could be local specificities like the *phaag* and *rachhare* songs that were sung on such occasions. The celebration of the festivals at concrete junctures in history gives them local dimensions as they mark situations specific to the history of Bundelkhand. The townsfolk celebrate Holi as Lakshmibai arrives as the queen of Jhansi. People are aware of the great qualities of the queen, and the joy of receiving her as one of their own overlaps with the jubilant mood of the festival.

3.1.3. Hills, Rivers, Ravines, Forests

The natural features of Bundelkhand – the hills, the rivers, ravines and forests are worked into the plot of the novels. The villagers in Man Singh Tomar's kingdom hide in the ravines when there is an attack by Sikandar Lodi. After being expelled from Kundar, Agnidutt roams around in the forest pondering over his misfortune. In a poignant moment, he stands on the Palothar hills overlooking the fort, looks down on Kundar, and decides that he must strike back. The forest is a space of danger as well as safety, war as well as love,

[18] Quoted in Rampyare Tiwari, *Vrindavanlal Verma ke Aitihasik Upanyason ka Punarmulyankan,* Delhi: Nirmal Publications, 2006, p. 263.

besides being the thoroughfare from one fort to another. In *Mriganayani*, Ninni and Lakhi spend their childhood deriving pleasure and sustenance hunting in the forest, and it is in course of a hunt that Man Singh Tomar decides to marry Ninni. At the same time, Ghiyas-ud-din Khilji asks Pilli and her caravan of gypsies who travel through forests to lure Lakhi and Ninni to Malwa. Previously, a set of Turkish soldiers had been sent by Mahmud Bagharra to forcibly bring Lakhi and Ninni to Gaujarat. They hid in the forest and almost captured Ninni. Yet it is the forest which comes to Atal and Lakhi's rescue when they are ostracized in their village; it is through the forest that they flee.

Verma used anthropomorphism to lend human qualities to nature and produce nature as part of the history of the people of the region. The hills stand firm in the defense of Kundar and the furious waters of the Betwa help exhibit the resolve of the soldiers escaping after defeat at Jhansi:

> The Betwa flowed in massive waves, wave after wave, incessant, unbroken. When, in a split moment, a mass of water struggled against one another and tried tirelessly to leave it behind, foam rose and covered the whole river, and the horsemen could not see the other bank at times. If they pierced one mass of foam, another instantly came in their way. It seems as though the flowing roar was repeatedly saying, be off, be off. If they eluded the fury from the front, it attacked from the sides...Again and again the riders found themselves amidst whirls.[19]

3.1.4. Diction

Verma occasionally used Bundeli words in the novels. Arjun Kumhar, the gatekeeper at Bharatpura fort, speaks to Agnidutt and Nagdev in Bundeli. In *Jhansi ki Rani*, Verma uses

[19] Trans. Rajeev Saxena from JKR. Quoted in Saxena, *Vrindavanlal Verma*, 1982, p.17.

the dialect in a *bazaar* scene where the townsfolk of Jhansi gossip about Jhalkari's husband's tribulations. Vishanath Prasad has pointed out that Verma added many Bundeli words to the Hindi lexicon. He has argued that Verma's writings would reveal many grammatical errors when judged by the standard Hindi of the times, and that we need to remember that Verma often relied on Bundeli grammatical conventions.[20] Rajeev Saxena says that his Hindi has the rhythm of the Bundeli idiom, which is almost untranslatable.[21]

It is only marginal characters, often lower castes like Arjun Kumhar, who speak in Bundeli. The major characters – the heroes and heroines – speak in Hindi, thereby acquiring a supra-local stature. Bundeli, in the tongue of the lower castes, often minor characters, function as the language of the small, while Hindi becomes the language of the big and the powerful, most often Kshatriyas, Baniyas and Brahmins. They can be so only in relation to each other, each reinforcing the other's hierarchical position. The Hindi-speaking characters, however, have no difficulty in understanding Bundeli. What we have then is a supra-local mother language and its local dialect that understand each other without the former giving up its higher social status. The narrators do not translate Bundeli into Hindi for the reader and the implied Hindi reader is perhaps supposed to understand Bundeli in the way Nagdev and Agnidutt do in *Garh Kundar*. That is not certain though. Ignorance of the exact meaning of the sentences in Bundeli would not affect an understanding of the plot in a significant way. Their gist would be clear from the Hindi sentences surrounding the Bundeli ones.

---

[20] Vishwanath Prasad, *The Selected Works of Vrindavanlal Verma,* New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1999, v.2, p.16.

[21] Saxena, *Vrindavanlal Verma*, 1982, p.18.

3.2. Producing the Social: Ethical Life in the Nation

If defense of sovereignty was one aspect of the historical process in the region and the nation, the practice of ethical life was another. The characters in the novels convey the values that different sections of the society should live by, and produce the subjects who struggle for those values as ideal. In the way the ethical life is portrayed, the stories based on Bundelkhand share a structural similarity with the ones based on other locales. Different regions are thereby shot through with uniformity and the nation emerges as a picture of unity in diversity.

King Romak has failed to handle the famine that has struck Ayodhya. On occasions, he has not distributed grains to the poor. Yet his enemies are scared of fighting him in an open battle, for he is a virtuous ruler. The Shudras will die for him. He stopped cow-slaughter; and sections of Brahmins and Kshatriyas support him for that. King Romak symbolizes a good sovereign heading a domain wherein all sections of the society do their duty and the society is conflict-free. In the novel *Bhuvanvikram*, Vrindavanlal Verma drew upon the prevalent Aryan ideal expressed so eloquently by Maithilisharan Gupta in *Bharat Bharati*: the Aryan society, harmonious and free of conflict, constituted the highest form of ethical life. The highest form was deemed to have been realized in the *varnashram dharma* wherein division of labor would be functional and all work would be respected. *Bhuvanvikram* is however set in the later Vedic age, when the fall from the ideal had just started. Part of the ancient period, it could still represent a near-ethical society. *Bhuvanvikram* aside, Verma opted out of the ancient period altogether. The social, as shown in space/time settings of the medieval and early modern period, is always full of conflict.

Ethical life cannot reach the highest form, and a continuous struggle is required to maintain whatever remains of it. Struggle itself is the over-arching virtue that constitutes the ethical life in such situations.

The ethical life is defined by a set of virtues which vary with the social positions of people. The sovereign is required to be benevolent and attentive to the protection of the territory against external aggressors and internal enemies who align with them, to the development of agriculture and the cultivation of fine arts. The peasant has to be energetic and work hard in the fields. He must resist 'rigid' caste norms of the village society. Inter-caste and companionate marriage is fore grounded as a virtue across social divisions. Patriotism, understood as loyalty to a just and benevolent sovereign or to a territory, as the case may be, is desirable in all and is an essential element of ethical life. The heroes and heroines in the novels are people who uphold such virtues – Agnidutt Pandey, Diwakar and Tara in *Garh Kundar*, Lakshmibai and her generals and warriors, and many common men and women of Jhansi, in *Jhansi ki Rani*, Man Singh Tomar, Mriganayani, Atal and Lakhi in *Mriganayani*, Kachnar in *Kachnar*, and King Romak, Bhuvan, Gauri, Dhamuya and Kapinjal in *Bhuvanvikram*. Here I will discuss the virtues that are deemed as desirable in different social subjects to create an ethical social life, by concentrating on the figure of the sovereign, models of womanhood, and the caste identity of subjects. The Muslims, except the Muslim rulers who feature occasionally and constitutes the 'other' of the ideal sovereign, are conspicuous by their absence. Except a few historical characters in *Jhansi ki Rani* and

Madhavji Sindhia, who fight for the sovereign, there are hardly any Muslim characters in the novels.[22]

3.2.1. The Ideal Sovereign

If there is one figure that makes the practice of ethical life in the time/spaces of the novels possible, it is the ideal sovereign. His presence announces to the reader that Hindu rulers have been capable of good governance while also evoking nostalgia for an order whose time was past. The progressive, benevolent king provides a model for the male sovereign, while the *virangana* for the female sovereign. The sovereign's first duty is to guard the country against the external enemy. He also faces challenges from internal enemies: warring feudatories who are ready to conspire with the external enemy, often a Muslim king, against his own country. He upholds a progressive view of religion and enables his citizens to lead an ethical life – Man Singh Tomar facilitates the companionate marriage of Atal and Lakhi with the help of the Brahmin Vijayangam who claims that inter-caste marriage is not against the *shastra.* In the ensuing conversation with Bodhan, the Brahmin who refuses to conduct the inter-caste marriage citing the *shahstras*, also calls for a reformed Hindu religion with an all-India character.

---

[22] We find an exception in *Garh Kundar.* Ibn Karim is a soldier of the Turkish army and is captured when they attack the Bharatpura fort. He is shown as brave and upright: once Nagdev and Hari Chandel agree to not kill him, he becomes their loyal servant and saves them from a surprise attack by a contingent of Turkish soldiers. However his character is not developed by the author. He becomes important in the novel by virtue of his new-found loyalty to Kundar and valorous attempts to save the Bundela chiefs from an attack.

Bodhan claims to be the preserver of the Aryan *varnashram dharma* and says that being a Brahmin, he does not want any advice about *dharma* from a Kshatriya. Man Singh points out that it is because of the rigidity of people like Bodhan that many Hindus have left the Hindu fold. 'If there is a sore on your limbs what do you do?' he asks. Bodhan replies that he would cut off the limb. Man Singh points out that that's what has become necessary to restore *aryavarta* to its pristine glory. Then Bodhan claims that the texts that Vijayangam cites are not the ancient Hindu ones, '...The *shastras* that he quotes to give his opinion are not that ancient. It was written only around three hundred years back. That too it was not written in Kashi or Mathura but in the *dravida* country.' Man Singh upholds that the *dravida* country is not outside the Hindu fold and that it has made important contributions to Hinduism, '...It is that *dravida* country that has given us lord Shankaracharya and lord Ramanujacharya. That's why I say, despite being so well read, at times you talk as if you have no *vivek* [sense/conscience]...'[23]

The Muslim King rarely features as an individual, but constitutes a political threat while remaining in the background. He features in *Mriganayani*, acting as a foil to Man Singh Tomar constitutes the 'other' of the ideal sovereign. Mahmud Bagharra of Gujarat as well as Ghiyas-ud-din Khilji of Malwa are vilified as rulers who are poor at governance, who oppress their people and are only interested in wars, territorial expansion. Instead of improving the condition of the people, they spend days in leisure during times of peace. They have huge harems populated with Hindu women, symbolizing the danger they pose to the Hindu society. The benevolent Hindu kings' character may be a mixture of virtues and vices

[23] Verma, MN, 2001, p. 251-53.

but he emerges as the focal point around which the society revolves. Man Singh Tomar is portrayed as a man sometimes carried away in his royal glory to the neglect of his duties as a king. He cannot always strike a balance between fostering social and cultural prosperity of Gwalior and strengthening the military in order to protect its sovereignty. Yet he goes on tours in disguise in order to inspect the kingdom, seeks to rid Hindu religion of rigid caste norms and is competent enough to repel Sikandar Lodi.

The sovereign being so central to society, in *Jhansi ki Rani* the crisis of sovereignty is the crisis of the society as a whole. As the situation inches closer to war, the sovereign becomes more important in holding the society together. The ethical life of Jhansi is centered on the chief protagonist, Rani Lakshmibai. When she enters Jhansi as the queen, the situation there was gloomy; much darker than Man Singh's Gwalior in *Mriganayani*. The signs of royal decadence were visible everywhere. Gangadhar Rao was a weak but cruel and oppressive ruler. Although he patronized poetry and the fine arts, he did not discharge his everyday political duties as a king with care. The lives of the common people were made difficult by the society, including the king, as we see in the case of Narayan Shastri and Chhoti's love affair. Narayan Shastri, a Brahmin, fell in love with Chhoti, a lower caste girl. The society, ridden with caste prejudices, would not let such a relationship blossom. Both were taken to the king. Shastri plotted to fool the king into questioning the integrity of the men who had launched the complaint. He told Chhoti to claim, with the help of forged evidence, that she had been pursued (for sexual pleasure) by many of those complainants themselves. Chhoti agreed to sacrifice her honesty for the sake of her lover. Ultimately their bluff was called and they were expelled from Jhansi. The king would not allow the virtue of

inter-caste companionate marriage in his territory. It was in such a gloomy situation that Lakshmibai entered Jhansi.

After arriving at Jhansi, she gradually transforms herself into a *virangana*, later dying for the sake of *swarajya* against the British. She unites people across caste and religious boundaries and even brings outcaste dacoits like Sagar Singh into the national fold -- instead of punishing him, she sees the reason behind his dacoity and urges him to fight in defense of Jhansi. In the novel, other figures might embody certain virtues; those, however, are realized only in the service of the nation, through the association with the warrior queen.

Lakshmibai as a sovereign is, however, different from the benevolent king. She is a *virangana*. Kathryn Hansen has argued that the *virangana* is a specific model of nationalist womanhood, distinct from the sacrificing, chaste, loyal wife and the mother goddess. The *virangana* is a valiant fighter who distinguishes herself by prowess in warfare, an activity normally reserved for men. She demonstrates her martial skills and courage by direct participation in combat, at the risk of her life. In fact, sometimes she dies in battle or takes her own life on the battlefield to avoid ignominious defeat. She is a leader of women and men, acting as head of state during peace and general in time of war. She adopts male attire as well as symbols of male status and authority, especially the sword, and she rides a horse. The *virangana* is dedicated to virtue, wisdom, and the defense of her people. Above all, she is a fighter and a victor in struggle against the forces of evil.[24] Four historical figures popular in contemporary nationalist imagination as *viranganas* feature in Verma's novels: Lakshmibai, the queen of Jhansi, Ahalyabai Holkar, the Maratha queen, Ramgarh ki Rani,

[24] Hansen, 'The Virangana in North Indian History: Myth and Popular Culture', *EPW,* 1998.

the Lodhi queen, Avantibai of Ramgarh, Maharani Durgavati, the Chandel queen. The *virangana* becomes a model for the ideal sovereign as well as womanhood in Verma's work.

As the sovereign, there is a significant difference between the benevolent king and the *virangana*. While the former is shown to be a mix of vices and virtues as a person as well as a ruler, the latter is portrayed as free of vices and exemplary. The nature of the classical *virangana* itself partly explains this tendency. In contemporary political imagination, the *virangana* became an emblem of the nation itself ('Mother India') engaged in righteous struggle; exemplarity was a requirement for the emblem to be pure. That aside, her arrival on the stage of history is often compelled by the lack of a competent male figure to perform the required functions. Her genesis being necessitated by a need for perfection, she could not but be perfect. Also, by virtue of being a female, she would always be vulnerable to charges of incompetency – for it was not her natural role. Perfection could provide a heightened response to a heightened vulnerability.

3.2.2. Models of Womanhood

The *virangana* provides a model of womanhood that goes beyond the warrior queen. Martial abilities and the readiness for entry into the male space are considered as desirable virtues in women. Mriganayani and Lakhi are not warrior queens but they are adept hunters. The former does not give up practice of horse-riding and archery after her marriage and is ready for combat although she is never required to. Lakhi is called to war in defense of the fort in Rai and is martyred. Agnidutt Pandey, in *Garh Kundar*, teaches archery to Manavati, his lover: martial arts are an important part of her education. In the situation of historical crisis, these are women ready to fight and advise men about their ethical lives.

Alongside these women, there is also the model of the innocent woman – Gauri in *Bhuvanvikram*, Tara in *Garh Kundar*. Love as a trope brings out their innocence – they are hopelessly in love, unaware of the barriers that may be posed in the form of war, conspiracy, and oppressive caste norms. The innocent woman is, however, not a pure model and can coexist with the model of the valorous woman. Lakhi in *Mriganayani* and Manavati in *Garh Kundar* reflect that coexistence. Manavati is trained in martial arts but is not an adequately strong character; she refuses to defy her parents and run away with Agnidutt. She is finally married off to Rajdhar by her parents who opposed her inter-caste romantic relationship with Agnidutt. Lakhi, on the other hand, is also hopelessly in love with Atal, not fully anticipating the possible recriminations from the village community. But when the situation demands she defies all barriers and takes on the society for the sake of her love. Gauri in *Bhuvanvikram* also presents a mixture of the two models. She is innocently in love with Bhuvan but is intelligent and fearless enough to help Kapinjal defeat the conspiracy against Bhuvan and Romak.

