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NATURE DISPLACED: POSTCOLONIAL HINDI LITERATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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Dedication

“With malice toward none, with charity to all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right.” Papa you have “borne the battle” and earned a “lasting peace.” This is in memory of you.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation foregrounds the environment as a key concern for the study of modern and contemporary Hindi literature. It takes the "environment" to be a polyvalent term that encompasses histories of environment-making, material histories and more contemporary senses of environmental crises. It draws on these different approaches to rethink literary critical approaches to the "environment" as a frame for narrative worlds as well as aesthetic senses of nature. Beginning with the era of decolonization, following Indian independence, the project inscribes environmental and material histories as an important, though neglected, constituent of the study of modern Hindi literature. It revisits critical debates on realism and modernism to show how an attention to the environment might enrich questions of literary representation and form in the Hindi novel and the short story. It concludes with more contemporary senses of environmental crises while emphasizing the underlying tensions between an aesthetic of nature in Hindi eco-poetry and the hybrid natures that have emerged in the wake of globalization.

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The transliteration of Hindi words follows the convention of McGregor's Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary with few exceptions. All diacritics have been removed. The short -a of some Sanskrit loanwords, still audible in Hindi, signaled with -ă in McGregor, have been transliterated as -a, thus Shiva instead of Śiva. The sibilants श and ष have both been transliterated as -sh. The sibilant स has been transliterated as -s. The palatal consonants च has been transliterated as -c. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Introduction

I met Radheshyam Tivari one evening in Mandi House in Delhi in late 2017. I had heard that he had edited the first anthology of Hindi environmental poetry. I was interested in knowing how Tivari put together the anthology of what he called "earth poems."[1]Tivari apologized for being late — he usually commuted by the Delhi Metro but had opted to come by scooter that day. The conversation then turned to how the anthology — a compilation of modern and contemporary Hindi poetry — came together. Before long, Tivari had slipped into nostalgic reminiscing about his village and the local river. I realized that this was a necessary component of what constituted his poetic sensibility. This is reflected in the anthology as well. Its poems evince a similar sense of loss and nostalgia or expressions of a poetic predisposition towards nature often translated as love of nature (*prakriti-prem*) — an important part of the idiom of modern Hindi poetry from the early twentieth century. Nature, for Tivari, was a sensibility against which the present was to be assessed; it made possible a mode of cultural criticism.

My choice of the word displaced, in the title of this thesis, therefore, doubles up two senses of the word. The first sense of displacement suggests the condition of being ousted from a place that is rightfully ours. As such, the word displaced has entered currency through grassroots social movements in India and encapsulates both a politics of environment and senses of loss and nostalgia in the Hindi literary imagination. However, there is a second sense of displacement that I take to be my starting point for this dissertation. Simply put I had encountered in Tivari a mode

[1] Radheshyam Tivari, *Prthvi ke paksha mem* (Delhi: Indraprasth Prakashan), 2006.

of transference.[2] Nature functioned as a form of displacement in that it allowed Tivari to render everything in his immediate surroundings — the metro, his scooter, the pulsating city of Delhi – extraneous to the task of ecocriticism. Nature was elsewhere.

The tenacity of this idea of nature is a conceptual problem that *Nature Displaced* returns to consistently. While Hindi literary studies has produced hundreds of dissertations and scholarly works on nature, a sustained and comparable attention to conceptualizing the "environment," has been glaringly absent. This has much to do with the fact that any discussion of nature in Hindi literature is invariably shaped by the formative aesthetic debates at the turn of the twentieth century.[3] *Nature Displaced* revisits these constitutive concerns from the perspective of questions of environment and moves beyond an aesthetics of nature. It argues that the "environment" highlights the absence of any sustained engagement with the histories of environment-making and material histories of objects in the study of Hindi literature. This absence has meant that Hindi writers continue to be read in the straitjacket of depictions of nature and literary genealogies of progressivism or experimentalism.

This study covers four key sites of postcolonial Hindi literature in the period between1950–2015 to address this gap. Each chapter assembles a body of texts to develop a reading for environment in distinction from "nature." Each reading exemplifies a particular limitation of "nature" in understanding the complexity of these texts. I analyze regional literature (*amcalik*

[2] My use of this of displacement borrows from both psychoanalysis and literary theory. Initially developed in clinical contexts by Sigmund Freud the term was adopted as a way of explaining the workings of ideology and individual consciousness in Marxist literary theory.

[3] Valerie Ritter has traced this formative period, in which the idea of real (*yatharth*) and nature were debated, back to the period between 1885–1925. She argues that this has been a relatively neglected period in the history of Hindi literature but is constitutive of much that characterizes the idiom of Hindi poetry till today, see Valerie Ritter, *Kama's Flowers: Nature in Hindi Poetry and Criticism, 1885-1925* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

sahitya) in the first two decades of post-independence India not as idealizations of rural nature, as they are often taken to be, but as texts engaged in projects of modernizing. The second revisits idealized readings of Adivasi communities as being close to the nature. I suggest Adivasi cosmologies do not conform to saccharine descriptions of relationality to nature. The third charts an affective life of energy and built environment as a counterpoint to psychologized readings of the urban landscape as a separation from nature. The last re-reads "nature poetry" in light of India's looming waste crisis.

If the appeal to nature does not facilitate an understanding of the environment, the term environment (*paryavaran*) has also posed methodological problems. Most of the writers in this study see themselves as engaged with social issues and not the environment. These include issues such as rural reform or the failure of governance. Others are concerned about the shape modern cities are taking or the fate of communities caught in the ravages of extractive mining. Moreover, for most Hindi speakers *paryavaran* is not simply a word for the environment. More than its scientific provenance it evokes the government slogan, the report and the school textbook that characterize official environmentalism. The latter has often been so brutal in its implementation that if one to were to write a history of environmentalism from an archive of Hindi literature it would invariably be a history of the *critique* of official environmentalism.

For instance, an important trope in Hindi fiction has been the corrupt forest department that prohibits local communities from using forest produce under the pretext of conservation but allows contractors to indiscriminately fell forests. Another trope involves descriptions of the state or national governments arbitrarily declaring conservation parks that displace local communities. One can easily proliferate such anti-people histories of environmentalist initiatives in India: from slum-demolition to the institutionalization of Brahmanical environmentalism with campaigns such

as the *Svacch Bharat* (Clean India Campaign).[4] Conservationist Anupam Mishra has gone so far as to say that the language used for official environmental programs is so bureaucratic that it is impossible to call it Hindi and that at most it can be recognized as something written in Devanagari.[5] These are some of the reasons why the language of environmentalism is counterproductive in engaging the literary, cultural and aesthetic sensibilities that inform Hindi writing.

Before turning to how this study develops the environment as a literary critical concern beyond an aesthetics of nature and a critique of environmentalism, a few conceptual clarifications regarding the terms and historical scope of this project are in order.

I: "Postcolonial" Hindi Literature: Categories and Scope

I use the term "postcolonial Hindi literature" with some caution. Harish Trivedi has pointed out that Hindi criticism and Anglophone postcolonial studies have often existed as two parallel planets.[6] For the Hindi writer a "postcolonial condition" would be less about hybridity and cosmopolitanism and more about the loss of cultural authenticity. This loss would be more intensely felt because of the linguistic and social codes through which aspiration is now made available in a newly globalized dispensation. Perhaps this is what partly explains the tenacious hold of the idea of nature in Hindi cultural critique.

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[4] Mukul Sharma, *Caste and Nature: Dalits and Indian Environmental Politics* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[5] Anupam Mishra, *Acche vicarom ka akal: Paryavaranavid Anupam Mishra ke vyakhyan*, ed. Raki Garg (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 2016).
[6] Harish Trivedi, "The Hindi Postcolonial —Categories and Configurations," in *Comparative Literary Studies* Vol. 53, No. 2 (Spring 2016): 400–407.

I remain attentive to the fact that Hindi literature is often grouped thematically and chronologically in very different categories than the "postcolonial." The terms "new" *(naya* or *navya*) "contemporary" (*samakalin*), "progressive" (*pragatishil*), and even "post-independence" (*svatantrayottar*) are more prevalent in Hindi criticism. The term "modern" (*adhunik*) works as a temporal marker, while it also indexes a measure of the "sense" or "understanding" an author has of modernity. The term "postcolonial" (*uttar-aupaniveshik*) is relatively rare.

However, despite the largely Anglophone provenance of the term "postcolonial," I retain its use because I understand Hindi literature to be postcolonial in as much as its literary modernity was crafted through the colonial encounter and its preoccupation with history and nation are ineluctably linked to the equally postcolonial entity, the nation-state. It is because of these shared preoccupations of nation and narration that it is possible to embed the problem of environment in the clearing between these two somewhat discontinuous projects. Since certain key concerns of Hindi and postcolonial literary studies constitute the point of departure for this project, they call for further elaboration.

II. Nation and Narration: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Literature

The late colonial period has been formative for key questions of literary modernity in India. Much has hinged on both the legacies and departures from this moment in assessing postcolonial writing. An important cluster of scholarship continues to revisit the legacies of literary radicalism.[7]

[7] Priyamvada Gopal, *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narration* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Snehal Shingavi, *The Mahatma Misunderstood: The Politics and Forms of Literary Nationalism in India* (New York: Anthem Press, 2013).

These legacies have also shaped standards of canonization and are also evoked in key debates over subjectivity and consciousness as shown by Toral Gajarawala and Laura Brueck.[8] Dalit literary critique, for instance, has been primarily articulated through issues of narrative privilege, characterization and consciousness and by challenging the representativeness of literary realism.

The political stakes of characterization have been matched by that other significant locus of critical attention – literary form. What is the relation of literary form to history? Does literary form unmask the constitutive elisions that have characterized narratives of a hegemonic nationalism? The answers to that question have been diverse. Some have emphasized realism's deeply humanist concerns against charges of being aesthetically programmatic. Others have focused on rescuing literature from the vagaries of nationalist and progressivist history by emphasizing the open-endedness inherent in minor genres such as the short story.[9] Often the interpretive freight of these inquiries has been borne by genres, such as the novel and the short story and broader comparative approaches to the legacies of realism and modernism in the colony.[10]

As might be evident from the above, postcolonial approaches to Indian literature have privileged certain aesthetic and political projects and features of the literary text that exemplify them. These are invariably located in exploring literary subjectivity or literary form with an

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[8] Toral Jatin Gajarawala, *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Laura Brueck, *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

[9] Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[10] For a seminal study of realism in the colonial context, see Meenakshi Mukherjee, Realism *and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (Delhi: New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Ulka Anjaria, *Realism in the Twentieth-century Indian Novel: Colonial Difference and Literary Form* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

attention to questions of postcolonial nationhood, identity, and social justice.[11] Is it because the imperatives of nation and identity have exercised a far greater hold in postcolonial India that literary studies has yet to robustly theorize the relationship between literature and environment? The project intercepts these founding concerns of postcolonial literary studies to ask what were to happen if those sites that seem most immune to postcolonial history become the locus of reading? What would we stand to gain? In what follows I revisit key sites of literary modernity in India where the environment emerges through a pivot in critical attention to previously unheeded connections.

III: Locating the Environment in Literature

This dissertation locates the problem of environment by engaging key sites of literary debate. The first site clusters around the literary taxonomy of realism (*yatharthvad*) in Hindi criticism. Following independence India witnessed a period of rapid agricultural modernization, land reforms and the introduction of an incremental plan for industrialization. The 1950s and 60s were significant as a moment of intense aesthetic experimentations and literary debate. The debates around the regional novel (*amcalik upanyas*), New Story (*Nayi kahani*) and the New Poetry (*Nayi kavita*) and the polemics around Marxism (*Marksvad*) and Experimentalism (*Prayogvad*) were inextricably linked to the significance of what Ulka Anjaria has called "realism in the colony."[12]

[11] In a recent review of postcolonial studies Rochona Majumdar has laid out why nationalism and the nation form were so significant to the development of postcolonial critique. See Rochona Majumdar, "Postcolonial History," in *Debating New Approaches to History*, eds. Marek Tamm and Peter Burke (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 49–74.
[12] Anjaria, *Realism,* 5.

In this context I trace a range of writers that came to be called regional (*amcalik*) writers. Writers such as Phanishvarnath Renu, Nagarjun, Mayanand Mishra, Ramdarsh Mishra and others refocused attention to rural India after a decade in which the modernist Hindi novel had dominated the Hindi literary scene. Regionalism (*amcalikta*) burst onto the literary scene in the mid 1950s and galvanized debates on realism and its relation to national self-realization. Since much hinged-on realism's ability to index the representative contradictions of its moment through the notion of typicality, the debate on *amcalikta* soon became one of rescuing this mode of writing from charges of mere mimeticism and naturalism.[13]

Two aspects of this debate are significant for this project. For the first time literary environment, setting and milieu were posed as aesthetic and political problems for the realist novel. Though comparisons with the regional novels of industrial England or the French naturalists were quick to be made, these were formal resolutions to the distinctiveness of the regional novel in Hindi. Secondly, the emergence of *amcalikta* was read as a corrective to the overly urbanized and intellectualized preoccupation of the experimentalists (*prayogvadi*) and New poetry[14] *Amcalikta* was either read as a form of rural realism that re-established a continuity with pre-independence social realist Hindi literature, especially, the work of Premcand. Or it was read through a lens of rural romanticism after the excesses of polemical debates that had raged around the meanings of

[13] For a representative account of the hardening of these criteria and the rejection of "naturalism" from within what is defined "yatharthvad", see Shivkumar Mishra, *Yatharthvad* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1975).

[14] Lucy Rosenstein's introduction to New Poetry and her translations of prominent new poets is a great place to start, see Ludmila. L. Rosenstein, *New Poetry in Hindi= Nayi Kavita: An Anthology* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003); Lothar Lutze, *Hindi Writing in Post-colonial India: A Study in the Aesthetics of Literary Production* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1985).

realism in the 1950s.[15] In my reading, this was a formal resolution to a problem posed by the landscapes within which regionalism was set.

Another significant moment in the history of debates around realism in Hindi has revolved around a critique of its progressivism and developmentalism. It was Dalit writing and criticism that, by raising issues of representation and the limits of the textuality of "protest literature," first traced the problem of representing "lower caste cosmologies" when the realist medium itself is complicit in upper caste cultural forms.[16] This study extends the implications of this debate for contemporary representations of Adivasi cosmologies and a sacral politics of nature in Hindi writing. This problem is not simply locatable in questions of genre alone. Instead it must be sought in a more dispersed language of form that traverses an entire range of aesthetic practices in depicting the Adivasi in the Hindi novel.

The Adivasi novels analyzed in this dissertation reveal that the established terms of realism fall short in addressing both Adivasi cosmologies and Adivasi politics of nature. I analyze in detail linguistic representation, localization, and ethnographic description. These strategies were first crafted in the anthropological turn in *amcalikta* from the 1960s and now work to sequester Adivasi politics to region and place. Moreover, readings that center *humanist* questions of self, consciousness and interiority do not address the fundamental divergence of Adivasi cosmologies in framing non-human agencies such as totems, spirits and rivers. These are invariably contained in the logic of cultural transcription.

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[15] For a partisan but nevertheless informative history of the literary debates of the 1950s, see Ramvilas Sharma, *Marksvad aur pragatishil sahitya* (Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1984).
[16] D. R. Nagaraj, *The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement in India* (Bangalore: South Forum Press,1993).

A second major site for framing questions of environment has been around development and world literature. This study engages with Anglophone and Euro-American comparative approaches that have emerged in the context of a debate around hegemonic forms of energy and climate change. A new field of loosely constellated approaches called the energy humanities have sought to devise comparative methods that revise ideas of a world literary system around systems of energy.[17] Such approaches have produced certain readings of "peripheral texts" as imbricated in a world system dominated by capitalist modernity.

Within the framework of the energy humanities, energy-driven formulations such as "petro-magic-realism" or "petroculture" have sought to redefine the study of postcolonial literature around globally hegemonic energy regimes.[18] Can we apply Wenzel's concept of "petro-magic realism to Hindi literature? These approaches have invariably reduced postcolonial histories to monochromatic accounts of resource extraction driven by similar imperatives as those that unfolded in the first world. Though scholars of literary modernity in South Asia have consistently engaged and troubled categories of world literature and world literary systems they have yet to engage these developments in postcolonial studies.[19]

The third significant site for this project has been to engage with methods of reading modernist forms in Hindi literature in relation to infrastructures, built environments and an urban

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[17] See Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer, *Energy Humanities: An Anthology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017).

[18] Jennifer Wenzel, "Petro-magic-realism: toward a political ecology of Nigerian literature," *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 9, no.4 (2006): 449–464; Imre Szeman, "Conjectures on world energy literature: Or what is petroculture?" in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 53, no. 3(2017): 277–288. See also, Graeme Macdonald, '"Monstrous Transformer": Petrofiction and World Literature', in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* Vol. 53, no. 3 (2017): 289–302.

[19] For a recent critique of the category of "world literature", see Francesca Orsini & L. Zecchini, "The Locations of (World) Literature: Perspectives from Africa and South Asia," in *Journal of World Literature*, Vol. 4, No. 1(2019): 1–12.

experience. A focus on energy infrastructures also opens up the possibility of an engagement with the experience of urbanization and how they mediated an experience of modernity. From a literary standpoint, the social dimension of the subcontinent's modernity–rather than its aesthetic dimension–provides the foundation of modernist innovation. However, the question of modernism, modernism and modernity have often been approached as a shift in sensibility. For instance, Aparna Dharwedkar points out that both Anglophone scholarship and Hindi criticism on "modernist" writers/poets/playwrights often use the terms "modern" (*adhunik*) or new (*navya* or *naya*) to index the particular change in *sensibility* in Hindi fiction. [20]

This is particularly the case with the Hindi short story where literary innovations are linked to urban middle-classness and an experience of existential crisis. This crisis is usually attributed to sociological and psychosocial factors, like changing familial relations, individualism, and senses of alienation and disillusionment. The formal and structural innovations that defined the short story are also explained sociologically as attempts to come to terms with the repercussions of industrialization and urbanization but invariably lapse back into assessing the complexities of character. This has been the case for critical assessments of the post-independence Hindi short story starting with the New story" (*Nayi kahani*).[21]

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[20] Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker, "Mohan Rakesh, Modernism, and the Postcolonial Present," in *South Central Review*, Vol.25, No. 1 (Spring 2008): 136–162.

[21] There is a rich body of scholarship around the *Nayi Kahani.* For contemporary assessments, see Namvar Simh, *Kahani: Nayi kahani* (Allahabad: Lokbharti Prakashan, 1966); Devi Shankar Avasthi, *Nayi kahani: sandarbh aur prakriti* (Delhi: Akshar Prakashan,1966); Kamleshvar, *Nayi kahani ki Bhumika* (Delhi: Akshar Prakashan, 1966). For more contemporary assessments of the relation between the urban experience and modernist innovation in the Hindi story, see, Gordon C. Roadarmel, "The Theme of Alienation in the Modern Hindi Short Story," (Thesis University of California, Berkeley,1969); Preetha Mani, "What Was So New about the New Story? Modernist Realism in the Hindi Nayī Kahānī," in *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 71 No.3 (September 2019): 226–251.

Pushpal Simh lists the innovations in form in the "Nayi Kahani" as comprising of powerful imagery, symbolism, flash-back structure, parallel, and secondary plot, prevalence of *the description of atmosphere and circumstances* over plot, conciseness and expressiveness of the language.[22] Similarly, Mahip Simh attributes the emergence of the "Story of Awareness" (*Sacetan kahani*) in the 1960s to a reaction against the "New Story" and its perceived adherence to the western perspectives on modernity and reality. [23] In contrast, the *Sacetan kahani* emphasized reality and modernity to its own environment. By the 1970s the *Sacetan kahani* had given way to the *Samantar kahani*– the story of the ordinary man.[24]

However, such analyses elide a long history of modernist literary innovation as an encounter with modern infrastructure.[25] Even when scholars have noted the significance of the city for the delineation of a modernist sensibility in Hindi fiction the focus of literary analysis remains on characterization against a setting or milieu.[26]Rather than providing another sociological reading, in which urban infrastructures merely locate characters or amplify a psychologization of character, *Nature Displaced* aims to reveal the overwhelming role that infrastructural failure has played in a modernist sensibility. It argues that infrastructures –such as access to fuel in rural and urban India and scarcity of public utilities like gas and electricity – produced the modernist

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[22] Pushpal Simh, "Samkalin Hindi kahani, *Bhasha tritya visv Hindi sammelan ank,* p. 80, quoted in L. Gupt, 'Mangal', *Hindi kahani ka itihas* (Kurukshetra, 1988), 26. Emphasis mine.
[23] See Mahip Simh, *Sacetan kahani: racna aur vicar*, p, 12, quoted in Upanendra Ask, *Hindi kahani ek antrang paricay* (Allahbad: Nilabh Prakashan, 1967), 263.
[24] Himanshu Joshi, ed., *Shrestha samantar kahaniyam* (Delhi: Parag Prakashan, 1976).
[25] An early short story collection by Kamlesvar is an instance of this, see Kamalesvar, *Khoyi hui Dishaem* (Kashi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1963). The novels of Ramesh Bakshi and Yogesh Gupt make the corporeal experience of infrastructures a fundamental aspect of their modernist method. See, Ramesh Bakshi, *Aṭharah Suraj ke paudhe* (Varanasi: Bharatiya Jnanpith Prakashan, 1965); Yogesh Gupt. *Anayas,* (Delhi: Sarasvati Vihar, 1982).
[26] Vasudha Dalmia, *Fiction as History: The Novel and the City in Modern North India* (Albany: SUNY press, 2019).

experience captured in the formal innovations of the short story rather than simply reflecting them. These forms of infrastructure have also produced a distinct postcolonial experience of modernization and infrastructural expansion that has yet to find a place in energy humanities scholarship in general, and literary analysis in particular. My general argument is that there is on the one hand a need for a broader imagining of *infrastructural affects* – experiences, sensations, structures of feeling – generated through peoples' material encounters with infrastructures. On the other hand, there is a need to resist readings of infrastructure as simply the *material base* for the formal operations of fiction.

As may be evident, the environment names a more expansive problem in the literary history of the subcontinent and one that has not yet been addressed within Hindi literary studies and postcolonial studies. However, does the emergence of postcolonial ecocriticism in the Euro-American academy and ecocriticism in India suggest that this lacuna has been addressed? I turn to these developments in order to reiterate the need for the study of Hindi literature as a corrective to some of their constitutive blind spots.

III: Postcolonial Environments: From Critical to Material Readings

In an article written in 2004 on the increasing traffic between environmental studies and postcolonial literary studies, Graham Huggan noted that the "green" turn in postcolonialism was in effect a sign of the scholars' admission that it was impossible to analyze modern imperialism and colonialism without engaging with the massive scale of environmental devastation that they

entail.[27] This, of course, was another way of saying that all colonial and imperial issues were, by their very nature, also environmental issues. In contrast, literary critic Rob Nixon traced the dissonances between environmentalism and postcolonial theory. Nixon juxtaposed environmentalism's more place-based and mimetic understanding of the relation between literature and the environment to postcolonialism's more cosmopolitan and discursive orientation.[28]It is also worth bearing in mind that both Nixon and Huggan approached the rift between postcolonial studies and environmentalism from within Euro-American contexts. They were seeking to bridge the disciplinary divides between cultural studies and literary studies and environmental studies in the Anglo-American academy.

Since then the field of postcolonial ecocriticism has fleshed out methods to establish a rapprochement between methods of postcolonialism and ecocriticism. However, on assessing these developments, some fundamental elisions continue to dog postcolonial ecocriticism as a field. The first pertains to language and how it has determined the field of postcolonial ecocriticism. English remains the language of both environmental studies and ecocriticism, even in India. This has not only overdetermined the meanings that accrue to the "environment" but has also constrained the discovery of other related concepts that might have more traction in non-Anglophone languages. The near total absence of non-Anglophone terms and concepts in discussions on postcolonial ecocriticism is duplicated in postcolonial ecocriticism in the Indian

[27] Graham Huggan, "Greening Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives," in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 3(2004): 701– 33.
[28] Rob Nixon, "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism," in *Postcolonialism and Beyond*, eds., Ania Loomba and Suvir Kaul (Duke University Press, 2005), 233–51.

subcontinent that has rarely engaged with non-anglophone writing in the subcontinent in a substantive and sustained way.[29]

This study consistently highlights the elisions that characterize Anglophone postcolonial ecocriticism and the environmental humanities more broadly. By identifying literary modes such as regionalism (*amcalikta*) and nature poetry (*prakriti kavya*) and revisiting key sites where "senses of the nature" have congealed in Hindi literature, this study seeks to address this gap. It is vigilant in not assuming the valence of debates emerging in Anglophone postcolonial ecocriticism for the study of non-anglophone literature. For instance, ecocritic Ursula Heise suggests that "eco-cosmopolitanism" and a "sense of planet" must replace more localist emphases given the urgency of climate crises.[30] I assess the implications of such a proposition in the context of the Hindi novel and its depiction of Adivasi politics. I show how the global legibility of a universal language of science and environmental harm might constrain the meanings that can attach to Adivasi politics.

This brings me to the second constitutive elision in postcolonial ecocriticism that has an impact on the study of literary South Asia. Imperial histories, histories of colonialism and more recently neoliberal globalization have been the most significant global frameworks for Anglophone postcolonial ecocriticism. On the other hand, Indian literary studies and Hindi literary criticism have overwhelming focused on critiques of nationalism and the politics of literary

[29] There are a few exceptions to this case. The work of Nirmal Selvamony on the Tamil concept of *tinai* is one such case. See Nirmal Selvamony, "Introduction," in *Essays in Ecocriticism*, eds. Rayson Alex and Nirmal Selvamony, (Chennai: New Delhi: OSLE: Sarup & Sons, 2007), xi–xxxi.

[30] Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (New York: OUP, 2008).

representation. Both in different ways have often reduced questions of environment to the social origins of these crises.

