CHAPTER IV

POST-PREMCHAND HINDI NOVEL

The years after Premchand were marked by radical changes in the form of the Second World War, the scientific inventions, the awakening and freedom of the colonized nations with the significant astronomical achievements among others. These developments questioned the fundamental values and led to revolutionary changes in humanitarian values, life style and ideologies. In India, the youth recruited for wars fought by the British, the Indian struggle for independence, the 1942 Quit India Movement and the suppression of the freedom struggle by the colonisers, the establishment of the Indian National Army by Subhaschandra Bose, unprecedented price rise, the famine of Bengal and the communal riots leading to the partition of the sub-continent and the consequent independence were some of the important developments from which no sphere of life could remain unaffected. Thus the influence of all these developments taking place in society had a profound impact on the literature of this age too.

The age of Premchand was an age of faith in the traditional culture and social values. The voice of protest had begun in the age of Premchand itself but it was still not an outright rejection of the traditional social and moralistic values. Thus Hori, the protagonist of Godan, the last complete novel by Premchand, is depicted as a conformist inspite of the exploitation by the established institutions and the miseries in his life. That was the limitation not of the writers but of the age itself. But the novelists after the age of Premchand
depict the activity of rebellion against the social and political injustice and attempt to present the new social and political order.

With the shift from writing to psychological and psychoanalytical, the modern novel took up individual experience as its basis. The internal conflicts depicted in the form of stream of consciousness and its influence on our action and conduct are the focus of the writers. The psychological complexes and prejudices, the suppressed desires, their finding place in the sub-conscious and their influence on the personality and behaviour of the character is of interest to the writers of this age.

The Hindi novel has been receptive to the influences of the Western experimental novel, especially the novels of Zola and Flaubert, and to such psychological novelists as Marcel Proust and James Joyce. Ajneya’s Shekhar: Ek Jivani (1941) exemplifies this influence as the action shifts from the external world to the internal.

I

The Hindi novel writing witnesses a shift from the presentation of the external world and its conflict to the psychoanalysis and stream of consciousness that is pioneered by Jainendra. Tyagpatra (1937) is one of his chief works.

In Tyagpatra, Jainendra’s magnum opus, the chief characters are Pramod and Mrunal his paternal aunt (bua). In fact, the male protagonist Pramod is just the narrator while the story is of Mrunal. Mrunal was brought up by the parents of Pramod as their parents had died when she was very young.
While studying in school, she fell in love with the brother of her friend Sheila and when the facts came to the knowledge of Pramod’s parents she was thrashed mercilessly with a stick. She was hurriedly married off to a man much older than her. But when her husband too gets to know of her past affair, not only do his atrocities increase but ultimately he even turns her out of the house. Out of helplessness Mrunal has to take refuge of an ordinary coal trader and she even carries his child. After some time the coal trader also deserts her and her daughter born out of the relationship with the trader too dies at the tender age of nine months. Mrunal’s struggle with the polluted world continues for another twenty years and ultimately she finds release through death. Pramod very dearly loves his aunt and true to her name he compares her symbolically to a lotus that floats above the polluted water. The news of her death shocks him to the extent that he resigns from the post of a judge and starts living a secluded life.

The novel is a moving tragedy of a pure woman driven by circumstances from one misfortune to another. She is more sinned against than sinning. Mrinal’s tragedy does not lie in her being an orphan, nor in her destitution and poverty, but in her persecution at the hands of a brute, unrelenting social order. She is forced into a life of ignominy and finally into prostitution until death overtakes her. At several points in her life, Pramod tries to rescue her, but she would have no pitying help. She turned him away asking him to transform the entire system instead of rescuing her alone. She retorted:

“Pramod, sahayta ki men bhoohki nahin hoon hoon kya? Tujhse hi vah sahayta na loongi? Lekin Sahayta ka haath dekar kyon mujhe yahaan se uthakar oonche varga men ja bithane ki ichha hai? To bhai mujhe maaf kar do. Vaisi meri
abhilasha nahin hai…Pratistha mujhe kyon chhahiye, mujhe to jo milta hai, usi ke bheetar saantvana pane ki shakti chahiye - ” (Tyagpatra 63)

“Pramod, am I not needy of help? Wouldn’t I take help from you itself? But why do you wish to lend me your support and place me on a higher class from here? Please excuse me then. I have no such aspiration…Why would I want prestige, I just want the strength to find consolation in what I get-”

Annoyed, Pramod left her to herself. Seventeen long years pass by and then he learnt that Mrinal was dead.