Women thus possess different qualities, and virtue lies in calling upon them at the right time and for the right purpose. Bravery, fighting spirit and intelligence are required in the struggle against internal and external enemies as also to uphold desirable practices like companionate marriage. A woman who calls upon them for the wrong purposes emerges as a villain.

Himani acts as a foil against Gauri and brings out the possible result of a disproportionate mix of valor and modesty in women. She rides a horse, blocks Bhuvan's way in the forest, and picks a fight with him. It is not bravery but sheer arrogance. The

narrator tells us that her dress was not that of an *arya* woman and she did not carry the *sheel-sankoch* (modesty-shyness/reticence) of an *arya* woman either. She displays voluptuous sexuality and ends up being one of the chief conspirators against Bhuvan and Romak. If women get rid of their modesty and if they use their intelligence and martial abilities against the sovereign, they may bring sorrow to the nation.

Companionate marriage emerges as one of the most important aspects of ethical life. War, conspiracy, and caste norms create barriers to companionate marriage. The author often chooses an inter-caste relationship to approve the idea of companionate marriage, as love becomes a trope for criticizing caste society. Polygamy among princes is at times portrayed as undesirable, though no clear critique emerges of the same. The author is reluctant to accept the tradition that claims Man Singh Tomar had two hundred queens and accepts the one that claims he had eight queens, Mriganayani being the ninth one. He is contrasted with Mahmud Bagharra of Gujarat who is ready to capture any beautiful girl in his kingdom or in surrounding ones and bring her into his harem. The quantitative difference in the number of queens is given priority over the fact that both are being polygamous. Mriganayani is initially suspicious of Man Singh's polygamous tendencies and thinks, 'He must have spoke so sweetly to all of them at the beginning. Will he always behave so nicely with me or marry a tenth time and treat me the way he treats his previous wives now?'[25] She soon thinks that she has the ability to capture his heart in a way that he will not marry again. It is not the male's fault that he is polygamous; it is the lack of happiness in marriage that may be the reason behind such a practice. The ideal happy companionate marriage then becomes an antidote to

[25] Verma, MN, 2011, p. 168.

polygamy. Polygamy does not feature in the life-world of common people in the novels though.

In *Kachnar* too, the author appears to move towards a critique of polygamy only to turn his back to it. Initially, there seems a unity between Kalavati, the queen, and his two companions, Kachnar and Anandi, against the sexual dalliance of Dalip Singh. When Dalip Singh desires sexual union with Kachnar, she feels for Kalavati and refuses. However, soon she demands marriage as a pre-condition to the sexual union, especially since the Raj Gonds follow a tradition of the king marrying the queen's companions who have been sent as dowry. Marriage then becomes the ultimate stamp of acceptability of sexual union.

3.2.3. Identifying Caste

In the later Vedic society in *Bhuvanvikram,* Kapinjal emerges as a model Shudra. He is a hard-working peasant and not willing to submit to oppression by the landlord. He runs away from Ayodhya after being mercilessly beaten by the landlord, Neel, and under the guidance of the Brahmin Dhaumya, he excels as a student. He is better than Dhaumya's other disciples – a heightened achievement that sharply critiques caste discrimination. The Shudra is not only an able scholar but also the best. After the completion of his education, Dhaumya tells him to go back to Ayodhya and share his knowledge. Kapinjal wants to go back and repay the debts to Neel, for which he had made him a bonded laborer. He considers that his duty. Dhaumya instructs him to go tell the rebellious peasantry to calm down, for 'those who can do *sewa* [service] without any show will soon reach a higher level

of existence'.[26] Kapinjal is willing to follow the Brahmin and submit to the caste system as long as each caste's labor is recognized and no one is oppressed. Thus towards the latter part of the text, the Shudra's agency develops under the guidance of the Brahmin.

The Shudra, as a named identity, is absent in other novels. Instead we have figures belonging to intermediate and low castes of the Bundelkhand region – Ahirs, Gujjars, Gonds, Lodis, Kumhars. The Gonds feature in *Kachnar* and Lodis in *Ramgarh ki Rani* as kings and queens displaying Kshatriya abilities; Avantibai is a *virangana.*[27] The lower caste common wo/man as an autonomous character who is also central to the plot, like the Muslim, is conspicuous by her/his absence in the novels. Atal and Lakhi in *Mriganayani* are exceptions. They too represent virtues similar to Kapinjal – hard work in the fields and defiance of

---

[26] Verma, BV, 2010, p. 255.

[27] I have not been able to have a look at this novel. It is treated as one of Verma's 'lesser' historical novels and is out of print. It is not even a part of the *Vrindavanlal Verma Samagra* edited by Vishwanath Prasad. I could only read a summary of the novel in Tiwari, *Vrindavanlal Verma ke Aitihasik Upanyason ka Punarmulyankan.* However it appears to be an important novel, for Avantibai is a celebrated figure among Dalits today. Upon reading the summary though, it appears to me that it is her Kshatriya abilities that have been celebrated in the novel. She is known to have fought against the British and died in the field. See Badri Narayan Tiwari, *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India: Culture, Identity and Politics,* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006, and 'Reactivating the Past: Dalits and Memories of 1857', *EPW,* 42 (19), 2007.

oppressive caste norms regarding marriage. There are lower caste characters marginal to the plot, like Daru in *Kachnar*, whose identity is that of a victim of caste oppression. Often the lower caste seems to be subsumed within the larger category of peasantry, whose primary virtue seems to lie in hard work in the fields. On the whole, three models of being lower caste emerge in the novels: the lower caste as a hard-working peasant, the lower caste as a victim of caste oppression, and the lower caste possessing Kshatriya qualities.

It is the Kshatriya who emerges as the nationalist model. The ideal king is either Kshatriya or displays Kshatriya-like qualities, 'Ramgarh ki Rani' Avantibai being a case of the latter. Women and lower castes displaying Kshatriya abilities become central characters in the novels. We have already seen how important the *virangana* was as a model of womanhood. Untouchable women like Jhalkari become important because of her martyrdom at the hands of the British.[28] The Khangars are appreciated because of their past as warriors and rulers and their present condition as a lower caste inspires pity in the author. In *Mriganayani*, Man Singh Tomar comes to Ninni's village for a hunt and learns of her bravery. She is then subjected to the male gaze of Man Singh as she proves her bravery during the hunt. It is her warrior spirit that impresses Man Singh who then decides to marry her. She too is attracted to Man Singh but is a silent admirer while he assumes agency in the marriage decision. Despite hailing the non-hierarchical society of the Raj Gonds in the introduction to *Kachnar*, the novel is a celebration of their past as rulers and warriors. The Kshatriya, therefore, tends to become a performative category rather than a pre-given identity.

[28] Jhalkari is a much revered Dalit *virangana* and Vrindavanlal Verma's novel is sometimes credited with bringing her into the limelight. *Ibid.*

Brahmins do not feature too often in the novels but when they do it is generally in pairs – an orthodox Brahmin acts as foil to a progressive Brahmin upholding an integrative Hindu society. We have already seen how Vijayangam acts as foil for Bodhan in *Mriganayani*. In *Bhuvanvikram* too Megh is the evil Brahmin who conspires against the benevolent king and endorses the oppression practiced by Neel on Kapinjal, while Dhaumya is the liberal Brahmin. It is the liberal, progressive Brahmin who emerges as the symbol of virtue and the possessor of the right knowledge of the scriptures. Interestingly, although the evil Brahmin is orthodox, an orthodox Brahmin is not necessarily evil. Bodhan leaves Gwalior after the argument with Vijayangam and Man Singh and goes on a pilgrimage to Kashi and Ayodhya. When he arrives at Lucknow, he runs into a bunch of Mullahs who invite him to a debate about religion. Bodhan gallantly puts forward his view that there is no one way to god and idol-worship could also be a way of reaching god. The orthodox Brahmin is no dishonest person; he is a man committed to his beliefs. He dies a martyr's death in the 'enemy' territory as he is slaughtered by the intolerant Mullahs.

The national space thus produced was defined by the struggle against the external enemy and ethical practices by its inhabitants. The selection and interpretation of empirical facts was central to the production of such a space. Therefore, it is to the question of source-criticism that I shall now turn.

3.3. Truth-Telling: The Novelist and His Sources

Vrindavanlal Verma downplayed the importance of history in the introduction to *Garh Kundar*:

> The introduction is necessary because there is a reference to the *itihas* of the times in different places; it wouldn't have been required otherwise. I do not intend to describe the history of Bundelkhand in brief. A brief mention of the *itihas* that is related to the story is enough.[29]

In these words, the introduction presents *Garh Kundar* as a novel. Since history provided the background, a discussion of *itihas* was deemed necessary to generate novelistic pleasure. The author writes that producing factual knowledge about the past is not the central concern of the novel. By the end of the introduction, however, the dismissive tone about history completely disappears. The reader is alerted to the necessity of resisting the erasure of the Khangar kingdom from historical memory. Khangar glory in the centuries past is a fact; it ought not to be erased. The author sits as a judge of history, emphatically declaring that the times, and not the Khangars themselves, were responsible for their descent in the social ladder. That is the historical truth for the author and he mentions that he has resorted to imaginary characters like Agnidutt Pandey in order to tell that truth. The past, especially its repressed spots, are not merely a backdrop in the novel, it is also the subject.

In this introduction, we see a dialogue between three dimensions of writing about the past that characterized the colonial Hindi literary world. The suspicion that Indian history had been distorted by Muslim and British historians inspired an urge towards authenticity across literary genres. Yet it was acknowledged that rigid adherence to facticity could, at times, be an obstruction to truth-telling about the past. The past may have to be poetically invoked in order to produce affects in the present; to urge people to act in the light of history. At the

[29] Verma, GK, 2011, p. 5.

same time, the past was an object of desire; it could produce a pleasure that Bhartendu Harishchandra had called the *itihas rasa*.

The question of *itihas rasa* is never taken up for a discussion in the introduction to any of the novels. It exists as a subtext, as in the opening paragraph of the introduction to *Garh Kundar*. The introduction is used to talk about the ways of accessing the past and of telling historical truths, his judgments of characters, times, and places of the past, and the relation between the past and the present. In doing so, he followed and in turn enriched a prevalent tradition of writing prefaces to novels; wherein in novels set in the past, the author would briefly discuss the past setting and clarify to what extent the novel was an authentic representation of that past. As I have already mentioned (section 2.2.3), in the preface to a historical novel *Tara va Kshatrakulakamalini* (1910), Kishorilal Gosvami mentioned that he had consciously forsaken history for the sake of imagination, citing the biased nature of the histories written in Muslim courts. He claimed that by taking recourse to those histories, the 'true' picture of Hindu oppression at the hands of Muslims could never be brought forth. He, therefore, had to write a novel and not history.

The introductions were signed by the authors themselves, allowing him/her to address the readers directly. Vrindavanlal Verma used the introductions to converse with the audience about the past and enable them to participate in the collective political act of writing history. After the introduction, the author disappears from the novel, with an omniscient narrator taking over. The narrator, though located mostly in the time-setting of the novel, at times speaks of that time-setting in the past tense. The narrator, then located in the present, becomes the voice of the author, carrying forward the concerns highlighted by the author in

the introduction. In *Madhavji Sindhia*, following a dialogue between Madhavrao Peshwa and his secretary Muni Singh narrated in the present tense, we find an instance of authorial intrusion to historically assess three leading figures of the Maratha confederacy – Madhavrao Peshwa, Raghunath Rao and the Bhonsle:

> Madahvrao Peshwa was a far-sighted man, intelligent, brave, firm but ill-tempered. His physician was unable to figure out whether the hot temper was a consequence of his tuberculosis or the other way round. Despite his disease he made continuous efforts for the good of the peasantry. When the Nizam joined hands with Raghoba, he defeated them. When Raghoba allied with Bhonsle he neutralized the Nizam, defeated the alliance and imprisoned Raghoba. Bhonsle was the symbol of the Maratha rebellion against the Brahmins that started with Tarabai and went on till the end. Raghoba reflected the selfish tendencies of the *sardars* of Maharashtra that sunk India deep into the sea of British diplomacy.[30]

In the following section, I shall look at the introductions and a few authorial intrusions in the novels in order to explore how the past is produced as a specific time. I shall study his approach to sources and his ways of telling truths about the past.

3.3.1. Written Text as Source

The writings on history in the colonial Hindi literary sphere contained a will to factual knowledge of the past. That invariably brought up the question of sources: how could the facts of the past be accessed? There was already a set practice that he could refer to; rather, one could say that the existence of nationalist historiographical cannon enabled his craft. The cannon, as we have seen in the previous chapter (section 2.3.2), were drawn from the first

[30] Vrindavanlal Verma, *Madhavji Sindhia*, New Delhi: Prabhat Praksahan, 2011, p. 258-59, henceforth referred to as MS in the footnotes.

and second generations of Indian historians, as well as medieval Islamic and modern British historians with whom the Hindi intellectuals shared an ambivalent relationship: they suspected them as well as relied on them. While scholarly work was respected, ancient Sanskrit texts were placed on the same pedestal and were often taken to be historically authentic, while medieval texts by Muslim authors were treated with suspicion.

The following table gives a list of scholarly works that the author cites in the introduction to some of the novels. It gives us a sense of the historiographical cannon that he referred to and the way he did it.

Table 3: Texts used by Vrindavanlal Verma

Novel	Author Cited	Text Cited	Comments made by Verma on the Authors and the Texts
Garh Kundar	None	None	The author does not refer to any written text in the introduction. He either exercises his own authority to make statements about historical truth or talks in terms of 'it is heard...' or 'it is said...'
Jhansi ki rani	Visnubhatt Godse	*Majha Pravas*	The author states that Godse had been in the fort when the Rani fought General Rose, and that he had used it for his novel.
	D.B Parsanis.	*Rani Lakshmibai ka Jeevan Charitra*	The author mentions that this is a book he had laid his hands on as a young man and was surprised to read that Lakshmibai's bravery was born

			purely out of necessity. It did not match with the stories he had heard from his grandmother about the Rani's valor.
Mriganayani	Firishta	None	The author merely says that Firishta calls Man Singh Tomar a brave and competent ruler.
	English historians	No text in particular.	The author writes that 'English historians' have called Man Singh Tomar's time as the 'Golden Age of Tomer Rule'.
	Court historians of Sikandar Lodi	None	It is stated that the 'Court historians of Sikandar Lodi' had written that Man Singh did not actually fight Sikandar Lodi but kept him at bay by repeated promises of gold and silver. The author goes on to say in an ironical tone, 'How strange! A warrior like Sikandar was fooled by such promises!'
	Translation of Elliott and Dowson	*Mirat-e-Sikandari*	It is referred to as a Persian *tarikh* that says all about how much Mahmud Bagharra ate daily.
Kachnar	General Malcolm	*Memoirs of Central India*	The author claims that incidents like Daru's journey to Karnal, his participation in the sack of Sagar with the Pindaris, and his encounter with death are all described in this book.
	The Governor General of India (1805)	*Notes on the transactions of*	The author writes that the document described the

		the Maratha empire	important events in the territories that concerned the East India Company between 1792 and 1803.
	Elwin	*Folk Songs of the Mekhal Range*	The text is mentioned without telling the reader how exactly he has read them.
	Nagpur Government	*The Raj Gonds*	
	Sir Jadunath Sarkar	*The Fall of the Mughal Empire*	
Bhuvanvikram	Narayan Chandra Bandopadhyay	*Economic life and Progress in Ancient India*	The author says that in pages 214-18 Bandopadhyay has discussed the practice of debt bondage in the later Vedic period, while page 325 mentions a terrible famine during the time of a king called Rompad.
		Rig Veda Shloka no. 4:66:6	The author notes that the word '*swarajya*' features in this *shloka*, which he takes to mean 'we have strived for *swarajya*' even in 'those times'.
	Valmiki Ramayan	None	It describes the famine in details.
		Atharva Veda Shloka no. 3:3:4, 6:11, 4:19	The *shlokas* in *Atharva Veda*, as well as pages p. 99-106 in Dr. Mukherjee's book talk about the practice of electing and impeaching a king by the *samiti* at that time.
	Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee	*Hindu Civilization*	

At times the author admits the authority of modern scholarly works, while at times he sieves through the sources, playing the historian. It appears that he never mentioned in the introduction all the works he had read and, therefore, it is difficult to arrive at any conclusion about the politics of selection of texts for discussion.[31] His comments on various sources gives us a sense of the 'historian's craft' as practiced by him.