It is here that the project expresses dissatisfaction with both idealized notions of nature as well as what constitutes materialist analysis in postcolonial ecocriticism.[31] The problem with Nature, is not only, as William Cronon astutely points out, that we risk "getting back to the wrong nature," but that the social production of nature still does not account for a range of material histories that intercept postcolonial histories and yet exceed them.[32] It is this excess that remains unaccounted in the materialist analyses that claim to theorize "postcolonial environments."[33]

In a moment of self-reflexivity postcolonial ecocritics Elizabeth Deloughrey and George Handley write:

> A postcolonial ecocriticism, then, must be more than a simple extension of postcolonial methodologies into the realm of the human material world; it must reckon with the ways

[31] I draw on several insights from critical theory that have drawn attention to the limitations of materialist approaches. For an engagement with the "matter" in materialism, specifically historical materialism, see John Frow, "Matter and Materialism: A Brief Pre-history of the Present," in *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn* ed. Tony Bennett (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 25–37. For drawing out the limitations of theorizations of "material culture" and the "social life of things", see Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. For the challenges for conceptualizing democracy in the wake of the new agentic powers of non-humans, see Bruno Latour, "Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics," in *Common Knowledge* Vol. 10, No.3 (2004): 450–462; Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University. For a close engagement with how the humanist and anti-humanist strands of Enlightenment and Postcolonial thought are no longer adequate for thinking of the figure of the human as a geological force, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change," *New Literary History* Vol 43, no. 1 (2012): 1–18.

[32] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Grounds: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1995), 69–80.

[33] Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan/Arts & Humanities Research Council, 2010).

> in which *ecology does not always work within the frames of human time and political interest*.[34]

I draw attention to this moment of self-reflexivity because it is one that is immediately lost sight of in most postcolonial ecocriticism. I hold on to the provocation that "ecology does not always work with the frames of human time" and I extend the fundamental premise of that thought in various ways in this dissertation.

In order to begin to redirect attention to agencies that are no longer captured by the humanist or anti-humanist impulses of postcolonial thought, it is possible to read two contrapuntal strands interwoven in this account of Hindi literature. The first is grounded in a critical history. This critical history returns to already familiar sites of literary cultural analyses and brings Hindi literature into dialogue with environmental history, anthropology, and questions of political ecology. The reason I call this a critical history is because here my reading shares with these disciplines a postcolonial critique of the nation state and the inequalities of ownership, authority, and power that have progressively intensified in the wake of the liberalization of India's economy in the 1990s.

However, the project extends the provenance of postcolonial critique beyond a literary critical version of social ecology. Instead, it advocates that we must entertain the possibility that literary subjectivity and literary form have been constrained by the demands of delineating *human* subjectivity. It emphasizes that it is only possible to begin to define the environment of Hindi

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[34] Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, "Introduction: Towards an Aesthetics of the Earth" in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press; 2011), 4.

literature by acknowledging the range of histories that have intercepted it and exceeded its scope. Each chapter in this dissertation demonstrates a reading in that direction.

Chapter One: Hybrid Nature: Technology and Community in the Regional Novel

This chapter revisits a literary debate around regionalism (*amcalikta*) and the *amcalik upanyas* from the mid 1950s. The term *amcalik* is attributed to its most iconic practitioner–the writer Phanishvarnath 'Renu' who used it, somewhat fortuitously, as a descriptor for this first novel *Maila Amcal* (The Soiled Border, 1954). The name stuck and came to be associated with a number of texts across the Hindi belt that demonstrated a certain aesthetic logic in their focus on peripheral spaces such as the village, the marginal community, the scheduled tribe, the inaccessible locality. Though *amcalikta* is often translated as regionalism, rural realism or the regional-rural, Indu Prakash Pandey cautions that neither is "very appropriate nor fully adequate to give the connotation of the Hindi word *amcal,* which is more poetic."[35]

My interest in *amcalikta* stems from the ways in which it illustrates a problem of environment and literary subjectivity. *Amcalikta* posed two formal problems—what constituted a fully developed character? And how significant was setting or milieu to the delineation of character? *Amcalik* novels were often critiqued for failing to develop the coherence of a novel that focused on the contingencies of character. Without character and its internally generated desires, idiosyncratic personalities, complex and even contradictory psychologies, *amcalikta* descended into naturalism. A resolution to this problem was sought in arguing that this particular form of

[35] Indu Prakash Pandey, *Regionalism in Hindi Novels* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974), 1.

realism depicted not characters but an entire region. However, this could either mean that regional novels were mired in excessive local detail or presented overly romanticized descriptions of the village community that failed to capture the social contradiction, potentiality, and crisis of post-independence India.

Amcalik writers continue to be read in static landscapes or as depicting entities like the "village", "the region." I show the limitations of such readings by analyzing three novels written in the period between 1957–1967. Renu's *Parti Parikatha* (Tale of a Wasteland, 1957), Nagarjun's *Varun ke bete* (Sons of Varun, 1957) and Mayanand Misra's *Mati ke log, sone ki naiya* (People of the Soil, Boat of Gold, 1967). All are set in and around the Kosi River. I show how these writers were grappling with complex and dynamic rural environment that compelled them in different ways. And just as they sought to control this environment, they were also controlled by it.

Chapter Two: Indigenous Nature: Writing an Adivasi Ecological Subject in the Regional Novel

This chapter further develops the focus on the representation of non-human environment in the regional novel through a reading of two contemporary Hindi novels. Ranendra's *Global gamv ke devta* (Lords of the Global Village, 2009) and Mahua Maji's *Marang goda nilkanth hua* (Marang goda, Blue-throated, 2012) are both set against the backdrop of contemporary Adivasi politics in the East Indian state of Jharkhand are often characterized as *amcalik.* The emergence of a vibrant Adivasi politics in Jharkhand has politicized literary regionalism to the extent that terms and phrases from various Adivasi languages spoken in the region have steadily been incorporated into Hindi writing. This has also been accompanied with an ethnographic presentation of Adivasi practices. However, this incorporation also poses a challenge for realist depiction. How are

Adivasi ontologies to be realistically rendered and yet contained? This question becomes particularly significant in the context of a sacred politics of nature which merges natural and supernatural elements. This leads to a peculiar predicament where a focus on plot and characterological development cannot coexist with the reconstruction of Adivasi life worlds.

Chapter Three: Nature as Resource: Traces of Energy in the Hindi Literary Archive

This chapter rethinks a literary history of the post-independence Hindi novel and short story around India's energy history. In order to emphasize the significance of energy history for literary history, the chapter first traces the emergence of the coal-mining novel in the wake of the nationalization of coal mines in the mid 1972–73. It does so in order to engage with two significant trends in the environmental humanities. The first involves world-literary approaches that periodize texts based on energy regimes. The second is an increasing focus on the ways in which infrastructures determine literary form and affective life.

In contrast to world-literary and comparative approaches which have narrowly focused on histories of colonial resource extraction or neoliberal resource regimes, this chapter explores the distinct postcolonial history of energy infrastructures from the largest coal mines of Jharia to the middle-class experience of energy transition in the Hindi short story of the 1980s. The chapter critiques world-literary approaches that fail to address the unique postcolonial experience of energy transition and development and read postcolonial texts as "resource texts." Instead the chapter brings a new attention to aspects of fiction such as the description of atmosphere and mood in order to more fully grasp the ways in which energy access comes to be constitutive of literary modernity.

Chapter Four: Posthuman, Post Nature: Objects and their Environmental Lives in Post-Globalization Hindi Literature

The last chapter analyzes the use of figures of nature (*prakriti*), earth (*dharti*), and planet (*prthvi*) in critiques of consumerism (*upbhoktavad*) and consumer culture (*upbhog samskriti*) in Hindi literature. Along with mounting concerns of cultural homogenization due to consumerism, India's globalizing consumption patterns have also heralded a deepening environmental crisis. The chapter explores how critiques of the commodity, however, rarely focus on the commodity itself. The chapter demonstrates this through a contrastive reading between fiction and poetry. It begins with a reading of the iconic Hindi story "Paul Gomra ka Scutar" (Paul Gomra's Scooter, 1997) by Uday Prakash that is often read as an allegory of the crisis of cultural authenticity brought about consumerism and a betrayal of the anticolonial legacy of Indian independence. The chapter reads the story through Paul Gomra's scooter and how its fate is intertwined with that of its owner. It then turns to a consideration of Hindi eco-poetry in which critiques of consumerism are articulated through a poetics of nature. It examines poetry from two anthologies of eco-poetry: *Prthvi ke paksha mem* (In Defense of the Earth, 2006) and *Kavya cayanika: 101 parisithtiki kavitaom ka sankalan* (Selected Poetry: A Compilation of 101 eco-poems, 2015) and analyzes how an ecocritical reading could emerge from nature poetry.

This dissertation contributes to both postcolonial literary studies and an emerging field of the Environmental Humanities. It reads the environment neither as a determining backdrop to narrative worlds nor simply as a descriptor for an ongoing crisis. Instead it revisits the founding concerns of postcolonial literary studies through a reading of those sites that seem most immune

to postcolonial history. It situates the environment in critical scholarship on histories of realism and modernism and presents readings that exemplify this contribution.

A second aim of this study is to contribute to literary and comparative studies within the broader rubric of the Environmental Humanities. While the environmental turn in the disciplines has generated a mandate for new kinds of humanities research in Anglophone and Comparative literary studies, the study of non-anglophone literature from South Asia has yet to robustly engage this moment. This dissertation introduces a range of modern and contemporary Hindi writers engaged in various literary and political projects to the global Environmental Humanities. It carves a space for the distinct literary-cultural history of South Asia while moving beyond the binaries of core and periphery, globalization and place, and modernity and tradition that have often constrained readings of South Asian literature.

Chapter One

Hybrid Nature: Technology and Community in the Regional Novel

Barren, uninhabited, endless region,
Disgraced land, fallow land, infertile land.
—Phanishvarnath Renu, *Parti Parikatha*[1]

The government didn't come to uproot the village,
But the village was uprooted.
—Virendra Jain, *Dub*[2]

In October 1991, an independent review committee was appointed by the World Bank to assess the Sardar Sarovar dam following a twenty–two day fast to protest the dam by activist Medha Patkar.[3] It was also the year that a young Hindi writer from Madhya Pradesh was awarded the *Premcand Mahesh Samman* for his novel. *Dub* (Submergence, 1991) by Virendra Jain was hailed as a literary classic instantly. The novel tells the story of a village displaced by the Rajghat dam that straddles the River Betva in Madhya Pradesh in Central India. The novel's career was intertwined with the *Narmada Bacao Andolan* (Save the Narmada Movement) as both

[1] Phanishvarnath Renu, *Parti Parikatha*, 1957. 12th ed. (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2016), 11.
[2] Virendra Jain, *Dub* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2014), 199.
[3] The Sardar Sarovar Dam is a gravity dam on the Narmada river near Navgam, Gujarat. Four Indian states, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, receive water and electricity supplied from the dam. The foundation stone of the project was laid out by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on 5 April 1961.

signaled a crumbling consensus on the desirability of multi-purpose dams and India's quest for development. For some, the novel reflected a moment when social movements and a global debate on environment, made evident that development which made "man (*manushya*) its center" had instead become "anti-man (*manushya virodhi*)."[4]

It was significant that *Dub* is set in rural India. A trend in Hindi fiction from the nineties has been a reassessment of the promises of self–rule (*svaraj*), independence (*azadi*), democracy (*prajatantra*) and development (*vikas*). The key sites for assessing these promises are peasant (*kisan*) and folk life (*lok jivan*) and the village as a civilizational entity (*sabhyata*) with a unique culture (*samskriti*). In fact, the village has been intrinsic to the Hindi literary imagination from the turn of the twentieth century. Scholars have pointed out the significance of the rural scene for imagining and contesting national modernity and the political uses of literary realism.[5] Village India is the site for identifying epochal problems (*yugin samasyaem*) and tendencies (*pravrtiyam*) evident in the repeated return to assessing the state of rural fiction (*gramin katha sahitya*) in Hindi criticism.[6]

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[4] Sudhish Pacauri, "Uttaryatharthvad ki shuruat," in *Virendra Jain ka sahitya* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1997), 85.

[5] For the significance of the village for literary India see, Priyamvada Gopal, "'Mahatma-magic': Gandhi and Literary India," in *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narration*. Oxford Studies in Postcolonial Literatures in English. (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2009),47; Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature, vol. 9, 1911–1956: Struggle for Freedom, Triumph, and Tragedy* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995); Ashis Nandy, *An Ambiguous Journey into the City: The Village and Other Odd Ruins of the Self in the Indian* Imagination (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); Surinder S. Jodhka, "Nation and Village," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2002), 3343–3353.

[6] Some sense of the regularity with which the 'village' has figured in criticism and edited volumes is evident from this list of select titles. For instance the monumental survey of rural literature undertaken by Viveki Ray, see Viveki Ray, *Svatantryottar Hindi katha-sahitya aur gram jivan* (Allahabad: Lokbharati,1974); Surendra Mohan Yadav, *Svatantryottar Hindi upanyas mem gramin yatharth aur samajvadi cetna* (Delhi: Bhavana Prakashan, 1992); Subhash Chandra

However, even as a deep ecological crisis has registered in rural fiction, current conceptualizations of literary realism and the novel have rarely intersected with critical environmental histories of development or scholarship that has opened the internal history of artistic representations to imaginaries of natural resource management and environmental catastrophe in South Asia.[7] It is a conversation between histories of the modern Hindi novel and these latter developments that this chapter seeks to establish. How can we read the modern Hindi novel in the context of environmental history or as an ecological form in its own right?

In order to establish this conversation, it is important to ask how the rural novel emerged as a site that most compellingly articulated both the social and ecological fabric of communities in the wake of modernization. Embedded in the literary-cultural and aesthetic debates from the mid 1950s onwards was an important literary development that forms the locus of this chapter. This was the emergence of the regional novel (*amcalik upanyas)*and literary regionalism

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Kusavaha, ed. *Katha mem gamv: Bharatiya gavom ka badalta yatharth* (Mumbai: Samvad Prakashan, 2006).

[7] For a history of multi-purpose river valley projects see Rohan D'Souza, "The emergence of multi-purpose river valley development in India (1943-46)," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 40:1 (2003): 81–105. For critiques of multipurpose dams in India and the political economy of water, see Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts Over Development in the Narmada Valley* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Satyajit Singh, et al. *The Dam and the Nation: Displacement and Resettlement in the Narmada Valley* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). For critiques of the planning and technological imaginaries that subtend multi-purpose dams, see Rohan D'Souza. *Drowned and Dammed: Colonial Capitalism, and Flood Control in Eastern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006). For the impact of agricultural modernization, see Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics (*London: Zed, 1992); Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 1998). For innovative histories of how art historians have pursued the interlinkages between art forms and natural resource management, see Sugata Ray, "Hydroaesthetics in the Little Ice Age: Theology, Artistic Cultures and Environmental Transformation in Early Modern Braj, c. 1560–70," in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (August 2016): 1–23; Sugata Ray and Venogopal Maddipati, eds., *Water Histories of South Asia: A Materiality of Liquescence*(Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019).

(*amcalikta*) in the decades following independence.[8] Regionalism galvanized literary-cultural debates across the political spectrum following independence and reopened the debate on the nature of realism.[9] It was also rapidly imagined as a global literary form that reflected an itinerary of decolonization.[10]

To this day regionalism remains a capacious category that continues to mediate the critical reception of contemporary writing on rural India. For instance, *Dub* was often referred to as a regional novel (*amcalik upanyas*).[11] The most obvious features that elicited this

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[8] Sadan Jha uses the "rural-regional" to translate the word "amcalik" since in his opinion it connotes more than rural, see Sadan Jha, "Visualizing a Region: Phanishvarnath Renu and the archive of the 'regional-rural' in the 1950s," in *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49, no.1 (2012): 1–35. Indu Prakash Pandey similarly points out that the term *amcalik* "suggests a greater amount of localization than is generally understood by the term 'regional'," see Pandey, *Regionalism*, 1.

[9] In contrast, the city and the antipathy between the city and nature shaped the birth of literary modernism. Though depictions of rural India dominated Hindi fiction from 1918–1936, in the period between 1937–1947 the rural novel ceded ground to the emergence of the modernist novel. The Hindi modernist novel was more often urban and explored the meaning of national modernity in the context of private and public subjectivity. It also pioneered narrative forms that explored characters' states of mind in first person narrative, see Vasudha Dalmia, *Hindi Modernism: Rethinking Agyeya and His Times: Proceedings of the Berkeley Symposium February 11-13, 2011* (Berkeley, Calif.: Center for South Asia Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2012). I follow the periodization adopted in Gopal Ray's monumental history of the Hindi novel. Ray characterizes the period from 1918–1947 as the period of " the new voices of realism" in which there was a focus on the peasant in the period 1918–1936 followed by a search for new directions see, Gopal Ray, *Hindi upanyas ka itihas* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2010).

[10] For instance, Hindi literary regionalism was compared to its American counterparts. Shivprasad Simh pointed out that unlike the former, its impetus was not a romantic reaction to industrial and technocratic modernity but a performance of cultural revival and diversity, see Shivprasad Simh, "Amcalikta aur adhunik parivesh," in *Adhunik parivesh aur navlekhan* (Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan, 1970), 114–28. Writer Phanishvarnath Renu claimed a more global *amcalikta* in the context of William Faulkner, Yugoslavian writer Ivo Andric, Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun, Turkish writers Nazim Hikmet and Suat Dervis, and Russian writer Mikhail Sholokov, see Phanishvarnath Renu, "Amcalikta: ek batcit," in *Sresth amcalik kahaniyam* (Delhi: Parag Prakashan, 1978), 9–12.

[11] Yadvendra Sharma, "Amcalik parampara ka upanyas," in *Virendra Jain ka sahitya* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1997), 104–107; Ramdarsh Mishra, "Vyvastha bhi to barh hi hai," in *Virendra*

characterization were the use of the genuine rustic (*theth*) idiom of Bundeli, spoken in Madhya Pradesh; an ethos of rural life (*lok jivan*); and an aesthetics and poetics of rural setting (*parivesh*). However, rather than reading the *amcalik upanyas* for questions of linguistic and ethnographic representation, I will read it as a geo-cultural form. I borrow the term "geo-cultural" from the historian Sadan Jha who characterizes literary regionalism as a form that emphasizes placeness.[12] By this Jha identifies an important characteristic of *amcalikta* which was the mutual imbrication of the social and ecological fabric of rural community in the novel's form. I push the limits of such a reading by accentuating an ecological reading of *amcalikta.*

I begin with a key figure — the writer Phanishvarnath Renu (1921–1977) who first used the word "*amcalik*" to describe his novel *Maila Amcal*(The Soiled Border, 1954).[13]Renu's use of the work "*maila amcal*" can mean *amcal* as a border area or region of the Indian subcontinent. *Amcal* also means the edge of a garment, and in this sense signifies the soiled edge of a woman's sari.[14] A native of Purnea, a border district contiguous to Bengal, Renu first sparked a discussion on regionalism as a new idiom for rendering the aesthetics and poetics of community with the publication of his two novels *Maila Amcal* and *Parti Parikatha*. Renu's centrality to the post-independence Hindi novel is only matched by his keen and perceptive engagement with regional

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Jain ka sahitya (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1997),101–103. These continuities are evident in the blurbs accompanying the 2014 edition of the novel. Atal Bihari Bajpai writes how *Dub* is "incomparable in terms of novels written with a regional (*amcalik*) focus." Harishankar Parsai says, "Its grasp, depiction, and linguistic rendering of village life (*gram jivan*) is no less than Premchand. It is definitely better than Phanishvarnath Renu."

[12] Sadan Jha, "Visualizing a Region: Phanishvarnath Renu and the archive of the 'regional-rural' in the 1950s," in *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49, no.1 (2012): 16.

[13] There is debate whether Renu can indeed be credited for inaugurating the "amcalik". See Pandey, *Regionalism*, 1974.

[14] Kathryn Hansen reads this use of *amcal* as a reference to "mother earth" or "bharat mata", see Kathryn Hansen, "Phanishwarnath Renu: The Integration of Rural and Urban Consciousness in the Modern Hindi Novel" (PhD diss., University of California, 1978).

and national politics. I show how an assessment of Renu's writing is incomplete without reading it as an ongoing engagement with the transformations of rural environments culminating in the Green Revolution.[15] These included changing land-use patterns as well as irrigation and mechanization. Both Renu and his readers would continue to re-read his work as an object lesson in the effects of modernization.

In order to show how regional novels were embedded in local ecologies, I then turn to three novels that are all set against the backdrop of land tenancy reforms and the construction of the Kosi dam which began in 1958 and concluded in 1962 in Bihar.[16] These novels are Renu's *Parti Parikatha* (Tale of a Wasteland, 1957) followed by Nagarjun's *Varun ke bete* (Sons of Varun, 1957) and Mayanand Misra's *Mati ke log, sone ki naiya* (People of the Soil, Boat of Gold, 1967). This focus on one region allows me to show how the depiction of rural communities — both agrarian and semi-nomadic — was indelibly linked to ways of reading land

[15] The term 'Green Revolution' came into use in the late 1960s and refers to the 'the new technology' comprising of high-yielding varieties (HYVs) of cereals, especially dwarf wheats and rice, in association with chemical fertilizers and agro-chemicals, and with controlled water-supply (usually involving irrigation) and new methods of cultivation, including mechanization. All of these were seen together as a 'package of practices' to supersede 'traditional' technology and be adopted as a whole. From the 1980s the consensus on the legacies of the Green Revolution was fractured. Critiques of global circuits of knowledge and technology transfer; capitalistic agricultural processes and deepening crisis of food sovereignty and security are just some of the critiques of this process that have emerged.

[16] The National Flood Control Policy in 1954 (following the disastrous floods of 1954 in a large part of the Kosi river basin) planned to control floods through a series of dams, embankments and river training works. The Kosi project was thus conceptualized (based on investigations between 1946 and 1955), in three continuous interlinked stages – the first was a barrage to anchor the river that had migrated about 120 km (75 mi) westward in the last 250 years laying waste to a huge tract in north Bihar and to provide irrigation and power benefits to Nepal and India. The second part was to build embankments both below and above the barrage to hold the river within the defined channel. The third part envisaged a high multipurpose dam within Nepal at Barakshetra to provide a substantial flood cushion along with large irrigation and power benefits to both countries. This was followed by the Kosi Agreement between Nepal and India signed on 25 April 1954 and revised on 19 December 1966 to address Nepal's concerns.

as soaking or dry, fertile or barren. These novels sought to embed a technologically enhanced nature within these landscapes and communities with varying degrees of success. Therefore, the political project of realism and its depiction of rural communities was an infrastructural imaginary in its own right.

In the concluding section, I return to *Dub* by Virendra Jain and analyze what has changed in regionalism since its emergence in the 1950s. The novel captures a growing dissatisfaction with techno-science and the dam by contrasting it to feudal and precolonial forms of infrastructure. *Dub* inaugurates a particular structure of feeling in the Hindi novel that brings a renewed attention to the socio-ecological fabric of rural community leading critics to debate the genealogies of the contemporary Hindi novel in *amcalikta.*

I. Crop, Green Revolution, and Postcolonial 'Green'

> *Dhusar, viran, anthin prantar.*
> *Patita bhumi, parti jamin, bandhya dharti.*
> Barren, desolate, endless region
> Disgraced soil, fallow land, infertile earth.[17]

These opening lines from *Parti Parikatha* have an iconic status in Hindi fiction. Aridity and barrenness never seemed so poetic before. Often scholars have dwelt on what made Renu's text so memorable. Kathryn Hansen has analyzed this depiction of land ravaged by the River Kosi, which in her words "provided a model for other writers."[18] Hansen focuses on how these lines conjure the aesthetic power to transform "a private image to a public landscape."[19] She

[17] Renu, *Parti Parikatha,* 11. All translations mine.
[18] Kathryn Hansen, "Dimensions of a Rural Landscape: Renu's Purnea District," in *Journal of South Asian Literature* Vol. 25, No. 1:18 (Winter/Spring, 1990), 18.
[19] Hansen, "Dimensions," 18.

highlights what she calls the "adjective-noun structure" of three phrases — *anthin prantar, patita bhumi,* and *bandhya dharti* — and explains how Renu's elevated style taps into associations of memory leading to a mental state where the "specific characteristics of the region fade" and the reader responds to the "universal quality of life-supporting stability inherent in the image."[20] Though the "Kosi floods are indeed the cause for the lands lying waste," Hansen says she is interested in the "felt universality," of this region in the "reader's mind."[21]

Similarly, Sadan Jha highlights the *linguistic* performance of place and region in Renu's novel. Jha calls the *amcalik* text a "geo-cultural form" that makes possible a "local theory of locality."[22] Reading Renu, according to Jha, gives one the sense of an "embodied and narrated distinctiveness of a set of social relations." Jha too focuses on the very same lines and explains their aesthetic and affective force in this way: "[T]he embodied distinctiveness of the region came alive when he deployed three different words (*bhumi*: tatsam, *jamin:* videsaj and *dharti*: tadbhav) for land in the same sentence. Without going into the *linguistic roots* of these differences, it may be safe to argue that these three terms produce multiple images of the land in the mind of a reader."[23]

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[20] Ibid., 24.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Sadan Jha, "Visualizing a Region: Phanishvarnath Renu and the archive of the 'regional-rural' in the 1950s," in *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49, no.1 (2012), 6.
[23] Jha, "Visualizing Region," 6. Emphasis mine. Jha does not dwell on the "linguistic roots" of these words leaving them undifferentiated in his translation as land. Kathryn Hansen gives much more significance to these proliferating terms for land. She notes that Renu uses "bhumi" (land) and "dharti" (earth) from a more Sanskritized register and the Urdu equivalent "zamin." The two Sanskritized words for earth "carry overtones of fertility, maternity, and sacredness." See Kathryn Hansen, "Renu's Regionalism: Language and Form," in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol 40, No. 2 (FEB., 1981), 275.While the range of meanings of all three words can be diverse, I believe that Renu used a concatenation of different words not to gesture to these varied meanings but to concentrate all meanings into one figure of a flood-ravaged region.

Hansen and Jha's readings draw on landscape and place studies to analyze the significance of locality in Renu's writing. Their work captures a critical moment in the study of post-independence India which was to privilege the local in juxtaposition to national modernity. Their analyses rest on uncovering the linguistic and cultural resources that imbue regional writing with a specificity that runs counter to the "linear narratives of modernity and Nehruvian development."[24] This shift to the local is also reflected in the deep suspicion of technology as a mechanism of controlling and dominating nature. Environmental historians have traced a long genealogy of the faulty implementation and ecological catastrophe wreaked by colonial and postcolonial geoengineering projects. These failures of infrastructural expansion and big technology led to a focus on small and everyday technologies and their social lives in post-independence India.[25]

However, there is another way of reading regional literature: one that is similarly focused on the region but traces a different relation between the region and technology. It is possible to trace to what extent the material world of North Bihar–both natural and technological– wrote itself into Renu's prose. Such a reading opens up literary form to both the rising water, moving banks and riparian habitat of the Kosi river as well as an aesthetics of technological modernity in post-independence India.