The novelist cares less for the outer structure of the novel, nor is he bothered about the plot. The unraveling of what goes on in the mind and heart of the character is his main concern. He unveils the inscape of his characters, mainly of Mrinal and Pramod.

He is at his best when he probes the human heart. He lays bare the pain that gnaws one from within, the conflict that grips the soul, and the suffering that overwhelms a person. Ill treated by her brother’s wife at a very early age, Mrinal gets acquainted with grief and harshness. What she wanted to cherish most was her emotional tie-up with the brother of her friend Sheila. Condemned for love, she tried to snap all ties and suffered in the process. The novelist is not concerned with the study of neurosis, he rather presents a deep analysis of Mrinal’s subtle feelings, the crisscross of her desires and dreams, and complexities of human emotions.

The work is based on the social condition of the women and the issues originating out of their helpless and miserable condition. Mrunal, in her childhood and youth was tortured by her sister-in-law. She is denied the right to love and as a punishment is married off hurriedly to a middle-aged man. Here too she compromises with her lot and wishes to be faithful to her husband. But
she is turned out of the house as if women have no rights for themselves. The novel presents a very grim and pitiable picture of the status of the women in the Indian society. The novelist considers social discord to be the only cause for Mrunal’s tragic end. She is entirely innocent. Barring the attraction of love in her youth never do we find sexual attraction in the character of Mrunal. We do not feel hatred for her even when for the sake of her livelihood she takes refuge of a man outside marriage. Rather she naturally wins our sympathy. This can be attributed to nothing else but the skilled presentation of the novelist. Mrunal’s greatness and stature rises even when surrounded by the the sinful world. Providing morality a new humanistic value, the novelist here raises morality above physical relations.

The characterization in the works of Jainendra is not natural as he presents only the bare minimum sketches to his characters and yet they are unforgettable for their conviction, depth and density of presentation. They are individuals, seem unreal and are created to carry out the Gandhian philosophy in a Jainendrain way. They move from the superficial to the subtle levels and bring into focus aspects of man which we normally do not see. His works do not suffer from abundance of characters nor do they have much use for an intricate network of events and episodes. They are essentially character-oriented and the female and revolutionary characters represent his forte. His female characters find more canvas in his works while the male characters are only as supporting figures of the story and are never in the main role. The
intricacies of man woman relationship, their interactions, their mutual attraction and repulsion represent a special feature of his fictional world.

Jainendra has tried his best to convince his readers that he is telling nothing but the truth and thus he falls here in the line with the school of English novelists beginning with Defoe who employ documents, memorandums and letters among others in order to create a sense of verisimilitude and increase the illusion of verifiable fact. Thus in the very beginning of his novel he states:

Sir M. Dayalji is prant ke chief judge the aur judgi tyagkar idhar kai varshon se Haridwar men virakt jeevan bita rahe the. Unke swargwaas ka samachaar do mahine hue patron men chhapa tha. Peechhe kaagajon men unke hastakshar ke saath ek paandulipi pai gai, jiska sankshipt saar itastah patron men chhap chukka hai. Use ek kahaani hi kahiye, mool lekh angrezi men hai. Usi ka Hindi ultha yahaan diya gaya hai. (Tyagpatra 8)

Sir M. Dayalji was the chief judge of this province and was living a solitary life from several years after giving up judgeship. The news of his demise was published some two months back in the dailies. The brief essence of a manuscript with his signature, found after his death has been published here and there. The original document is in English, can be called a story. The same has been translated here into Hindi.

Thus, Tyagpatra imposes upon the readers as nothing but a reproduction of documents fallen, by chance, into the hands of the author. Thereby the novel adds novelty to the writing of its time and an innovative way of presentation that provides curiosity too. The novelist by basing his work on the technique of stream of consciousness and psychoanalytical type, explores the human psyche in Tyagpatra through the immortal characters of Pramod and Mrunal.