In *Maharani Durgavati*, he discusses the character of Akbar and the marriage of Durgavati in the introduction, thus:

> Vincent Smith has written an important revisionist account of Akbar. He is correct in saying that despite being a virtuous man in many ways, Akbar had a major vice – he had an insatiable love for empire and was a ruthless conqueror. Although a queen as noble as Durgavati never harmed his state or his interests in any way, he still wanted to annex Gondwana (p. 50-51). Vincent smith (in p. 50) has said that Durgavati's father had fallen down the socio-economic ladder, that's why he gave her in marriage to someone of a lower class. That is wrong. These *deen-heen* [poor and low] Chandels gave the powerful Sher Shah Suri a tough fight for so long; how can we forget that?[32]

As a public intellectual, he reserves his right to have the final say on what he thought was (in)correct in modern scholarly works as well as in pre-modern texts. His discordance with Smith lay in his assessment that it was impossible that the Chandels had fallen down the social ladder so soon after they had fought Sher Shah Suri. Of course, he does not consider

---

[31] Information obtained on the basis of survey of Vrindavanlal Verma's notebooks at his house in Jhansi, and through conversations with Mr. Lakshmikant Verma and Mr. Ramakant Verma.

[32] Vrindavanlal Verma, *Maharani Durgavati,* Prabhat Prakashan: New Delhi, 1994, p. 6-7, henceforth referred to as MD in the footnotes.

the possibility that some Chandel families somewhere in the region may actually have met with such a fate. That aside, his judgment could also be influenced by the way he had imagined the story of Durgavati. In strands of contemporary Hindu cultural nationalist imagination, Durgavati's unconventional marriage to Dalpat Shah, who belonged to a lower caste, has been used to construct a modern-day image of her as a high-minded, forward-thinking reformer, struggling with society's prejudices and the opposition of a caste-conscious father.[33] It is precisely this image that Verma invokes.

Verma's reading of pre-modern texts primarily indicates that he read between the lines to confirm the story/stereotype of the ancient period: Rig Veda to claim the story of the Aryan Golden Age and the desire for *swarajyaya* in ancient India, or the *Atharva Veda* to corroborate the fact the ancient society followed democratic procedures in politics. Although the texts are used to corroborate modern scholarly works, or as self-standing sources, there is not an example of the texts being cited to disapprove a modern scholarly work. It may indicate the ascription of primacy to modern works even while invoking ancient texts.

Medieval Islamic texts and authors are cited both approvingly and otherwise – the latter being the case whenever they go against the nationalist image of Durgavati as a *virangana*, as in the case of Abul Fazal in reference to what Verma perceived as the maligning of Durgavati:

> Abul Fazal has mentioned that Durgavati had a sister named Kamalavati, which is totally wrong... He (Abul Fazal) praised Durgavati's bravery and far sightedness highly, but said that she had a vice – she was full of pride and vanity, a *ghamandin*

[33] Hansen, 'The Virangana in North Indian History: Myth and Popular Culture', *EPW*, 1998.

> [arrogant]. She refused to bow her head to Akbar's *dehleej* [threshold]... Is that a vice of the Durgavati who has always kept our head high? In the Akbarnama, he sent Kamalavati, a figment of his imagination, to Akbar's harem after Durgavati's death. That was perhaps to reduce the burden of Durgavati's vices![34]

One can notice similar attitude towards British sources. We have already seen in the previous chapter (section 2.3.2) that, 'less prejudiced' British historians were often part of the nationalist historiographical cannon. Verma's reliance on British historians is evident in table 3. Suspicion of these sources as biased is an abiding concern. The novel *Jhansi ki Rani* seems to have been inspired in the first place by the erasure of the queen's 'true' history by the British historians. Precisely because the sources are suspect, appreciative mention of Indian rulers in them is cited as a final confirmation of their greatness. In the introduction to *Madhavji Sindhia*, Verma says approvingly, 'General Malcom writes grudgingly, "Madhoji made himself a sovereign by calling himself a servant."'[35] In the epilogue to *Jhansi ki Rani*, he mentions that a British historian had finally admitted the greatness of the Rani, though he did not agree with his conclusion.

> Of late C.A. Kinkead, retired ICS officer, has written a book in English titled Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi... The book has 102 pages but only 14 pages are devoted to Lakshmibai. Yet she is called 'Lakshmibai – the queen of Jhansi'... while he says that general rose was a very powerful and clever commander, he has something to say about the Rani. "He (General Rose) was a man of boundless energy and of the highest military talents." For the Rani, he has said, "She was an educated and polished lady". Kinkead's imagination says that neither was she a murderer nor did she commit *ghadar* [here, treachery]. He says the she was fighting for a lost cause...

[34] Verma, MD, 1994, p.8.

[35] Verma, MS, 2011, p. 10.

> The English may finally confess but I do not agree. The Rani fought for *swarajya*, died for *swarajya* and laid the foundation stone of *swarajya*.[36]

3.3.2. *Parampara* ('tradition') as Source

The introduction *to Jhansi ki Rani* begins on a personal note,

> Diwan Anandrai was my grandfather. He had died fighting for Rani Laxmibai at Mau in 1858. I was eight to ten years old when my great grandmother passed away. I used to hear many stories about the Rani from her. She had seen the Rani.[37]

The subtext of the first paragraph contains a claim to authentic knowledge about the Rani. The domestic space of his childhood home was replete with legends about the Rani, and he was connected to those through family ties. His grandmother had died, but the legends, and therefore the Rani, had survived through all those to whom the stories had been bequeathed. The preface is an autobiographical statement. Verma's interest in the Rani had arisen in his childhood, and his research had continued through almost fifteen years. Engagement with the nationalist heroine was integral to the author's nationalist self. This claim, made in the preface, is reiterated in his autobiography, *Apni Kahani* (1962), written sixteen years after the publication of *Jhansi ki Rani*. Family traditions, a *parampara*, held the Rani in glorious light. Verma heard the stories and as someone located within the *parampara*, had no reasons to disbelieve them. That was till he read modern scientific history in school:

> ...a strange and vague inheritance (the stories about Lakshmibai), its contours were hazy. It was based less on truth and more on deference. As I read history and began

[36] Verma, JKR, 1993, p. 347-48.

[37] Verma, JKR, 1993, p. 5-8.

> to understand the meaning of facts, I began to give less and less importance to that inheritance. I still had Parsanis's book *Rani Lakshmibai ka Jeevan Charitra* with me. It seemed like a skeleton of the past, and its views were in opposition to the stories handed down by my grandmothers. Parsanis's investigation was quite useful. But his conclusion, when compared to what I had heard from my grandmothers, did not fit well with my heart. He had written that the Rani used to rule Jhansi on behalf of the English during the 'rebellion'. Anyway, I began to think that the stories I had heard were the product of peoples' 'wishful thinking'. In course of time I had developed an iconoclastic attitude towards the idol that I had worshipped so diligently since my childhood.

He claims that after being exposed to modern scientific history, he had come to the reluctant conclusion that *parampara* could not be trusted as the repository of historical truth; whatever it might have to say, after all, the historians had concluded that Lakshmibai had not fought for *swarajya*. However, a strange dream one night instilled a doubt in his mind,

> When I was staying at the boarding house [in Victoria College, Gwalior], I had dreamt that a battle was on at the hockey ground. I was fighting on the side of the Rani and sustained serious injuries. I was left quite stunned when I got up – after all, I had not struck even a blow of the stick on the ground that day!
>
> That dream kept bothering me quite often.

He tells us that sometime in the 1930s, he discovered a set of old documents at the district court, and he continued searching for more. The more he looked into these texts, the less he was convinced that the Rani had not fought for *swarajya*. This realization led him back to oral sources. He writes,

> ...I got in touch with another person, Mohammed Turabali Daroga... at the time of the 'rebellion' Turabali was a police official. I got to know a lot from him about the Rani; and it reiterated what my grandmothers had told me.

> ...On top of that I started bugging the elders of Jhansi. But the enthusiasm and veneration with which they spoke about the Rani assured me that they were hardly irritated by the flurry of questions I was putting to them.

The journey from childhood faith in *parampara* to a suspicion of the same, and finally to a reiteration of that faith, was a cyclical one. Verma's re-awakening to faith in his own tradition seems to mirror the nationalist reawakening to its own glorious past. Interestingly, his 'inheritance', contained in family traditions, was enabled by the modern scientific history's undoing of itself. Parsanis's work, though a good investigative work, had failed to ascertain the truth, and the written word had shown itself incapable of *guaranteeing* its truth-claims over the oral. The attempted hegemony of the written word and that of modern scientific history stand for modernity's claims to superiority over tradition. Their failure as the guarantor of truth brings home the inadequacy of modernity; tradition gains a re-entry through the backdoor. In Sudhir Chandra's word, it would now be an alienated 'tradition':

> As colonialism progressed, a dual tension with regard to the West and to indigenous culture came about. With the intensification of political conflict against alien rulers, the emotional need for cultural belonging deepened. At the same time, and paradoxically, familiarity with indigenous culture diminished progressively. The state of being organically, and unselfconsciously, related to indigenous culture so transformed that it required consciously designated links for the relationship to exist between individuals and their culture.[38]

In the introductions to his historical novels, he mostly talked about screening the correct facts from the false ones in tradition. The model of modern source criticism applied to written texts was thus applied to *parampara*. His act of returning to tradition, narrated in the

---

[38] Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p.6.

preface to *Jhansi ki Rani*, was an act of putting it at par with written texts that carried the approval of modernity – an invention of the national modern as opposed to the colonial modern. Verma wrote in an essay titled 'Aitihasik Upanyas aur Mera Drishtikon' (The Historical Novel and My Point of View):

> There are historical facts in *jan parampara*, popular tradition, that have been respected for ages. The historical novelist can interpret those facts through his imagination, devoting himself to the cause of *satya*, *shiva*, *sundar*. The only condition is that he must pay attention to the actual traditions while he does so.[39]

The same principle was applied by Verma while selecting facts for his novels. He gave himself the creative freedom to leave out certain 'minor' facts and imagine some while structuring his narratives, as long as such acts of exclusion did not paint an incorrect picture of the times that the novel was portraying. This principle was applied irrespective of whether the facts were provided by modern historians or by folklore.

It is only on a few occasions that Verma poetically invokes *parampara* – familial, regional or national – as the signifier of an age-old tradition, and not as a set of empirical facts that had to be screened for historical truth. When he does, tradition mingles with material remains and natural setting to evoke a lost world of folk life of which only traces remained.

> Let us not see a twisted picture of *itihas* in the fort of Dhamoni and in the jungles and deserted sites around it. The remains matter to us, the common people, not because the place gave birth to a major Mughal minister or because it was the place

[39] Verma, 'Aitihasik Upanyas aur Mera Drishtikon' in Govindji ed., *Hindi Aitihasik Upanyas,* 1970, p.25-26.

where a Mughal king once camped. Look beyond; that very place was home to a simple, natural transparent way of life. There was a *jan rajya* [peoples' republic] of the Gonds. It had of course been mutated to a certain extent by the *samanti* [feudal] structure, but had not undergone a complete transformation. That is what we have to see, and that is what holds some significance for us.[40]

Parampara, as the still living tradition, a carrier of the traces, transcended history and had to be sieved for facts. The lost world is an object of desire and one could wish that it were reborn. But could that happen? It is a question left unanswered:

> Although they rule several states in the central parts of India, the Gonds don't seem to be playing a well-known part in the political development of the country today. But at one point of time they enriched Indian culture with their easy, simple, natural and joyous life. Can they not do it again? I do hope they can.[41]

3.4. The Metahistorical Fact

> I have no doubt about the historical aspect of Kachnar. All the incidents described in the novel are true. Alterations have been made in respect of their time and place only. For example, some of the incidents relating to Daru, particularly the murder of his brother, did not take place in Dhamoni but in Ubora village of the former Orchha state. The name Daru was also taken from the Ubora village. All the other incidents such as Daru's promotion to the rank of Colonel, Pindari's participation in the plunder of Sagar and, in the end, Daru facing his death boldly are all historical facts. General Malcolm has mentioned many of these incidents in his book Memoirs of Central India. However, the real Daru was hanged when the soldiers refused to shoot him dead. I did not find it necessary to have him killed. Mahant Achalpuri and his *akhada* [camp] are real. In that period, bands of Gossain soldiers used to roam in

[40] Verma, KC, 2011, p. 9.

[41] *Ibid*, p.6.

> Central India in search of adventure and wealth. One of the bands had even established a kingdom.[42]

The concise paragraph on the historicity of *Kachnar* reveals the nature of the author's historical craft. Each of his historical novels claims to have an *authentic core* – a historically real incident(s) and some real characters around which the story is built. In each of the introductions, he mentions what this core, the *mool aitihasik ghatana* (the basic historical event), is. It is on this core that he performs speculative and imaginative acts to come up with incidents and characters that are *historically possible*, even though not ascertained to be true by empirical standards. In Verma's opinion, Daru's location in Dhamoni instead of Ubora is historically possible and does not alter the essence of the space/time setting around which he structures the story.

The *mool aitihasik ghatana* may be historically real but the novels are not set entirely in historical time. There is a mix of historical time, adventure time and everyday time. The climax of Ghiyas-ud-din Khilji's pursuit of Lakhi in *Mrignayanai* exhibits the intertwining of the three frameworks of time. Ghiyas-ud-din, the Sultan of Malwa, had been keen to have Lakhi and Ninni in his harem. Khawaj Matru, his close confidante, promised a hefty sum to a caravan of gypsies if they could get the job done. In the meanwhile, Ninni got married to Man Singh Tomar, and the villagers at Rai came to know of the love affair between Atal and Lakhi. The entire village, burning with disgust at the inter-caste romantic relationship, turned on them. Pota and Pilli, two of the gypsies, saw the moment as opportune and convinced them to travel to Mandu, the capital of Malwa. On their way, they

[42] *Ibid*, p.8.

entered a conflict zone at Narwar, within Man Singh Tomar's territory. Raj Singh Kachhwaha had allied with Ghiyas-ud-din to lay siege on the Narwar fort. Pota, Pilli, Atal and Lakhi took shelter in the fort while a plan was being hatched behind their back. Pota and Pilli had been told by Ghiyas-ud-din's generals to somehow get Lakhi and Atal to Ghiyas-ud-din's camp.

On their way to Mandu, Pota, Pilli, Atal and Lakhi had by chance run into Ghiyas-ud-din at Narwar. The chance, however, lay within the limits of the historically possible. Raj Singh Kachhwaha is a historical figure who had attempted to attack Man Singh's kingdom in alliance with either the Delhi or the Malwa Sultanate. Ghiyas-ud-din did eventually lay siege on Narwar and capture it, though the exact date is not of concern to the author. The precise dates struck off, the siege provided the perfect setting for the climax of one of the sub-plots of the novel.