In October 1968 the prominent Hindi magazine *Jnanoday* published a special feature on the author of *Parti Parikatha.* The article titled "Meet—Phanishvarnath 'Renu' and his surroundings" ("Miliye Phanishvar Nath 'Renu' aur unke paridrsya se") began with a rhapsodic

[24] Jha, "Visualizing Region,"5.
[25] David Arnold, *Everyday Technology: Machines and the Making of India's Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

account of the verdure (*haritima*) that greets Suvas Kumar, a Hindi literary critic and author of the piece, on his arrival at the Simraha station in Purnea to interview Renu. The description reads like this:

> Verdure. Like all the green of the world has been laid out in this one spot. On either side of the railway tracks extends this endless expanse of greenery. With every gust of the easterly wind (*purva*) the stalks of paddy sway flirtatiously as if proud of their beauty. The dust tracks are lost in the chest-high crop. Barring a few clumps of bamboo and some trees the entire panorama is captured by the greenery of the paddy fields.[26]

This verdant green immediately reminds Kumar of the famous opening lines of Renu's *Parti Parikatha*. In that novel, published more than a decade earlier the same landscape had been depicted as harsh, desolate, and flood ravaged. In his interview Kumar mentions how he re-read *Parti Parikatha* after a period of four years for this interview and wished he could imagine these fields as they once were, "full of bramble and never-ending sand" like a "barren woman."[27]

For visitors to Purnea, the landscape and Renu's writing formed a feedback loop that is striking in its consistency. In another piece titled "Caliye Renu ke des," (Let us go to Renu country) the critic Jaishankar also recalled Renu's description of the sand and scraggly vegetation of this region:

> As soon as trains arriving from elsewhere enter into Purnea: the *jharber*, *sahud*, *babul*, and *samel* trees on either side of the tracks and in the distance the sandy dunes…not land, but the corpse of a land with no grass growing on it. These make one recall Renu. From

[26] Suvas Kumar, "Miliye Phanishvarnath Renu aur unke paridrsya se", in *Renu se bhent: Phanishvarnath Renu se bhentvartaom ka sankalan*, (repr., New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1987), 15.
[27] Kumar, "Miliye," 16.

> here begin the narrative journeys of Renu's *Maila Amcal* and *Parti Parikatha*! His country (*sar zamin*)![28]

Hansen rightly points out how Renu's prose had created a "public image" of the region across riparian North India, *amcalik* Hindi writers began writing about communities living in ecologically volatile and debilitating environments caused by flooding, chronic hunger, and disease. While Renu had elevated barrenness, flooding, and drought to poetic heights, Hindi writers in the floodplains of Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh were engaged in similar literary projects. Descriptions of floods in Devendra Satyarthi's *Brahmaputra* (1956), Raghuvar Dayal's *Triyuga* (1967), Bhairav Prasad Gupta's *Ganga Maiya* (1967) and Ramdarsh Mishra's *Pani ke pracir* (1982) are just some examples. Not far from Renu's Purnea, Mayanand Mishra's *Mati ke log, sone ki naiya* (1967) described the land near the Dhemra, a tributary of the Kosi river, with similar epithets – "*udas, ujar, jhankad, viran*" and again "*vishal marubhumi, udas, viran.*"[29]

The depiction of rural environments in these instances or the ambient quality of the regional text were often (and continue to be) elaborated in formalistic taxonomies, like locale (*sthan-vishesh*), region (*amcal*), environment (*vatavaran*), setting (*parivesh*) and nature (*prakriti*).[30] Critics often talk about how *amcalikta* was distinct from earlier variants of the rural

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[28]Rajkumar Agraval 'Jaishankar', "Caliye Renu ke desh," in Bharat Yayavar, ed. *Phanishvarnath Renu athart mridangiye ka marm* (repr., Hazaribagh: Vipaksh Prakashan, 1991), 30.

[29] Mayanand Mishra, *Mati ke log, sone ki naiya* (Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1967), 4,9.

[30] Shrinarayan Agnihotri, *Upanyas, tatva evam rup-vidhan*, 1st ed. (Kanpur: Acarya Shukla Sadhana Sadan, 1962); Prakash Vajpeyi, *Hindi ke amcalik upanyas* (Varanasi: Nandkishor and Sons, 1964); Ramdarsh Mishra, *Hindi upanyas:ek antaryatra* (Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1968); Shivprasad Simh, *Adhunik,*1970; Adarsh Saksena, *Hindi ke amcalik upanyas aur unki shilpvidhi* (Bikaner: Surya Prakashan Mandir, 1971); Nagina Jain, *Amcalikta aur Hindi upanyas* (Delhi: Akshar, 1976).

novel in that it depicted an entire "form of life" of a particular region.[31] However, neither paradigms of realism, naturalistic depiction of *milieu,* or an aesthetic of folk life discuss why writers were redefining dwelling, nature, and technology in specific regional settings.

The significance of this preoccupation with land and an aesthetics of rurality can be extrapolated from what Suvas Kumar actually sees as he recalls Renu's text. The "greenery" that Suvas Kumar describes in such effusive prose comprised of standing crops of paddy. The significance of this greenery stemmed from the implementation of the Green Revolution in India in the 1960s. It remains the single most important developmental legacy of a global food regime that rapidly transformed agricultural environments with dams, industrial technology, high-yielding varieties of seeds, and chemical fertilizers.

Kumar explained the rationale of seeking out his interview with Renu in the piece saying, "All this change must have had an impact in different ways. This change was so visible and its force so evident that its impact on cultural aspects must be researched. Why not 'interview' some farmer about this?"[32] National newspapers in India would often carry such features on model farmers or *kisan pandits* who had successfully adopted modern methods of farming.[33] It is quite possible that Kumar's feature on Renu was in the same genre. It is evident from reading Kumar's interview that Renu was such a self-styled *pandit* and had detailed knowledge about various seed

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[31] Shivprasad Simh, "Amcalikta,"119. *Amcalik* novels were compared and contrasted to social (*samajik*), psychological (*manovaijnanik*), and historical (*aitihasik*) novels by Shashibhushan Sinhal. See *Hindi upanyas ki pravrittiyam* (Agra: Vinod Pustak Mandir, 1970).
[32]Kumar, "Miliye", 15.
[32] Renu, *Parti Parikatha,* 20.
[33]Benjamin Siegel, "Modernizing Peasants and "Master Farmers": Progressive Agriculture in Early Independent India," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 37, no. 1 (May 2017): 64–85.

varieties, fertilizers, and pesticides introduced through the Green Revolution. Renu's biographer, Bharat Yayavar, would call him a gentleman farmer (*samskari kisan*).[34]

In the interview with Kumar, Renu talked about the need for increased agricultural production given "international hunger."[35] Famine was a key theme in Renu's writing from much earlier on. In a piece titled **"**Hadiyom ka pul" (Bridge of Bones), published in September 1950 in the Hindi magazine *Janta*, he described how starving, emaciated villagers from Purnea travel from one village to another asking prominent zamindars for grain:

> Dusty earth, dusty sky. There are some stumps of *jharber* […] *babul* and other inferior species of trees here and there. …In search of grain the sons of this barren earth are moving on.[36]

This description inscribes famine into the landscape. It is significant that the trees Renu mentions, particularly the *jharber*, were often put to various uses by nomadic communities. I will return to the significance of how famine and flood were also a matter of the optics through which landscape was viewed.

Famine was not far from Renu's mind in the interview with Suvas Kumar as well. Just the previous year, he had published a reportage on the Bihar famine of 1966 while touring the affected districts with prominent Hindi writer Ajneya.[37] During the interview, Suvas Kumar and

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[34] Bharat Yayavar, "Renu ki kahani," in *Renu se bhemt: Phanishvarnath Renu se bhemtvartaom ka sankalan*, (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1987), 11.
[35] Kumar, "Miliye," 23.
[36] Phanishvarnath Renu, "Hadiyom ka pul," in *Pranom mem dhule hue rang* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1993), 76.
[37] Phanishvarnath Renu, "Sukha:1966 (Bihar)" in *Rnjal, Dhanjal* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2015), 77–112. Darren C. Zook has written about the construction of a new moral environment around famine in the South Asian agrarian landscape. One of the most important forms of famine depiction was the "eyewitness narrative account", a genre Darren Zook locates in the nineteenth century that develops in tandem with popular mass media. Zook claims that famine retreats in the Indian landscape after the turn of the century to become a land of chronic hunger,

Renu visited the fields to see Renu's crops. Kumar recounts how the "touch of the paddy crop against the skin was romantic" and "something hard to find in urban life."[38] Renu himself compared growing paddy (*dhan*) to writing poetry.

This comparison is striking and gains meaning in the context of the literary debates that raged after the formation of the All India Progressive Writers Association in 1936. Renu was very much a product of a period between the 1930s into the late 1950s that Priyamvada Gopal describes as one in which aesthetics and politics were to be articulated together in unprecedented ways and the precise modalities of that partnership were to remain open to debate.[39]

Often the debate between art for art's sake and social commitment was figured through metaphors of hunger. Nagarjun, for instance, would counterpose the aesthetic to the visceral experience of hunger. He declared:

> We will no longer sing these empty, vacuous songs of *sujala-sufala* now,
> Until we get our fill of rice-dal-vegetables.[40]

The words "*sujala-sufala*" are a reference to the national song of India — *Vande Mataram* penned by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee — that describes the abundance and fertility of the motherland. Nagarjun's irate refusal to endorse the celebration of these qualities of the land is also at the same time a critique of the aesthetic divorced from the fulfillment of bodily needs.

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see Darren C. Zook, "Famine in the Landscape: Imagining Hunger in South Asian History, 1860–1990," in *Agrarian Environments: Resources, Representations, and Rule in India*, eds. Arun Agrawal, K. Sivaramakrishnan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

[38] Kumar, "Miliye,"21.

[39] Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005).

[40] Nagarjun, "Lal bhavani," (1948; repr., *Hazar-Hazar bamhom vali* New Delhi:Radhkrsn Publications, 1981), n.p.

Nagarjun's critique of the aesthetic was not, however, endorsed unanimously by writers that shared his socialist vision. Ramvrksh Benipuri, a contemporary of Nagarjun and socialist writer, wrote an essay, "Gehum banam gulab," (Wheat versus the Rose, n.p.) in which he expressed his exasperation saying: "Grow wheat, grow wheat, grow wheat! Open fields (*maidan*) are being ploughed and orchards (*bagh*) are uprooted—all for wheat!" Benipuri rued the fact that because of the imperative to grow food and meet the demands of the body, all higher pursuits of the human mind (*manas*), epitomized in the rose (*gulab*), took a backseat.[41]

Renu brought together the roles of the farmer (kisan) and the poet (kavi). It was the marriage of two moral worlds–that of provider (*anndata*) and the visionary even though it was the older writer Nagarjun, who came to epitomize this combination more successfully. However, it is significant that the aesthetic debates of the early years of independence were increasingly figured through metaphors of crop —*gehum, dhan,* and *anna.* For Renu the Green Revolution was not simply a moral imperative or a neutral technological force.

In an article titled "The Fairy of the Green Revolution descends" (*Utari svapn-pari-hari kranti*), published in *Jyotsana* in November 1968, Renu recalled how his writing initially elicited the ridicule of his friends because of its hyperbolic flowery prose:

> I [Renu] remember, twenty-two years ago I published a reportage called "dayan kosi" (Witch Kosi) in the *Janta*. It ended on an optimistic note in these words: "There will be better days for the wasteland (*parti*). The colors of life will spread over the land." For my friends this became something they would tease me about: "So, did the colors soaked in your life cover the land? Mister! When will the golden eggs of your dreams hatch? When will we hear the golden birds sing?"

[41] Ramvrksh Benipuri, "Gehum banam gulab," *Hindisamay*, https://www.hindisamay.com/content/1189/1/रामवृक्ष-बेनीपुरी-निबंध-गेहूँ-बनाम-गुलाब.cspx (accessed April 16, 2020)

> I would initially be taken aback. And then I would laugh and say, "On that first dawn of independence."[42]

Renu would often narrate accounts of revisiting his work in the context of changes in his material environment. In the same essay he wrote:

> The day the first crop of wheat was harvested in our fields I was overjoyed (*rom-rom pulkit*). Touching the stems of the crops to my head I chanted the *mul mantra*. Then I took out both my novels and wrote down the following on the final pages: 'Lakhs of acres of Kosi ravaged deadened soil *has awakened* into verdant fields (*shasya shyamala*). In the shroud-like *maidan* covered by white sand dunes the living green of paddy fields *has taken* root. Women planting in the maize field burst into laughter for no reason… the entire earth has turned the colors of the rainbow.'"[43]

This act of revisiting his writing and inscribing in his texts what he saw as the realization of their speculative promise, was a lifelong process with Renu.

Renu's imagination of rural reconstruction was, of course, incomplete without mechanization. From the petromax lantern in the story "Panchlight" to the roar of tractors in *Parti Parikatha*, Renu imagined these objects as instilling new life into rural subjects. For example, in an article published in the magazine *Alocana* in October 1957, he imagined an affective relation between the common man and national development that was mediated through a series of industrial objects:

> Who knows, somewhere a peasant's son is moved by the inspiration of national development? And he is struggling to articulate the joy in his heart in his rough tongue. In some forlorn village some old ironmonger may be rediscovering his youth listening to the distant rumblings of tractors and bulldozers. He might feel the strength returning to

[42] Phanishvarnath Renu, "Utari svapn-pari-hari-kranti", 1968 in *Renu racnavali*. Vol. 5 (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1995), 284.
[43] Renu, "Utari", 286. Emphases mine.

> his forearms. Watching the chimneys of the thermal power plant 50 *kos* away from his sanatorium, the wounds of some convalescing youth may begin to heal…[44]

The several metaphors of aural and corporeal rejuvenation are striking. Whether tractors or bulldozers or the distant thermal power plants, Renu was fascinated by how they affected rural subjects.

In the interview, Renu and Kumar would discuss the implications of these material changes in the rural countryside. Kumar asks Renu how the common masses perceive "the big colonies, colossal machinery, huge dams, electricity poles, siphons, culverts, canals and the network of canals made and used in the Kosi project." He wants to know from Renu what impact these have had on forms of expression and the rural psyche. Renu points out that rural speech is one index of the impact of these changes. He tells Kumar that "some words have been amalgamated into rural speech even if in their corrupted form" and that "the process of creation has not finished."[45] One has only to think of characters like Bhimmal Mama who renders a series of English words into Hindi, like *dimakrishi* (democracy), *pradhyush* (produce) and *tra* (telegram) in *Parti Parikatha*. The adoption and eventual vernacularizing of English terms in this instance is evidence of the robustness of the rural idiom and an optimism surrounding the processes of rural transformation.[46]

As this brief reception history of regionalism and Renu, its most iconic figure, suggests regionalism was increasingly tethered not just to social reform but to a technologically enhanced

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[44] Phanishvarnath Renu, "Rashtra-nirman mem lekhak ka yogdan,"1957. *Renu racnavali*, ed. By Bharat Yayavar, Vol. 5 (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1995), 271.
[45] Kumar, "Miliye," 26.
[46] Renu, *Parti,* 24.

nature. It is only by turning to *Parti Parikatha* that the full scope of how Renu elaborated this vision within the rural world becomes apparent.

II. Tales of the *Parti:* Community and the Reclamation of Wasteland

Parti Parikatha is divided into two parts the first of which covers a three-year period of the land survey and settlement operation that began in Bihar in Eastern India in 1952. The second describes the implementation of *gram panchayats* and the beginning of the construction of the Kosi barrage in North Bihar.

In the first part of the novel, Paranpur is polarized by competing claims to village property and inheritance in the wake of the implementation of land reforms. The government survey includes "land and fields, riverbanks, gardens and orchards and ponds" that are all tied up in litigation. Maps are redrawn and "the measuring chain" (*jarib ki kadi*) clanks over the land establishing "new accounts, new titles, and new owners."[47] Several political interests in the village including the local Congress and Socialist party members attempt to capitalize on the anti-zamindari sentiments brewing in the village. The land survey has crippled all democratic institutions in the village. Appointments to the middle vernacular school are rife with caste polarizations. Similarly, the hospital set up by the district board and the community library are in disuse.

It is amidst this social and political turmoil that the prodigal landlord Jitendra Mishra, locally known as Jitan Babu, returns to the village of Paranpur and declares that he is going to cultivate the wasteland (*parti*). The villagers are skeptical, especially because the wasteland's

[47] Renu, *Parti Parikatha,* 30.

scraggly, arid vegetation services neighboring pastoral communities. When Jitan Babu puts an injunction on pastoral rights declaring that he is going to plant "*sonabang*, *lalmegh*, and Japanese jute plants" the villagers are resistant to this change. They are puzzled by why Jitan Babu would break up the *parti* since "every year those that have been displaced by the Kosi, the pastoralists from Saharsa, bring their cattle here [...] and he [Jitan Babu] gets two *rupees* for each cow and three *rupees* for each bull."[48] These suspicions are compounded by the tractor that Jitan Babu has acquired to plough the wasteland. As the tractor rumbles across the wasteland, tearing up weeds and preparing the soil for cultivation, rumors spread amongst the villagers about this strange contraption.[49] The first section of the novel ends with reiterating the opening lines of the novel, "barren, uninhabited, endless region," setting up the denouement of the novel in the second section.

The second section of the novel marks the beginning of the construction of the Kosi barrage and the setting up of the project encampment for officials working on the project. An official of the Kosi construction team–Dr Raychaudhari—visits Jitan Babu and they discuss different pest-resistant crops that can be grown in the region. Meanwhile, an engineer in the distant capital of Delhi comes up with a plan to revive a dried-up tributary of the Kosi leading to further submergence of farmland. The force of these developments is felt in Paranpur. Jitan Babu encourages the staging of a performance that brings together folk stories from the region about the Kosi and a movie on the images of flood and destruction by the river. The performance

[48] Ibid., 50.
[49] Domestic production of tractors in the country started from around 1960–61 with 880 tractors and by 2010 had crossed 350, 000. Until 1960 the demand for tractors was met entirely through imports. The tractor Jitan Babu drives is imported. War surplus tractors and bulldozers were imported for land reclamation and cultivation.

culminates with the projection of a brown shadow on the stage-curtain being slowly overtaken by waves of greenery to the accompaniment of a *bhatiyali* tune on the flute.

This constant juxtaposition of a folk sensorium with an aesthetic of technological mastery is the definitive feature of the novel. The region's ecology is crucial to the articulation of these contrapuntal strands. At the very beginning of the novel the reader is given two accounts of the ecology of the region. The Kosi, also known as the "River of Sorrow," has turned the region into a barren wasteland:

> It is possible that about three to four hundred years ago Mother Kosi wreaked havoc in this region. Thousands of acres of land were paralyzed. A large portion of this land turned to naught. Wells, ponds, rivers and water channels were silted by white sands. And the fading greenery was replaced with an advancing brown hue that covered the land.[50]

Immediately following this description, the narrator shifts to the folksongs and legends surrounding the river. These are an intrinsic part of knowing rivers in the Indian context. [51] The narrator remarks: "There must be a tale (*katha*) about this wasteland. A tragic tale about this barren earth."[52] The narrative now masterfully moves between the tale and another narrative form — the *parikatha* (a story incorporated in another).[53] The distinct structural feature of the

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[50] Ibid.,11. For a history of colonial policy concerning this riverine ecosystem and the British institution of canals and embankments in order to facilitate sharecropping over more adaptive farming see, Christopher V. Hill, *River of Sorrow: Environment and Social Control in Riparian North India, 1770–1994* (Michigan: Association for Asian Studies, 1997).

[51] E.T. Prideaux, the district magistrate of Bhagalpur (1941–1943) collected some songs on the Kosi. Brajeshvar Mullick published a collection of Maithili songs on the Kosi called the Songs of Kosi (*Kosi git*). See Brajeshvar Mullick, *Koshi git* (Panchgaslia Sarai, 1947). The complete publication details of these collections are not known to me currently.

[52] Renu, *Parti,*11

[53] The classification of prose narratives into *katha* and *akhyan* can be traced back to Sanskrit poetics but open to much debate within the tradition. The *parikatha* is a term that emerges along with others such as the *khandkatha* and *sakalkatha* in order to classify a proliferation of several

parikatha is the concatenation of numerous anecdotes told by several people that often compete with each. Everyone has a tale to tell about the Kosi, including the: "Old buffalo-herder" and the "weed smoking *fakirs*."[54]

It is this old buffalo herder who recounts the tale of the temperamental virgin river Kosi. He first calls to mind his guru, then putting his "hand to his ear, he begins the invocation (*manglacaran*) which he calls the *bandauni*." Kosi's home is the kingdom of western Tirhut and she is married into a family in the east. Kosi is ill-treated by her mother-in-law and her two daughters and is finally forced to flee her husband's home. As the grief-stricken river rushes through the plains, trying to return to her home in the west—Tirhut—she leaves devastation in her wake: "[F]illing gullies and streambeds, rivers and riverlets, big and small, all with sand; turning aside to throttle and choke paths and trails and *ghats* with *Babul,* spiny plum-trees, *Khair, Sahur, Paniyala, Tinkathia* and all manner of spiny trees, thorny bushes and the like, making everything impassable."[55]

Interestingly, Renu draws on local legends and folklore about the Kosi rather than from the epic and puranic tales.[56] Secondly, and more significantly, the *katha* and the *parikatha* move between anthropomorphizing the barren land and the aggrieved river. It is difficult to tell them apart. Where does the river end and land begin if both morph and keep changing? Environmental

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kinds of prose narratives inspired by oral tradition. *The Encyclopedia of Indian Literature* defines it as "numerous anecdotes told by different persons" and attributes this classification to Anandavardhan. See Radhavallabh Tripathi, "Fiction (Sanskrit)," in *The Encyclopedia of Indian Literature*,Vol. 2, ed.Amaresh Dutta (New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 2005), 1267–1269.

[54] Renu, *Parti,* 13.

[55] Ibid., 15.

[56] For a survey of some of these legends from the epics and *puranas,* see Dinesh Kumar Mishra, "The legends of Kosi," in *Himal South Asia*, February 27, 2009, https://www.himalmag.com/the-legends-of-kosi/.

historians have more recently shown that large swaths of land bordering rivers and deltas elided rigid definitions of what constituted "land."[57]

In one of the first ecocritical readings of the novel, Amul Gyawali discusses how *Parti Parikatha* is often read only within entangled paradigms of the post-colonial state and society, and center and periphery.[58] What is often overlooked yet equally important, according to Gyawali, is the paradigm of man and nature. Gyawali highlights the significance of local ecology and its impact on the denizens of the region. This situates ecology alongside the social, political, and economic realities that inform the novel.

However, what is striking is how the "realities" of ecology are rarely presented naturalistically in the novel. The folk tale makes possible an aesthetics of scale and force that is way more compelling than a more realistic account of the suffering and devastation the river leaves in its wake. Moreover, Renu's description focuses exclusively on land as barren. As I show later, this is a significant elision given that the region is home to other adaptive ways of dwelling. What then does one make for the kind of description of the Kosi that the opening pages of the novel present for the reader? I mentioned earlier that the novel continues to imbue an aesthetic to technology through its attunement to a folk sensorium. This becomes evident when

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[57] Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt and Gopa Samanta. *Dancing with the River: People and Life on the Chars of South Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Debjani Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta: The Making of Calcutta* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018). The twin instruments of property law and hydraulic technologies (Kosi dam) that reorganize this mobile landscape of soaking ecologies into an agrarian frontier resonates with Bhattacharyya's work on the creation of urban Calcutta from marshy lowland.

[58] Amul Gyawali, "Discovering Ecocriticism in Hindi: Renu's tale of a barren land," MULOSIGE/SOAS university, http://mulosige.soas.ac.uk/renu-eco-criticism-hindi/. Accessed Dec 10th, 2018.

after recounting the tales surrounding the Kosi, the novel stages another mythic force as a counterpoint to the powerful river.

This force first appears immediately after the folk stories of the anthropomorphic story of Kosi's ill-treatment by her in-laws. The novel shifts to describe a figure in the distance — the character Bhavesh Kumar who is visiting the village of Paranpur. Kumar is described photographing different aspects of this wasteland (*parti*). He compares the viewfinder of his camera to "his own eye, the real eye" through which he sees the land as it will be "in thirty years" turned into a "rainbow-land" with swaying crops and "by that time color photography will have developed too." He imagines villages transformed with tractors threshing bumper harvests; engineers and workers building dams; and scientists conducting experiments on the soil. All evidence of "man's battle against nature." [59]

This battle between man and nature becomes a constant refrain in the novel. Another instance of this is the pilgrimage that the novel's main protagonist Jitendra Mishra or Jitan Babu makes to see the Damodar Valley Project. Peering through the binoculars he explains, to his fellow activist Iravati Malhotra, how the coal from mines will travel to the Konar river turning its water to steam from where the "huge white skeletons of demons," that are transformers, will send waves of electrical power to "Patna, to Calcutta, Bihar! Bengal!" Standing by the river Konar, "under the shade of a huge crane by the damsite," Jitan wonders when similar work will begin in the "region devoured by Kosi." And inspired by Jitan Babu, Iravati is instilled with hope that "man does not murder and rape only; man can give shape and form too." And that man is working hard to "people the wilderness, to make the barren tracts green with trees and crops."[60]

[59] Renu, *Parti,* 18.
[60] Ibid., 227–229.

This drama is embedded in a parallel project of tracing the lineaments of community by a second figure who is introduced along with Bhavesh Kumar. This is Surpati Ray, an ethnographer, who travels by bullock-cart and is working on a doctoral degree. Ray is engaged in taking down the "names of river-ghats" and records on his tape-recorder the "stories and legends" attached to these names.[61] He conducts interviews, collects rare documents, and jots down all the details of local festivals. Surpati is absorbed in piecing together the village mind (*gram man*) and the folk wisdom of village community. Therefore, Paranpur in the viewfinder of Bhavesh Kumar's camera and Paranpur documented in Surpati Rai's tape recorder, converge in the story of a village undergoing an epoch-making transformation.