II

Vrundavanlal Varma (1889-1968), a contemporary of Premchand contributed to Hindi literature for several decades and has more than two dozen
novels to his credit. His important works are *Gadh Kundhar* (1929), *Viraata Ki Padmini* (1936) and *Jhans Ki Rani* (1946).

Vrunadavanlal Varma achieved great fame for his historical novels because he was the first to bring out good quality historical works in Hindi that associated past incidents with life and with the psyche of the people.

The historical novel *Jhans Ki Rani* primarily deals with the depiction of valour and sacrifice of Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi and her army in the struggle for achieving *swaraj*. The novelist attempts to provide an honest and historically agreeable story of the great sacrifice of Rani.

The great grandfather of the novelist Deewan Anandrai had laid down his life for Rani Laxmibai in the battle at Mau in 1858. As a child he had heard several tales regarding her valour from his great grandmother and later after her death from his grandmother. Though unclear and vague, the heritage was more based on faith and devotion rather than truth. But a biography of Rani by Parasnis titled *Rani Laxmibai ka Jeevan Charitra* stated facts that contradict and undermine the sacrifice and valour of the Rani. It states:

…inka shaurya vivashta ki parishthitiyon mein utpann hua tha. (*Jhansi Ki Rani* 5)

…her bravery had originated out of a situation of helplessness.

Disagreeing with Parasnis, the novelist states:

Parasnis ka anveshan kaafi mulyavaan hote hue bhi unka vichar ki rani Jhans ki prabandh angrejo ki aur se gadar ke jamane mein karti raheen, pardadi aur dadi ki batlai hui paramounton ke samne man mein khatra nahi the. (*Jhansi Ki Rani* 5)

The investigation of Parasnis though quite valuable, the suggestion that Rani managed Jhansi on behalf of the British during the revolt does not stand testimony against the traditions narrated by great grandmother and grandmother.
Thus, the novelist takes the onus of providing the due respect and honour that Rani deserves in the struggle for Swaraj by proving the views of Parasnis to be baseless and prejudiced.

The novelist also feels that the novel form was the most appropriate to suit his purpose and a good medium to enthusing flesh and blood on the skeleton of history.

Expressing his resolution of writing a historical novel on Rani Laxmibai that is historically factual and agreeable, the novelist observes:

Maine nischay ki upanyas likhunga jo itihaas ke rag-reshe se sammat ho aur unke sandarbha mein ho. (Jhansi Ki Rani 8)

I decided to write such a novel that is in conformity with historical facts and with references.

In the court of Jhansi, the novelist came across official correspondence that took place between some English army officer and the then Lt. Governor in 1858 just after taking control over Jhansi. The novelist in the introduction remarks that these letters further strengthened the novelist’s faith in the sacrifice and valour of Rani, and convinced him about the facts that bravery was not the outcome of a situation of helplessness. (Jhansi ki Rani 6)

The novelist also came across a rojnamcha belonging to Nawab Alibahadur from his grandson. The rojnamcha threw light on the important facets of Rani’s personality and heroism. It not only revealed the kind of person Nawab Alibahadur and Pir Ali his servant were; but it gave an idea of Rani Laxmibai’s dynamism and also of the contemporary society. (Jhansi ki Rani 6)
The novelist accidentally came across the details of the other characters that are presented in the novel such as Motibai, Juhi, Durga and Mughal Khan. The novelist affirms the authenticity of these characters and their importance in assisting Rani in her struggle for swaraj.

The theme of the novel is the selfless defiance of Rani in fighting the British and forming a unity among her subjects for the patriotic cause. The struggle was not in isolation but was a mass movement with the common man uniting across a wide cross section of communities along with the traditionally combative communities such as the Rajputs and the Marathas.

The success of Rani Laxmibai in motivating the masses speaks of her vision and of her ability to cast a spell on her subjects. She realized the limitation of the *Varna* system and discarded it to add teeth to her movement of swaraj. For her every able-bodied man and woman of Jhansi was a potential soldier in the fight for *swaraj*. Thus she involves her subjects in the struggle irrespective of their caste and community at a time when the fortune had deserted the country and the fortune of the British was on the rise.