Atal had almost been tricked into the trap, when Lakhi figured out their plan: all four of them were supposed to get out of the fort late at night with the help of a rope and Ghiyas-ud-din's soldiers would presumably be waiting for them. As night fell, Pota was the first to go and Pilli told Lakhi that she would follow her and Atal. Lakhi cleverly got her to go first. As soon as she crossed the wall of the fort, she cut the rope and Pilli fell to her death. The news spread quickly and the couple was hailed for saving the fort; for the gypsies would have leaked all the arrangements for its defense to Ghiyas-ud-din. Man Singh came to Narwar himself, took the couple to Gwalior and got them married. Atal was rewarded with a *jagir*. Lakhi and Atal thereby entered royal service and it was in defense of the fort at Rai during an attack by Sikandar Lodi that both of them died. In course of the novel Lakhi and

Atal's everyday life had undergone a significant change. They had been born as peasants, and they died as warriors. Yet the everyday, like chance, was plotted within the limits of the historically possible. The Ahirs and Gujjars have a long history of peasant life in the region. The tribulations faced by them are not pieces of fiction as per Verma's idea of history:

> The caste system has historically played the protector in India; perhaps it is playing so even today. However it has been no less destructive as it has been protective. Let me mention news that was published in 1950. 12 years back in Tehri (a village in Almora), a Luhar had married a girl of a different caste. For 12 years he remained excommunicated from the caste set-up. Only now, in April, the *panchayat* has allowed them back into the village. Then what all must Atal and Lakhi have been subjected to back in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries! We can only imagine.[43]

The sources would not reveal the stories of common people like Atal and Lakhi and one had to depend on the imagination. In Atal and Lakhi, however, the author does not feel that he is resorting to imagination at the cost of the historical. In the opinion cited above, the newness of the present marked a few positive changes in Indian society, the lessening of caste discrimination being one. In a period of fall (after the ancient) stretching across the past and the present, the standard of ethical life was low. On a few issues, like caste discrimination, the present society was slightly more ethical than that of the past, while on other issues like bravery and valor, it was the other way round. If that be the course of history, then Atal and Lakhi are historically possible characters.

What we have in *Mriganayani* is an attempt to subsume everyday time and adventure time within a chronotope of the historically possible. The parameters of the

[43] Verma, MN, 2011, p.8.

historically possible were set by a dialogue between the empirical facts of history he encountered during his research and his understanding of the over-arching story that history told. That story could simply be put thus: India's past in the period of fall after the 'Aryan Golden age' is a story of struggle, to combat external enemies that threatened its political sovereignty and to uphold a fast-disappearing ethical life within the national space. It is precisely a faith in this story that prompted Verma to disregard the tradition that claimed that the Bundelas had conspired to bring the Muslim rulers into Bundelkhand. Verma states with reference to this tradition, 'The last statement of the Khangars is completely opposed to history, and seems totally illogical. That is why the author cannot accept it.' The tradition went against the story; the Bundelas had come to define the historical identity of the region in its struggle against the (Muslim) rulers of Delhi. How could they have brought the Muslims into Bundelkhand? For similar reasons, the socio-economic decline of Chandel families could not have been the reason behind Maharani Durgavati's marriage to a person of a lower caste. After all, the Chandels had been at the forefront of the historical struggle against the Muslim enemy, and had preserved 'ancient Hindu culture' in Bundelkhand!

His understanding of the story that history told undergoes internal shifts in course of his work. To take an example, in *Garh Kundar*, he is far more pessimistic about the possibility of individuals having battled caste barriers and entered into companionate marriage in the past. Diwakar and Tara finally decided to live as hermits in the forest; caste society would not tolerate their sexual union, and they had to seek consolation in spiritual union. In the later novels, as in *Mriganayani*, he is far more upbeat about the possibility. However, on the whole, the story forms a set pattern in his novels across time. It constitutes *the metahistorical fact* to which all empirical facts are made secondary. While facts defined

the limits of historical possibility beyond which Verma's imagination could not hold sway, *the metahistorical fact* defined the limits of historical possibility beyond which empirical facts, whether sources from texts or *parampara*, could not hold sway – beyond those limits the facts appeared illogical.

The metahistorical fact also prompted the selection of issues to be discussed in the introduction. Besides the *mool aitihasik ghatana*, Verma chose a set of incidents and characters whose historical veracity was discussed in the introduction. Incidents that would be significant for historians, for example, whether Sikandar Lodi attacked Gwalior as many times as mentioned in the novel or not, are not discussed. Rather, a lot of space is devoted to what people like Atal and Lakhi might have gone through in those times while braving the caste society and standing up for inter-caste marriage. Given the metahistorical fact that structures the narrative, Atal and Lakhi are historically as important as Sikandar Lodi, if not more. Verma states on more than one occasion that characters such as these are imaginary but their history is real. Historical reality gets reconstituted beyond the constraints of empiricism and the metahistorical fact emerges as the defining feature of Vrindavanlal Verma's idea of history.

4. *Apni Kahani*: The Author Writes Himself into History

> People certainly want to know [their] *charitra* [character]; those who have pioneered or aided movements and revolutions with the sword, policy or pen; those have helped their *jati* in its progress; those who have exerted massive influence on the *samsara* [world] by virtue of their strength of character. If there are such people related to our country, knowing their *charitra* is absolutely necessary.[1]

As we have already seen (section 2.2.2) nationalist writers resorted to biographies in order to produce exemplary subjects. The biography was, however, a surrogate genre in the opinion of Satyendra, the writer of the above piece. They had to be written because literature lacked a genre that would serve the purposes of biography better: the autobiography. He lamented the fact that only a few great men have written autobiographies, *atmakatha* – their own life stories. After all, who else would be able to paint an authentic picture of oneself if not the autobiographer?

Satyendra's lament was answered a generation later. The 1940s onwards, the Hindi literary sphere witnessed a flowering of autobiographies. They were mostly of public figures – often literary and political personas that plotted their lives drawing upon different autobiographical genres. Major litterateurs who wrote autobiographies included Rahul Sankrtyayan, Viyogi Hari, Yashpal, Chatursen Shastri, Harivansh Rai Bachchan, Bechan Sharma 'Ugra' and Vrindavanla Verma, among others. They were often modeled on the

[1] Satyendra, 'Jeevan Charitra kya Hai?', Pratap, 30 November, 1913, NMML.

Bildungsroman,[2] as the journey into the social world that they came to belong, or on the Memoir[3] – a story of their times. It was a generation of writers who conflated the identity of the author with that of the activist and the public intellectual; wielding the pen to serve the nation (Section 2.2). The autonomy of the literary field had invested writers with a new dignity as original intellectuals and put them in the limelight, while the role assigned to literature in the nationalist movement entrusted literature with the responsibility of 'writing for the nation'. This role of the author in society helped to produce the author as an exemplary individual and assigned authority to his memory and experience to speak for his times. It was this author-function, produced in the institution of the 'Hindi literary system', which created what Gillian Whitlock calls the 'discursive threshold' necessary for autobiographies to become part of a politics of identity.[4] The identity in question here was nationalist in the broadest possible sense, with a million diversities and internal dialogues.

---

[2] Traditionally the Bildungsroman has been regarded as the novel of development and social formation of a young man. It has been taken up more recently by women and other disenfranchised persons to consolidate an emerging sense of self and larger presence in public life. It is the latter understanding of the genre that I have resorted to in this dissertation. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2001, p. 189.

[3] The Memoir is a mode of life narrative that historically situates the subject in a social environment as either observer or participant; the memoir directs attention more to the lives and actions of others than of the narrator. Secular memoirs often emphasize life in the public sphere. *Ibid*, p. 98.

[4] Gillian Whitlock's theory discussed in David Huddart, *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography*, London/New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 5-11.

The model of the author discussed above constitutes the ideological 'I' of Vrindavanlal Verma's autobiography, *Apni Kahani*. Written in 1969, the year of his death, and published posthumously in 1972, it is a retrospective recall of the author's life, containing many references to his historical novels. It is the story of the author's realization that he is embedded in a larger collective – that of the Hindi-speaking and reading public which, for him, stood for the national public. The autobiography draws upon multiple genres to fashion a specific self for the narrated 'I' – that of a writer of historical novels.[5] The early part of it appears to be a Bildungsroman, as the narrating 'I' 'recounts the youth and young manhood of a sensitive protagonist who is attempting to learn the nature of the world, discover its meaning and pattern, and acquiring a philosophy of life and an 'art of living'.'[6] The protagonist moves from one experience to another, and they provoke different realizations. He learns values like honesty, discipline, hard-work and tolerance, he defies his father's wishes and takes admission for a law degree at Agra, he enjoys the experience of modern education and derives pleasure from reading

[5] I have drawn upon Smith and Watson's formulation that the producer of the autobiography may be split four-ways: (a) the real, historical 'I', who signs the autobiography, whose life is far more diverse and complicated than what is written in the autobiography, (b) the narrating 'I', who calls forth part of the experiential history of the real, historical 'I' to tell a story, (c) the narrated 'I', who is the object 'I', the protagonist of the narrative, the version of the self that the narrating 'I' chooses to constitute through the recollection for the reader, (d) the ideological 'I', which are the concepts of personhood culturally available to the narrator. Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography,* 2001, p. 58-63.

[6] C. Hugh Holman, quoted in Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography,* 2001, p. 189.

Hindi novels, plays, history, and European literature, he engages with contemporary political currents and ponders upon the viability of each in bringing about *swarajya*, he cringes at what he considers untruthful representations of the Indian past in histories that he reads, he detests the neglect of historical glories of Bundelkhand, he looks for jobs to earn money and support his family, and he travels and hunts in the forests during vacations. Different experiences convey to him different meanings of the world until they all come together in his decision to write historical novels in Hindi as a way of serving his region, language and nation, in his early adulthood. Till that time, he had faced several crises of identity – crises that were related to his vocation in life as well as the values that he was choosing to live by. These were crises that pointed out to him a lack in his own self, as if his self was incomplete, as though he had not found his calling in life. The lack is ascribed to the conditions of the present, as the present becomes part of the metahistory of fall and calls for struggle. After the decision to write historical novels in Hindi, the moments of crisis are fewer and they all relate to the conflict between moving away from that decision and sticking to it. Moving away was also an option, for he was quite interested in public life as a politician and social worker. While that type of public activity continued after he started writing historical novels, he felt over a period of time that writing was his true vocation. Despite being a writer of a few social novels and plays, the protagonist realized his calling in writing historical novels.

After the first decision to write historical novels, the structure of the autobiography shifts. The experiences of the world cease to have a significant effect on his internal self, though there are few instances when his experiences remind him of his calling in the world. Most experiences however teach him more about what people are like and less about what he (the

protagonist) should be like. The autobiography, now cast as a memoir, describes the people he met and the incidents that occurred around him in his personal and public life.

The narrative closure adds a third dimension to the structure of the autobiography. The text ends dramatically with a statement that he rejected the Padmabhushan award in protest against the government's failure to establish Hindi as the sole national language. The dramatic end looms large over the entire text, calling for a retrospective questioning about why the government's failure meant so much to the protagonist. The protagonist as an author had envisioned his work as service to his language and his nation, and had been involved in the campaign for Hindi as the sole national language. His childhood and young adulthood was a story of moving towards his calling as an author despite multiple barriers within and outside himself, as well as other possibilities that were present. His adulthood was a story of sticking to that calling despite his interest in other activities. Writing Hindi historical novels thus marked his ethical life and his life was a struggle to perfect the ethic. This ethic was necessitated by the conditions of the present: ethical life of the nation in the present contained a lack that only the past could fill, and Hindi as the soon-to-be sole national language, according to him, was the perfect medium to fulfill that lack. His struggle in living up to that ethic was therefore allegorical of the struggle of the 'people' to do away with the incompleteness of ethical life in the present. The perceived betrayal of the state that prompted him to reject the Padmabhushan was a betrayal of that struggle of the people. The narrator uses negative capability to describe the moment of betrayal. He refused the Padmabhushan – what after that? If the protagonist had

to be true to his ethical life, he had to continue the struggle, like the people had to. That retrospectively establishes the autobiography as a Testimonio.[7]

In this chapter, I read the autobiography closely to explore how Vrindavanlal Verma fashions himself as a writer of historical novels. In the first section, I discuss the different intersecting identities of the protagonist and argue that the narrator arranges the protagonist's experience in a way that his identity as an author of historical novels in Hindi assumes primacy. In the second section, I discuss the function of that author in society by looking at two moments in which the voice of the protagonist reveals his philosophy of historical novels. I read these moments in connection with the historical novels that he claims to have written. The protagonist locates the author at the interface between the past and the present and assigns himself the job of bridging the gap between the two. The task involved negotiating heterotopias and producing affective knowledge of the past. The text becomes the medium in this process. The act of bridging could be an act of discovery or an act of reception, and the protagonist veers towards the latter opinion as the autobiography progresses. Either way, bridging the gap constitutes the ethical life of the author in the present as he sets himself up as the highest ethical being in society. Such a position is not meant to be permanent though; he has to move towards perfecting the interface between the past and the present. It implies that destruction of such an author function is the highest stage of ethical life in the future; for that would be the time bridges between the past and the present would be adequately built and no individual will have to take on the specific function of doing so.

---

[7] In Testimonio, the narrator intends to communicate the situation of a group's oppression, struggle or imprisonment, to claim some agency in the act of narrating and to call upon the readers to respond actively in judging the crisis. *Ibid*, p. 206.

4.1. Intersecting Identities: Emergence of the Author Subject

The shift in the autobiography from the Bildungsroman model to the Memoir is essentially a shift in the protagonist's identity. His early childhood, school-going age and adolescence constitute the time of multiple and intersecting identities – the subject is split at least in six-ways between a 'moral' subject, a 'Hindi' subject, a 'Bundeli' subject, a 'historical' subject, a 'public' subject and a 'productive' subject. Towards the end of the period the moral subject gradually dies out as the moral codes of the ethical life of the protagonist come to stabilize. He undergoes no further experience which teaches him a moral lesson; rather he now learns about the morals that others in society follow. Early adulthood is also the time when one day, lying below a fort, Garh Kundar, waiting for a hunt, he finds his calling as the writer of historical novels. The philosophy of historical novel, as brought forth in the interior monologue reveals a self that is confident about its moral coordinates. The moral subject thereby gets incorporated in the author subject that is born at that moment. The Hindi subject, the Bundeli subject, and the historical subject lived parallel but intersecting lives till he realized his calling; after that the three subjects mingle in the identity of the author as the writer of Hindi historical novels using Bundelkhand as the setting. The historical subject now gets totally subsumed within the author subject, while the Hindi subject exists outside it as well, in the public subject. The non-author public subject had existed in a nascent form in his adolescence although it flowers fully in his adulthood. However, it suffers a blow in his defeat in the 1952 general elections, which reminds him that writing and not politics is his purpose in life. The non-author public subject now gets subsumed in the author subject. The productive subject had been around

right from his adolescence, with the protagonist's efforts to mould his body into a strong, healthy productive body. With the increasing dominance of the author subject, the productive subject gets fashioned as the writer of historical novels. It is now defined by a body that experiences specific affects in the heterotopias of the present and circulates them in society through the production of the historical novels as tangible texts.

4.1.1. The Moral Subject

> My mother fed me dinner early in the evening. She went to finish her household chores and I went to bed...
>
> I had a dream.
>
> Mauranipur, around 40 miles south-east of Jhansi, is my birthplace and ancestral village. I used to travel by rail from Mauranipur with my parents. I saw in the dream that when the rail stopped at Mauranipur, mother was nowhere to be found. The luggage was taken out of the compartment. There was a huge sack among all the bags. It was opened and I saw my mother's dead body cut to pieces lying in it. I woke up with a scream and wept copiously. Mother got up immediately and hugged me. I stopped only when it was confirmed that she was very much alive to kiss me and calm me down.
>
> She asked, 'Why are you crying?'
>
> I told her my story. She started laughing and said, 'Look my son, I am well alive and will live long to see you grow up and get educated.' There was so much more that she said.

> I said to her immediately, 'Mother, I shall never cheat you again. I had stolen your money today, which is why I saw you in such a horrible condition.'[8]

Apni Kahani begins with the dream and with the protagonist learning the lesson that one should never steal. It is the first of a series of incidents in his life which teach him different moral lessons that he claims to have adhered to in the rest of his life. The series produces the narrated 'I' as a moral subject, in search of an ethical life.

After an initiation into education in a village *pathshala*, he was sent to Lalitpur to enroll in an elementary school. An Arya Samaj activist visited the school once and the protagonist was inspired by him to read the *Satyarth Prakash*. He was now a devoted Arya Samaji. He went back home in the holidays and made snide remarks about her mother's Vaishnavite beliefs. She did not get angry, but kept her hand on his shoulder and laughed, saying, 'Look my son, everyone follows their religion. Never criticize others [for their beliefs].'[9] The protagonist learnt another moral lesson; that tolerance is a virtue.

After finishing his school education, he took up a clerical job at the Jhansi District Court. He found his work rather oppressive and was perturbed by the prevalent practice of bribery. One day he was offered a bribe to do a job and he found the offer tough to refuse. Sitting at his home feeling damned, he said to himself, 'Oh, so the great revolutionary has

[8] Verma, *Apni Kahani,* 2001, p.1., henceforth referred to as AK.