Throughout the novel the battle to cultivate the *parti* carried on both individually by Jitan Babu and the influx of information on hybrid seeds, tractors, and bumper crops is punctuated by several folk festivals and performances. For example, there is the performance of *Sunnari Naika*, a traditional ballad, that presents a folk history of Paranpur's five water pools, dug up during a drought to bring water to the village. This tale of a community brought together by the vicissitudes of drought is again recounted towards the end of the novel. As the preparations for the construction of the Kosi dam reach a crescendo, the tale of *Sunnari Naika* reappears. To the distant rumbling of the Kosi operation party's tractor, Jiten Babu hums a verse from *Sunnari Naika*, "*Namma, Naika Sunnari, sun le more bachania re-nam, bhat-bhat, bhat-bhat-bhat-bhat…*" thereby mimicking the sounds of the tractor and harmonizing it to the folk song's melody.[62]

[61] Ibid., 19.
[62] Ibid., 370.

So, what is the significance of this reading of the mutual imbrication of community and technology in the novel? Often the processes of agricultural modernization and community life have been sundered apart in readings of the novel. If critics recognize the distinctive nature of Renu's depiction of community life (*loksamskriti*), they ignore how it is inextricably linked to the *jouissance* of rural modernization. A closer attention to the novel reveals that, rather than the promises of democratic self-governance and the hurly-burly of clashes between protagonists from different castes and political orientations (all depicted with gentle irony), the novel is more interested in bringing the contrapuntal rhythms of community and technologically enhanced nature together. The impersonal processes of modernization and a fragmented village community are brought into mutual attunement. Its large canvas of characters, often criticized for what critics saw as its fragmentation (*bikharav*), is meant to convey individual voices without sacrificing the sense of a non-differentiated community ethos. Due to the multiplicity of characters and its descriptive and ethnographic excess the novel was often critiqued as "romantic" in progressive circles. The initial reception history of the novel shows several critical reviews of the novel by critics like Ram Vilas Sharma and Candrakant Bandivadekar. Both drew attention to the absence of certain kinds of realistic depiction leading to the romanticization of community. Bandivadekar, for example, observed that the novel gave no insight into the "conditions of the impoverished," or "what or how much is cooked in the homes of the *nattin* toli or the *raidas toli*." He went to say that, "*it is as if all the events in Paranpur take place in the streets, thoroughfares, and fields*[...] an author who expects to present an all-encompassing depiction of a village cannot afford to ignore these aspects." [63]

[63] Candrakant Bandivadekar, "Parti-Parikatha: Phanishvarnath 'Renu'," in *Upanyas:Sthiti aur gati* (New Delhi: Purvoday Prakashan, 1977),104. For a reading that rescues Renu from the charge of

I have argued that rather than a granular engagement with village life Renu poses a tumultuous river and a distant dam against a non-differentiated community. Its public quality that Bandivadekar finds insufficiently political, actually gains a significance in my reading. As section one demonstrated, there was a reason why rural environs and their transformation gain such aesthetic and emotive traction for Renu. The romanticization of community, that both his critics and admirers focus on, is inextricably linked to his attempt to craft an aesthetics of modernized nature. That this imaginary was shared across the political spectrum is evident in another iconic regional novel –Nagarjun's *Varun ke bete*. Set in the same region as *Parti Parikatha*, the novel focuses on a particular community living on the banks of the Kosi and the forms of human habitation and dwelling made possible by her tumultuous waters.

IV. Fishing, Local Ecology, and Nagarjun's *Varun ke bete*

Nagarjun's *Varun ke bete* (Sons of Varun, 1957) depicts the region not from the optics of land but from water.[64] The novel tells the story of two nomadic, fishing communities called Malahi and Gomrhiyari, and how the Zamindari Abolition Act of 1950 and the Bihar Land Reforms Act of 1950 impact the livelihoods of these communities. The plot revolves around how these fishing communities organize against the takeover of certain waterbodies by local zamindars.

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being overtly 'romantic' see, Suvas Kumar, "Parti Parikatha: Gaom ki atma ki tutati papdiyam," in *Phanishvarnath Renu athart mridangiye ka marm* (Hazaribagh: Vipaksh Prakashan, 1991), 204–220.

[64] Nagarjun, *Varun ke bete,* 1957 in *Nagarjun: cuni hui racanaem*. Ed. Shobhakant Mishra, (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1985), 261–346.

Like Varun, the god of the oceans and water, the two communities make their living from the aqueous bounty of a continually flooding Kosi. The novel focuses on two topographical features of this flood-prone region that are of significance to these communities. The first is a "three-hundred-year-old" waterbody called "gadhpokar":

> It was not any ordinary pond (*talai*) or the kind of small pond (*cabhacca*) you would find inside an orchard; it was the well-known 'gadhpokar' The name had been blunted on the local tongue and had now become 'garokhar'. Counting all the surrounding mounds (*bhind*), the marshy lowland (*kachar*), and the large expanse with water, the garokhar in total covered nearly 50 acres of land.[65]

The second natural feature of the landscape is another temporary formation known as a *diara* land in Bihar and Bengal:[66]

> About a mile away to the east from the village […] is a large *char* […] comprising about two and half *kos.* This land is called *dhanha char.* The Sisodia kings of Mangalgarh were initially its zamindars, now it has come under the special supervision of the regional officer.[67]

Though the region is described as "dahlan" (flood-prone), the rising and falling waters of the Kosi are "like a boon" for the community's fishermen who are able to catch many *maunds* of fish from September into the winter months.

Nagarjun uses a series of highly localized words from Maithili to describe the different kinds of water bodies and kinds of plants that grow in the region:

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[65] Nagarjun, *Varun,* 263.
[66] The definition of *diara* land may be taken as the land lying adjacent to or surrounded by a perennial river. Such lands are known by different names like *khadar* land, *char* land, *mara* land, *majha* land, *dariayi* land, *kachar* land, riverine area etc.
[67] Nagarjun, *Varun*, 272.

> In the Malahi- Gomrhiyari, community there are about 30–35 odd families of fisherfolk […] they head out to fish in the surrounding region for about 5-7 *kos* or upto 10-15 *kos*. Wherever they found a pond (*pokhar*) or tanks (*tal-taliyam*) here, however many rivers and lakes (*jhil*), any place that water collected was their hunting ground. They didn't only get fish but also water chestnuts (*singhada*), *talmakhana*, lotus flowers, lotus pods, lotus stalks, *kadhad*, *kesaur*, and *sarukh*. There was even a demand for the rounded, shiny leaves of the lotus plants in the market.[68]

Initially the communities of Malahi-Gomrhiyari enjoy rights of usufruct to water bodies. The novel tracks the complications that emerge due to the legal loopholes in the various land reforms:

> In keeping with the abolition of zamindari, they [the zamindars of Mithila] had now lost the rights to levy a tax (*lagan*) or charge rent (*malguzari*). Self-cultivated land, gardens, orchards, wells, ponds, property offered up to the gods and goddesses, grazing lands, wastelands, the banks of rivers, and borderlands–in matters of all kinds of immovable property the law had given owners complete freedom. As a result, they secretly began to sell ponds and grazing lands– 'make hay while the sun shines.'[69]

The abolition of zamindari and the land survey and settlement leads to the transference of the *gadhpokar* to the zamindars of Satghara who in turn auction fishing rights to another fishing community.

The sale of the land around these water bodies constitutes the immediate context for the community to politically organize to resist the sale of this water way. An advancing agricultural frontier threatens to eclipse this unique landscape that has sustained the community:

> In the last two three years roughly two-thirds of the trees had been cut down. The rich alluvial lands surrounding the riverbanks (*kachar*) have been settled. Seeing the swaying crops within the borders of the *gadpokhar,* people would say that it would disappear in five to ten years and only a shallow-muddied pond would remain.[70]

[68] Ibid., 273.
[69] Ibid., 281.
[70] Ibid.

The transfer of property rights leads to confrontations between the community and the police and the novel ends on a note of simmering class antagonism with members of the community forming a *Machua Sangh* (Fisherman's Organization) and resisting arrest. The caste and class antagonisms that are described in the novel continue to this day. Environmentalist Mukul Sharma has documented how lower-caste and Dalit communities in the Mithila region continue to organize and resist the takeover of several large and small waterbodies by powerful landlords in the region.[71]

Nagarjun's work has appealed to more radical socialist and left-leaning political views because of its grasp of the rural world of Bihar and his commitment to social justice. Nagarjun's own political vision is best described as "anarchist"– a term Prabhakar Machve uses for the unique blend of democratic and communist political visions that comprise Nagarjun's work.[72] Nagarjun initially trained as a Sanskrit *acarya*. He eventually converted to Buddhism, was imprisoned three times for organizing peasants in Bihar, and spent much of his life as an itinerant (*fakkad*) activist telling truth to power in his characteristic poetic voice.

One can see aspects of this political vision in the novel as well. The principal character of the novel and prominent leader of the two communities–Mohan Manjhi– is a member of the communist Kisan Sabha that organizes the community to fight for their fishing rights. It is also evident in the radicalization of the Malahi-Gomrhiyari community and the novel's critique of political organizations like the *Hind Hitakari Samaj* and the Congress party that seek to exercise influence in the region. The novel is critical of the exploitation of rural labor for building the

[71] Mukul Sharma, "Dalit Memories and Water Rights," in *Caste and Nature*: *Dalits and Indian Environmental Politics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017), 161–211.
[72] Prabhakar Macve, "Nagarjun aur unki kavita," in *Nagarjun* (Delhi: Rajpal and Sons, 1977), 7.

Kosi dam under the ruse of voluntary labor (*shram dan*) and the corruption of officials in the region.

However, Nagarjun's canonization as a people's poet and radical writer has come at the expense of muting the more "naturalistic" aspects of his writing. *Varun ke bete* deploys a minute observation of the communities embedded in the floodplain. The novel's descriptive style suggests an attention to the poetics of dwelling practiced by the two fishing communities. Its omniscient narration dwells on how the community's temporary settlements are embedded in the landscape offering us a panoramic glimpse (*jhamki*):

> Two or three sets of families would cumulatively stake claim to bits of this land. Dozens of little makeshift thatched huts stood on the dry land…In the daylight, this world of huts would come alive [...] half-naked old men mending nets, old women smoking hookahs, young women wearing grimy, torn *dhotis* grinding turmeric and chilli next to blackened pots on clay ovens. [73]

The novel also gives granular descriptions of how the community fishes, the names of various kinds of nets and knives used, and different kinds of fish found in the region.

Critical readings of the novel that solely focus on class antagonism have usually overlooked this descriptive economy. Nagarjun's attention to the numerous names for features of the landscape and his attention to the complex interplay between land, water and people in the Mithila region, opens him to precisely the same critiques that were levelled at Renu. Critics pointed out that Nagarjun's characters failed to match the stature of Premcand's Surdas in *Rangbhumi* or Hori in *Godan*.[74] Indu Prakash Pandey takes note of this peculiarity, pointing out

[73] Nagarjun, *Varun*, 273.
[74] Devishankar Avasthi, *Vivek ke rang* (Varanasi: Bharatiya Jnanpith Prakashan, 1965), 207; Ramdarsh Misra, *Hindi Upanyas*,199.

that in Nagarjun's novels "plot-construction is spasmodic […] the background, i.e., environmental setting, becomes the foreground." She also notes that "characters are lively and interesting as examples of environmental features, and not so much as individuals."[75]

Nagarjun sounds a contrapuntal note to Renu's vision of community and technology by making questions of equitable distribution central to such a vision. But here he also shares common ground with Renu in that *Varun ke bete* imagines an emancipated community through a technologically enhanced nature. This vision subsumes dwelling in shifting landscapes with a community embedded in an expansion of technology. One has also only to recall the chant-like poem "*annpacisi"* in which Nagarjun talks about the enchantment (*maya*) of life-sustaining grain (*annbrahm*) that will create a "new constitution, new machine," to know how he echoes Renu's concerns.[76]

V. *Mati ke log*: Dwelling, Settlement and *Samaj*

Another significant iteration of the theme of nature, community, and technology can be found in the novel *Mati ke log, sone ki naiya* (People of the soil: Golden Boat, 1967) by Mayanand Mishra. Nearly a decade separates this novel from the preceding ones. Bihar had witnessed a drought and famine in the years 1966-67 and the Green Revolution was implemented a little later. These factors would make the emphasis on settled agriculture in the novel that much more urgent. *Mati ke log* is a story of a small fishing settlement that springs up on the eastern banks of another tributary of the Kosi—the Udha river. Fed by the Kosi, the Udha is initially a boon for the region which boasts of "bustling ghats, numerous shops, hundreds of travelers, and

[75] Pandey, *Regionalism*, 16.
[76] Nagarjun, "Annpacisi," in *Purani jutiyom ka koras* 1974 (Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1983), 59.

folk performances of *Rannu Sardar*."[77] Through an omniscient narration the reader is introduced to the peculiar challenges posed by the Kosi in this region and learns that between the years 1945 to 1950, the Kosi has moved westward.

Like in *Varun be bete*, there is an impressionist description of these dwellings in a flood-ravaged landscape:

> These settlements (*tole*), little thatched huts, irregular roofs—they looked very odd. These small settlements were spread out from the north to the south for about three to four miles. After every 10 to 15 homes there is an interval of wasteland. On the wasteland clumps of grasses of *kas* and dusty *jhau,* mounds of sands, on the mounds scattered small *aak* plants, and around them *padher* and and *jhau* bushes; between every second or fourth house– earthen wells; in the cattle shed there would be an animal or two; in the front brinjal, chilli and sweet potato plants, numerous fishing nets, *tapi* and *gamj*[78] hung out to dry, semi-clad children rolling in the sand.... And the womenfolk wearing soiled rags engaged in daily chores. Life here follows a very distinct rhythm (*jivan tarang*).[79]

The periodic flooding of the Kosi determines the constantly shifting landscape of human settlement:

> As the Kosi river moved westward, the people living in the underlying regions of the west, those that could easily abandon their settlement (*dih*) and sunder their attachment to place; those that could make a living through sharecropping or labor; or those that had nothing in terms of local property moved eastwards and settled there […] In the Kosi region such settlements (*tole*) come up in a week and if necessary or if devasted by the Kosi are deserted overnight. People flee. They settle down wherever they can muster up resources for food like in the hunting-gathering age; otherwise they are uprooted and move elsewhere. There is no attachment to place, no property to tie them down, no long-established lineage and no sense of shame tying them down [...] And these settlements

[77] Mayanand Mishra, *Mati ke log,* 9. The story of Rannu Sardar is also popular in the region of Purnea. In this folktale the River Kosi remains unmarried because of her wayward, free-spirited ways. A warrior, Rannu Sardar, asks to marry Kosi and she agrees on the condition that he build a dam on her waters within a certain designated period of time. He fails to curb her waters and accepts defeat.
[78] These are types of fishing nets used in the region.
[79] Mishra, *Mati ke log*, 17.

> don't have any name because they never become villages. They remain settlements. And people from settled villages know these Kosi stricken folk as *navtoliya* or *navghariya*.[80]

As the River Kosi continues to migrate westwards, the Udha dries up but the movement of the river doesn't break the back of the fishing community immediately. The Udha continues to have water for few months in the year and the settlement sustains itself from fishing. Members of the community diversify into pastoralism since the local *kas-pater* and *jhoa* trees can sustain cattle and bring in good revenue for the community. They also use these spindly trees to weave baskets to supplement their income.

The construction of the Kosi dam adversely impacts this adaptive arrangement when the "Kosi planners" decide to close off the mouth of the river Udha completely. Now there is absolutely no water "even for a crow to take a bath in."[81] The local block development officer (B.D.O.) confirms that the work on the dam has commenced and that the fishing community will have to "drive tractors and take to farming."[82] The narrative now shifts to focalizing a collective community and its reaction to these developments. They perceive the tractor as a "demon (*daitya*)" that can "pulverize two hundred *bighas* of land" and doesn't need a "plow or a bullock."[83]

In a community comprised largely of sharecroppers and pastoralists, *Mati ke log* now focuses on the peasant Hitlal. Through Hitlal, the novel focuses on the subjectivity of small sharecroppers who dream of owning land. There are two vivid dream sequences in which Hitlal imagines "tilling the land" and owning farmland with "swaying crops and their yellow-green

[80] Ibid., 18.
[81] Ibid., 20.
[82] Ibid., 25.
[83] Ibid., 26.

eaves."[84] This is a significant development from both *Parti Parikatha* and *Varun ke bete* that rarely spend any time on depicting interiority. It is also significant that the novel now significantly expands the circumference of its character's personal life. For instance, the novel adds a subplot that Hitlal's wife has eloped and is living with another man. This subplot awaits its resolution in Hitlal finally being able to own his own plot of land.

The plot now hinges on overcoming the resistance to farming given the community's dependence on fishing and a pastoral livelihood. In a meeting to discuss the suggestion to start collective farming, the itinerant nature of the community becomes a subject of discussion. Hitlal talks about how it is not feasible to migrate since further east is a land of "starvation." "More importantly," chimes in another peasant, "it doesn't feel right to leave the community (*samaj*) repeatedly" and the entire community should "live and die together."[85]

After the plan to implement collective farming takes shape, a series of narrative complications ensue including an absconding Block Development Officer (B.D.O.) and a pestilence that threatens the entire standing crop. Each of these complications are meant to illustrate the challenges faced by a new dispensation and how new technologies can tackle them. They are, however, also poignant reminders of new systems of precarity that were to become synonymous with the modernization of agriculture.

Mayanand Mishra's *Mati ke log* indexes the distance that has been traversed in the *amcalik upanyas* in the intervening years. All three writers imagine forms of settlement and village community in relation to the rapid socio-ecological transformations ushered in by agricultural modernization. This included an expanding agrarian frontier, the building of large

[84] Ibid., 84.
[85] Ibid., 88–89.

dams, the implementation of the Green Revolution by the early 1960s, and a series of new technologies like tractors, pesticides and hybrid seeds. I have shown how regional writers viewed these processes from the optics of highly specific communities and regional ecologies.

The ecocritical reading I offer emphasizes how a new relation between technology and rural community had to engage with the nature of human dwellings in ecologically volatile environments. This was not simply a static relation between character and environment. If Renu depicted a majestic tempestuous river he also imagined the technology that would curb the powers of nature. Similarly, Nagarjun's vision of political radicalization is eventually rooted in a vision of an *equitable* control over the resources of the floodplain. In *Mati ke log*, Hitlal imagines a time when the work on the barrage and canal is completed: "There will be electricity everywhere and water will reach the fields" and "crops will sway everywhere."[86] Mishra makes a sense of community (*samaj*) contingent on grasping the possibilities opened up by embracing the demon (*daitya*) of technology.

The post-independence Hindi regional novel developed an aesthetics of community in relation to the unpredictable patterns of river and flood plain. Pursued through the optics of rural communities, the ecological and topographical specificities of the rural-regional became the site where the object lessons of technologies of modernization were staged. In contrast, from the 1990s novelists have returned to village communities at the dawn of independence in a mode of critique.

VI. From *Ujar* (barren) to *Ujarna* (uproot): Dam and Displacement in Virendra Jain's *Dub*

[86] Mishra, *Mati*, 116.

Virendra Jain's *Dub* (1991) is set in the region of Bundelkhand that spans the states of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The novel captures the slow attrition of a village community once it is declared to be in the submergence area of the Rajghat dam. The Rajghat dam was inaugurated around the same period that Damodar River Valley project and the Kosi dam, that form the context of the three novels *Parti Parikatha*, *Varun ke bete*, and *Mati ke log* I analyzed in the previous sections.

Divided into three sections the novel spans the period between India's independence in 1947 and the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. The village Ladai, the epicenter of the story, comprises numerous high, middling, and low castes. The precise number of families in the village are archived in the memory of its aging protagonist Mate (also known as/also called Imrat Singh) who is an Ahir by caste. Through Mate the reader learns that there are "twenty houses of Baniyas, fifty-five Ahir, three Kachi houses, five Thakur, two houses of Gadhari, twelves belonging to the Chamar, one house of Basor, one house of water Dhimar, four Baman, three ironsmiths, one goldsmith, one chaukidar, two houses of Sali one Dhobi, three Khvas, and one carpenter."[87] Its caste component, as becomes evident later, determines a series of occupational patterns of migration and settlement.

Initially the village coheres around the community ties of the numerically significant Ahir, Thakur and Jain (*Sav*) communities. The novel describes how the rhythms of the day are interwoven with the daily lives of these communities:

[87] Virendra Jain, *Dub*, 13.

> Mother dusk (*samjha maiya*) descends twice in Ladai. First, she comes immediately after the setting of the sun when the sounds of the temple bells and *arati* arise from the temple of the *baniyas*. At this time all the Jain *Sav* families finish their evening meal and congregate in the temple for the *arati* and sermon. This is also the time when peasants return from working on the fields.[88]

Immediately following this, dusk descends again about "an hour and a half later." This time her arrival is heralded by the pealing bells of the *Vaishnav* temple."[89]

Giriraj Kishor has pointed out that *Dub* is a meditation on how villages are settled and uprooted and the processes involved in this phenomenon.[90] For example, there are violent purges buried in Ladai's recent past. The largely Hindu residents of Ladai are complicit in the massacre of a small Muslim community in the wake of Partition. Similarly, the novel tracks how members of prominent communities like the *Savs* and *Thakurs* migrate for education but are inextricably tied to the village through land holdings, rent, and money lending. These patterns of migration are superimposed on generational histories and memories of settlement. The reader learns of these whenever a character remembers how their community came to settle in the village of Ladai. For the wealthy *Sav*, this history is traced to the political fallout of the revolt of 1857. Similarly, the *Thakurs* of the village settle in the region after fleeing the persecution of the British. But Ladai has older layers of settlement that the novel revisits. These cumulative histories of settlement gain significance as events unfold.

News that the British have left ushering in self-rule (*svaraj*) spreads slowly in the village. The precise implications of this transition are deliberately muted in the novel. The introduction of electoral politics and local self-governance continue to be riven with caste antagonisms like in

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[88] Ibid., 36.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Giriraj Kishor, "Do samskrtiyom ka antaral," in Manohar Lal, ed. *Virendra Jain ka sahitya* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1997), 87–88.

the early regional novels. The impending *pancayat* elections sow the seeds of intra-caste rivalries beginning with the social ostracism of Moti Sav who is expelled from the Jain community and moves to his in-laws in a nearby *tehsil.* Travelers return bearing news of rapid changes in the offing, including the news that the village of Ladai will be in the submergence zone of the Rajghat dam.

As the construction on the Rajghat dam begins, Ladai becomes difficult to access. Roads are dug up and the provision of water to villages dries up due to the diversion of the water to the dam. Villagers begin to migrate away from Ladai. It is then that patterns of migration spring into action with more prosperous members of the village community using already established social networks to migrate away from Ladai. Prominent members of the Sav community, who have migrated to urban centers, conceive elaborate plans to hoodwink peasants (*raiyat*) into handing over land in order to pocket the compensation. The combination of bureaucratic corruption and feudal forms of patronage and debt are poised to break the back of the villagers. The final nail in the coffin is when one of the dam's embankments collapses and inundates several villages.

The government falsely claims that it evacuated villages before the embankment collapsed. Enraged at this blatant lie, Mate calls the government "a liar, a big (*maha*) liar, a complete (*sarasar*) liar." The novel ends with this accusation echoing across "hills, plains, caves, in villages, in towns, in cities, in metros, in lakes, in ponds, in rivers, in estuaries, in the seas, in the oceans" and reaching "the dumb, the deaf, those who are asleep, the awake the ignorant, the wise, the dead, the living, the shameless, and the shameful…"[91]

[91] Jain, *Dub*, 288.

I began with describing how *Dub* was reminiscent of paradigms of post-independence *amcalik sahitya* and how a particular feature was the recreation of authentic rural speech. Jain uses this device not to represent the diversity of dialects in a national framework but as a critique of language hierarchies. This becomes evident in the way the novel mocks official (*sarkari*) Hindi and demonstrates its distance from the language of the people. For example, the speech of a local politico, who is from the royal family of the region, is described as a "garbled (*gisar-pitar*) language" that is not "understood by anyone," in the village. This incomprehension is further accentuated by the fact that the speech given by the Queen mother (*rajmata*) is in Hindi while the residents of Ladai speak Bundeli. The substance of this incomprehensible speech is then presented in a list of nouns: "Nehru ji, Congress, Madhya Pradesh, Dam, Rajghat, Betva river, You people, Bundelkhand, District Guna, Bhakra, Nangal," — all words the villagers have heard for the first time.[92]

This incomprehension of the villagers is in contrast to a novel like *Parti Parikatha* where standard Hindi and bureaucratic terms are inflected by local speech. *Dub* consistently makes standard Hindi and terms such as freedom (*azadi*) or progress (*taraqqi*) inscrutable. It also suggests these ideas are poorly embodied in material objects. For example, Massav (Master Sav), the local schoolteacher and one of the few educated members of the village, struggles to explain freedom (*azadi*) and progress (*tarikki*) to the villagers of Ladai. Besides the "motor, road, school, gazette" and other such "paltry proof," Massav has not much to offer in terms of explanation.[93]

The novel also constructs remoteness and inaccessibility as a fundamental feature of Ladai. There is a weekly motor car (*motargadi*) that ferries people from Ladai to the main towns.

[92] Ibid., 61.
[93] Ibid., 58.

The incredulity with which the illiterate villagers perceive the car serves to defamiliarize its ordinariness for urbanites (*shahrati*). Similarly, the helicopter (*cilgadi*) is a sign of the ominous presence of outsiders and is often described as menacing. Mate often shuttles between this form of rural naivete and a native intelligence that unmasks the disjuncture between the rural mind *(gram man*) and the material indices of progress and development. When news of the construction of the Rajghat dam spreads in the village, the meanings of electricity (*bijli*) and dam (*bandh*) are themselves shown to be untranslatable by the same narrative strategy.

What then is Virendra Jain's relation to the legacy of *amcalikta*? Though *Dub* activates memories of *amcalik sahitya*, it is particularly lacking in any affective attachment (*ragatmak lagav*) to a rural ethos so typical of *amcalikta*. Ramdarsh Mishra, a critic and first-generation regional writer himself, points to the absence of this affective relation in *Dub*: "Aren't there any festivals in this village? [...] Don't characters see the trees, plants, fields, crops, and rivers and ponds and have an aesthetic reaction to them?"[94] Mishra fails to note that that aesthetic was crafted in the context of the transformation and modernization of rural environment. In fact, the regional writer that best epitomized this affect was Renu.

The critique of *amcalikta* is now not its failure to be realist but its complicity with realism. For instance, Sudhish Pacauri insists that *Dub* is neither a realist text nor an example of "colorful regionalism" (*rangin amcalikta*).[95] Both these genealogies of the Hindi novel are tied to the violence of development. Literary realism, Pacauri argues, is complicit with development and the "sole meaning of development" is to dismantle self-contained and self-satisfied village societies through the "green revolution, electricity, roads, communication, market and capital."