Throwing light on the life, personality and childhood of Rani, the novelist remarks:

Manu was active, determined and sharp...Because of being less in the company of women she had distanced from shyness and hesitation. (*Jhansi Ki Rani* 29)

Manu chapal, hathili, aur bahut paini buddhi ki thi. Striyon ki sangati kam pratit hone ke karan vah laaj sankoch ki ati dabav aur jhijhak se dur hatati gai thi.

She was nicknamed ‘Chabili’ by Baji Rao and others in childhood itself because of her attractive looks. Her views too were unconventional and
differing from the contemporary women. Presenting her unconventional views, he observes:

Purushon ko purusharth sikhlane ke liye striyon ko malkhamb, kushti, ityadi seekhana hi chahiye. Khoob tej daudna bhi. Nachne gaane se bhi striyon ka swasthya sudharta hai, parantu apne ko moha k bana lena hi to stri ka samast kartvaya nahin hai. (Jhansi Ki Rani 51)

To teach men perseverance the women should definitely learn *malkhamb* and wrestling. The health of the women becomes good by running fast and by dancing and singing too. But just making oneself attractive is not the only duty of theirs.

Manu’s unconventional mode of thinking in the childhood is also observed in her views when she reaches womanhood and took up her struggle to save Jhansi from the British. Her views regarding the caste-system have been presented in the novel wherein she was against the discrimination of caste and inisited all able bodied men and women irrespective of their caste affiliation to train themselves in warfare and join the struggle for swaraj. Understanding the strength in the masses like the peasants and the artisans, she avers:


Mass is the real strength. I’m confident that it is invincible. Chatrapati had challenged the mighty Samrat of Delhi just because of his faith in the masses and not on the basis of his trust on the kings. The people of Malwa were *Kunbis* and farmers and are today too. In their plough is the urge for swarajya and independence. I assume the people of this place to be the same.

The people of Jhansi too are of a fighting spirit. They resent the growing influence of the British and are ready to take up arms for swaraj. They have complete faith in Rani and are ready to lay down their life for her. Reflecting this fighting spirit a resident of Jhansi states:
Samay aane par Teli-Tamboli bhi talwar-bandook chalavenge. Le aao apni dhal talwar. Main apni dhal talwar laata hoon. Fir dekh lo Jhansi ka paani. (Jhansi Ki Rani 110)

When time arrives Telis-Tambolis too will take up arms. Bring your sword and shield. I’ll bring mine. Then have a taste of Jhansi’s valour.

Rani is determined in her mission. She, with Lord Krishna as a witness, has taken up the task of acquiring swaraj even if none in Hindustan takes up the pious task. She is ready to take up this task even if she has to sacrifice everything of hers. She is confident that even if she fails in delivering her task, the flow of swaraj that she has furthered would be eternal. For her, her subjects are everything and the satisfaction of her subjects supporting her is the utmost. Thus the subjects have to be bonded with the slogan of swaraj. Her conviction is that the British can destroy the kings of Hindustan but not the people. She dreams of the day when leading these very people she will hoist the flag of swaraj.

She has even set up an intelligence wing that spy on the British and their activities. Rani’s associates are in a hurry to begin the rebellion against the British. But Rani wants to wait for an appropriate opportunity to strike. Advising them to be patient, Rani avers:


Not now, Orcha, Ajaygadh and Chatarpur’s rulers are minor. These states are managed by the British. Besides with the declaration of the revolt the dacoits and the thieves would become active. Our people would be the victims of this revolt. We shouldn’t begin unless we have a strong army. Apart from
defeating the British we have to suppress these elements too. Or else the
unhappiness of the mass would be diverted from the British towards us. We
should continue accepting the Hindustani armymen. Only when I am
completely satisfied will the consent to attack be given.

These words of Rani not only reveal her shrewd strategies for the
achieving swaraj but also her concern for her subjects as well as the
neighbouring states. The subjects too reciprocate her love and concern. Thus
the love and respect of the people of Jhansi for Rani too has no bounds. They
worship her as a goddess.