[9] Verma, AK, 2001, p.23.

fashioned himself into a *munshiji* and is busy accepting bribes!'[10] Feeling disgusted at the immorality that he had allowed to descend upon himself, he soon left the job and took up another. The next job was that of a junior manager at the forest office in the Jhansi area. One of his colleagues was a member of the Theosophical Society and gave the protagonist A.P. Sinnette's *The Occult World.* While he was busy reading at the office, his senior commented, 'Brother, the office is meant for work. Please read books at home.'[11] The remark stung him and he imposed a penance upon himself for neglecting duty. He decided not to sit at his workplace for a week but remain standing while doing all the work.

After his brief forays into working life, he went to Victoria College at Gwalior for his B.A. degree. Excelling in studies as well as in sports, he was the Principal's favorite student. One day he came late for class by just half a minute. To his embarrassment, the Principal chided him in front of everyone and asked him not to enter the classroom. Insulted, he was left heartbroken by the Principal's behavior. He sat weeping and the Principal called him to his office later in the day. He patted him on the back and explained to him:

> You are my favorite student. I have set you up as an example for others. I have observed a major fault in the people of your country. First of all, they lack a sense of time-discipline. On top of that they are lackadaisical in their duty. Since the students know that I haven't spared even you for this fault, they will be more careful in future.[12]

---

[10] *Ibid*, p.26.

[11] *Ibid*, p.26.

[12] *Ibid*, p.34

The protagonist claims to have seen sense in the words of the Principal and accepted it as a valuable lesson in the virtues of everyday life. As he moved into early adulthood, this was the last in the series of experiences that taught him moral lessons.

4.1.2. The Hindi Subject

The protagonist was only seven years old when he read his first Hindi book. It was a historical play titled *Asrumati.*[13] His uncle Biharilal was into Hindi literature and he claims to have acquired the addiction to read from him. The introduction to Hindi literature also marked his first brush with questions of history. The play tells the story of romance between Asrumati, the daughter of Rana Pratap, the king of Mewar, and the young prince Salim (Jahangir) against the background of Mughal-Rajput conflicts. The protagonist did not enjoy reading the play and asked his uncle if the content of the play was historically true. He told him that the book contained many wrong facts: Rana Pratap did not have a daughter at the time of the Battle of Haldighati and Jahangir was very small at that time. A voice of wonder asked, 'Why did the author write all that then?'[14] A nonchalant voice replied, 'Many people write such wrong stuff.' The protagonist retorted, 'I shall not write such wrong stuff!', and provoked a patronizing laughter in his mother and uncle. After his mother hugged him, his uncle took him to watch a play with him. The only thing he remembers from the play is that the actors had cross-dressed and that there was a scary old female character. While he vowed to watch more plays in the

[13] It was a Bengali play by Jyotirindranath Tagore, translated into Hindi.

[14] Verma, AK, 2001, p.7-8.

future and understand them better, he disliked the 'immoral' way the theatre troupe behaved while in their own camp.

What we have in the above incident is a picture of the nascent Hindi public sphere in the late nineteenth century, and the protagonist's location in it. Modern Hindi literature was getting consolidated after the pioneering work of Bhartendu Harishchandra and a Hindi reading public was coming into being at this time. The protagonist's family belonged to the economic strata that could just about afford to buy Hindi books on a regular basis. The early works in Hindi included novels as well as translated plays like *Asrumati*, where the past became a backdrop for enacting romantic stories without much concern for factual accuracy. There was also a popularization of plays like Harishchandra's *Bharat Durdasha*, a satire on contemporary India. The protagonist read *Bharat Durdasha* as a young boy and it became one of his favorites. In liking *Bharat Durdasha* over *Asrumati*, he was playing the discerning reader, making choices about forms, genres and contents. He was doing the same in feeling uncomfortable about the falsification of history in *Asrumati.* The protagonist's love for *Bharat Durdasha* is contrasted also with his dislike for 'popular' theatre, what probably his uncle took him to see after the above-mentioned conversation. Popular forms like the Parsi, the *Nautanki* and the *Svang* theatre had become an object of ire of the emerging avant-garde Hindi litterateurs for its so-called vulgarity, depravity and lack of aesthetic refinement. The protagonist claims to have felt a discomfort with it, though there is a mention of him watching such plays later. The narrator thereby fashions the protagonist as a natural fit into the elite Hindi literary sphere that he would encounter later in his life. The future author-subject is foreshadowed in the author-impulse in his early childhood itself; in his negative response to the tendency of falsification of historical truth in a historical play and confident assertion: 'I will not write such wrong things.'

The Hindi subject is reinforced by the mention of incidents that bring out the protagonist's attachment to Hindi. At the age of twenty, he, along with Maithilisharan Gupta and others, founded a branch of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha at Jhansi. The shift to modern education meant that he was incompetent in Urdu, which was the official language required for government employment in the United Provinces. The protagonist felt bitter about being denied employment because of this lack and it made him feel strongly against the perceived discrimination against Hindi. In his days in the boarding school at Victoria College in Gwalior, he encountered Bengali and Marathi students who brought with them the rich treasure of literature in their languages. It kindled in the protagonist a desire to make Hindi literature equally rich. The Hindi subject continued its existence fused with the author subject in the public activities of the protagonist later in life, especially in his participation in the movement for propagation of Hindi as the national language in the 1950s.

4.1.3. The Bundeli Subject

His habit of voracious reading right from the schooldays created occasions for him to identify himself as a Bundeli subject. Reading Walter Scott's historical novels in school, he wanted to write similar stories with Bundelkhand as the setting. He had been hearing stories from his grandmother about the bravery of Lakshmibai and the other 'martyrs' of Bundelkhand in the 1857 revolt; about tales of Rajput bravery in the near and distant past. While staying in Gwalior, he once heard a Punjabi boy call Bundelkhand a *kambakht* (wretched) place, where men were weak and women strong, where there were only hills, rivers and forests, where animals were better than the humans. The incident aroused of his passion for Bundelkhand. The voice of the protagonist says:

> It is the land which gave birth to my parents, which witnessed the bravery of Lakshmibai, which nurtured the Chandels and Chhatrasal! It is the land of the people whose *alhas* are sung everywhere! It is the place that gave Aurangzeb as well as the British a hard time at conquest! How can that land be *kambakht*? Each pebble, each drop of water, each leaf of Bundelkhand, appeared beautiful to me at that moment.[15]

Just at the moment the Bundeli subject is about to assert itself, it is counteracted by the Hindi subject. The voice of the protagonist immediately adds:

> ...But right from day one I never let that thought [of the greatness of Bundelkhand] assume narrowness. *Neeldevi*, *Bharat Durdasha*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were my constant companions. It was only a question of which place I would select to locate my literary works.

Neeldevi and *Bharat Durdasha* written by Harishchandra, became canonical Hindi texts of modern Hindi literature. The mention of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in the ensemble of texts produces a Bundeli subject in tune with the larger Hindu traditions of the times.

The description of his travels around Bundelkhand after finishing higher education provides the occasion for the Bundeli subject to assert its autonomy. In no situation though does it come in conflict with the Hindi subject. The two run parallel to each other with occasional intersections. During his travels he encountered characters that make him think of the region and its past. He says that one day he heard that a gang of dacoits had encamped near Shaymsi village where he was staying. He learnt from a local Thakur that its leader Sher Singh knew about Vrindavanlal Verma, and had once refused to attack the home of a friend of Verma. Deeply touched, the protagonist mused:

[15] *Ibid*, p.19-20.

> Sher Singh remained in my thoughts for a long time – he is the grandson of Sagar Singh who had enrolled in Lakshmibai's army and died fighting the English! From what I have heard, Sher Singh never troubles women and children. If he and his likes had not indulged in dacoity and assisted the revolutionaries in uprooting English rule, how famous they would have been today! Sher Singh died two years later at the hands of the police. I have provided some glimpses of Sher Singh in the character of Sagar Singh in the 'Lakshmibai' novel.[16]

Young men from well-established Rajput families of the Jhansi area had taken to dacoity in economic distress. The protagonist wondered how these people might have made the nation and the region proud.

The travels continued throughout his life. It is precisely in course of one of his travels that he encountered Garh Kundar as a site that spoke to him about the past and prodded him to write historical novels.

4.1.4. The Historical Subject

If the protagonist encountered false histories in plays early in his childhood, suspect scholarly works of history did not have to wait too long to appear in his life. E. Marsden's *History of India* was a textbook in fifth and sixth standards in his school. He bought the book despite it being too expensive for him to afford. He was so angry after reading it that he tore it apart. The protagonist claims,

[16] *Ibid*, p. 109.

> It was written that since India is a warm country, it has always lost to people coming from cold countries. But they wouldn't lose again because the British are here. During summers they go over to hill stations and then they go back to England and when they do, young Englishmen come over. That means that Indians will always remain slaves of the English. Whatever Lakshmibai had fought for is then in vain. I tore that page apart and when I told that to my uncle he was livid. It was an expensive book after all. He said, 'What will you achieve by tearing off a page?'[17]

He revolted against the 'prejudiced' history writing of the colonizers. Upon asking his uncle if the point about warm and cold climates made by Marsden was true, he was told, 'It is incorrect. Rama, Krishna, Arjuna and Bhima were sons of this very warm country. But don't get into all this right now. Read more, pass your exams and then investigate.' The protagonist vowed to do just that.

Like the first encounter with Hindi literature, this too is an encoded message to the reader. In rejecting Marsden's history, the protagonist was performing the classic act of the nationalist historian, thereby constituting himself as a 'historical' subject opposed to the attempted hegemony of the universal history of the empire. He had suspected, and learnt from his uncle, that Marsden was writing to deny Indians historical agency. In recognizing that Indian history too had its own epoch-makers, who were born in none other than the country with warm climate, he was affirming the view that Indian history was not defined by a teleological movement towards colonialism. Indians were conquered but they too had their glorious days in the time of Rama, Krishna, Arjuna and Bhima, and much more recently, Lakshmibai. That was a history that constituted the colonized subject's sense of self.

[17] *Ibid*, p. 15.

The reference to Lakshmibai in the protagonist's furious reaction to Marden's book, cross-refers to the memory of hearing legends about her from his grandparents. The latter is mentioned as one of the important memories of his early childhood. His family had been *jagirdars* during the Rani's time and his great-grandfather had died fighting for the Rani. He had taken his grandmother's tales seriously and questioned Marsden on that basis. The lengthy meditation on the issue that is discussed in the introduction to *Jhansi ki Rani* is avoided here and the protagonist's self is fashioned as a fighter against modern history's hegemony right from his childhood. While he never forgot the grandma's tales, he went on to read history in school and college and got a broader perspective about the way the past was written.

As discussed in the introduction, the exposure to discourses on the past through modern education was integral to the intellectual growth of many a nationalist, the real historical 'I' of the autobiography. The debates on education provided a discursive space in which questions about the past featured directly or indirectly.[18] The space of the institutions provided scope for different forms of socialization that led to exchange of ideas.[19] History was an important subject in all examinations from elementary to higher education. The subject aside, history was an

[18] See Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, c.2.

[19] For example, the Union Club debates in the M.A.O. College, Aligarh, in the late nineteenth century would feature arguments on themes including science, education, equality, nationhood; and students would draw upon Western ideas they had learned through the curriculum, as well as non-Western ideas that they had imbibed from elsewhere, in the debates. David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, 1978.

important component of many other disciplines.[20] With multiple discourses on the past circulating in and around sites of modern education, it is no wonder that the protagonist claims to have compared forms and themes in historical works, sitting in his college library. While the

[20] To take an example, if we look at the Allahabad University syllabus around this period, we find that History featured as a compulsory subject in the Matriculation examination. Seventy five was the maximum mark in History. To pass the matriculation examination, one had to compulsorily pass in History. The syllabus consisted of history of England and of India with special reference to North India. The books prescribed for Indian history included *History of India* by Claude de la Fosse, *Oxford Students History of India* by Vincent Smith, *History of India* by Thompson, *History of India* by Haraprasad Shastri. In the Intermediate Examination, history was compulsory again but one could opt for ancient or modern history. The course structure of history itself opened up a space for debates on authenticity in historical writing. Since critical judgment largely depended on getting the facts right, a nationalist concern for authentic history was incited. The discipline of history aside, history was an important component of many other courses. In the English syllabus for the Matriculation Examination under Allahabad University, the list of non-compulsory suggested readings included *Life of Julius Caesar* by Plutarch, *Mary, Queen of Scots* by Scott, and Gandy's Selections from *Shah Namah*. These, including *Shah Namah*, were meant to increase the students' knowledge of 'ordinary English prose'. At the B.A. level, we witness the most widespread infusion of history across academic disciplines though history as a subject was not compulsory. The English paper consisted of two sections – the general and the special, and the candidate had to pass in both. The first paper was on grammar and composition and included questions based on unseen passages on various issues including history and biography. The special section was on prose and poetry and included sections on literary history of English prose and poetry. The second paper in Political Economy included Indian economics, and scope, method and history of the science. There were no specific books prescribed on history, though the syllabus mentioned 'Need of economic history. Statistics. Characteristics of the chief English Economists. Influence of Economic theories on Legislations and Social History.' In the master's degree too there was infusion of history into other disciplines. Minutes of the Allahabad University, 1912-1918, Central Library, Allahabad University.

content of Max Muller's *India and What It Can Teach Us*[21] and Todd's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* appealed to him as opposed to Marsden's *History of India*, Walter Scott's stylistic choices inspired a desire to follow him.

4.1.5. The Public Subject

As the protagonist grew up, he started keeping a tab on the political events that shook the country. The anti-partition movement during 1905-08 kindled in him an appreciation for the revolutionary terrorists and inspired the play, *Senapati Udal*. The publication, as we have seen earlier (section 1.3.1), was proscribed by the government and he was warned by the police and kept under observation for some time. He became a journalist with *Pratap*, a leader in the field of political journalism in Hindi, during 1915-17. Journalism was to give him the first experience of a communal riot, which killed the founder and editor of the journal and the protagonist's close friend Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi in 1928.

Initiation into adulthood is marked by the rising prominence of the public subject. His first experience of political activism came with the Council elections in 1922, when he campaigned for the Liberal candidate C.Y. Chintamani against a Congress candidate in Jhansi. Attracted by the leadership of Tej Bahadur Sapru, he soon joined the Liberal Party. He regularly participated in famine relief, vaccination campaigns in and around Jhansi, and took part in the

[21] The book, published in 1882, reaffirmed the Orientalist construct of the 'glory' of the 'ancient civilization of the Hindus'. Max Muller, *India: What Can It Teach Us?* Calcutta: Longmans Green and Co. Limited, 1934.

Cooperative Credit Movement 1928 onwards. His experience of the exploitation of the peasantry in the course of this campaign resulted in a social novel on village life, *Amarbel* (1935). He contested and won the election for the Chairmanship of Jhansi Municipality in 1936. The 1940s marked a lull in his political career, which again picked up steam with the general election of 1952 in which he contested. Defeat after a long and bitter campaign convinced him to withdraw from politics once and for all, and the 1950s and early 60s produced the majority of his literary works. The public subject that remains after this decision is subsumed within the author subject.

The private self of the protagonist is a subject of the autobiography in as much as he recounts his friendships, leisure trips for hunting and occasionally refers to his wife and son. The latter come into the picture primarily during exceptional situations like illness, marriage, career difficulties, and death. His friends often being leading public figures in the Hindi literary world, the recounting of friendships often becomes an appreciation of their public life and activities. On the whole, silences on his private life help to produce the protagonist as primarily a public figure as an author and part politician and social worker.

4.1.6. The Productive Subject

The day the protagonist realized that the British were falsifying Indian history, he increased his hours of physical exercise: 'If ever, may be some day, I get into a challenge with an Englishman, I shall ensure that he cannot stand straight', he writes.[22] In his schooldays, he used to have secretive discussions with his friends about sex, and the discussions excited his

[22] Verma, AK, 2001, p. 16.

sexual desires. However, he suppressed his sexual desires and channelized the energies of his body towards building greater physical and mental strength, in line with the notion of self-reliance borne during the *swadeshi* movement. He started reciting the *hanuman chalisa* and increased the degree of physical exercise yet again. *Hanuman chalisa* inspired him to exercise more and he gradually became disinterested in sex. The above two instances show the protagonist as a keen cultivator of physical strength with a view to fighting for the nation. His body is marked by *virya*, a form of bravery associated with Rajputs, later flowing into the discourse of revolutionary terrorism in the 1910s and 20s. His *virya* found strange outlets at times: he used to fight regularly with neighborhood kids in his childhood. But largely it is fashioned as an embodied product directed against an unstable external aggressor. It could be the British; it could be dacoits he encountered on his tours, or even wild animals that were his potential hunt.