[94] Ramdarsh Mishra, "Vyavastha bhi," 103.
[95] Sudhish Pacauri, "Uttaryatharthvad," 81.

Pacauri argues that *Dub* arrests the telos of development and shows that national history is disjunct from the lived temporality of the villagers of Ladai. Pachauri's reading resonates with a significant moment in postcolonial literary studies that has questioned the radical potential of literary realism.[96] Ulka Anjaria has pointed out how the epistemic status of realism has been countered by the parodic and antirealist forms of postcolonial fiction.[97]

However, both advocates for and against a reading of the novel as *amcalik* scarcely tease out how the novel imagines the socio-ecological fabric of community. Ramdarsh Mishra reads rural nature as static. Pacauri, on the other hand, does not pay close attention to the implications of the deliberate presentation of an "ancient rural economic structure," (*purani gramin arthvyavastha*). A feature rarely commented on by critics, is the novel's engagement with the governance and management of water. The novel mentions the hydraulic management of ancient regimes starting from the time of King Shishupal to the Candelas. Drawing on the common etymological roots of the words "king" (*raja*) and "government" (*rajya*) Mate observes: "Earlier when the king (*raja*) needed water he settled villages. Now the government (*rajya*) needs water so it uproots a village."[98] The centrality of water to polities is reiterated in an account of an ancient canal (*nahar*) constructed by the kings of Canderi of Bundelkhand. A love affair between a princess and a commoner necessitates the construction of a canal in order to ensure the provision of water to the royal household and the young couple's estate. Owing to the fact that the provision of water to the royal family must be distinct from that of the commoner, a

[96] Simon Gikandi, "Modernism in the World," in *Modernism/Modernity,* Vol.13, no. 3 (2006): 419–424.
[97] Ulka Anjaria, *Realism*, 166.
[98] Jain, *Dub*, 196.

settlement of water carriers (*dhimar*) called Panipur, literally translated as "village of water", springs up to supply water to the royal household.[99]

These cultural memories of settlement are not presented as historical fact but as moral economies that are expressly counterpointed to the uprooting of village communities in the wake of the dam. *Dub* challenges us to relinquish visions of technology as a critique of feudal pasts However, the novel distances itself from the promises of technology by ironizing the seemingly obvious association between concepts such as freedom and progress and objects that one might associate with them. It enacts a civilizational clash between the rural lifeworld and the nation-state.

Jain's substitution of both realist description and affective attachment allows him to stage the socio-ecological fabric of community as a central problematic for Hindi ecocriticism. Instead of a political-economic critique of the dam the novel presents a remembered account of the relation between history, political power, and nature. It is this remembered and recounted quality that gives it its unique narrative style. The conflict between an *ancient* village settlement and an encroaching industrial form is pitched at the level of historical practices of settlement that are distinct to the region.

The reader learns that the village of Ladai was atop a hill for "thousands of years." It was only after an earthquake, and a resulting water shortage, that people were forced to migrate. What follows is an extended account of how this new settlement was established. The reader learns that first land is identified, then "the Brahmins performed a sacrificial fire ritual (*havan*)." They were followed by the *Baniyas*. They prayed to all the ghosts and gods and goddesses that

[99] This caste of water carriers is traditionally responsible for carrying water.

resided there saying "Nothing is hidden from you." And they beseeched them to let them settle without fear. It is only when "the gods residing in every atom had vacated was the village of Gurila (Ladai) settled." The village was settled according to all the rituals. "On all the four boundaries one tank (*bavadi*) and one well were sunk. A *pipal* tree was planted next to each of the wells." [100]

The agents that occupy the land that has to be settled and are meant to be propitiated are not reconcilable with the kind of affective (*ragatmak*) relation to nature that Ramdarsh Mishra finds wanting in the novel. And this is what a critique of *amcalikta* as overly romanticized or "colorful" misses. Romanticism is also an aesthetic of the real as Valerie Ritter has shown.[101] Ritter shows how the emergence of nature was tied to an empirical poetics of natural objects. This empiricism is threatened by agents that defy being consigned to naturalism.

VII. Disillusionment: The Afterlives of the Dam

One such class of defiant agents are the very rivers that form the "backdrop" of these novels. It is these actors that are often relegated to the "vagaries of nature," that must also be rehabilitated into our readings. It is these agents that also effect a breach between the speculative promise that modernization set out to achieve and what eventually unfolded. For instance, the Kosi continues to wreak havoc across Bihar and as late as 2008 it breached the embankment in

[100] Jain, *Dub*, 272.
[101] Ritter, *Kama's Flowers,* (see intro., n.3).

Kushaha (Nepal) and shifted 108 km eastwards.[102] As the impacts of dams on the floodplains of North India reveal that rivers have a mind and a logic of their own, how do we read the early *amcalik upanyas*?

Interestingly, one such act of re-reading is performed by Renu himself. In 1975, almost two decades after the publication of *Parti Parikatha,* and roughly two decades before *Dub* was published, Renu was stranded in one of the worst floods the city of Patna had ever witnessed. His account of this experience was published shortly after.[103] As the torrential monsoon rains inundated the city, Renu recounts how he reached for his novels again. He writes:

> In this state of mind—I am not sure why—I take out my copy of *Parti Parikatha*. I try to turn over the pages and read them. I read—sitting on the banks of the river Konar–at the dam site, in the shadow of a giant crane, Jit [the protagonist of *Parti Parikatha*] had said, "Not sure when work will begin on the Kosi—the Kosi ravaged region–my locality (*ilaka*) where every year lakhs of humans are sacrificed to Queen Kosi (*maharani*)" [...] I pick up the coloring box. But I am not satisfied even after I have painted over the marked lines from *Parti Parikatha* and *Julus* with black paint and a paintbrush. Then I pick up the candle and begin slowly dripping wax over the paper.[104]

This moment of frustration is intercepted by an interlude of fantasy. Renu writes that, "suddenly the idol of god sitting on the shelf yelled out saying, 'have you lost your mind?'" Renu breaks down and responds to the figure saying, "*Thakur*! You know with what unflinching faith and firm resolve I wrote those lines." *Thakur* responds by calling him a "Bastard, hedonist, egoist."

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[102] For a history of attempts to control the unpredictability of this river, see Christopher V. Hill, *River of Sorrow,* 1997.
[103] Phanishvarnath Renu, "Badh: 1975," in *Rnajal, Dhanjal*, 1977. 5th ed. (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2015)
[104] Renu, "Badh: 1975," 70–71.

Renu "comes to his senses" and apologizes. He acknowledges that he wrote whatever *Thakur* wanted him to. [105]

This Job-like account of Renu dithering and resolving his self-doubt through a *deux ex machina* presents him as a non-sovereign subject moved by a force outside himself. Typically, this is an idea of creative inspiration being a gift from the divine. Renu recasts this trope in the immediate context of the flood that he had only been too familiar with all his life. Why doesn't Renu exercise a model of secular critique of the failure of modernization? Why does he choose instead to cast this moment as a failure of faith? Sadan Jha has critiqued the early Renu saying:

> Renu appears to be charmed by the dominant imagination of 1950s—Nehruvian modernity and the mammoth task of nation building in the first decade of India's independence. He did not offer any criticism of big dams or the Nehruvian idea of development either. In this sense, Renu's villages were mere locations, geometric units of time and capital.[106]

Renu's quasi-spiritual account of a force that moves from without is of a different order from the ideological complicity with developmentalism and capitalist agriculture that determine Sadan Jha's reading of him.[107] Renu's preoccupation with rural reconstruction must be understood not simply as politically or ideologically motivated. It was an ecological vision that sought to aesthetically engage with the non-human agents that would make rural reconstruction possible. This has often been read as a "developmental fantasy" or a failure of the planning imaginary.

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[105] Ibid., 71.
[106] Jha, "Visualizing Region," 29.
[107] This is not to suggest that Renu was not critical of the outcomes of modernization. In an article nearing the end of his life he is aware of the unintended effects of siltation caused by the canals, caste polarization, increasing landlessness, and water shortages see, Phanishvarnath Renu, "Tutate-bikharte sapnom ki dastan," (speech, Writer's conference, 1975) in *Renu racnavali*, ed. Bharat Yayavar Vol. 5 (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1995), 242–252.

However, there is an aesthetic dimension to the charm and fascination that technological modernity held for regional actors. It exercised a force that was felt intimately much like faith.

I began with observing that as India entered into another phase of intensive modernization after the 1990s, *amcalikta* remained an important literary and cultural register within which rural critique has emerged in Hindi fiction. If the post-independence writer asked what constitutes community, this question was inextricably linked to rural transformation. The contemporary writer is faced with an altogether different question: what has led to the decimation of rural community? For a long time, Hindi regional writing has been read as a pastoral literary form about a particular kind of space. However, this approach doesn't quite capture the volatility of the ways that individuals and communities respond to and define their local environments. Nor does it account for the fact that nature has its own changing history and calls into question the very ground on which regional discourses rest.

I also do not reiterate the critique of "state works" and the violence of the nation state by highlighting the triangulated struggle between state, communities, and corporate power.[108] This is an approach that Rob Nixon has already developed to tremendous effect. Nixon argues that the dam is defined by a tyranny of scale that obfuscates local particularity. I argue instead that these monumental projects had to be imagined at local sites. I situate the "failure" of the dam in a

[108] Nixon reads the dam against the idea of the nation as an imagined community He argues that the tyranny of scale in global development projects leads to the forgetting of displaced communities or the flattening out of local particularity. Nixon traces the dam as a "developmental fantasy" from the era of decolonization to its transmutation into a symptom of neoliberal globalization. The dam is a spectacular fantasy of monumental modernity characterized by an aesthetics of "gigantism." See Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 168–172.

longer history of regionally specific imaginaries of nature, technology, and rurality. I read depictions of village settlement, socio-ecological particularities, and cultural practices of non-urban communities in regional literature not simply as literary strategies of localization and particularity but infrastructural interventions in their own right. By moving away from largely pastoral and one-dimensional readings of rural modernization I show how Hindi fiction can be read for these technologically mediated relations between community and nature.

Chapter Two

Indigenous Nature: Writing an Adivasi Ecological Subject in the Regional Novel

> During the presidencies of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, fifty-three treaties were forced on the Native Americans (*Indiyanom*) to seize their land. Finally, land grab was declared a state policy in the second decade of the eighteenth century…Sixteen thousand Cherokee (*janjati*) were besieged, in their tepees, by the army. After that summer, they were dispatched, during the rainy season, on a 1500-kilometer journey. Around eight thousand children, women, elderly and the sick died in the course of the evacuation. A few years later, in 1841, forty-eight pony-carts carrying skeletons reached Sacramento on the infamous Oregon trail. The tragic passage is called the Trail of Tears. We were at a loss for words after going through these horrible descriptions. *The evening seemed to grow heavy. Lord Sing-bonga was uneasy too, it seemed, and covered his face.*
>
> —Ranendra, *Global gamv ke devta*[1]

This account of the violent relocation of Native American communities by colonial settlers, cited in the epigraph above, occurs in Ranendra's *Global gamv ke devta* (Lords of the Global Village, 2009). The unease of *Singbonga* (Sun God) –a Munda deity worshipped by Adivasi communities –solicits the reader's empathy with the victims of this violence through a self-conscious localism. It also sets her up for the comparison between the displacement of Native American communities and Adivasi communities in India that is to follow.[2]

[1] Ranendra, *Global gamv ke devta* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Gyanpith, 2009), 62–63 ;*Lords of the Global Village*, trans. Rajesh Kumar (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2017).

[2] The word Adivasi means "original inhabitants" was first used in a political context in the Jharkhand region, with the formation of the Adivasi Mahasabha (the Great council of Adivasis) in 1938, see Sanjay Basu Mallick, "Introduction," in R.D. Munda and S.Basu Mullick (eds) *The Jharkhand Movement : Indigenous People's Struggle for Autonomy in India,* (Copenhagen: International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2003), iv–xvii.

Strikingly, *Global gamv* is the first novel in Hindi that makes the comparison between Adivasi struggles in contemporary India and settler-colonialism in the Americas explicitly.[3] Arguments claiming indigeneity for Adivasis or Adivasi indigeneity, a term I borrow from Kaushik Ghosh, comprise not only of internationalist discourses of global indigeneity but longstanding claims to Adivasi autonomy in India.[4] These claims stem from constitutionalist/ rights-based Adivasi struggles but also regional imaginaries and ethnic movements for Adivasi language and cultural survival and state autonomy.

Hindi writing has also contributed to these developments through a literary project of Adivasi indigeneity. Literature is an alternative rhetorical site for the articulation of Adivasi consciousness vis-a-vis the silences of history. Novels have given Adivasis their place of "honor" in the history of India's anticolonial struggle.[5] Others have novelized Adivasi ethnic

[3] Comparisons with the Native American case can be traced to the political rhetoric of Jharkhand from at least the mid-1980s.

[4] Kaushik Ghosh makes a distinction between Adivasi indigeneity and global indigeneity. He cautions against a flat narrative of displacement and dispossession and suggests tracing concrete histories of political subjectivity and peoplehood with regard to indigenous communities. In this context he departs from a global reading of the formalization of customary law as detrimental to indigenous communities. Instead he argues that the colonial construction of a domain of "exclusive governmentality" and customary law has provided Adivasi communities a form of political agency against dispossession and displacement which is markedly different from the case in America and Australia. See Kaushik Ghosh, "Indigenous Incitements," *Indigenous Knowledge and Learning in Asia/Pacific and Africa: Perspectives on Development, Education, and Culture.* Ed. Dip Kapoor and Edward Shizha (New York: Palgrave, 2010), n.p. K. S. Singh, *Tribal Movements in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1982).

[5] Rakesh Kumar Simh, *Jo itihas mem nahim hai* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 2005); Hariram Mina, *Dhuni tape tir* (Rohtak: Sahitya Upkram, 2008). Important translations in Hindi include Mahasveta Devi, *Jangal ke davedar* (New Delhi: Radhakrsn Prakashan, 1998). I refer here to the inclusion of previously excluded groups in the history of the nation, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Minority History, Subaltern Pasts," in *Postcolonial Studies* Vol. 1. No. 1 (1998): 15–29.

movements for regional autonomy in postcolonial India.[6] These developments in fiction are paralleled in the emergence of Adivasi poets that have written of their communities as peoples under siege by the developmental state.[7]

In this chapter, I focus on a distinct aspect of Adivasi indigeneity in India: the emergence of an ecological Adivasi subject. Whether as a political claim to historical priority or a significant ecocultural ethic, Adivasi assertion signals a new politics of ecology. The Adivasi speaks *as* nature and *for* nature. Though responsive to global indigenous movements around nature and transnational environmental justice movements, this growing corpus of literature is rarely considered in studies of literatures of indigeneity. I ask, how have literary representations of Adivasi indigeneity produce this figure at the level of literary discourse?

I trace this question in three movements. In the first, I briefly discuss the invocation of *amcalikta* in novels that depict Adivasi communities. I trace how a*mcalikta* historically localized and particularized Adivasi communities as belonging to specific regions. One way in which it achieved this was through amalgamating Adivasi languages into regional variations of Hindi and situating Adivasi characters in distinct locales. I trace how this linguistic feature of *amcalikta* has been radicalized due to the emergence of Adivasi indigeneity. In the second segment, I discuss Ranendra's *Global gamv ke devta.*[8] Ranendra is deeply interested in recovering the buried

[6] On the movement for Jharkhand, see Rakesh Kumar Simh, *Hul Pahariya* (New Delhi: Samyik Prakashan, 2012); *c*. For a novel that traces the history of prominent leader of the Jharkhand Mukti Morca–Shibu Soren, see Vinod Kumar, *Samar shesh hai* (New Delhi: Prakashan Sansthan, 2005).
[7] Jacinta Kerketta, *Angor* (Kolkata: Adivani 2016); *Jarom ki zamin* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 2018); Anuj Lugun, *Bagh aur Sugan Munda ki beti* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2018); Ramanika Gupta, *Kalam ko tir hone do: Jharkhand ke Adivasi Hindi kavi* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2015).
[8] Henceforth, *Global gamv.*

histories of tribal kingdoms in Eastern India.[9] His novel critiques popular culture and history that has ignored these dynastic histories and depicted Adivasis either as anthropological subjects or insurgent/liminal figures. This has a bearing on how the novel constructs Adivasi claims to autochthony and relations to land. Historians of South Asia have mostly discredited the political claim to Adivasi autochthony on the grounds that processes of acculturation make it difficult to make a distinction between tribal communities and peasant castes.[10] However, *Global gamv* brings Adivasi histories into imaginative synchrony with indigenous histories in the Americas. It constructs an alternative history of a people robbed of their glorious past and a community with a distinct eco-cultural ethic. By doing so the novel sets itself apart from the representation of Adivasi communities as insurgent peasants —a depiction more prevalent in Hindi novels emerging out of regions bordering the adjacent state of Bihar. I suggest that the novel complicates descriptions of peasant and subaltern forms of radicalism by tapping into a distinct sacral politics of nature in Adivasi movements. In the third and last movement, I consider another contemporary Hindi novel —Mahua Maji's *Marang goda nilkanth hua* (Marang Goda Blue-throated, 2012)—that also constructs Adivasi indigeneity through the struggle of the Ho Adivasi community against uranium mining.[11] In contrast to *Global gamv*, Maji depicts the Ho Adivasi as a distinct non-agrarian, forest-dwelling community, and attributes their distinct eco-cultural practices to their forest-dwelling ethic. In the wake of the destruction of the Ho

[9] This is based on a personal interview with Ranendra in December 2017.
[10] André Beteille, "Tribe and Peasantry," in *Six Essays in Comparative Sociology*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974; "The Idea of Indigenous People," in *Current Anthropology* Vol. 39 No. 2 (1998), 187–91; Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India,1200-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Virginius Xaxa, "Transformations of Tribes in India: Terms of Discourse," in *Economic and Political Weekly* (June12, 1999): 1519–24.
[11] Mahua Maji, *Marang goda nilkanth hua*, (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2012). Henceforth *Marang goda*.

community by the toxic effects of uranium mining the novel asks us to consider an Adivasi model of development.

Through a consideration of these novels, I trace how Adivasi knowledges and customs are presented as ecologically sound ones. However, I also draw attention to the depiction of occult practices in both *Global gamv* and *Marang goda*. Do saccharine clichés of ecological harmony veil a discomfort with the prevalence of "superstition" within Adivasi communities in Hindi fiction? Can the concept of "nature" or ecological *wisdom* really capture the range of agencies that Adivasi cosmologies grant non-human agents? I pose this as a question for the broader Environmental Humanities and forms of cosmopolitanism that have emerged in the wake of climate crisis.

I consider the possibilities opened up in discussions of what scholars now call indigenous cosmopolitics?[12] I understand indigenous cosmopolitics to be a political stance that integrates and encompasses the human, natural and supernatural spheres. I draw on the insights of scholars working on indigenous communities and non-modern cosmologies to argue that to assume that indigenous cosmologies are simply about nature or cultural perceptions of nature would be to miss the true challenge they pose to thinking ecologically.

I. Narrating the Adivasi: Political and Literary Regionalism in Jharkhand

[12] See, Bruno Latour, "Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics," in *Common Knowledge* Vol. 10, no. 3; Mario Blaser, "Ontological Conflicts and the Stories of Peoples In Spite of Europe: Towards a Conversation on Political Ontology," in *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (October 2013): 547–568; Marisol de la Cadena, "Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond "Politics"," in *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 25, No. 2 (2010): 334–370; Pramod Parajuli, "No Nature Apart: Adivasi Cosmovision and Ecological Discourses in Jharkhand, India," in *Sacred Landscapes and Cultural Politics: Planting a Tree* eds. Philip P. Arnold and Ann Grodzins Gold (Burlington, Singapore, Sydney, Ashgate, 2001), 83–114.

As I have discussed in the first chapter, *amcalikta* emerged in the early years of independence, at a time when political regionalism (*pradesikta*) and discourses of cultural diversity sought to bring various communities of independent India into the nationalist fold.[13] Adivasi communities often figured at the interstices of regional-rural fiction, but by the 1960s, as Indu Prakash Pandey notes, regional writing took an anthropological turn. A key impulse of the regional novel, Pandey points out, was to focus on "communities recognizable as distinct entities" through "concentration and particularization."[14] This is evident in the way early regional novels by Rajendra Avasthi, Shyam Pramar and Yogendra Sinha incorporated folksongs, sayings and forms of recreation of Adivasi communities residing in Bastar, Malwa and South Bihar into their prose.[15]

In the absence of histories that trace the interaction between *amcalikta* and Adivasi languages, Hindi literary criticism and Adivasi Studies have rarely overlapped. Instead, Adivasi literary critics writing in Hindi have often focused on the paradigm of "consciousness" as an important category for assessing what constitutes Adivasi literature. Prominent Adivasi Hindi critic Ganga Sahay Mina, for example, identifies the distinctive feature of Adivasi literature as

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[13] See Gajarawala, *Untouchable Fictions,* 104. Similarly, Shivprasad Simh points out that Hindi literary regionalism was distinct from its American counterpart in that unlike the former, its impetus was not a romantic reaction to industrial and technocratic modernity but a performance of cultural revival and diversity, see Simh, "Amcalikta," in *Adhunik parivesh aur navlekhan* (Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan, 1970), 114–28.
[14] Pandey, *Regionalism,* 8.
[15] See Rajendra Avasthi, *Suraj kiran ki chamv* 1950. Reprint (Delhi: Parmesvari Prakashan, 1997); *Jangal ke Phul* (New Delhi: Army Educational Stores,1969); Shyam Parmar, *Morjhal* (n.p:np,1950); Yogendranath Sinha, *Van ke man mem* (Delhi: Atmaram, 1962).

Adivasi consciousness.[16] Mina's concern with "consciousness" echoes some of the debates that emerged in Dalit criticism. However, Mina only partially addresses the question of language when he cautions that the category of Adivasi literature must include writing *in* Adivasi languages and not only Hindi. Nor does he discuss a range of literary strategies that have sought to incorporate Adivasi languages into Hindi writing or the relation between these languages to distinct regional idioms of Hindi.

Adivasi studies on the other hand have usually discussed Adivasi languages divorced from the problematic of literary regionalism and more in terms of hegemonic languages versus marginal and endangered languages.[17] Prathama Banerjee has pointed out that, unlike Dalit literature, Adivasi languages are not seen as productive of a distinct subjectivity or an indisputable locus of a region or regional politics in India.[18] It is also often the case that issues concerning Adivasi languages have been more visible as a politics of script.[19] The threat of

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[16] See Ganga Sahay Mina, *Adivasi aur Hindi Upanyas* (Delhi: Ananya Prakashan, 2016). Similarly, Vandana Tete emphasizes that "Adivasi literature is primarily a creative literature that encompasses nature-creation (*prakriti srishti*)" and is not to be confused either with the literature of protest or identity politics. However, she doesn't present any instances of how to read this difference in contemporary Hindi writing, see Vandana Tete, *Adivasi Sahitya: Parampara aur prayojan* (Ranchi: Pyara Kerketta Foundation, 2013).

[17] For the epistemic loss involved in the loss of indigenous languages, see G.N. Devy, *A Nomad Called Thief: Reflections on Adivasi Silence*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006; *The Crisis Within: On Knowledge and Education in India* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2017).

[18] Prathama Banerjee, "Writing the Adivasi: Some Historiographical Notes," in *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 53, no. 1 (January 2016): 131–53.

[19] The recognition of a different script of Ol Chiki for Santali gained momentum in Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Orissa and was spearheaded by the Kolkata-based All India Santal Council, Adivasi Socio-Educational and Cultural Association, All India Santali Writers' Association and the Santali Bhasha Morcha, see Sitakant Mahapatra, "Language and the Sociology of Santal Ethnicity" in *Ethnicity and State: Raghunath Murmu and the Emergence of Jharkhand* (New Delhi: USB publishers, 2008), n.p. Nishaant Choksi, for example, has shown how the multiscriptual identity of Adivasi languages, especially Santali, was suffused by questions of power. See, Nishaant Choksi, "Charting the Multiple Scripts of Santali: Notes Towards a Visual History of Adivasi Languages and Literatures," in *Performing Identities: Celebrating Indigeneity*

linguistic loss has been accentuated by globalization and the increasing dominance of languages such as Hindi and English.[20]

However, even though Adivasi languages are yet to achieve the status of literary vernaculars they have played a significant role in delineating a distinct regional milieu and altered the stakes of literary representations of the Adivasi in contemporary Hindi literature. [21] Writers in Jharkhand, in particular, have often been judged not only on how well they represented local specificity but how well they understood the significance of language for the political regionalism of this newly formed state.[22]This is evident in the way a politics of literary representation plays out at more local and regional levels in Jharkhand.

For instance, Mahua Maji's novel *Marang goda nilkanth hua* was criticized for misrepresenting the local speech of characters from Western Singhbhum, who instead of speaking in the local language (*kshetriya bhasa*), spoke in standard Hindi (*tatsam pradhan*).[23] Another writer from Jharkhand –Ranendra–was praised by critics as a fine practitioner of *amcalikta* because of the felicitous way in which he uses folk songs (*lokgit*), sayings (*muhavare)* and experimentation with language (*bhasha prayog*) in his novel.[24] Its prose seamlessly amalgamates words from Asuri, a language belonging to the Austro-Asiatic family of languages,

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in the Arts. London: Routledge, 2015; Norman Zide, "Three Munda Scripts" in *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* Vol. 2. no. 2 (Fall 1999): 199–231.

[20] Nirmala Putul "Adivasi Language-Literature in the Vortex of Globalization," in Adivasi Sahitya Vimarsh (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers, 2014), 63–65; Avinash Kumar Simh, "Bhasha, Rashtriyata, aur Adivasi saval," in *Adivasi Sahitya Vimarsha* ed. Ganga Sahay Mina (New Delhi: Anamika Publishers, 2014), 50–62.

[21] Sheldon Pollock makes the distinction between "literization," and "literarization," "i.e. the commitment of the same language to writing and the employment of a language for literary composition respectively.

[22] The state of Jharkhand came into effect in November 15, 2000.

[23] Ranendra, "imam mujhe khainche hai to roke hai mujhe kufr," *Naya Gyanoday*, June 2012.