The novel contains lengthy descriptions revealing Rani’s warfare skills,
the preparations before the war and her team work that made her achieve the
impossible. Thus the first task she takes up after taking up the reins of Jhansi is
to bring peace and maintain law and order. The thieves and dacoits are brought
under control. Her achievement is her ability to make optimum use of the very
limited resources she has at her disposal. She does not just depend on the
traditionally combative communities for her army but trains and inducts all the
able-bodied men and women. Sundar, Mundar and Kashi are her most trusted
assistants. Such magical influence does she have even on the dacoits and
plunderers that Kunwar Sagar Singh, a notorius dacoit gives up the evil path
and joins the army of Jhansi along with his gang. In the same manner the
backward communities too join hands with her and add teeth to her force. She
has the vision of her Jhansi that is free from caste bias and strong. Unhappy
with the prevailing caste descimination in the contemporary society, she
exclaims:

Hamare desh men oonch-neech ka bhed na hota to kitna achha hota. (Jhansi
Ki Rani 224)
How good it would be if there was no discrimination of high and low in our society.

Keeping the futuristic interests of Jhansi in mind she desires that selected people from all the castes should be taught to fire canons. Rani includes each and every segment of the society of Jhansi in her struggle for swaraj and makes it a mass movement in a true sense. Even women who were earlier unknown to yielding weapons take up arms against the British and put their entire might for the struggle for swaraj. Raising the moral of the women, Rani Laxmibai observes:


Within two or four days our Jhansi would be attacked by the British. Many of you have mastered the art of warfare. Take up the charge of whatever you can perform. The soldiers should be supplied with ammunition, food water etc. in time. If need arises you will also have to take up arms. Of you some are like my sister, some like my mother. The honour of your father, your father-in-law, your husband, your brother lies in your hands. Do such deeds that bring honour to the name of your ancestors.

Her commitment to swaraj inspires the women and the Pathans to even lay down their lives for Jhansi. Reflecting confidence and patriotism Motibai remarks:

Sarkar mujhko aur meri sanginiyon ko alag morche diye jayen aur fir dekha jaaye ki swaraj ki ladai ke liye Jhansi ki striyan akele kya kar sakti hain. *(Jhansi Ki Rani 272)*

Sarkar, I and my female soldiers should be given separate fronts. Then just watch what the women of Jhansi alone can do in the fight for swaraj.

The Pathans who were given refuge in Jhansi too are ready to lay down their lives for this just cause. Gulmuhammad, the Sardar of the Pathans vows:

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The character of Rani Laxmibai dominates the novel. The secondary character of this novel is the legendary freedom fighter Tantya Tope who moves about all over India and gathers significant information regarding the political conditions prevalent in other states. He has secretly visited Awadh, Gwalior, Punjab, places in Maharashtra and South India. But Jhansi falls not because General Rose’s army was more powerful than that of Rani’s but because of the betrayal by Pir Ali and Deewan Dulhaju.

The novel also depicts the excess committed by the British army on the people of Jhansi after taking over the fort. Innumerable houses were razed down. Children, youth and the aged were shot at. Loot and plunder at a large scale took place. Piles of dead bodies were formed. Analysing the reasons responsible for the defeat, the novelist avers:


Inspite of an able general like Tantya Tope the army was unorganized. The reason being the flaw in Tantya’s nature – that is of accepting Rao sahib as his mentor and forgiving the addictions of his soldiers. He was very dear to Rao Saheb and the soldiers, but this did not compensate for the indiscipline of the army.

Another drawback of the rebels led by the Peshwa against the British was that they turned euphoric even on small successes. Instead of preparing for next offensive after capturing Gwalior, they begin indulging in lengthy celebrations. The novelist delineates:
Gwalior ka gaayan-vaadan shatabdiyon se prasiddh raha hai. Isliye uska akhand upyog kiya jaane laga. Nrutya aur gaayan se din aur raat ot prot ho gaye...Kavi sammelan aur mushaire bhi hue jinme kavi kalpana ne shabdon ke pul baandh baandh kar, zameen aasma n ek kar diye. Koi Peswa ki tulna Ramchandraji ke saath kar raha tha aur koi Indra ke saath. (Jhansi Ki Rani 315)

Songs and music of Gwalior are popular since centuries. Thus they were fully utilized. Days and nights got involved in dance and music...Kavi sammelan and mushairas were held in which the poetic imagination at its best was presented. Some compared Peshwa to Ramchandraji and some to Indra.