The incident at his office when he decided to stand and work the whole day as a penance for his lack of duty, presents another sensibility of the body – a disciplined body. As the author subject asserts itself in the autobiography, the emphasis on regularity and discipline in writing grows. Regularity and discipline come across as embodied qualities. The ethical self becomes a combination of an ethical body as well as an ethical mind.

Other references to the body are rare and made in a reticent tone. There was a time when the protagonist had started having severe headaches due to repressed sexual desires. He claims to have considered marrying a second time but ruled it out due to his age, and solved the problem himself. No further details are mentioned. While paying tribute to his wife at her death, he says that she had borne intense difficulties with a smile during that particular illness. Such a

reference to the body as a sexual being is rare; the body is brought to language primarily in regard to the demonstrations of *virya*, his pubic life, and disciplined writing practice.

I shall now look at the role of the author-subject in the present by studying the two internal monologues in the autobiography where the protagonist voices his philosophy of the historical novel.

4.2. Birth of the Author-Subject

> April 6, 1927. Before dusk I entrenched myself in a ravine on the bank of the river Betwa. I had been informed that a pig and a panther had passed that way. I was alone. I spread my bedding and waited for a *shikar* [hunt]. On one side I put my rifle. As night fell, cries of river birds and wild animals began to resound. Stars sparkled. The breeze was quite cool. My heart began to resound with an impulse. I was attracted by the ranges of hills which were somewhat hidden behind the fog. They seemed to be asleep. Behind them, on one hill, the fortress of Kundar looked drowsy. Garh Kundar is now deserted but during the rule of the Chandels it must have experienced tumultuous activity. To what men and women, to what social upheavals, turns and twists of history could this fortress have borne witness! I began to turn the pages of *itihas* and *parampara* in my mind. Innumerable stories of Bundelkhand's glories filled me with *pulak* [happiness].[23]

The protagonist here was in a state of reflective nostalgia.[24] Inhabiting a place that carried signs of the past, he was transported back in time. Time zones of the past and present

[23] *Ibid*, p.85.

[24] According to Svetlana Boym, 'reflective nostalgia' is a specific kind of longing for the past that one feels when at monuments, museums and such places, where one can

converged on his body, producing it as the interface between the past and the present. The condition inspired an act of recall and he began to turn the pages of *itihas* and *parampara* in his mind. The remembrance of time past in turn kindled thoughts about the necessity of returning to the same in search of values that were lacking in the present. Garh Kundar, situated among hills and forests, functioned as a heterotopia, presenting to the protagonist an absent image of what present society might have been if virtues of the past had not been forgotten.[25] Perhaps life in the present would have been as vibrant as it was at Garh Kundar in the time of the Chandels. The image in a concrete form was absent as Garh Kundar lay in ruins but the fort, as a physical trace of the past, presented such an image as historically possible. He asked himself:

> Was then, in the past, everything beautiful, were all men and women godly or did then also exist saints and sinners, the virtuous and the venal, the fair and the foul, as they exist today? Perhaps yes, in different proportions. The outer layer keeps changing, but the inside? After all, the *vikas* [development/progress] of man happens continuously, but gradually. Can we take something from that age for our use? After all, the present is born of the past... If the way of living of the people of those times, the interests which guided them, their actions in love,

---

simultaneously inhabit the past and the present. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia,* New York: Basic Books, 2001, p. 49-57.

[25] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopia and Heterotopia', in Neil Leich ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, London/New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 330-336.

> bravery, selflessness, valor are reconstructed today, we may gain something of use.[26]

The act of recall appears to have inspired an urge to a specific action – a reconstruction of the past. Questions now arose about formal and stylistic choices that an author might make.

> But do I want to preach any sermon? Should a novelist be a preacher? Or, is art for art's sake? No, neither this, nor that! Many people enjoy a monkey-dance or a snake-charmer's show. But, does that enjoyment enrich them with any freshness, vitality and strength? Very little, if any...The rains, *dussehra*, *dipawali* do. On such occasions there are *akharas* and *kushti*, *kabaddi* in the villages of Bundelkhand. There are also many swimming festivals on rivers during such festivals, outside Bundelkhand. The participants as well as the audience enjoy the entertainment as well as brim with strength, vitality and freshness. Let such a medium be followed. All our festivals and fairs fill our people with zest and energy even without preaching any direct sermons. Why should I not adopt the same method?[27]

The author should ideally choose a form that produces pleasure through 'good' entertainment. He could tell stories by locating characters in their time and environment:

> In my bag of experiences, I have a variety of characters and I can use them. I only have to ensure that they are placed in their time and environment... Someone may say that I am an advocate of regionalism,

[26] Verma, AK, 2001, p. 86-87.

[27] *Ibid.*

> but let him say what he likes. A character is to be created on his soil. Moreover, I must revive the glory of the forgotten Bundelkhand.[28]

Rooting the characters in their region would enable the protagonist to selectively revive the past – a past that would be Bundeli in its texture. It is the task that he now sets for himself, and the prospect of the task fills the pores of his body with pleasure:

> *Itihas* and *parampara*, characters and of events, art and its objectives – a veritable storm set my mind reeling. Slowly it subsided and the matter became clear. My watch told me it was four o' clock in the morning. The bed showed wrinkles, caused only by movement of the legs. The rifle stood in the same position as it was last evening. This time I earned *anand* [joy] without hunting. I did not have even a wink of sleep, but each pore in my body was full of *ullas* [exuberance]. It appeared that something had fallen into that knot...[29]

The protagonist claims to have gone back to his house, freshened up, and started writing his first historical novel *Garh Kundar*. After finishing it in one month's time, he came back to the same spot and prayed to his *ishtadevata* (one's personal god). He had found his calling in life: he had to produce a text in the form of the historical novel that would disseminate the signs of the past in the present. The authorial act would be an act of bridging the gap between the past and the present; he had to stand in the gap and ensure a structural continuity in the ethical life. He could do it by fulfilling two functions: negotiate with the heterotopias in the present and producing affects so as to urge the reader to inculcate the positives of the past in their lives.

---

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] *Ibid.*

4.2.1. Negotiating Heterotopias

We have to die one day, brother
And I shall choose today
For our queen I shall lay down
My life,
I shall hack the *firangis* [Europeans] with my sword
And the world will forever
Remember me![30]

Folklore has it that these were the last words of Khudadud Khan when he died guarding the main gate of the Jhansi fort during the revolt of 1857. Stories of Lakshmibai's fight against the British became a part of collective memory in the Jhansi region in the years after the revolt. Memory of the pre-revolt days is likely to have provoked questions about the past-ness of the old order in such a milieu, especially because his own father had embraced the new political order as a government servant. Popular memory of Lakshmibai aside, the spatial setting of the Jhansi district itself would have enabled a certain engagement with the question of past-ness. The town had expanded beyond the confines of the fort area after British annexation. A city church belonging to the Church of North India had been built right at the heart of the old city in 1889. A little outside the town, the terrain was dotted with remains of Chandel embankments, many of which had fallen into disuse.[31]

---

[30] P.C. Joshi ed., *1857 in Folk Songs,* Peoples' Publishing House, 1994, p.49.

[31] See Alexander Cunningham, Tours in Bundelkhand and Malwa in 1874-75 and 1876-77, Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1966, *Reports of a Tour in Bundelkhand and Rewa in 1883-84 and of a Tour in Rewa, Bundelkhand, Malwa, and Gwalior in 1884-85.* Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1969, Poorno

The region continues to be replete with heroic legends of powerful Rajput families till date. A glance at the 1909 Jhansi District Gazeteer immediately tells us that the legends could easily catch the locals' imagination at that time. According to the 1901 Census, the Rajputs were only sixth in terms of population, constituting 6.09% of the people of the district. 13.38% of the Hindu population (which was 92.7% of the whole) were Chamars, followed by Kachhis (10.14%), Brahmans (10.10 %), Ahirs (9.06%) and Lodhis (8.24%). However, the Rajputs held 38.56% of the total area of the district, followed by Brahmans who owned a distant 19.52%. The Rajputs had a dominant landed presence. Yet land was a mere symbol of power. By the late nineteenth century, the Rajput families were facing a steep economic decline. Young men of Rajput families were known to have taken to dacoity and loot. In the face of the new political order, they tried to maintain their social status by keeping up rituals of lordship.[32] The sharp contrast with the past could fire the imagination of people about bygone times. It is precisely in such a milieu that one could romanticize about what Sher Singh the dacoit might have been.

To add to that, *vir-rasa* poetry, legends of heroism and romance narrated in popular theatre like *svang*, *nautanki* and Parsi theatre, located the present in mythic time. Such forms enabled the audience to identify with the heroic characters without depending on the immediacy of experiencing them. It is this spatial setting that formed the site of discourses about *parampara*. The space had a story to tell about how it came to be inscribed by past-ness; about how it ceased to be living and became static, a site of mere accumulation of time. In contrast,

---

Chander Mukherjee, *Report on the Antiquities in the District of Lalitpur, North Western Provinces, India,* Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1972.

[32] S.P. Pathak, *Jhansi During British Rule*, New Delhi: Ramanand Vidya Bhavan, 1987, c. 6, 7.

there were the grounds and rivers; sites of seasonal fairs and festivals which stretched back into a past that lay beyond the collective memory of the living. Here time was fluid, transitory and cyclical, in sharp contrast to the roadblock that linear time had put in the life of the decayed forts and embankments.

Such material remains were often separated in chronological time by centuries, falling into disuse at different times in the past. The discourse of colonialism, and of modern teleological time, reconfigured these places as a set of materials that told a uniform story of past-ness. Together they stood for an order that was gone. Their past-ness had a political charge in the present. Constructions like Garh Kundar, now deserted, had a story to tell about how such a state of being came about. So did the forces that had been responsible for the same. The Church at the heart of the fort-city of Jhansi stood as a constant reminder of the fact that times had changed. The fort itself was on its way to becoming a monument – a tourist attraction: the site of the discourse of the modern state that would soon put in place there 'a system of opening and closing that both isolates them [the fort in this case] and makes them penetrable.'[33]

The historical text had to perform two functions in negotiating the heterotopias: it had to restore places like Garh Kundar in chronological time that defined its historical specificity. At the same time, it had to give a slip to chronological time, leap into the slice of the past in which it was located, and reconfigure the site as one of ethical life that defined history in the period of fall from the 'golden age'. In doing so, it had to locate the present in continuum with the past as an extended period of fall.

---

[33] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', in Leich ed., *Rethinking Architecture*, p. 335.

4.2.2. The Text as an Affective Artifact

Garh Kundar lay where it was for ages. The protagonist is bound to have seen it many times in course of his hunting expeditions in the forests around Jhansi. It was only on one fine day that he was urged into action by the presence of the fort. That feeling gave the experience the status of a calling and marked the birth of the author-subject. No longer was the fort merely an object of knowledge. It induced a capacity in him to act; it had produced a specific affect. On that night when he lay below the fort, he experienced a passage of intensities all around him, as if the environs wanted to communicate its stories to him. The intensities passed into his body producing pleasure and configuring Garh Kundar as an object of desire. They stuck to his body and produced an urge to a specific action: to start off and continue a practice of disciplined writing of historical novels. The experience reconfigured the author's body as a specific productive body: one that produced affective knowledge of the past through the medium of the text.

Producing mere knowledge was not the primary function of the text; it had to produce affect: vital forces other than conscious knowing that exist beyond emotion, that 'serve to drive us towards movement, towards thought and its extension, that can likewise suspend us across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability.'[34] Affect is something difficult to pin down. For the nationalist author, affects had to be channelized in a specific direction. The text had to urge its readers to

[34] Melissa Gregg & Gregory Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in Melissa Gregg & Gregory Seigworth ed., *The Affect Theory Reader*, Duke: Duke University Press, 2010.

lead an ethical life in the present by inculcating the values that they had lost in the course of time. It had to produce specific affects that would configure the readers' bodies as 'national' bodies', enabling them to struggle against internal and external enemies and practice paradigmatic values in the present. The text could do so through a medium of entertainment. Yet neither knowledge nor entertainment was its chief objective; producing affective knowledge through the medium of entertainment was. The text as an affective artifact would be the medium between the author and his readers, democratizing affective knowledge about the past and reducing the society's reliance on the author in the process.

4.3. The Author as the Bridge

Wondering about the meaning of history lying at the foot of Garh Kundar, the protagonist had said to himself: 'The outer layer keeps changing, but the inside? After all, the *vikas* [development/progress] of man happens continuously, but gradually.' In other words, though the outer layer of society may have changed over time, the past had not disappeared completely. One had to go into the inner fabric of society to find it. It was there, the author had to look for it: the act of bridging would be an act of discovery. Later in the autobiography, the protagonist further elaborates on this author-function:

> I am no priest, religious instructor, pastor or mullah. But I have a responsibility to society; I have felt like that for a long time. We have forgotten the best part of the doctrines and facts of the past. We have become lifeless and pour vision has become hazy. To what extent can we 'claim to possess the virtues of fearlessness, renunciation, unselfishness, courtesy and humility today? We pass of boorish ad violent behavior as signs of vitality. And so many people spend their days biting pieces off one another, exploiting and looting others, and

> realize at the end of the day that there really is nothing to boast of in their lives! Life is short. *Vinay* [humility] has been the hallmark of our culture; renunciation has been the cornerstone of our spiritual tendencies: how much of it remains today? ... Thousands of years back all this used to be said in our country with an intensity that is missing today. I think about all this and feel inspired to write.[35]

This is the second internal monologue and comes at a time when the protagonist had already written a host of historical novels. Compared to the first monologue, the tone here is rather pessimistic. There is no reiteration of an underlying continuity between the past and the present. It is only said that the present is born of the past and that there are *chhipa hua* (hidden), *dhundhla* (hazy), and *adrishya* (invisible) areas even in the recognizable past, the *parichit pracheen*, which call for illumination. He asks rhetorically: 'To what extent can we claim to possess the virtues of fearlessness, renunciation, unselfishness, courtesy and humility today?' It is almost as if the past is dead. Almost but not quite – the protagonist never ever makes a statement to that effect. Rather, he seems to be saying that as we move further away from the past, the lesser we remember the paradigmatic values and the crisis deepens.

Yet the pessimism in the second internal monologue is revealing of a slight shift in the structure of the protagonist's thought on the act of bridging. To begin with, he was never interested in the ancient 'golden' past. It was as good as dead. In the first monologue, he located the present in continuum with a past within the period of fall. The latter would imply the late ancient, the medieval, the early modern and the colonial period. The identification of the past as located in the late ancient, medieval and early modern in his historical novels, in turn located the present in the colonial/post-colonial period. We, therefore, have a tacit acceptance of

[35] Verma, AK, 2001, p. 139.

colonialism as the harbinger of a rupture in time, but a break that was not drastic and could be partially suppressed, for it had not killed off the past completely. Through the act of discovery, the author could partly undo the rupture: that would constitute the act of bridging. The pessimism of the second internal monologue implicitly grants greater agency to the rupture. At this point, the protagonist is chronologically located in the post-colonial period. Political sovereignty of the nation, so dear to the protagonist, had been won again. Still, he was bitter: an erosion of faith in his own project perhaps? Was it disenchantment with the post-colonial state due to its 'betrayal' of Hindi?

Towards the end of the second monologue, he asserts: 'Food, clothes and entertainment are not adequate for man. These are of course the primary necessities, but there is something more, *kuchh aur*, that he needs. The past will give us this '*kuchh aur*' [the phrase is put within inverted commas in the text].' The lack therefore lay squarely in the present and the past becomes the redeemer. It is here that a sense of the past and the present as two distinct times becomes clearer than anywhere else in the autobiography or the historical novels. If the past is distinctly different, the authorial act cannot be an act of discovery. The past does not lay hidden in the present; it lay 'beyond' the present. Following soon after the above statement, the protagonist refers to Occultism and Parapsychology in explaining the author-function. It gives us a clue to a different kind of authorial act.