[24] Prem Tivari, "Adivasi gamv mem global devta," *Naya Path*, July 2013.

that has been categorized as a "definitely endangered language" by UNESCO, and Sadari or Nagpuri that is the lingua franca of Jharkhand. [25] Within Jharkhand the novel has been marketed as a Nagpuri novel (*Nagpuri upanyas*) –a descriptor that is absent from other editions of the novel.[26]

The roots of this regionalization of the linguistic identity of Adivasi communities and the quest for a Jharkhandi identity (*jharkhandi asmita*) lie in the history of political regionalism. In an essay published in the early 1990s, Ramdayal Munda and Visheshvar Prasad Kesari –two Jharkhandi intellectuals–summed up the decisive changes that had taken place in the movement for state autonomy for Jharkhand by the1980s.[27] In the reconfigured landscape of Jharkhandi politics several broader alliances between Adivasis and naturalized non-Adivasi residents of Jharkhand (groups known as *sadan*) emerged. In the new scheme of things, Munda and Kesari emphasized that the political movement formed only a small, though significant part, of a greater

[25] This language is one of three language families spoken in the region, according to V.P. Keshari, and is variously called *Nagpuri*, *Nagpuriya*, *Sadari* or *Sadani*. This language was initially categorized as a sub-dialect of Bhojpuri in the Linguistic Survey of India by George Grierson. The language was also grouped as an Eastern Maghi language in the Census Report of 1961. See [*Jharkhand ke Sadan :aitihasik prshthbhumi, samaj, aur samskrti* (Ranchi: Chotanagpur Samskritik Sangh, 1992).

[26] It is also important to note that region, caste, and community affiliations are crucial components of the literary field in Jharkhand. The varied histories of naturalization of each of these authors is significant given that Jharkhand has witnessed a strong ethnicization of both Adivasi indigeneity and 'legitimate' non-Adivasis (*sadan*). Both writers are non-Adivasi–Ranendra is a Bhumihar (high caste) from Bihar and Maji belongs to a Bengali industrial family settled in Jharkhand. Maji is a prominent figure in the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha that built a regionalist framework and is one of the prominent political groups instrumental in spearheading the movement for the autonomous state of Jharkhand.

[27] Ramdayal Munda and Visheshvar Prasad Kesari, "Recent Developments in the Jharkhand Movement," in *The Jharkhand Movement: Indigenous People's Struggle for Autonomy in India* (Denmark: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2003), n.p. The claim for a tribal majority state of Jharkhand was made in the1930s and had waxed and waned for many decades before being brutally crushed in the mid-seventies.

movement towards Jharkhand's cultural reconstruction. Institutions such as the Department of Tribal and Regional Languages at Ranchi University (est. 1981) would go on to play a crucial role in consolidating the claim for a distinct cultural identity for Jharkhand through linguistic and cultural recovery.[28] This Jharkhandi cultural revivalism also drew on colonial and missionary ethnographic projects that first catalogued Adivasi songs, folklore, and cultural practices.[29] It also consolidated more disparate movements to render Adivasi languages in the Chotanagpur region into scripts such as Devanagari, Bengali, and Oriya or invent new scripts for these languages.[30]

This distinct brand of cultural regionalism and the emergence of the Jharkhandi "nationality question" took several forms including attempts to craft a distinct linguistic identity for Adivasi languages; an anti-Brahmanical animistic religion variously called "Sarna" or "Adi dharam"; and a broader alliance of Adivasi and non-Adivasi ethnic groups (*sadan*) in Jharkhand.[31] Jharkhandi regional politics also led to the popularization of distinct forms of

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[28] Visheshvar Prasad Kesari had already published extensively on the Nagpuri language spoken in the region, see Visheshvar Prasad Kesari, *Nagpuriya kavimanak suci:paricay aur racana sangrah kare khatir* (Daltonganj:Bihar, 1967).

[29] The work of documenting Santali culture and language can be traced to the arrival of the American Free Will Baptist Mission in 1835. See D. Swaro, *The Christian Missionaries in Orissa* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1990).

[30] The history of rendering Adivasi languages into Devanagari can be gleaned from the monumental People's Linguistic Survey of India conducted in 2010. In the Jharkhand volume of the Survey, the editors trace a much longer history of rendering several Adivasi languages into the Devanagari script that were pioneered in Jharkhand as early as 1904. See for example, William George Archer, *Lila Kho-raa Khe-khela: Uramv Dandi* [*The Blue Land: An Uraon Songbook*] (Laheriyasarai: Pustak Bhandar, 1940). For a history of distinct scripts for Adivasi languages, see Norman Zide, "Three Munda Scripts" in *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* Vol. 2. no. 2 (Fall 1999): 199–231; Barbara Lotz, "Casting a Glorious Past: Loss and Retrieval of the Ol-Chiki script," in *Time in India: Concepts and Practices* (New Delhi: Manohar: 2007), 235–262.

[31] For the linguistic and cultural uniqueness of Jharkhand see, Vishesvar Prasad Kesari, [*Jharkhand ke Sadan :aitihasik prshthbhumi, samaj, aur samskrti* (Ranchi: Chotanagpur Sanskritik Sangh, 1992). For discussions on Adi-dharam and Sarna, see Ramdayal Munda, *Adi dharam : Sarna,*

address and greeting in the region and demands to protect customary forms of land ownership like *khuntkatti* and *bhuinhar*i.[32] This ethnicizing of Adivasi communities reflects a strong connection between language and place and a distinct ecologization of ethnicity in the case of Jharkhand.[33]

It is to the credit of this politics of Adivasi indigeneity that most Adivasi and non-Adivasi writers writing about Jharkhand now situate Adivasi languages within the regional registers of Hindi they use. Features of this change are evident in the transliteration of terms from different Adivasi languages such as Santhali, Ho, and Asuri into Devanagari. Novels incorporate songs, Adivasi cosmologies and deities (*Sarna, Sing bonga*), flora and fauna that is indigenous to Jharkhand (*sal*, *mahua* and *palash*), forms of economic life such as the weekly market (*hat*), and forms of cultural life such as the *akhra* (a communal meeting spot) and *jaher sthal* (a sacred grove).[34] Writers also often incorporate a discussion of how a particular Adivasi language is endowed with a far more advanced semiotic system. So, for instance, Mahua Maji's *Marang goda nilkanth hua* begins with a discussion on the expressivity of the Ho language compared to mainstream languages – like Hindi. This is illustrated through an explanation of the protagonist's

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Jahir, Sari, Samsari, Bathau, Donipolo, ityadi namom se cinhit Bharatiya Adivasiyom ki dharmik asthaem, ek prarambhik ruprekha, ed. Ratan Simh Manaki (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2009).

[32] J. Prakash Gupta, *The Customary Laws of the Munda and the Oran* (Jharkhand Tribal Welfare Research Institute, Ranchi, India, 2002); Carol Upadhya, "Law, Custom and Adivasi Identity: Politics of Land Rights in Chotanagpur," in N. Sundar (ed.) *Legal Grounds: Legal Resources, Identity and the Law in Jharkhand,* (India: OUP, 2009), n.p.

[33] Pramod Parajuli, "Ecological Ethnicity in the Making: Developmentalist Hegemonies and Emergent Identities in India," in *Identities* Vol. 3. No. 1–2: 15-59; *Ecological Nationalisms*: *Nature, Livelihoods, and Identities in South Asia* eds. Gunnel Cederlof and K. Sivaramakrishnan (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

[34] P.C. Hembram, "Return to the Sacred Grove," in *Tribal movements in India*, ed. K. S. Singh (New Delhi: Manohar, 1982).

name. In Ho, the name Sagen is used for a newly sprouted branch. If a tree, or any of its parts, were to fall off, a speaker of Hindi could either say that a tree or a branch had fallen but in either case they would need several words to explain this. However, in Ho it is possible to gauge "which part of the tree is broken, how it broke, and in what condition it has fallen."[35]

Do novels, especially, those written by non-Adivasis risk dubious forms of ethnographic reportage through the incorporation of Adivasi languages and cultures into Hindi writing? Does Hindi writing replay a relation of desire that the Adivasi retain her "primordiality"?[36] These are open questions and while it is certain that Adivasi languages have circulated in literature as a counterhegemonic force, the weight of literary convention has not lost its force. A dense knot of conventions of nature and love (*prakriti aur prem*) often characterize literary prose about Adivasis written by non-Adivasis. And there are deep-rooted tensions between conventions of literary regionalism and a politics of Adivasi indigeneity that I will return to in my discussion of the two novels.

In the wake of India's liberalization in the 1990s, two prominent narratives concerning Adivasis have emerged in literature. The first has been around a subaltern experience of dispossession from land with Jharkhand becoming a resource frontier of the Indian state and multinational mining companies. The other is one of ecological and cultural rights that has drawn on transnational discourses of indigeneity. In the following section I want to turn to how novels from Jharkhand traverse these two somewhat divergent trajectories.

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[35] Maji, *Marang goda*, 11.

[36] For a discussion of how the Adivasi figures in nationalist discourse, see, Prathama Banerjee, 'Culture/Politics: The Curious double-bind of the Indian Adivasi', in *Subaltern Citizens and their Histories: Investigations from India and the USA,* ed. Gyanendra Pandey (New York, Routledge, 2010), 125–141.

II. Adivasi Representations in *Global gamv ke devta*

Ranendra's *Global gamv ke devta* begins with its principal character –a non-tribal schoolteacher simply referred to as Master Sahib – arriving in the fictional hill town of Bhaunrapat in Jharkhand. He is to teach science at a Residential School for girls belonging to the "particularly vulnerable tribal group" (PVTG). Earlier referred to as "Primitive Tribal Group" this group belongs to a government of India classification created with the purpose of enabling improvement in the conditions of certain communities with particularly low development indices. [37] Master Sahib learns about the Asur communities that are included in this

[37] Particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) (earlier: Primitive tribal group) is a government of India classification created with the purpose of enabling improvement in the conditions of certain communities with particularly low development indices. The Dhebar Commission (1960-1961) stated that within Scheduled Tribes there existed an inequality in the rate of development. During the fourth Five Year Plan a sub-category was created within Scheduled Tribes to identify groups that considered to be at a lower level of development. This was created based on the Dhebar Commission report and other studies. This sub-category was named "Primitive tribal group". The features of such a group include a pre-agricultural system of existence, that is practice of hunting and gathering, zero or negative population growth, extremely low level of literacy in comparison with other tribal groups. Groups that satisfied any one of the criteria were considered as PTG. At the conclusion of the Fifth Five-year plan, 52 communities were identified as being a "primitive tribal group", these communities were identified on the basis of recommendations made by the respective state governments. At the conclusion of the Sixth Five-year plan 20 groups were added and 2 more in the Seventh Five-year plan, one more group was added in the eighth five-year plan, making a total 75 groups were identified as PTG. The 75th group recognized as PTG were the Maram in Manipur in 1993-94. No new group was declared as PTG on the basis of the 2001 census. In 2006 the government of India proposed to rename "Primitive tribal group" as Primitive and vulnerable tribal group". PTG has since been renamed *Primitive and vulnerable tribal group* by the government of India.

categorization, also inhabit the area.[38] The Asur are divided into three branches–Bir Asur, Agaria Asur and Birijia Asur—and eke out a living farming the dry, water-starved, terrace fields of the plateau and occasionally working as seasonal labor in the bauxite mines that dot the landscape.

The chief conceit of the novel is implicit in its title that parodies the triumphal narrative of the world becoming one "global village" (*global gamv*). The novel puts some distance between itself and such optimistic globalism. Master Sahib notes that "the high-flying global deities,"–a reference to several multinational mining interests in the region –and an oppressive nation-state have merged together and it is "now difficult to tell them apart."[39] Early on in the novel the reader is given a sense of the geographical remoteness of this district which is "no less than 300 kilometers," from the narrator's hometown and stands "in the middle of a forest, up in the hills."[40] These depictions of remoteness index a deliberate production of underdevelopment. Its tell-tale signs are everywhere including the "clumps of forest here and there," indicating loss of forest cover and "fallow barren fields" that indicate soil erosion caused by "open-cast bauxite mines." The "yawning craters" are described as if "Mother Earth's face (*dharti ma*) was pitted with smallpox."[41] Governmental neglect becomes more apparent when characters discuss that cerebral malaria is endemic to the region. When Master Sahib asks why the government has not filled the gaping holes that are a breeding grounds for mosquitoes, character informs him that the

[38] The name 'Asur' belongs both to ancient mythology and to a small Mundari-speaking tribe living to the northeast of Ranchi District. In mythology, they are mentioned in Sanskrit texts, such as the *Satpath Brahmana*, as being the descendants of Prajapati, the Lord of the Creation. They became evil spirits (Asur means "not-god") and fought against the Devata for the possession of the earth and were overcome. They appear also in the *Puranas* and other later writings, as demons, giants and enemies, although in the *Rgveda*, Asur, apparently meant a god or supreme spirit.
[39] Ranendra, *Global gamv*, 141
[40] Ibid., 7.
[41] Ibid., 9.

government "intends to decimate the population." The mining companies charged with filling the cavities left after excavation have "impudently flouted" all such regulatory safeguards.[42]

The novel describes how the metropolitan view of nature-as-resource has produced a violent landscape of rural superstition, land disputes, sexual violence, simmering religious and caste polarizations compounded by a corrupt state bureaucracy, spurious godmen, and national and multinational corporations. The plot involves a series of conflicts between local members of the Asur community and powerful landed castes, government officials, and multinational mining interests that are all interested in acquiring Asur *raiyat* and common lands (*gair majurwa*) on which the Asur depend. The final nail in the coffin is when the government declares that a wildlife conservatory in the area will displace thirty-seven villages. A face-off between members of the embattled community and the authorities leads to a brutal suppression of the movement and the murder of several members of the community. The suppression of protests is conveyed through a magic realist twist when several slain activists mysteriously disappear. An Officer-in-Charge and an old constable, in charge of disposing their dead bodies, realize that there are no corpses. Instead when they get closer "they saw only molten steel, seeping slowly into the soil."[43] The molten steel harks back to the mythological Asur race as the original ironsmiths.

On the face of it *Global gamv* rehearses a long-standing problematic of land rights and redistribution from the earlier years of independence. The demand that right to land be recognized as a basic right of the subaltern has been a persistent subtext of modern Indian politics. The agrarian land question was a central feature of the Hindi novel from the beginning

[42] Ibid.,13.
[43] Ibid., 88.

of land reforms in the early 1950s.[44] The Maoist insurgency and the formation of the Jharkhand Mukti Morca (Jharkhand Liberation Front) from the late 1960s consolidated a radical politics of the rural countryside around "peasant" exploitation. Hindi writing witnessed an evident shift from the developmentalism and social reformism of the early years to the foregrounding of peasant exploitation and the failure of land reforms by the 1970s. Novels such as *Jamgal ke as-pas* (1982) by Rakesh Vats, *Vantari* (1986) by Suresh Chamd Srivastav, *Jaham bams phultem haim* (1997), *Kala Pahar* (1999) by Bhagavandas Morval, and more recently the novels of Rakesh Kumar Simh, Vinod Kumar, and Madan Mohan Pathak are a product of this trend.[45] These novels on Adivasi communities depict the socio-economic exploitation of Adivasis by the influx of outsiders (*diku*) and the vice like grip of merchants and moneylenders (*mahajan, sahukar*) over the Adivasi. Writers often trace the arc of Adivasi resistance from the colonial to the postcolonial period. Themes such as the imposition of colonial forms of land settlement, the alienation of land and the breakdown of the more egalitarian forms of land ownership, like *khuntkatti*, are often foregrounded.[46]

It is important to note that these depictions of Adivasi resistance differ in scope from what characterizes definitions of indigeneity transnationally. Transnational indigeneity has often been defined by a concept of priority. Mary Pratt observes that "in English, the cluster of generic descriptors used to refer to indigenous peoples–indigenous, native, aboriginal, first nations –all

[44] The novels of two prominent regional (*amcalik*) writers Phanisvarnath Renu and Nagarjun were centrally concerned with the question of land reforms. See the discussion of land reform in Renu's *Parti Parikatha* and Nagarjun's *Varun ke bete* in Chapter 1.
[45] Vinod Kumar, *Samar*, 2005; Madan Mohan Pathak, *Gagan Ghata Ghahrani* (New Delhi: Granth akademi, 2015); Rakesh Kumar Simh, *Hul pahariya*, 2012; Sanjiv, *Pamv tale ki dub,* (Bikaner: Vagdevi Prakashan, 2005).
[46] Mahasweta Devi, *Jangal ke davedar*,1998; Hariram Mina, *Dhuni tape tir*, 2008 and Rakesh Kumar Simh *op.cit.*

refer etymologically to priority in time and place. They denote those who were here (or there) first, that is, before someone else who came 'after'."[47] In contrast, Adivasi indigeneity as it is depicted in the novels is characterized by the absence of "priority." Kaushik Ghosh has differentiated between Adivasi indigeneity and transnational indigeneity precisely on the absence of priority and an emphasis "on an idiom of ethnicity that is pointedly defined by reference to specific histories and relations of exploitation by moneylenders, landlords, the state and corporations." [48]

However, a tradition of literary radicalism defined by peasant resistance and subalternity doesn't quite capture the emphasis on Adivasi indigeneity I am tracing. For instance, *Global gamv* does foreground Adivasi priority by tracing the contours of a civilizational war waged against the Asur people —a familiar template in minority/oppressed histories of the subcontinent.[49] The novel reinvents a classic tale of misdemeanor and punishment narrated in the Puranic corpus and re-reads it through the lens of the violence unleashed on the race of the Asur. A cosmic battle fought between the gods (*devas*) and the demons (*asur*) now becomes a minority history of autochthony and displacement. Rumjhum, an Asur character, explains how the Asurs go from being described as "gods in the Rgveda" to being described as "dark-skinned giants with protruding teeth."[50] He further points out that the mythical "struggle between the gods (*surs*) and

[47] M. L. Pratt, "Afterword: Indigeneity today" Marisol de la Cadena & Orin Starn (eds.), *Indigenous experience today* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 397–04.
[48] Kaushik Ghosh, "Indigenous Incitements," in *Indigenous Knowledge and Learning in Asia/Pacific and Africa: Perspectives on Development, Education, and Culture.* Ed. Dip Kapoor and Edward Shizha (New York: Palgrave, 2010), n.p.
[49] For a significant compilation of caste histories of marginal communities that similarly refers to a Puranic corpus, see Badri Narayan, *Upeksit samudayom ka atm-itihas* (Daryaganj: Vani Prakashan, 2006).
[50] Ranendra, *Global gamv ke devta,*18.

the demons (*asur*) was in all probability a historic battle "involving the Paleolithic ore-smelting people (*asur*)" on one hand and "the forest-razing, cultivator-producers (*sur*) on the other."[51] He further points to the archaeological evidence of abandoned brick dwellings and burial grounds that confirm that "waves of Munda invaders, followed by Oraons, pushed and chased them [*asur*] to their current homes, to this region in the hills."[52] When the severed head of an Asur is discovered in the fields, Master Sahib notes that it is "simply the latest happening in the overt, and often covert, strife" that has been going on for "thousands of years." This violence confounds the narrator's sense of time and space and he wonders "if we were living in the Vedic age or the twenty-first century."[53]

In order to account for the violence and dispossession meted out to the Asur community the novel also draws out affinities with Native American history. The beheading of an Asur over a land dispute reminds Master Sahib of the "helpless Incas, Mayans, Aztecs and Red Indians," since they too "had been driven away and decimated in a similar fashion."[54] At another point Rumhjum points out the parallels between the commemoration of violence against the Asur in Hindu myths and the violent displacement of Native American communities.[55] Still later Master Sahib likens a young Asur woman activist to Princess Pocahontas.

It's no coincidence that a novel set in Jharkhand should make such a comparison. Activists from Jharkhand first claimed India's Scheduled Tribe populations qualified for the new

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[51] Ibid., 18.
[52] Ibid.,43.
[53] Ibid., 32.
[54] Ranendra, *Global gamv,* 33.
[55] The depiction of the way Sing bonga metes out a brutal punishment to the Asur for the practice of iron-smelting is compared to the violent displacement of Native American communities narrated in the book *Trail of Tears.*

transnational term "indigenous peoples." They claimed this status on the grounds that they were culturally different from mainstream Indian society, especially, because they had been internally colonized and dominated by a system of values and institutions maintained by the ruling groups of the country.[56] Indigeneity emerged as a global discourse with the establishment in 1982 of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) a subsidiary body of the United Nations. Very soon after, Jharkhandi intellectuals spearheaded the formation of the Indian Council of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP) in 1985–a working group that has been instrumental in elaborating indigenous rights in the Indian context.[57]

The official position of the Indian government is that there are no indigenous people in the country. This position is echoed by scholars such as André Beteille and Sumit Guha that have challenged the 'fit' of transnational discourses of indigeneity to the Indian context. [58] The reasons given for this misfit vary from a critique of the colonial construction of tribe as a product of the colonial racial classification of Indians; the difficulty of differentiating tribes from the peasantry; and a history of complex interactions between tribals and non-tribals that has meant that no population that can be described as settler.

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[56] An early article published in the *Frontier* magazine in April 17 and 24 1982 by A.K. Roy drew attention to the economic processes of underdevelopment in Jharkhand, a term he characterized as "internal colonialism", see A.K. Roy, "Jharkhand: Internal Colonialism," in *The Jharkhand Movement: Indigenous People's Struggle for Autonomy in India* (repr., Denmark: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2003), 78–85. India is home to over eighty-four million people classified as members of Scheduled Tribes–that is 8.2 percent of India's total population.

[57] For a history of international organizing on the idea of indigeneity see Bengt G. Karlsson, "Anthropology and the "Indigenous Slot": Claims to and Debates About Indigenous People's Status in India," in *Indigeneity in India* ed. Bengt. Karlsson and Tanka B. Subba (London: Kegan Paul, 2006), pp: 51–74.

[58] André Beteille, "The Idea of Indigenous People," in *Current Anthropology* Vol. 39 no. 2 (1998): 187–91; Sumit Guha, *Environment*, 1999; Virginius Xaxa, "Transformations", 1999.

Global gamv flies in the face of historiography that has denied the historical validity of claims to indigeneity. Even though the comparisons the novel draws between Native American history and Adivasi indigeneity are not "historically" accurate, I have shown how they extend a global politics of indigeneity.[59] This involves a continuous process of translation as well. The novel at times uses the dated term "Indian" for Native Americans, perhaps more familiar to Hindi readers, and at other times refers to them as original inhabitants (*mulnivasi*) or groups (*jati*). This globalization of the term "indigenous" marks a deliberate deterritorialization of Adivasi politics–through a process of what Dipesh Chakrabarty has called "politics unlimited."[60] Chakrabarty reads the adoption of indigeneity in Adivasi politics as part of ongoing attempts to produce the postcolonial national subject in the context of mass democracy and a weakly developed constitutionalism that has failed to protect fundamental rights. Such a reading rescues the politics of Adivasi indigeneity from the determination of "historical fact" and opens up an understanding of Adivasi struggles as a "politics of belonging."[61] Increasingly scholars have read such claims as a process of ethnicization where questions of historical validity are less important and indigeneity provides valuable tools for framing and protecting rights and resources.[62]

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[59] For an analysis of the potential overlaps between indigeneity and subalternity see Jodi A. Byrd & Michael Rothberg, "Between Subalternity and Indigeneity," Interventions, Vol.13, no. 1 (2011): 1–12.

[60]Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Politics Unlimited: The Global *Adivasi* and Debates About the Political," in *Indigeneity in India* ed. Bengt. Karlsson and Tanka B. Subba (London: Kegan Paul, 2006), 235–245.

[61] Sangeeta Dasgupta and Daniel Rycroft, "Introduction," *The Politics of Belonging in India: Becoming Adivasi* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), 1–14.

[62] For such readings, see Vinita Damodaran, "Indigenous Forests: Rights, Discourses, and Resistance in Chotanagpur, 1860-2002," in *Ecological Nationalisms*: *Nature, Livelihoods, and Identities in South Asia* eds Gunnel Cederlof and K. Sivaramakrishnan (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 115–150; "No Nature Apart: Adivasi Cosmovision and Ecological Discourses in Jharkhand, India," in *Sacred Landscapes and Cultural Politics: Planting a Tree* eds. Philip P. Arnold and Ann Grodzins Gold (Burlington, Singapore, Sydney, Ashgate, 2001), 83–

However, while the depiction of Adivasi indigeneity *in Global gamv* may be read within processes of politicization and rights, there remains an ambivalence in this depiction. This ambivalence manifests itself in the novel as an attempt to delimit a sacred politics of nature from various practices of the occult in the region. This first becomes apparent following a murderous attack on a member of the Asur community. Master Sahib learns that local superstition in the region has it that soaking rice seedlings in human blood yields a bumper harvest. As a result, traditional head-hunters (*murikatvas*) roam the region in search of human victims during the paddy planting season. The human sacrifices are carried out to propitiate a local goddess (*devi*). The narrator reports that the practice, though prevalent till recently, has begun to wane with the spread of education and survives only in a much more muted form.

This minor incident in the narrative concerning occult practices can be juxtaposed to another moment in the novel when a character contrasts Asur beliefs concerning nature as opposed to the practices of a fear-mongering godman (*baba*) who is an outsider to the region:

> We are worshippers of Nature. Our Lord–the All-compassionate Mahadeva–is not the same as Langta Baba's. Our Mahadeva is this hill, this plateau (*pat*), which sustains us. Our *Sarna Mai* (Mother Earth) suffuses not only the *sal* (*sakhua)* tree but the flora all around. We include all creatures in our clan (*gotra*). We don't consider ourselves separate from even the smallest living thing, insect, or moth. We simply don't have the concept of the "other". With such an all-encompassing holistic way of life why would our community need to seek the shelter of Langta Baba or any other fellow?[63]

114; Gunnel Cederlöf, *Landscapes and the Law: environmental politics, regional histories, and contests over nature* (Ranikhet : Bangalore: Permanent Black ; Distributed by Orient Longman, 2008).

[63] Ibid., 72.

The novel can recuperate this iteration of the sacredness of nature into secular politics. This is made possible by the passage's juxtaposition of the practices of the Asur with the critique of "superstitious" practices propagated by the fraudulent baba. However, though it criticizes the Hindu godman it also evident that neither Mahadeva, the Adivasi concept of *Sarna* nor the forms of relationality to more than human subjects, is neither assimilable into right-wing nor secular politics.