In fact it is Rani who understands the political and warfare strategies better than any other leader of that time. She even visualizes the outcome of the current policies and strategies of Tantya Tope. As a last attempt to bring round the rebels Rani advises Peshwa:

Kayda barateia. Kile men band hokar ladne ki baat mat sochiye. Angreji fauj ko aage badhkar saamna kijiye. Aur sabse pratham Scindia ki is saina ko apne sardaron men baatkar kada anushasan jari kar dijiye. (Jhansi Ki Rani 319)

Maintain law and order. Don’t think of facing the British from within the fort. Face the British army by moving ahead and charging at them. And the foremost of all, enforce strict discipline by dividing the Scindia’s army among your Sardars.

But the Peshwa thinks differently. He does not heed to the advice of Rani Laxmibai nor does he agree to her views. He believes that the time spent on the celebrations and feeding the Brahmins is not a waste of time, but something equally important as fighting for swaraj. Rather the Peshwa believes that feeding the Brahmins and acquiring their blessings would be instrumental in achieving swaraj. Clarifying his stand, he remarks:

Is samay bhi kuch avashyak kaam hi ho raha hai. Dharma ki neev par hi sab kuch tikta hai. Dharma hi vijay ka karan hota hai. Isliye dharma karay ja raha hai. Brahman bhojan aur dakshina ke liye unme chale aa rahen hai. Iska aashirwaad kya vifal jayega. (Jhansi Ki Rani 319-20)

At present too some necessary work is being done. Everything is based on the foundation of dharma. Dharma is cause of victory. Thus the Dharma is
being done. Brahmins are being fed. They will bless us. Brahmins from far off are arriving for food and dakshina. Will these blessings go in vain?

Peshwa’s inaction and content, celebrations and slackness prove to be disastrous for the rebels. The over confidence, poor understanding of the situation, complacence of the Peshwa and the limitations of Tantya Tope ruin all the achievements of Rani and help the British in taking control of Jhansi. To the conclusion of the novel is the tragic death of Rani fighting valiantly the British forces and achieving martyrdom. But the Rani remained a tremendously inspirational figure up to the very end, who believes in herself and laid down her life for swarajya.

The historical novel not only highlights the profound sacrifice of Rani Laxmibai but also attempts to depict authentically the period of the first rebellion for independence.

Though Vrindavan Lal Varma began his writing career in the age of Premchand, he continues contributing for a long period even much after. But he stuck to his bastion of writing historical novels throughout his career, consequently earning the tag of a historical novelist.

The publication of Jainendra’s Tyagpatra was an announcement of departure from the narrative style of fiction writing. Premchand wrote his fiction mainly about rural India whereas Jainendra chose his stories from the new emerging educated middle class. Premchand’s realm consisted chiefly of the external social and political situations and traditions causing conflict and misery in life of people whereas Jainendra took up internal psychological conflicts emerging due to the changes taking place in society.
The age after Premchand remains entirely dominated by Jainendra until the Indian independence and even much later till the seventies. Jainendra had proximity with Premchand and was presented to the readers by Premchand as his successor. Yet, he did not imbibe much of Premchand’s influence either in content or in the craft of story-telling. Jainendra’s thematic content adopts the subjective world and the mysterious goings on within the inmost recesses of human mind as field. He brought a change in the very conception of structure. Premchand conceived of plot in terms of logical continuities, in terms of relation of cause and effect, in terms of a particular consequent under a given set of antecedents. Chronology dominates Premchand with action or plot as an organizing factor in it. But Jainendra models his novel on the operative character of consciousness as such in Tyagpatra. Not action but psychology and the subjective aspect of experience controls form and maintain unity in the novels of Jainendra.

Another distinct characteristic is in the comprehensiveness of the writing. While Premchand’s novels are detailed and comprehensive in depicting the contemporary society and its concerns, Jainendra’s writings are precise and dealing not with the entire gamut of issues of the age but only the ones that affect the psyche. Thus, a clear and subtle growth is observed in the Hindi novels with the change of age from Premchand to the post-Premchand one. With introduction and increase of psychological and psychoanalytical knowledge and an upsurge of individuality in society, the writing too reflects these characteristics.