In the nineteenth century Europe and America, Occultism had become a term for supernaturalism in a modern world where science had already succeeded in securing its triumphant position of prominence. It concerned itself with worldly powers and phenomenon and not salvational gnosis, and was a sort of 'secularization of the demonic'. Science had still to

explain many things: there was a lacuna that created the possibility of a supernatural to be part of the yet-to-be-comprehended natural. The Theosophical Society, founded by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Olcott in India in 1882, was very much interested in Occultism and practiced the esoteric cult of the 'guru'. In Blavatsky's opinion, Occult knowledge(s) could be transmitted only in privacy from the adept preceptor (*guru*) to the disciple (*shishya*). A.P. Sinette's *The Occult World*, which the protagonist of the autobiography invokes, is an account of the occult powers of Madame Blavatsky and contains descriptions of his conversations with a Tibetan *yogi*, Koot Homi, through Blavatsky. It was a peculiar product of the West's tendency to orientalize and be permeable to possible 'hidden treasures' of 'Eastern Spirituality.'[36]

If the break had been so drastic that the past was situated 'beyond' the present, the author's task being to illuminate the invisible areas of the *parichit pracheen*, a broadly recognized past, he could easily be the *shishya* in an 'occult' practice of knowing the past. The protagonist claims to have 'felt something' which challenged his deep-seated atheism. Discovering the link with the past in traces that lay around would not be his job. He could be the sole receptor of an esoteric knowledge that lay 'beyond'. Just like occult knowledge did not lie beyond the natural *per se*, but within the natural that was not yet in the grip of science, the past lay not beyond the knowable but within the historically possible that was not yet illuminated by the empirical facts. The historically possible too could be historically real. It is that reality that the author must access. But since it lay 'beyond' the factual knowledge of humans, it could come to him as a revelation. The *shishya* could be summoned by his *guru*: none other than the

[36] Neha Chatterjee, *Submerged Aspects of Bhadralok 'Culture': Middle Class Engagements with 'Esoteric' Spirituality and the 'Occult' in High Colonial Bengal*, Unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2012.

past itself. As the first receiver of affective knowledge about the past, he could be the priest of an esoteric practice of knowing the past, and a storehouse of affects related to that knowledge.

The invocation of Parapsychology adds another dimension to the authorial act as an act of reception. Parapsychology was a later and slightly different phenomenon from Occultism. It marked what may be called the application of laboratory research method to occult phenomenon, pioneered by J.B. Rhine (1895-1980) in Duke University in the 1950s. *The New World of the Mind*, which the protagonist cites in the autobiography, was written by J.B. Rhine in 1957, and contains an account of his laboratory experiments. Parapsychology was the name given by him to the scientific study of psychic and paranormal phenomenon like thought-transference without a physical medium, clairvoyance, and telepathy. Such phenomena were taken to suggest that extra-sensory perception was possible.[37] The protagonist of *Apni Kahani* seems to be especially interested in telepathy. Was he implying that communication between the past and the present was possible in the way thought-transference could occur without a physical medium? Dialogue with the past through telepathy would also go some distance in restoring agency to the author; it would not be a revelation as such but a two-way communication. He would not merely be a receptor of impulses from the past – he would enter into conversations with them.

If the present communicates with the past through thought-transference, what happens to the text? The text does not cease to be a medium in the present, for not all would be able to

[37] Melton, Gordon J. ed., *The Encyclopedia of Occultism & Parapsychology*, Vol. I, Michigan: Gale Group, 2001.

communicate with the past. The rupture between the past and the present defines the contemporary; how could such a rupture happen if most people had been in dialogue with the past? The author, as the high priest of an esoteric practice, might have privileged access to it. The text would continue to be the democratizing tool; circulating affective knowledge about the past and urging people to act in that light. The arrangement has a futuristic implication. If knowledge of the past spreads to all corners of society, then the author could count himself successful in his project. That would however be a scenario when each individual could fulfill the lack in the present in light of the past, in their own individual capacity. That would, in turn, cause the author to lose his specific function in the future. If a perfect interface between the past and the present is the utopia, a privileged author has no space in it. The authorial act in the present thus contains a futuristic implication of the death of the author of historical novels. His self-destruction in the future is what he must struggle for in the present, thereby making the authorial act also a self-destructive act. The moment of the authors' destruction is the utopia; an imaginary time and place where the metahistory of struggle in the period of fall would come to an end. The author would be happily dead.

5. Conclusion: The Historian in the Audience

> If the writer has enkindled in the reader the strength to die for his *purushartha* [manliness] and *satsiddhanta* [correct/honest decisions/beliefs], he should know that he has explicated the facts of history in the way he should have. The past has witnessed the pageantry of the gods, and of the demons too. They are happening even now. The writer of the novel can render both in an interesting manner, and he should. But the reader must fall for the pageantry of the gods; he must feel contempt for the demons. Only then can one say that the writer of *itihas* has given the right explanation of history. Creation moves towards *vikas* [progress/development], it doesn't traverse the path of decline. That is why demons lose at the end. It is this *vikas* that has to be illustrated in the historical novel, in an entertaining manner.[1]

In Vrindavanlal Verma's idea of history, time is not empty, it has a meaning. The conflict between gods and demons is a metahistorical fact, and so is the ultimate victory of the gods. The struggle defines history, and the writers of *itihas* must place themselves and their readers on the right side of the struggle. The reader must be made to feel *mugdh* (full of wonder, thrilled) at the pageantry of the gods. In other words, the writer has to communicate the right affective knowledge to him. He has to present the metahistorical fact to the best of his abilities. Vrindavanlal Verma, as we have seen, made stylistic choices regarding the setting, characters, and others, which enabled him to produce the struggle against enemies and the practice of ethical life as the metahistorical fact. Other novelists could do so too, in his opinion; they could narrate the story in a *rochak* (interesting) manner.

Time moves in a linear fashion for Verma, towards progress and away from decline. It has a pre-determined end: the victory of the gods, of paradigmatic values. Yet it is an abstract end, functioning as a metaphor for multiple possibilities. As Verma's historical novels and the

[1] Verma, 'Aitihasik Upanyas aur Mera Drishtikon', in Govindji ed., *Aitihasik Upanyas*, 1970, p. 25-26.

autobiography tell us, there is an admission of change of values over time. Man Singh tells Bodhan that values and practices that have become obsolete and troublesome must be thrown away. Struggle becomes the over-arching paradigmatic value, while all others may be judged according to the times. Also, linearity of time did not mean that one could not leap from one moment in time to another. Verma did – in his choices of space/time settings, he leapt from a moment in his present to one in his past, and then again to different ones in his past, adding a touch of the same to all of them. The settings enjoyed a metaphorical relation with each other while being metonymic vis-à-vis the nation.

But wait! In the above passage, who is Verma telling all this to? Is he addressing solely the historical novelist? In the midst of talk about that specific form, a term comes up which makes me think: 'the writer of *itihas*'. That term surely cannot exclude the professional historian, or an apprentice in the job, like me. What is he trying to tell me? Can I understand him?

Let me briefly tell about two incidents that occurred in course of my intense engagement with Vrindavanlal Verma. As I rambled on about my dialogue with the 'popular' on the computer screen, a friend of mine asked, 'So are you engaging with the popular in order to contain it better?' Who am I to contain it? I thought. More importantly, what identity do I own that makes my friend think that I may want to 'contain' Verma? And that I may have the resources to do so if I want to?

On another occasion, as I sat in my room musing about the 'popular', in came a friend, another apprentice in the job, to tell me about a book that had thrilled him. It was a Bengali book, titled *The Mahabharata War and Krishna*, written by a non-historian, Nrisinghaprasad

Bhaduri.[2] He had taken Krishna to be a historical figure and not a mythical one. The book was an assessment of Krishna in the circumstances in which he functioned in his lifetime. Published in 1989, it had echoes of Jaychandra Vidyalankar's critique of Lala Lajpat Rai's *History of India*, around seventy years back. Vidyalankar had asserted, 'For European scholars, Rama and Sita, Krishna and Dusyanta are mythological figures – does Lalaji think so too? When does the history of India begin; did Dusyanta and Bharata, Rama and Lakshmana, Krsna and Arjuna exist historically or not? These are very important questions for our nation (*jati*) and our history.'[3]

Thus reads the blurb of 'The Mahabharata War and Krishna': 'Was Krsna a god? Or was he a magnificent personality, someone who grew out of uncertain beginnings to become the central figure in political games in the India of his times?' The blurb also states that none of what the author has written are figments of his imagination; that he is a thorough scholar. Some strands of the 'popular' have not changed over the past century. And here I had a future academic historian raving about the book and telling me that though Bhaduri may not be historically accurate all the time, his views are fascinating. And he was indeed taking them seriously! Neeladri Bhattacharya has written that the historical and the mythic often coexist in the minds of people. They coexist in the minds of the professional historian as well.[4] Who is the 'popular'?

The issue that has stood out above the rest in the conflict between the 'popular' and the academic in the wake of post-colonial cultural tensions is the question of method. For example,

---

[2] Nrisinghaprasad Bhaduri, *The Mahabharat War and Krsna*, Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1991.

[3] Quoted in Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 2002, p. 181.

[4] Bhattacharya, 'Predicaments of Secular Histories', PC, 2008.

the academic maintains a critical distance with his source material, uninfluenced by the passions of the 'popular', or so we believe. With such ideas in mind the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty went to study the historical craft of Jadunath Sarkar, one of the founding fathers of modern scientific history-writing in India. And he ended up having an 'archival experience'. Reading Sarkar's letters to his friend and historian G.S. Sardesai, Chakrabarty felt that Sarkar was speaking to him: 'After Sir Jadunath's scolding I made an effort to improve my handwriting. I suddenly knew that in course my dialogue with Sir Jadunath through the manuscripts, the historical distance between me and him had actually lessened.' The past that lay 'beyond' suddenly made its presence felt all around Chakrabarty. It wan affective experience, like lying below Garh Kundar was for Verma. Would Vrindavanlal Verma have been as excited about Jadunath as Dipesh Chakrabarty was? Perhaps not; after all Verma had consciously forsaken the path of academic history-writing. And what is it that fascinated Chakrabarty so much about Jadunath Sarkar that he came to feel that the man was his method? There are no easy answers to these questions. However all roads appear lead to one point: the question of location.

A long time ago, Romesh Chandra Dutt, a historian as well as historical novelist wrote: 'I do not know if Sir Walter Scott gave me a taste for history or if my taste for history made me such an admirer of Scott, but no subject, not even poetry, had such a hold upon me as history.'[5] The hold of history on Indian society has continued. If you are a student of physics, your co-passengers on the train ask you questions about wonderful natural phenomena. If you are a student of history, you are lectured: on how Mahatma Gandhi betrayed Bhagat Singh, on how Subhash Chandra Bose may have brought a better freedom to India than what eventually came. In a milieu where the past is very much a part of the lived present, one cannot miss the way

[5] Quoted in Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality*, p. 44.

Verma locates his sensibility of the past in his experiences of life; experiences largely shaped by the social, cultural and political milieu that he worked himself through.

The question of location is obviously nothing new. With the loss of faith in grand-narratives, we have become increasingly aware of how our location shapes our ideas; of the power and privilege that the university, as an institution, bestows on the professional historian. What Vridavanlal Verma tells us is nothing new, but each Vrindavanlal Verma reminds us of the many more that exist as writers or readers; of the varied life of the protocols of modern scientific history in the postcolonial modern. Verma calls for greater urgency in the project of linking the question of knowledge production about the past to the politics of location. To me, he asks a simple question: in the midst of varied sensibilities of the past that are part of each one of us, what does it mean to be a 'student' or a 'teacher' of history?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BENGALI WORKS

Bhaduri, Nrisingha Prasad (1991). *Mahabharater Juddho o Krishno.* Kolkata: Ananda Publishers.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2001). *Itihasher Janajiban o Anyanyo Prabandho.* Kolkata: Ananda Publishers.

Tagore, Rabindranath (1961). 'Sahitye Aitihasikata' in *Rabindra Rachanabali (Centenary Edition)* Vol. 14. Calcutta: Government of West Bengal.

HINDI JOURNALS

Pratap (1913-1928); at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML).

HINDI BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Awasthy, Krishna (1978). *Vrindavanlal Verma ka Sanskritik Adhyayan.* Kanpur: Pustak Sansthan.

Bhargava M.L. (1988). *Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi.* New Delhi: Publications Division.

Chaturvedi, Nareshchandra (2009). *Balkrishna Sharma 'Naveen' Kavya Rachnavali.* Part I. New Delhi: Prakashan Sansthan.

Chugh, Satyapal (1978). *Hindi Aitihasik Upanyas: Pratiman evam Vikasetihas.* Delhi: Konark Prakashan.

Govindji (ed.). (1970). *Hindi Aitihasik Upanyas: Prakriti evam Swaroop.* Allahabad: Sahityavani.

Harishchandra, Bhartendu (1980). *Neeldevi*, Delhi: Rajesh Prakashan.

---------- (1953). *Bharat Durdasha.* Gorakhpur: Motilal Modi and Sons.

Joshi, Shrikant (ed.). (1983). *Makhanlal Chaturvedi Rachnavali.* Delhi: Vani Prakashan.

'Kamlesh', Padamsinh Sharma (1958). *Vrindavanlal Verma*, Delhi: Sarvoday Prakashan Mandir.

Khangar, Ram Avatar Singh (2003). *Bundelkhand mein Khangar Rajya.* Banda: Jagiya Devi Smarak Nyas.

Kumar, Kapil (ed.). (2005). *Bundela Itihas aur Sanskriti*, Bhopal: Adivasi Lok Kala Academy.

Madhuresh (ed.). (2007). *Banabhatta ki Janmakatha: Paath aur Punarpaath.* Panchkula: Aadhar Prakashan.

Malik, Suchitra (2000). *Vrindavanlal Verma ke Aitihasik Upanyason Mein Lok Sankriti*, Roorkee: Ajay Printers and Publishers, Roorkee.

Nagendra (1973). *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas.* Delhi: National Publishing House.

---------- (ed.). (1989). *Jayshankar Prasad: His Mind and Art.* Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.

Ojha, Dashrath (1984). *Hindi Natak: Udbhav aur Vikas.*Delhi: Rajpal and Sons.

Ojha, Gaurishankar Hirachand (2002). *Suprasiddh Itihaskar Colonel James Todd ka Jeevan Charitra.* Jodhpur: Rajasthani Granthagar.

---------- (1999). *Sirohi Rajya ka Itihas.* Rajasthani Granthaghar

---------- (1998). *Banswara Rajya ka Itihas.* Rajasthani Granthaghar.

Paliwal, Krishnadatt (2008). *Maithilisharan Gupta Granthavali.* New Delhi: Vani Prakashan.

Pandya, Mithilesh (ed.). (2008). *Bhartendu Granthavali.* Vol. III. New Delhi: Naman Prakashan.

Prasad, Vishwanath (ed.). (1994). *Vrindavanlal Verma Samagra.* Varanasi: Pracharak Granthavali Pariyojna.

Ray, Gopal (2002). *Hindi Upanyas ka Itihas.* New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan.

Shah, Ramesh Chandra, (1978). *Jaishankar Prasad.* New Delhi: Sahitya Academi.

Sharma, Ramnarayan (2001). *Bundeli Bhasha Sahitya ki Itihas.* Jhansi: published by Mrs. Sushila Sharma.

Sharma, Ramvilas (ed.). (1997). *Teen Maharathiyon ke Patra.* Vani Prakashan.

---------- (1953). *Bhartendu Yug aur Hindi Navjagaran ke Samsyanen.* New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan.

---------- (2008). *Premchand aur Unka Yug.* New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan.

Shukla, Acharya Ramchandra (2006). *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas.* Varanasi: Vijay Prakashan Mandir.

Shukla, Ramchandra (1986). *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas.* Varanasi: Nagari Pracharini Sabha.

Singh, Vaibhav (2007). *Itihas aur Rashtravad.* Panchkula: Aadhar Prakashan.