This is precisely the problem that has dogged theorizations of the sacral politics of nature in India.[64] Detractors point to the risks of "ecological romanticism" peddled by anthropologists and environmental historians with regard to Adivasi communities. Archana Prasad sees these positions feeding into forms of Hindu revivalism and cultural traditionalism[65] Others point to how transnational discourses of sustainability have been quick in celebrating traditional practices of Adivasi communities leading to, what Alpa Shah, has called "eco-incarceration."[66] Shah suggests that ideas of ecological primordialism or rootedness circumvent the emergence of liberatory Adivasi politics. Similarly, Amita Baviskar points to how discourses of ecological

[64] There is a lot of work on significance of the sacred grove as an indigenous form of forest conservation. See Madhav Gadgil and V.D. Vartak, "The Sacred uses of Nature," in *Social Ecology,* ed. Ramachandra Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 83–88; P.C. Hembram, "Return to the Sacred Grove,"1982; Nirmal Minz, "The Adivasi Perspective on Ecology", in Andreas Nehring, ed., *Ecology: A Theological Response* (Madras: Gurukul Summer Institute, 1994), 67–88.

[65]Archana Prasad, *Against Ecological Romanticism: Verrier Elwin and the Making of an Anti-Modern Tribal Identity* (New Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2000).

[66] For a critique of transnational discourses of indigeneity see Alpa Shah, *In the shadows of the state: indigenous politics, environmentalism, and insurgency in Jharkhand, India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Kaushik Ghosh, "Between global flows and local dams: Indigenousness, locality, and the transnational sphere in Jharkhand, India," *Cultural Anthropology* Vol.21, No. 4 (2006): 501–534. Uday Chandra, "Going Primitive: The Ethics of Indigenous Rights Activism in Contemporary Jharkhand," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* [Online], Vol. 7 (2013). Accessed on 13th February 2020.

sustainability are far-fetched concerns for the rural masses and more a product of middle-class activism.[67]

In contrast to such political-economic assessments, there has also been an attempt to read Adivasi cosmologies and religious beliefs simply as efficacious ecological wisdom. Such an approach underscores that Adivasi ways of life hold the key to solving several global crises. This perception can be gleaned from the way English language publishing has repackaged the conversation on Jharkhand into a global environmental framework.[68] This is a connection that has been constructed within Jharkhand. For example, in the preface to a recent reprint of Ram Dayal Munda's *Adi-Dharam: Religious beliefs of the Adivasis of India,* Samar Bosu Mullick also talks about how the "Adivasis are going to play a historical role in protecting the planet from the impending threat of anthropogenic disaster."[69] Similarly, in the preface to the English translation of the ritual of *Sosobonga* from Mundari, Ram Dayal Munda talks about how in the present context of concern for the environment "the relevance of this story is self-evident. The current global warming and consequential fear of rain-fire and deluge is not mythical but *real.*"[70]

It is important to pause here to tease out the implications of these two readings: the politico-economic reading of the 'true' motivations behind the appeal to the Adivasi belief in

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[67] Amita Baviskar, "Tribal Politics and Discourses of Environmentalism," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. 31 No. 2 (1997): 195–225.

[68] In a review of the English translation of Ranendra's *Global gamv ke devta* (Lords of the Global Village, 2017), for instance, writer Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar calls the novel a cautionary tale that will be "sung in dark times" if "capitalism goes on destroying our planet," see Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, "A novel for our dark times," in *National Herald* (Sunday 23rd April 2017) https://tinyurl.com/wvpmznv. (Accessed 21st October 2019).

[69] Samar Bosu Mallick, "Preface," *Adi-Dharam: Religious beliefs of the Adivasis of India* (Kolkatta: Adivaani, 2000), x.

[70] Ram Dayal Munda, "Preface," in *Sosobonga: The ritual of reciting the Creation Story and the Asur Story prevalent among the Mundas* (Kolkatta: Adivaani, 2015), xvii.

sacred nature and an understanding of Adivasi practices as simply a more efficacious form of ecological practice. Both in their own ways refuse to engage with what it means to take Adivasi practice at *face value*. Confronted with the communalization of a sacral politics of nature there is a compulsion to frame the problem in binaries of knowledge or belief, secular or religious, rational or romantic practices. The question remains whether Adivasi practices of ecological stewardship draw on similar understandings of the efficacy of non-human agents that practices of occult and witchcraft do. How do we think of Adivasi practices of relationality and nurture together with the "degraded" practices of superstition that inevitably dog accounts of Adivasi life worlds in Hindi fiction?

Ranendra approaches Adivasi ontologies and the challenges they might pose to rationalized ideas of personhood, consciousness and agency as a writer and cultural commentator who is deeply aware of the nuances of Jharkhandi Adivasi politics.[71] This is evident in an interview given in his capacity as the Director of the Ram Dayal Munda Tribal Welfare Research Institute, in Ranchi, Jharkhand.[72] In the interview Ranendra makes a distinction between the holistic approach the Adivasi has honed over hundreds of years as opposed to the new-fangled atomized "knowledge" of the environment. Ranendra criticizes the impoverished depictions of Adivasis as either anthropological subjects or perennial insurgent figures of revolt. Instead he suggests excavating the histories of tribal dynasties and correcting lopsided regional histories.

[71] Ranendra has published two novels, a collection of poems and short stories each, and also coedited a four-volume Jharkhand encyclopedia. See Ranendra, *Jharkhand insaiklopidiya*, ed. Ranendra and Sudhir Pal (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2008).
[72] Ranendra, "Guftagoo with Ranendra: Interview with Ranendra," by Irfan, Rajya Sabha TV, October 26, 2019.

However, Ranendra effects a different resolution to the anti-rational elements of Adivasi practices. The novel subsumes Adivasi knowledge into an aesthetic holism by activating a poetics of nature and community. This is evident in the overtly poeticized descriptions of the temporal rhythms of sowing, reaping, and harvesting and descriptions of moods of elation, intoxication, and the sublime the narrator experiences. Others have also explained Adivasi ontologies as a form of aesthetic holism. For instance, Adivasi critic Vandana Tete makes a distinction between Adivasi consciousness and ideas of "folk consciousness" (*lok*) or "radical consciousness". She emphasizes that "Adivasi literature is primarily a creative literature that "encompasses nature-creation (*prakriti srishti*)" and is not to be confused either with the literature of protest or identity politics.[73] For both Ranendra and Tete, aesthetic holism seems to be far more acceptable resolution to the distinctiveness of Adivasi ontologies than their translation into a language of political radicalism. However, Tete has invariably to rely on the singular Nature (*prakriti*) rather than theorize the ontological premise of Adivasi thought.

Global gaon attributes the prevalence of occult practices and superstition to the lack of development and the precarity created by multinational companies in cahoots with the government. However, in doing so it foregrounds a problem that I will continue to purse in the following section. While the novel illustrates how the globalization of indigeneity has bolstered Adivasi critiques of resource extraction and reconfigured the histories that communities can lay claim to, it displaces the problem of Adivasi practice to a tragic template of a people decimated by historic violence. It is with *Marang goda nilkanth hua* that the question of an indigenous cosmopolitics takes centerstage.

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[73] See Vandana Tete, *Adivasi Sahitya: Parampara aur prayojan* (Ranchi: Pyara Kerketta Foundation, 2013), n.p.

III. Magic, Poisons, and Toxins: *Marang goda nilkanth hua* and Indigenous Cosmopolitics

Mahua Maji's novel *Marang goda nilkanth hua* (Marang Goda Blue-throated, 2012) is set in the forests of Saranda in Western Singbhum, Jharkhand. Marang Goda stands for Jadugoda where India's first uranium mines were set up in1967.[74] The novel tells the story of three generations of a Ho Adivasi family comprising of Jambira, his son Rimil and his grandson Sagen.[75] The novel spans the colonial period beginning with the British copper mines that employed labor from Adivasi communities. This is where Jambira, Sagen's grandfather, is initially employed. Following independence Jambira is employed in the uranium mines of Marang Goda.

Jambira eventually sickens up and dies a painful death. The novel is structured as a narrative of the growing political consciousness of its main protagonist Sagen who slowly learns that his grandfather Jambira's death was the result of radioactive uranium mining and the careless disposal of toxic waste in a tailing dam. This leads Sagen to initially organize locally to ban uranium mining. These efforts happen against the backdrop of the movement for state autonomy

[74] The fictional name "Marang goda" is meant to echo the actual site for Jadugoda where radioactive uranium is mined. The term "marang" means "great" and is used with the word "buru" (*marang buru*) to refer to the supreme deity of the Santhal and Ho Adivasis.
[75] The Ho are one of several Adivasi communities in Jharkhand and have been the subject of extensive anthropological interest, see C.P. Singh, *The Ho tribe of Singhbhum* (New Delhi: Classical Publications, 1978); Sunil Kumar. *Tribal Struggle for Freedom: Singhbhum 1820-1858*. New Delhi: Concept Pub. Co., 2008; Asoka Kumar Sen, *Representing Tribe: The Ho of Singhbhum Under Colonial Rule* (New Delhi: Concept Pub. Co., 2011); Sanjukta Das Gupta, *Adivasis and the Raj: Socio-economic Transition of the Hos, 1820-1932*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011; Aditya Prasad, *Ho lok katha, ek anusilan* (Varanasi: Kisor Vidya Niketan, 1997); *Ho Bhasa aur Sahitya ka itihas* (Delhi: Vikalp Prakasan, 2012).
[75] Mahua Maji, *Marang goda*, 13. A classic history of the region is Sarat Chandra Roy, *The Mundas and Their Country* (Calcutta: Jogendra Nath Sarkar at the City Book Society, 1912).

Jharkhand in the seventies and eighties.[76] The novel mentions political events such as the forest policy unrest of the 1970s and popular agitation against the pollution caused by the Guva mine in the region.

However, the novel soon moves to a transnational arena when Sagen realizes that issues of environmental justice are not of immediate priority in the movement for political autonomy. The novel shifts to situating the story of Marang Goda on a larger canvas of transnational networks of anti-nuclear activism, including indigenous activists and a broader scientific community. As news of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster trickles in, the novel ends with Sagen's urgent appeal to abandon the quest for limitless development and follow an "Adivasi model of development." *Marang Goda*, like *Global gamv*, turns to transnational imaginaries in order to articulate Adivasi indigeneity. It is because *Marang goda* makes a bold and imaginative claim to worlding, that I want to first trace how it moves from being an *amcalik* novel into a *cosmopolitan* one before returning to what is lost or elided in such a move.

Marang goda taps into global discourses of environmental harm which suggests that the novel might be read, borrowing a term from Ursula Heise, as an "eco-cosmopolitan" text.[77] Writing primarily in the context of America, Heise critiques the localist emphases of American environmentalism, or what she calls its "sense of place."[78] She argues that risk and environmental harm are no longer strictly local and necessitate modes of representing global ecology or a "sense of planet." Heise's call for what she calls "eco-cosmopolitanism" —a term

[76] The State of Jharkhand came into being on the 15th of November 2000.
[77] Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place*, 8 (See intro. n. 28).
[78] Ibid., 21.

she coins for an ecologically inflected idea of "world citizenship" resonates with many features of *Marang goda*.

Marang goda is invested in forms of cosmopolitanism that recognize new forms of minority rights and forms of ecological citizenship that are global and even planetary. It constructs an eco-cosmopolitanism from the Global South by focusing on the activist world of anti-nuclearism. This becomes evident in the latter half of the novel after its Adivasi protagonist Sagen begins to organize with local and national level Non-Governmental Organizations (N.G.O.s). The novel references real-life activists in the anti-uranium mining movement of Jharkhand. Their names are changed slightly but are easily recognizable by those familiar with Jharkhandi politics. For instance, in order to publicize the plight of the people of Marang Goda, Sagen is introduced to another non-Adivasi filmmaker called Adityashri by a prominent Christian activist–John Dias. Both Adityashri and John Dias are thinly veiled references to prominent activists based in Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand.

Similarly, in order to dispel any doubts local people might have of the toxic impacts of uranium mining, an NGO from Rajasthan sends doctors to Marang Goda to describe the toxic effects of the Ravatbhata nuclear power plant in Rajasthan. The aim of these visits by "experts" is to dispel "in a scientific way" any doubts people have about the effects of radiation.[79]This emphasis on proving the effects of radiation in a "scientific way" has to be unpacked further in the context of the novel's localization as well as its eventual cosmopolitan frame.

Given the statist jingoism and nationalist rhetoric surrounding nuclear power, it is important to bear in mind that the pushback against uranium mining in India has often been

[79] Maji, *Marang goda*, 168.

articulated through regional discourses of ethnic sovereignty and indigenous rights.[80] It is significant that the novel is written by Mahua Maji, a prominent figure in the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (Jharkhand Liberation Front or JMM) party and former Chairperson of the State Commission for Women. Maji is a naturalized resident of Jharkhand in favor with the state government. Maji's regional political affiliation with the JMM and the latter's critique of the right-wing BJP government's nuclear energy program are well-known. Moreover, the JMM built a strong regionalist framework and is one of the prominent political groups instrumental in spearheading the movement for the autonomous state of Jharkhand. *Marang goda* taps into the political fault lines between the center and state governments that has fueled the political regionalism of Jharkhand. Its critique of the right-wing central government's nuclear program stems from a longer history of tensions surrounding right-wing mobilization in the region.[81]

The political stakes of getting the "science" right are then very high which might explain both the emphasis on an *international* consensus on the deleterious effects of nuclear power and a *scientific* consensus that nuclear power is not the benevolent agent of development that the right-wing central government claims it to be. The novel tackles these entrenched perceptions of the benevolence of nuclear power by advancing a series of critiques of why nuclear energy is destined to fail. It does that by critiquing the efficiency of nuclear power via an Australian doctor

[80] Bengt G Karlsson, "Nuclear Lives: Uranium Mining, Indigenous Peoples, and Development in India," in *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 44. No. 34 (22nd August 2009):43–49.
[81] Indu Bharati, "Behind BJP's Vananchal Demand, " in *The Jharkhand movement : Indigenous People's Struggle for Autonomy in India*, ed. Singh Jaipal, et al., IWGIA document ; (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs in collaboration with Bindrai Institute for Research Study and Action, 2003); For representations of nuclear technology in the first two postwar decades, see Hans-Joachim Bieber "Promises of Indian modernity: representations of nuclear technology in the Illustrated weekly of India," in *The nuclear age in popular media: a transnational history, 1945-1965* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

who is identified as White." He tours the region and publishes his findings adding authority to the movement to ban uranium mining. Soon after, Sagen forms the Marang Goda Organization Against Radiation (MOAR) and the novel turns to more transnational examples of anti-nuclear activism. Often these are set up as conversations where characters discuss examples of other actions. For example, John Dias tells Sagen about the 1985 "Operation Exodus" which was carried about by Greenpeace to stop nuclear testing by the French government in the Pacific Islands.

The novel quickly morphs into a compendium of third world critiques of Western modernity loosely held together by its two major characters –Sagen and Adityasri. Simultaneously it builds on Global Third World critiques of development and global discourses of indigeneity. Marang Goda now also shifts physically to a transnational sphere of anti-nuclear activism. A long segment of the novel is set in Japan and is told from the perspective of Adityasri who meets various atomic scientists and doctors. He discusses the natures of the anti-nuclear movements in Japan, South Africa and the U.S. and engaged in lengthy discussions on a global scientific consensus on nuclear radiation and its effects. Members of the Marang Goda Organization Against Radiation (MOAR) also travel South Africa, and Arizona to attend several international conventions including the Indigenous World Uranium Summit. Several experts from around the world also visit Marang Goda and publish their findings. As the novel moves from being a localized text to a transnational one it acquires more characters and also comes to focus on the circulation of information through scientific reports, documentaries, seminars, and conferences that are cited in the novel.

Marang goda also moves away from predominantly Euro-American imaginaries of nuclear war, terror or global dystopia and focuses instead on the accident (*durghatna*); the

contingencies of disaster, and the toxic afterlives of development. [82] This makes the novel heir to the legacies of the environmental justice movement in India in India as well. Though the novel has been marketed as the first anti-nuclear novel in Hindi, it does something more significant by addressing the palpable absence of Hindi literature on toxicity.[83]

Scholars have drawn attention to the grossly inadequate modes of conceiving and describing the experience of victims of toxic harm and have tried to address this gap through ethnographic fieldwork and the documentation of testimonios and biographies that capture the afterlives of disaster, its dispersed nature, and the experiential embodiment of toxicity. [84] To these existing paradigms of the critique of toxicity and environmental harm *Marang goda* brings the question of Adivasi indigeneity and the unique challenges of writing about nuclear harm while rendering Adivasi ways of life.

Arguably *Marang goda* constructs an eco-cosmopolitanism of the Global South by not only linking local Adivasi struggles to global scenarios of risk but also by foregrounding toxicity. This situates the novel in a broader conversation on literary cosmopolitanism that has

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[82] Srirupa Roy has traced the cultures of protest and symbolic-cultural repertoires within which social movements have critiqued India's nuclear program. She notes that Cold War anti-nuclear imaginaries of total annihilation and mass death have not had much traction in the Indian context because they fail to construct an injustice framework or create a radical or transformative politics, see Srirupa Roy, "The Politics of Death: The Anti-nuclear imaginary in India," in *South Asian Cultures of the Bomb: Atomic Publics and the State in India and Pakistan* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 113–132.

[83] There is a small and significant corpus of Hindi short stories and poems on the Bhopal Gas tragedy for instance. However, the sort of imaginative reconstruction of events of chemical and nuclear disaster such as in the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan and Chernobyl is singularly lacking in the Indian case.

[84] Kim Fortun, *Advocacy After Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Suroopa Mukherjee, *Surviving Bhopal: Dancing Bodies, Written Texts, and Oral Testimonials of Women in the Wake of an Industrial Disaster* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

emerged in the wake of both globalization and global environmental crises. Its preoccupation with the global circulation of images, documentaries, and various scientific documents is a hallmark of this. It is possible to also read the novel as a form of what Bishnupriya Ghosh has called a "situated cosmopolitics." Situated cosmopolitics, for Ghosh, is not simply a privileging of postnational forms of belonging but one that emerges from locally situated writers who interrupt majoritarian forms of hegemonic nationalism and recover heterogenous past.[85]

The deepest conundrum for the cosmopolitical writer is how to render local struggles globally communicable without emptying out the specificity of the local. How to be attentive to the radical polysemy of the other? While it is possible to see how *Marang goda* switches into a cosmopolitan register, it is important to return to the beginning of the novel and trace how the cosmopolitan intent of the novel cannot coexist with the Adivasi life world. This is first evident in the very structural shift in the focus of the novel and secondly in the figurative resolution through which Adivasi ways of life are rehabilitated into the novel much like the "magical" disappearance of the Asur in *Global gamv.*

IV. From Witchdoctors to Stone doctors: From Poison to Toxins

It is only halfway through the novel that one realizes that the focus on building narrative authority through specialized knowledge and an eco-cosmopolitan focus has completely taken over the thick description of the Ho community that had characterized earlier chapters. Returning to these earlier chapters one notices that behind the detailed engagement with customs and

[85] Bishnupriya Ghosh When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel (Rutgers University Press, 2004), 140.

recounting of ways of catching and relating to food is a system of knowledge that, though described, is never really engaged with. For example, there are instances were Adivasi characters recount tales that articulate what the novel interprets as a practice of ecological equilibrium. Cariba, a young Adivasi woman, recalls the story of a villager whose head was separated from his torso while hunting for fish in the forest. His death was attributed to the punishment meted out by a spirit (*bonga*) because he had sneaked off to catch fish in private on a day when it had been decided that the tribe would go to hunt collectively.[86]

In the same vein the Ho are presented as a prelapsarian community. Barring an accident in which Jambira's first wife is trampled by a wild elephant there is no death or disease. Fatal or near fatal accidents are usually caused by wild animals or *attributed to the malicious intent of angry spirits or dead ancestors and relatives.* The transition away from this world happens when a new disease grips the region. Its first victim is Jambira who sickens up and starts coughing blood. He has now worked for many years in the uranium mines at Marang Goda. When traditional medicines and herbs (*jadi buti*) fail he visits the company doctors who misdiagnose his ailment as tuberculosis.

As mentioned earlier the novel is now focalized through Sagen and his growing *consciousness* of the toxic effects of uranium mining to which he loses both his grandfather and his parents. However, the politicization of environmental harm is accompanied by a break with the earlier narrative focus on the Adivasi lifeworld. This is also the precise point at which an urban non-Adivasi protagonist–Adityashri–is introduced. More importantly, instead of making a narrative choice to privilege testimonial or psychosomatic/experiential modes that have often

[86] Maji, *Marang goda,* 133–134.

been adopted by ethnographies and documentaries on Jadugoda's slow violence, the novel now focuses exclusively on "expert" knowledges weighing in on the toxic vulnerabilities created by nuclear waste.[87] The novel morphs into a form of *dissemination* about the toxic effects of radiation (*vikiran*) shifting its focus to the credibility of scientific authority on this issue. Adityashri and Sagen tour the radiation effected districts while meeting experts and activists who exchange information. These tours culminate in the making of a documentary film that now circulates as a *consciousness-raising* tool through which public *awareness* of uranium's toxic effects takes center stage. The novel then focuses exclusively on its non-Adivasi character – Adityashri–and his travels abroad to publicize the plight of Marang Goda through his documentary.

As soon as the novel moves from the local to the transnational domain, its focus shifts away from the Adivasi lifeworld to exclusively documenting the scientific, legal, and medical protocols through which to understand radiation effects. The Hindi reader enters the world of transnational anti-nuclear and indigenous activism and is given a potted history of global antinuclear activism, various organizations involved in the anti-nuclear movement, and detailed discussions on the impact of radiation and the need for international standards on regulating nuclear power and energy. Why doesn't the novel construct the experience of toxic harm from within the Adivasi cosmologies it has so far described so carefully?

Here one begins to sense a deeper problem on the nature of knowledge of environmental harm. The transition from the granular engagement with Adivasi forms of knowledge to the

[87] Perhaps the most important being the real-life documentary on which this fictional account is based, see Shriprakash, *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda: (Ragi, kana, ko bonga buru)* (Jharkhand: Kritika, 2000).

science of toxicity poses the most interesting problems in thinking about the sources and agents of toxicity. How does one write about indigenous practices that are at variance with modern science but also possess a sense of the efficacy of agents to harm or heal?

IV.The *Pharmakos*: Witch-hunts and Disease

This sense of the efficacy of agents to harm and heal is first presented from within an Adivasi life world. I have already mentioned how the depiction of Adivasi habitat and an exoticization of landscape as wildness render the Ho prelapsarian and disease free. However, there is a fleeting encounter between an indigenous practice of healing and colonial bioprospecting in the region that is significant for the larger point I am making.[88] Most diseases and accidents up to this point in the novel are *not* interpreted bio-medically and are often attributed to the malicious intent of angry spirits or dead ancestors.

When Jambira's wife is trampled to death, he and his brother migrate further east in search of work. One morning, as Jambira and his brother Rimil travel across the Saranda forest, Rimil carelessly tears off the bark of an unknown tree to clean his teeth. To his horror the bark makes all his teeth fall off. Distressed, the two seek refuge in a nearby Ho village where the local headman (*munda*) directs them to a large mountain that is known to be densely covered by various medicinal plants and where an aging traditional practitioner of medicine (*kabiraj*) also lives.

[88] The work of Paul Bodding stands out. See Paul Olaf Bodding, (1927) *Studies in Santal Medicine & Connected Folklore*. Reprint (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1986); *Santal Riddles [and] Witchcraft Among the Santals* (Oslo: A. W. Brøggers, 1940).

Rimil and Jambira are introduced to this practitioner who resides in a small hut with "numerous herbs (*jadi buti*), dried seeds, leaves and barks of various trees and plants and several bottles of oils."[89]They are taken aback by the presence of an Englishman, who is sitting on his haunches next to the doctor, stirring a large iron pot. The Englishman, the two are told, is learning how to cure different kinds of ailments with medicines made from local trees like the *sindvar*, *samel*, and the *palash* trees. [90] On hearing how the bark of the tree caused Rimil's teeth to fall off without any bleeding or pain, the Englishman is keen to exploit the anesthetic potential of this tree and enlists Rimil and Jambira to help him find it.

This is a deeply suggestive moment in the novel where Adivasi ethnomedicine swims into view. David Arnold has discussed how allopathic practitioners closely observed the indigenous use of medicinal plants valuing them as potentially valuable substitutes for imported substances or as examples of local *materia medica* whose efficacy warranted incorporation into their own therapeutic practice.[91] However, the novel doesn't dwell on this incident to draw the reader's attention to the viability of Adivasi practices. Instead it functions as another instance of the wildness of the landscape comprising of dangerous exotic plants, the elusive traditional practitioner, and the Englishman who seems to have "gone native."

This incident could potentially be read within the framework of an unacknowledged transnational history of science through what Londa Schiebinger has identified as

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[89] Maji, *Marang goda,* 69.

[90] The *sindvar* tree (commonly known as the *Vitex*, Chinese chaste tree, five-leaved chaste tree**)** is native to South and Southeast Asia. The *samel* tree (commonly known as *Bombax ceiba* or as cotton tree) is also an Asian tropical tree. The Palash tree (commonly known as the *Butea Monosperma***)** is a species of *Butea* native to tropical and sub-tropical parts of the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia. The Palash is also the state flower of Jharkhand.

[91] David Arnold, *Toxic Histories: Poison and Pollution in Modern India* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

"bioprospecting".[92] The empirical and epistemological processes through which imperial and more recently neoliberal agencies have appropriated local knowledge and bioresources for their commercial systems are undeniable.[93] However, my purpose of dwelling on this moment is different. This moment stages the ontological ambivalence of not only what constitutes poison in different cultures but the kinds of efficacy one is willing to grant them. This moment invites us to think of the histories of toxins as precisely this middle ground in which cultures decide and act on the efficacious power of substances.

The Adivasi practitioner expresses his inability to restore the fallen teeth and is interested in treating the patient for any discomfort he might have. It is the Englishman who is interested in the anesthetic properties of the plant. This moment is echoed again when the "stone doctors" (a term Jambira uses for the geologists who come to Marang Goda) discover uranium deposits in the region. Jambira is struck with horror as he peers at a sample of radioactive uranium through a microscope. The geologists on the other hand inform him how *useful* and precious this new substance is.

It is important to juxtapose this moment of Adivasi ethnomedicine to how the novel unfolds when members of the Ho community bordering the uranium mines begin to die mysteriously. As the toxic waste of the uranium mines begins to affect the health of neighboring Adivasi communities, a strange phenomenon grips the regions of Saranda, Kolhan, Porahat. A movement to purge the region of witches (*dain*) escalates into the formation of village protection teams and a region-wide campaign to eliminate them. The reader learns of how members of the

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[92] Londa L. Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004.
[93] Vandana Shiva, "Bioprospecting as Sophisticated Biopiracy," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* Vol. 32, No. 2 (Winter 2007): 307–313.