Sinhal, Shashibhusan (1993). *Kathakar Vrindavanlal Verma.* Chandigarh: Haryana Sahitya Akademi.

Talwar, Veer Bharat (ed.). (2004). *Raja Shivaprasad 'Sitarehind': Pratinidhi Sankalan.* New Delhi: National Book Trust.

Tiwari, Gangasagar (ed.). (1986). *Bharatiya Itihas, Sanskriti aur Samaj.* Prayag: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan.

Tiwari, Rampyarey (2006). *Vrindavanlal Verma ke Aitihasik Upanyason ka Punarmulyankan.* Delhi: Nirmal Publications.

Verma, Vrindavanlal (2011). *Mriganayani.* Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.

---------- (2011). *Kachnar.* Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.

---------- (2011). *Madhavji Sindhia.* Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.

---------- (1993). *Jhansi ki Rani Lakshmibai.* Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.

---------- (2011). *Garh Kundar.* Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.

---------- (2010). *Bhuvanvikram.* Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.

---------- (1998). *Maharani Durgavati.* Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.

---------- (1996). *Ahilyabai.* Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.

---------- (1997). *Devgarh ki Muskan.*Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.

---------- (2001). *Apni Kahani.* Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan

Yayavar, Bharat (2006). *Mahavirprasad Dwivedi Rachna Sanchayan*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy.

ENGLISH OFFICIAL SOURCES

Minutes and Calendar of Allahabad University (1900-1930), at Central Library, Allahabad University.

Cunningham, Alexander (1966). *Reports of a Tour in Bundelkhand and Malwa in 1874-75 and 1876-77*, Varanasi: Indological Book House.

---------- (1969). *Reports of a Tour in Bundelkhand and Rewa in 1883-84 and of a Tour in Rewa, Bundelkhand, Malwa, and Gwalior in 1884-85.* Varanasi: Indological Book House.

Mukherjee, Poorno Chander (1972). *Report on the Antiquities in the District of Lalitpur, North Western Provinces, India.* Varanasi: Indological Book House.

ENGLISH BOOKS, ARTICLES, DISSERTATIONS

UNPUBLISHED DISSERTATIONS

Sharma, Namrita (1996). *The Making of Medieval Bundelkhand*, Unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Neha Chatterjee (2012). *Submerged Aspects of Bhadralok 'Culture': Middle Class Engagements with 'Esoteric' Spirituality and the 'Occult' in High Colonial Bengal*, Unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

PUBLISHED BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Arnold, David and Stuart Blackburn (2004). *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography and Life History.* Delhi: Permanent Black.

Bakhtin, M.M.(1984). *The Dialogic Imagination.* edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bandopadhyay, Shekhar (1997). *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namashudras of Bengal, 1882-1947.* Richmond: Curzon Press.

Bannerji, Prathama (2006). *Politics of Time: Primitives and History-Writing in a Colonial Society*, Oxford University Press Delhi, 2006.

Barthes, Roland (1975). *The Pleasure of the Text.* Translated by, Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang.

Bhargava, M.L. (1987). *Hundred Years of Allahabad University.* Delhi: Ashish Publishing House.

Bhattacharya, Neeladri (2008). 'Predicaments of Secular History', *Public Culture.* 20 (1).

Bouchard, Donald F. (1977). *Language, Counter-Memory and Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews (of Michel Focuault).* Translated from French by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press.

Boym, Svetlana (2001). *The Future of Nostalgia.* New York: Basic Books.

Carteau, Michel de (1988). *The Writing of History.* translated by Tom Conley. New York: Columbia University Press.

Carter, Roland, Angela Goddard, Dantua Reah, Keith Sanger and Maggie Bowring (2001). *Working with Texts, A Core Introduction to Language Analysis*, London: Routledge.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2001). *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Chandra, Sudhir (1981) 'Premchand: A Historiographic View', *Economic and Political Weekly.* 16 (15). pp. 669-675.

---------- (1982). 'Premchand and Indian Nationalism', *Modern Asian Studies.* 16 (4). pp. 601- 621.

---------- (1986). 'Maithilisharan Gupta and the Idea of Indian Nationalism: A Centenary Critique', *Economic and Political Weekly.* 21 (51). pp. 2227-2230.

---------- (1992). *The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Chatterjee, Kumkum (2005). 'The King of Controversy: History and Nation Making in Late Colonial India', *The American Historical Review.* 110 (5). pp. 1454-1475.

Chatterjee, Partha (1986). *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse,* New Delhi, Oxford University Press 1986).

---------- (1994). *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

---------- (1996). *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

---------- and Anjan Ghosh (2002). *History and the Present.* Delhi: Permanent Black.

---------- and Raziuddin Aquil (2008). *History in the Vernacular.* Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2008.

Chatterjee, Rimi B. (2006). *Empires of the Mind: A History of the Oxford University Press in India under Raj.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Chaudhuri, Rosinka (2004). 'Historicality in Literature: Subalternist Misrepresentations', *Economic and Political Weekly.* 39 (42). pp. 4658-466.

---------- (2004). 'The Flute, Gerontion, and Subaltern Misreadings of Tagore', *Social Text.* 22 (1). pp. 103-122.

Choudhary, Surendra (1987). *Phanishwarnath Renu.* Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.

Coles, Robert (ed.). (1999). *The Erik Erikson Reader.* New York: W.W. Norton &Company.

Connerton, Paul (1989). *How Societies Remember.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Skaria, Ajay (1999). *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers, Wildness in Western India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Crapanzo, Vincent (2004). *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Dalmia, Vasudha (1997). *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhartendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

---------- (2003). 'The Locations of Hindi, Review: Hindi Nationalism by Alok Rai', *Economic and Political Weekly*. 38 (14). pp. 1377-1384.

---------- (2008) 'Merchant Tales and the Emergence of the Novel in Hindi', *Economic and Political Weekly*. 43 (34). pp. 43-60.

Das, Sisir Kumar, *A History of Indian Literature*. Sahitya Akademi. Volume 7, 8, 9.

Deshpande, Prachi (2007). *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India 1700-1960*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black.

---------- (2008). 'The Making of an Indian Nationalist Archive: Lakshmibai, Jhansi, and 1857', *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 67 (3). pp. 855-879.

Dirks, Nicholas (2001). *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Drake-Brockman, D.L. (ed.). (1929). *Jhansi Gazeteer*. Allahabad: Government Press, Allahabad.

Eco, Umberto (1984). *Postscript to the Name of the Rose*, Trans. William Leaver, San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic.

Fleishman, Avrom (1971). *The English Historical Novel: From Sir Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins Press.

Forbes, Geraldine Hancock (1975). *Positivism in Bengal: A Case Study in the Transmission and Assimilation of an Ideology*. Calcutta: South Asia Books.

Gaeffke, Peter (1978). *Hindi Literature in the Twentieth Century*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Georg, Lukacs, translated by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (1983). *The Historical Novel.* Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.

Gill, Gagan, Kunwar Narayan, Shrikant Verma and Kedarnath Singh (1994). 'Four Hindi Poets', *World Literature Today.* 68 (2). *Indian Literatures: In the Fifth Decade of Independence.* pp. 325-330.

Gottlob, Michael (2001). *History and Politics in Colonial North India.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Guha, Ranajit (1998). *Dominance without Hegemony.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

---------- (2003). History at the Limit of World History. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Gupta, Abhijit and Swapan Chakravorty (ed.). (2004). *Print Areas.* Delhi: Permanent Black.

Gupta, Charu (1991). 'Portrayal of Women in Premchand's Stories: A Critique', *Social Scientist.* 19 (5/6). pp. 88-113.

---------- (2007). 'Dalit 'Viranganas' and Reinvention of 1857', *Economic and Political Weekly.* 42 (19). pp. 1739-1745.

Guptoo, Nandini (2001). *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth Century India.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hale, Dorothy J. (ed.). (2006). *The Novel, An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1900-2000.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Hansen, Kathryn (1988). 'The Virangana in North Indian History and Culture, *Economic and Political Weekly.*23 (18).

---------- (1992). *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India.* New Delhi: Manohar.

Harder, Hans (2010). *Literature and Nationalist Ideology: Writing Histories of Modern Indian Languages.* New Delhi: Social Science Press.

Huddart, David (2008). *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography.* London: Routledge.

Hughes, Helen (1993). *The Historical Romance.* London: Routledge.

Hutton, Patrick H. Hutton (2000). 'Recent Scholarship on Memory and History', *The History Teacher.* 33 (4).

Isaka, Riho (2002). 'Gujarati Intellectuals and History Writing in the Colonial Period', *Economic and Political Weekly.* 37 (48). pp. 4867-4872.

Jain, Nirmala (1986). 'Women in Premchand's Writing', *Journal of South Asian Literature.* 21 (2). *Essays on Premchand.* pp. 40-44.

Jain, Ravindra K. (2002). *Between History and Legend: Status and Power in Bundelkhand.* Hyderabad: Orient Longman.

Jenkins, Keith, Sue Morgan and Alan Munslow (2007). *Manifestos for History.* London and New York: Routledge.

Jobs, Sebastian and Alf Lutdke (eds.). (2010). *Unsettling History: Archiving and Narrating in Historiography.* Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag.

Joshi, P.C. Joshi (ed.). (1994). *1857 in Folk Songs.* Peoples' Publishing House.

Kaviraj, Sudipta (1995). *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

King, Christopher R. (1994). *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India.* Bombay: Oxford University Press.

Koselleck, Reinhart (1985). *Futures Past, On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Translated by Keith Tribe. New York: Columbia University Press.

---------- (2002). *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, Translated by Todd Samuel Pressner and others. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Kumar, Krishna (2005). *Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas.* New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Leach, Neil (ed.). (1997). *Rethinking Architecture, A Reader in Cultural Theory*, London: Routledge.

Leach, Neil (ed.). (2007). Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory. London and New York: Routledge.

Leavis, F.R. (1948). *The Great Tradition.* London: Penguin.

Lelyveld, David (1978). *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*, Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Lincoln, Andrew (2007). *Walter Scott and Modernity.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ludtke, Alf (ed.). (1995). *The History of Everyday Life, Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life.* Translated by William Templer. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Mayaram, Shail (2004). *Against History, Against State: Counterperspectives from the Margins.* Delhi: Permanent Black.

McGregor, R. S. (1967). 'The Rise of Standard Hindi and Early Hindi Prose Fiction', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3/4. pp. 114-132.

McGregor, Ronald Stuart (1974). *Hindi Literature of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries.* Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

McKeon, Michael (ed.). (2000). *Theory of the Novel, A Historical Approach*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Melton, Gordon J. (ed.). (2001). *The Encyclopedia of Occultism & Parapsychology*, Vol. I, Michigan: Gale Group.

Menon, Kalyani Devaki (2005). '"We Will Become Jijabai": Historical Tales of Hindu Nationalist Women in India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 64 (1). pp. 103-126.

Metcalfe, Thomas R. (1998). *Ideologies of the Raj.* Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

Mishra, Laxman Prasad (1973). 'Forms and Themes in Early Hindi Novels', *East and West.* 23 (1/2). pp. 171-185.

Mishra, Suresh (2007). *Tribal Ascendancy in Central India: The Gond Kingdom of Garha.* New Delhi: Manak Publications.

Misra, Biswa Swarup (2010). Credit Cooperatives in India: Past, Present and Future. London and New York: Routledge.

Misra, Laxman Prasad (1973). 'Forms and Themes in Early Hindi Novels', *East and West.* 23 (1/2).

Misra, Ram Darasa (1983). *Modern Hindi Fiction.* Delhi: Bansal and Co.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi (1985). *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Muller, Max (1934). *India: What Can It Teach Us?* Calcutta: Longmans Green and Co. Limited.

Nandy, Ashish (1983). *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983.

---------- (1995). 'History's Forgotten Doubles', *History and Theory*, 34 (2) *Theme Issue 34: World Historians and Their Critics.* pp. 44-66.

Narayan, Birendra (1981). *Hindi Drama and Stage*. Delhi: Bansal and Co.

Neusner, Jacob (2004). *The Idea of History in Rabbinic Judaism.* Leiden: Brill.

Nora, Pierre (1998). 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire', *Representations. Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory.* 26.

Orsini, Francesca (2002). *The Hindi public Sphere, 1920-40: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

---------- (2009). *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India.* Ranikhet: Permanent Black.

Pandey, Geetanjali (1983). 'Premchand and the Peasantry: Constrained Radicalism', *Economic and Political Weekly.*18 (26). pp. 1149-1155.

---------- (1984). 'North Indian Intelligentsia and Hindu-Muslim Question: A Study of Premchand's Writings', *Economic and Political Weekly.* 19 (38). pp. 1664-1670.

---------- (1986). 'How Equal?: Women in Premchand's Writings', *Economic and Political Weekly.* 21 (50). pp. 2183-2187.

Pathak, Shiv Pujan (1987). *Jhansi during British Rule*, New Delhi: Ramanand Vidya Bhawan.

Patni, Sohanlal (1988). *Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha.* Udaipur: Rajasthan Sahitya Akademi.

Philip Lutgendorf (1994). *The Life of a Text: Performing the* Ramcaritmanas *of Tulsidas*.Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Rai, Alok (2000). *Hindi Nationalism.* New Delhi: Orient Longman.

Ramaswamy, Vijaya and Yogesh Sharma (2009). *Biography as History: Indian Perspectives.* Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan.

Rosenstein, Lucy, (edited and translated). (2003). *New Poetry in Hindi: Nayi Kavita. An Anthology.* London: Anthem Press.

Rubin, David (1971). 'Nirala and the Renaissance of Hindi Poetry', *The Journal of Asian Studies.* 31 (1). pp. 111-126.

---------- (ed.). (1998). *The Return of Sarasvati: Four Hindi Poets.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Sarkar, Jadunath (1938). 'Historical Introduction', in Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay and Sajanikanta Das (eds.)., *Anandamath.* Calcutta: Bangiya Shahitya Parishat.

Sarkar, Sumit (1987). *Writing Social History.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Saxena, Rajeev (1982). *Vrindavanlal Verma.* New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi

Sen, Indrani (2007) 'Inscribing the Rani of Jhansi in Colonial 'Mutiny' Fiction', *Economic and Political Weekly.* 42 (19). pp. 1754-1761.

Singh, Upinder (2004). *The Discovery of Ancient India: Early Archaeologists and the Beginnings of Archaeology.* Delhi: Permanent Black.

Sinnett, A.P. (1888). *The Occult World.* American Edition.

Smith, Bonnie G. (1984). 'The Contribution of Women to Historiography in Great Britain, France and U.S.', *American Historical Review.*89.

Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson (2001). *Reading Autobiography, A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Smith, Vincent A. (1924). *The Early History of India: From 600 B.C. to the Muhammadan Conquest.* London: Oxford University Press.

Stark, Ulrike (2007). *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India.* Ranikhet: Permanent Black.

Stoler, Ann Laura Stoler (2009). *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Thapar, Romila (2000). *History and Beyond.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Tiwari, Badri Narayan (2007). 'Reactivating the Past: Dalits and Memories of 1857', *Economic and Political Weekly. 42* (19). pp. 1734-1738.

---------- (1998). 'Popular Culture and 1857: A Memory against Forgetting', *Social Scientist.* 26 (1/4). pp. 86-94.

---------- (2004). 'National Past and Political Present', *Economic and Political Weekly.* 39 (31). pp. 3533-3540.

---------- (2006). *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India: Culture, Identity and Politics.* New Delhi: Sage Publications.

---------- (2007). 'Imagining the Past and Reconstructing Histories', *Social Scientist.* 35 (9/10). pp. 67-87.

Todd, James Todd (1898). *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or The Central Western Rajpoot States of India*, vol. I, Calcutta: Indian Publications Society.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph (1995). *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Ungurianu, Dan (2007). *Plotting History, The Russian Historical Novel in the Imperial Age.* Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

Veyne, Paul (1983). *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths, An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, Translated by Paula Wissing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vinod, Bhagwan Chandra (1983). *Dr. Kashi Prasad Jaiswal.* Madhepura: Bateshwar-Priya Shodh Sansthan.

Vishwanathan, Gauri (1989). *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India.* New York, Columbia University Press.

Wallace, Diana (2005). *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000.* Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

White, Hayden (1975). *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.