Ho community have superstitiously attributed radiation deaths to the machinations of witches. When his own aunt is accused of killing her husband and child and declared a witch, Sagen is angst-ridden and critical asking, when will our community (*samaj*) be rid of this superstition?[94]

Witch-hunting is a well-documented phenomenon in the region and the particular events to which the novel refers to took place in 1983.[95] Scholars have argued that outbreaks of epidemics and the failure of the government to provide primary healthcare can often be correlated to witch-hunts. Archana Mishra, who has traveled extensively in Jharkhand to study this phenomenon, attributes witch hunts to illiteracy, ignorance, poor public health infrastructure and the arcane practices of shamans (*ojhas*).[96] Others have contested such readings of these practices as something that is only confined to poor, illiterate Adivasis. Commenting on such arguments as instances of a colonial mindset, Sanjay Basu Mallick points out that witch–hunts are practiced across class and caste and are a phenomenon absent from Adivasi communities that have not taken to settled agriculture.[97]

Instead of adjudicating what constitutes the correct *social interpretation* of witch-hunting practices *Marang goda* does something different. At one level it approaches these events as an instance of the ignorance that plagues Adivasi communities. The novel stages Sagen's growing

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[94] Maji, *Marang goda*, 125.

[95] For a colonial history of this practice, see Shashank Sinha 'Witch-Hunts, Adivasis, and the Uprising in Chhotanagpur', in *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 42, No. 19 (2007):1672-676. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4419566; for a similar phenomenon in Bastar, see Nandini Sundar, "Divining Evil: The State and Witchcraft in Bastar," *Gender, Technology and Development* Vol. 5 No. 3 (November 2001): 425–448; Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony," *American Ethnologist* Vol. 26 no. 2 (1999): 279–303.

[96] Archana Mishra, *Casting the Evil Eye: Witch Trials in Tribal India* (New Delhi: Namita Gokhale Editions, Roli Books, 2003).

[97] Sanjay Basu Mallick, *Dain Gatha* (Ranchi: Institute for Community Forest Governance, 2009).

scientific understanding of the toxic effects of uranium mining. Lengthy dialogues ensue on the effects of toxic waste littered with a barrage of facts Sagen has collected from his access to the literature in the library of the company where he is training to be an electrician. As he reads on, the "clouds of his ignorance (*ajnanta*) lifted."[98]

However, what Maji presents as Sagen's rational understanding of the real causes of environmental harm –a product of his scientific self–education–is a much richer moment for thinking about what an Adivasi critique of radiation and nuclearism could look like. I have already shown that in order to establish the correct etiology of disease and attribute culpability for environmental harm an overt scientism comes to dominate the novel. However, the potency of uranium to inflict harm and act at a distance cannot be captured by this overt scientism.

This becomes evident when Sagen decides to establish the Members of Marang Goda Organization Against Radiation (MOAR) to ban uranium mining. He takes this decision after he hears that the local priest (*dehari*) of Marang Goda has seen a recurrent dream in which "*pipal*, *sal*, *soso* and other trees" talk to him. They tell him that their "health is continuously worsening" and they "are not being able to propagate properly." Furthermore they say that every month they "fall seriously ill on a particular day" and they fell ill "on the day of the full moon (*purnima*)."[99] On investigating further, Sagen discovers that nuclear waste from different atomic research labs, nuclear reactors, and radioactive waste from various hospitals in the country are all being dumped in Marang Goda. And, in fact, the premonition is correct because it is on the 18th of the month, the day of the full moon, that this waste is transported to Marang Goda.

[98] Mahua Maji, *Marang Goda*, 158.
[99] Ibid., 177–178.

V. Discourses of Development: *The Pharmakon*

Sagen's growing awareness of the toxic effects of uranium mining are described in a chapter that is titled "The real witch is nabbed." It's a strange metaphor to use but also strangely apt.[100] At the level of trope, the novel borrows from an Adivasi worldview comparing uranium to a witch. If the witch is a *pharmakos*–a victim sacrificed in the interests of her community–she also lends her figural power to the discovery of the real witch (*asli dain*) —uranium. It makes sense that this metaphor is connected to another meaning of the *pharmakon* as both poison and remedy.[101] Unlike the operation of self-purgation of the body politic, the *pharmakon* poses a different problem. India's reliance on radioactive uranium mining is bolstered by a public discourse that nuclear power is the only way forward for "cheap electricity, better medicine, and national security."[102] Uranium is both poison and remedy.

As soon as environmental harm circulates as a global problem, the Adivasi lifeworld recedes from view. As if conscious of this, the last part of the novel returns to Marang Goda. This time the reader sees the region through the eyes of another non-Adivasi protagonist – Pragya. Pragya travels with Sagen and Adityasri researching the Naxalite insurgency in Jharkhand. The novel attempts to recreate the magic and wonder of the landscape by drawing the

[100] Ibid., 347.
[101] In his reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*, Derrida focuses on the '*pharmakon*'—which can also mean philtre, drug, recipe, charm, medicine, substance, spell, artificial colour, and paint—as that which produces a flickering and disorienting play in conceptual/ philosophical oppositions: remedy/ poison, good/ bad, true/ false, positive/ negative, interior/ exterior, see, Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination* (trans. Barbara Johnson. London: The Athlone Press, 1981), 61–172.
[102] *Marang Goda*, 347.

attention of the reader to exotic plants and wildlife as if in search of alternatives to the deadlock of energy-intensive development.

It is no coincidence that these last chapters of the novel unfold like a travel narrative. Now no longer presented from within the Adivasi lifeworld, the novel's narration vacillates between an account of descriptions of relief, topography, natural vegetation on the one hand and a romantic primitivism that becomes the main talking point between Adityasri and Pragya on the other. Familiar tropes of the simplicity and naivete of the Adivasis resurface. For instance, Adityasri chides Pragya saying, "You urbanites go dancing in discos or pubs, and they [Adivasis] dance in the lap of nature."[103] During the course of traveling in the Saranda forest the novel continues to shift registers between nature as it is evident in the forest and the "carefree *nature* of the Adivasis."[104]

VI. Conclusion: Indigenous Cosmopolitics

I have traced the many valences of the term indigeneity in literary discourse from the linguistic to the novelization of Adivasi indigeneity and the challenges that accompany this process. How can bold and imaginative claims of worlding emerge from regionalized notions of Adivasi identity, rights-based claims and transnational discourses of global indigeneity? Through an analysis of *Global gamv ke devta* and *Marang goda nilkanth hua* I have explored how these come together in various permutations.

The primary question that these novels struggle with is how to frame the Adivasi as an ecological subject. They understand this subject through a combination of regional and

[103] Maji, *Marand goda*, 279.
[104] Ibid, 292. Emphasis mine.

cosmopolitan gestures. However, it is difficult to arrive at an answer to that question without considering what were to happen if we were actually to inhabit the cosmological proposition of Adivasi indigenous thought and accept the agency of actors we never imagine.

Chapter 3

Nature as Resource: Traces of Energy in the Hindi Literary Archive

> The industrial age emerged from the use of coal, and to the present day has detained us in a haze of coal smoke; it is in that smoke that we can discern the history and the future of the modern world.
> —— Kuntala Lahiri- Dutta, *Coal Nation*[1]
>
> It is Asia, then, that has torn the mask from the phantom that lured it onto the stage of the Great Derangement, but only to recoil in horror at its own handiwork; its shock is such that it dares not even name what it has beheld—for having entered this stage, it is trapped, like everyone else.
> ——Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*[2]

Two characters, Ashish Ghosal and Udham Simh, arrive as apprentices in the coal mining town of Candanpur, set in present-day Jharia, Jharkhand. They survey the blighted landscape of Candanpur —a product of fires in the coal mines that have ravaged the region for over a hundred years and caused massive subsidence. But it is not only the landscape of Candanpur but also its air that is described in some detail:

> [T]he city of smog *(dhuamse*) Jharia! Not fog (*kuhasa*), but smog! Dust, smoke and fog—all three make this word smog (*dhuamsa*). And, as if trapped in the fine net of this smog, are numerous blinkering lights, far and wide, like stars in the firmament.[3]

[1] Kuntala Lahiri-Datta *The Coal Nation: Histories, Ecologies and Politics of Coal in India* (Surrey, Routledge, 2014), 1.
[2] Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 92.
[3] Sanjiv, *Savdhan! Nice ag hai,* (New Delhi: Radhakrsn, 1986), 12. All translations are mine.

The scene is from the Hindi novel *Savdhan, Nice ag hai* (*Look Out! There's Fire Down Below*, 1986). The coal mines of Jharia, described in this opening scene, are the most iconic site of India's long love affair with coal. They are also a site where grinding poverty and India's quest for development seem locked in a death grip. The subject of numerous photo essays and articles in international newspapers, Jharia is depicted with its smoldering coal mines and human figures poised precariously on its blasted landscape.[4] In the international media these mines have become emblematic of dirty energy and the need to transition away from fossil fuels.[5]

Thus far, I have dwelt on the limitations of postcolonial literary studies in theorizing literary form and ecology and in advancing an understanding of the "environment" as more than human. In Chapter one, I demonstrated these limitations through a reading of the non-human forces that shaped the *amcalik* novel. Similarly, in Chapter two I queried the idea of "nature" as a way of understanding Adivasi cosmologies in the work of regional writers such as Ranendra and Mahua Maji. In both instances, I teased out the implications of paying attention to the more-than-human that escapes narrative containment.

In this chapter I train my gaze to literary atmosphere that forms the stuff of literary worlds. The conceptualization and naming of this representational feature as "background" comprises one of the fundamental aspects of formal literary analysis. It involves analyzing forms of narrative attention across the diegetic space, often understood as *setting* or *milieu* that

[4] Ronny Sen, *End of Time* (New Delhi: Nazar Foundation, 2017); BBC News, "Photos of 100-year fire win Getty Instagram award," (Accessed June, 2019) https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-37426714 ;Tom Maguire, "Fires in Jharia spell death and disease for villagers," *Guardian*, 11th March, 2019 https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/mar/11/fires-of-jharia-spell-death-and-disease-for-villagers-india-coal-industry (Accessed June, 2019).

[5] Niklas Hohne et.al., "Emissions: World has four times the work or one-third of the time," *Nature* Vol.579 (March 2020): 25–28.

materialize reality. The description of the smog of Candanpur is self-contained within the world of the novel. It creates the *bhava* of the scene for the reader by presenting a visual mediation of its characters' perspective. The reader has learnt to interpret such descriptions as the novel's atmosphere/mood (*vatavaran*). My interest in atmosphere, however, derives from an attention to a very particular agent that animates this scene — coal.

Almost three decades have elapsed since scientists first highlighted the link between climate change and fossil fuels.[6] These seemingly innocuous agents of industrial modernity, that constituted the mute "background" of literary worlds, are now legible as an archive of atmospheric effects that exceed both conventional historical periodization and literary analysis. How do we read these agents that have barely registered in our consideration of literature's environment?

For the most part, postcolonial studies scholars have engaged the growing environmental concerns around fossil fuels by showing how the resource logics of fossil-fuels are embedded in histories of colonialism and imperialism that continue to fuel global capital.[7] However, the focus on the colonial and imperial axes of resource extraction has largely ignored third-world histories

[6] The constitution of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992 first made the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions an agenda for global governance. Mark Maslin points out that from 1988 onwards the use of the phrase "global warming" and "climate change" gained support, while "greenhouse effect" lost its appeal and by 1997 was rarely mentioned. See Mark Maslin, *Global Warming: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2004). Prior to this, two Indian environmentalists –Sunita Narain and Anil Agarwal had already emphasized that fossil fuel emissions from the Global North had a far greater share in global warming than the methane emissions of subsistence economies and changing land-use patterns in the Global South. See Sunita Narain and Anil Agarwal, "Global Warming in an Unequal World," in *India in a Warming World: Integrating Climate Change and Development* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019): n.p.

[7] Wenzel, "Petro-magic-realism," 2006; Elizabeth DeLoughrey et. al, *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities* (New York: London: Routledge, 2015); *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

of decolonization.[8] Elizabeth Chatterjee has queried the exclusive focus on some "undifferentiated force of global capitalism" while giving short shrift to how Asian nations often embraced the fossil energy regime as a part of the widely shared state-led project of "fossil developmentalism." Chatterjee defines "fossil developmentalism" in contrast to "fossil capitalism" and argues that the spread of cheap energy is not simply an outgrowth of capitalism and colonialism but a product of the distinct moral economies of postcolonial nation states.[9] Smiliarly, Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests that a history of "fossil-fuel modernity"– an epochal transition to fossil fuels worldwide – could potentially look very different when viewed from the perspective of the "subaltern modernizers of world history."[10] Chakrabarty asks where "are the anticolonial, late-modern and the late modernizing leaders Asia and Africa – the Nehrus, the Nassers, the Sukarnos, the Nyereres, the Senghors, the Frantz Fanons – in this story?"[11] One could add Phanishvarnath Renu and Nagarjun

[8] For the convergence between histories of decolonization and the historiography of climate change, see Will Steffen, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen, and John McNeill, "The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, Volume 369, Issue 1938 http://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2010.0327, accessed August 22, 2019; Will Steffen, Wendy Broadgate, Lisa Deutsch, Owen Gaffney, and Cornelia Ludwig, "The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration," *The Anthropocene Review* Vol.2, no. 1 (April 2015): 81–98.

[9] Elizabeth Chatterjee, "The Asian Anthropocene: Electricity and Fossil Developmentalism," *The Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol.79, No. 1 (February 2020):1–22.

[10] See, Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Planetary Crises and the Difficulty of Being Modern," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* Vol 46, No. 3 (2018), 259. Dipesh Chakrabarty has drawn attention to how early stages in negotiating global carbon emissions was challenged by countries like India. This challenge stemmed from an attempt to prolong what he calls the 'developmental regime of historicity' in which fossil fuels were the cornerstone of visions of emancipatory futures. On the significance of Asian histories for the Anthropocene, see Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Mark J. Hudson, "Placing Asia in the Anthropocene: Histories, Vulnerabilities, Responses," in *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol.73,No.4(2014): 941–62. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43553461.

[11] Chakrabarty, "Planetary," 273–274.

to this list as well. What these interventions suggest is that the *global* story of fossil-fuels is a story that has yet to be told.

I take these interventions as a starting point to think about India's energy history in the context of literary history and periodization. How does one delineate a literary archive of energy in the context of postcolonial India? I focus on coal precisely because it straddles both the colonial and postcolonial periods and continues to be the primary source of energy in the subcontinent. My analysis begins with tracing why the *belatedness* of the coal mining novel is an important indication of the distinct postcolonial trajectories of development suggested above. Following the nationalization of India's coal mines in 1972–73, I explore a range of literary sites where questions of energy management and distribution as well as energy access and energy security become literary concerns. These include the regional coal mining novel; urban fiction on the middle-class experience of energy infrastructures; depictions of traditional practices of energy, and the emergence of a subaltern demand for cheap energy in the wake of globalization.

My analysis will engage with emerging approaches to literary comparativism that read texts from diverse locations as "underpinned by hegemonic forms of energy extraction, production and consumption."[12] While also reading for how forms of energy *determine* literary texts, I suggest that these approaches have not gone far enough. Often falling back into resource-driven analyses of fossil capitalism they do not pay sufficient attention to how the "subaltern modernizers of world history" have, in fact, unleashed the global lives of fossil-fuels.

[12] See Graeme Macdonald, "Research Note: The Resources of Culture," *Reviews in Cultural Theory,* Vol.1,no.2(2013)[http://reviewsinculture.com/2013/08/01/research-note-the-resources-of-culture/#noteref4, accessed 26th May 2019].

I. The Nation and Coal: The case for the emergence of the "coal mining novel"

How does one constitute literary archives of India's energy history? Coal, without which India's energy history cannot be told, is the most obvious place to start. In December 2017, I met Hindi writer Sanjiv to talk about his iconic novel *Savdhan!* and others such as *Dhar* (A Sharp Blade, 1990) and *Pamv tale ki dub* (The Trodden Grass,1995) that have meticulously tracked the political and social histories of coal mining in Eastern India. I asked Sanjiv if he was aware of novels preceding his in India. Sanjiv didn't seem to be aware of his literary precursor Damodar Sadan whose *Kala Hira* (Black Diamond, 1981) — depicts the coal mines of Chindvara in Madhya Pradesh.[13] But he did mention Emile Zola's *Germinal* and D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. "The critics said my novel reminded them of the novels of Zola and Lawrence," he smiled and continued "I hadn't read them when I began writing."[14]

Sanjiv's comment sums up the predicament of the third-world literary text that arrives on the scene of world literature as if already read.[15] But it wasn't only the presumed similarity of the Hindi coal mining novel to its European counterparts that raised interesting questions. While Emile Zola's *Germinal* was published in 1885 and D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* in 1913, it seems that a literary historian would be hard pressed to find a comparable novel in Hindi until the late 70s. I was soon to discover more novels set in India's coal mines, but their *belatedness*

[13] Damodar Sadan, *Kala Hira* (Delhi, Prakashan Samsthan, 1981).
[14] Based on a personal interview with Sanjiv in December 2017.
[15] I use the term "third-world" in order to reference a predicament of the non-anglophone text that is first, albeit controversially, analyzed by Frederic Jameson. See Frederic Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," in *Social Text,* No. 15 (Autumn, 1986): 65–88.

was significant for models of literary comparativism that focus on the relation between literature and energy histories.

Scholars have suggested that literary periodization, usually governed by immediate historical and generic landmarks, can be rethought from the vantage point of energy systems. Patricia Yaeger famously asked whether: "Instead of divvying up literary works into hundred-year intervals[...]or categories harnessing the history of ideas (Romanticism, Enlightenment), what happens if we sort texts according to the energy sources that made them possible?"[16] Similarly, Imre Szeman asks if one of the ways it might be possible to grasp the impact of energy on literary and cultural production is by engaging in a process of periodization.[17]

The methods that have emerged so far in the context of these new provocations of thinking literary periodization in light of energy history have invariably focused on the Euro-American cultures. It has also been far easier to derive an energy-driven literary periodization from colonial history. For instance, Benjamin Morgan's observation that the Victorian period might usefully be *re*described as the "Age of Coal" is borne out by the centrality of coal in the "empire's worldmaking project" as Nathan. K. Hensley and Philip Steer show.[18] Similarly, the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) has developed methods of literary comparativism as an approach to "world-energy literature."[19] Their comparativist manifesto is driven by the new

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[16] Patricia Yaeger, "Editor's Column: Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale Oil,Gasoline, Atomic Power, and Other Energy Sources," in *PMLA* Vol.126. No.2. (2011): 305.
[17] See Szeman, "Conjectures," 278.
[18] For a discussion of the Victorian period as the "Age of Coal", see Benjamin Morgan, '*Fin du Globe*: On Decadent Planets', in *Victorian Studies* Vol. 58, No. 4, (2016): 609–635.
Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer, 'Signatures of the Carboniferous: The Literary Forms of Coal', in *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire*, eds. Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 63–84.
[19] WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 7.

strapline that world literature " is the literature of the world-system" and that literary texts must be read as "resource texts."[20]

There has been skepticism concerning the periodization of fossil-driven world-systems within the historiography of climate change more generally that might be worth reiterating here. This has predictably come from area studies and postcolonial studies scholars. Area studies scholars have pointed out that the narrative of historical transformation implied in climate change historiography "is a narrative in which the 'dynamics of global transformation,' […]lie almost entirely in the North Atlantic."[21]The story, as Ottoman historian Alan Mikhail observes, "has not challenged the Enlightenment chronology or narrative of history," rather, it aims "to rewire the Enlightenment to include a story of progressive environmental degradation."[22] In her discussion of what she calls the "Asian Anthropocene" Elizabeth Chatterjee also observes that universal logics of Western-style fossil capitalism stemming from Atlantic colonialism and British industrialization ill-fit the historical record. [23]

In different ways these interventions caution against a singular narrative of diffusion and dissemination that has dominated the link between the deeper penetration of fossil-fuels worldwide and climate change. For instance, how would Morgan's suggestion of an "Age of Coal" look like from the perspective of the literary history of South Asia?[24] Coal has two lives in

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[20] Graeme Macdonald, '"Monstrous Transformer": Petrofiction and World Literature," in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* Vol. 53, No. 3 (2017): 289–302.
[21] Sunil Amrith, "The Anthropocene and the Triumph of the Imagination: An Environmental Perspective on C.A. Bayly's *Remaking the Modern World, 1900–2015*," in *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol.78, no. 4 (September 2019): 839.
[22] Alan Mikhail, "Enlightenment Anthropocene," in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* Vol. 49. No. 2 (2016):217.
[23] Elizabeth Chatterjee, "The Asian Anthropocene," 4.
[24] For a comprehensive history of coal mining in India, see Lahiri-Datta *The Coal Nation*, 2014.

the Indian context – first in the British imperial enclave economy and the second in the postcolonial context.[25] In the first iteration coal plays an important function in the imperial axes of resource extraction.[26] Coal mines were the most prominent amongst the various modern industrial enterprises established in India under colonial rule. This intensified during what Jason Moore describes as the post-1870 "era of peak appropriation" in which "capitalism as a planetary system became possible through the production of a globe-encircling railroad and steamship network.[27] This is a periodization that has proven more productive for examining how expanding technologies of fossil-fuel modernity can inform scholarship on the Victorian period.[28]

[25] This is not to suggest that coal was unknown in the precolonial period. Evidence exists substantiating the early use of coal in India: the Sanskrit word *angar* stands for coal and the ancient texts of *Rgveda*; *Taittiriya upanisad* and Kautilya's *Arthashastra* all mention the burning of coal for smelting iron and other ores. Evidence of sophisticated iron-making – for example in the skilled manufacture of wrought iron pillars of the Kutab Minar in New Delhi – also suggests that coal might have been in use during the Mughal period. The remains of old slag heaps can still be found scattered around the hillocks of Jharkhand that contain coal deposits. Throughout this region, coal-related place-names – such as 'kalipahari', meaning black hill – also indicate the possibility of early coal use.

[26] Although coal was not unknown in India the first commercial use of coal was a product of colonial enterprise. On 11th August 1774, John Sumner and Suetonius Grant Heatly applied to Governor General of Bengal Lord Warren Hastings to produce and sell coal in Bengal and its dependencies. In exchange, they also offered to supply to the British East India Company ten thousand *maunds* (a Bangla term, no longer in popular use, roughly equivalent of 40 kgs) of pit coal every year for a period of five years.

[27] Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015), 136–137. On how this period led to the development of enclave mining in the colonial period, see Dietmar Rothermund and D.C. Wadhwa, *Zamindars, mines, and peasants: studies in the history of an Indian coalfield and its rural hinterland,* South Asian studies (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978).

[28] The colonial history of coal in India has been significant for Victorian studies scholars who have documented coal's imperial reach in British cultural production. See Benjamin Morgan, '*Fin du Globe*," 2016; Jesse O. Taylor, *The Sky of our manufacture: the London fog and British fiction from Dickens to Woolf* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016); Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer, "Signatures of the Carboniferous," 2019.

Cultural histories of colonial India have to a certain extent examined the connection between the radical reorganization of time and space through technologies, like the railways, and cultural forms. Harriet Bury, for example, has traced the novelty of the traveling experiences of the Hindi intelligentsia in the railway era. She credits the crafting of a distinct genre of travel writing to the railway travels undertaken by one of the central figures of modern Hindi literature –Bharatendu Harishchandra.[29] Similarly, Indra Deva has documented the steady incorporation of modern modes of communication and industrialization into folk songs.[30] Through a reading of Hindi and Bhojpuri folk songs she shows how they archive the transformations in patterns of migration with the expansion of the railways and industrialization. Kris Manjapra lists the expansion of communication and travel technologies, especially shipping, printing, telegraphs and finance, as a backdrop to the global imaginary of modernism in Bengal by the 1920s. He traces the global communities of imagination, discussion and even affection that became intrinsic to the life worlds of colonial subjects who made long-distance travels, either physically or imaginatively.[31]

While the British imperial axes of energy dependencies radicalized senses of space and time in colonial India they were far from extensive. Nor can the benevolence of colonial power explain how new technologies, made possible by fossil fuels, expanded in the context of postcolonial India. These were not simply "affordances" that were inherited but had to be

[29] See Harriet Bury, "Novel Spaces,Transitional Moments:Negotiating text and territory in Nineteenth-Century Hindi Travel Accounts," in *27 down : new departures in Indian railway studies*, ed. Ian J. Kerr (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2007), 1–38.
[30] Indra Deva, "Modern Social Forces in Indian Folk Songs," in *Diogenes*, Vol. 4, No. 15 (1956): 48–64.
[31] Kris Manjapra, "From Imperial to International Horizons: A Hermeneutic Study of Bengali Modernism," in *Modern Intellectual History* Vol. 8, no. 2 (2011): 327–359.

reimagined within the colonial context by indigenous players.[32] If coal was symbolic of colonialism it was also an insurgent form within which both nationalist and left critiques could be articulated. Aspects of this coal nationalism was evident in short fiction in colonial period.[33]

A demand for nationalization first arose from early trade union activities.[34] However, it was only with Indian independence and the postwar global imaginary of "development" that inaugurated the "great acceleration" *fueled* by the distinct decolonial imagination of coal. A vocabulary of coal nationalism intensified in India after the sixties with coal playing an increasing role in the domestic sector, particularly for urban middle-class consumers. Trade unions reiterated the demand of state control and called for the dismantling of the colonial structures of coal management and the nationalization of coal mines. This demand was coupled with the radicalization of labor around biopolitical concerns of health, compensation, and industrial hazard; the emergence of Maoist peasant-worker alliances in the wake of the *Naxalbari* movement; and sub-nationalist movements for regional autonomy in Eastern India

[32] The work of scholars such as Sunila Kale has also shown how infrastructures of electricity developed unevenly in colonial India and was not simply gifted to the colonies. The growth of infrastructures of electricity was elaborated within diverse trajectories and eventually realized within postcolonial forms of development. See Sunila Kale, "Structures of Power: Electrification in Colonial India," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* Vol. 34, No.3 (2014): 454–75.

[33] Some of the early short fiction on coal mines is in Bengali. A writer associated with the literary magazine *Kallol*—Shailjanand Mukhopadhyay (1900–1976) wrote two short story collections *Kayalakuthi* (The Coal Miner's office, 1930) and *Din-Majur* (Day Laborer, 1932) that depicted the life of coal miners in his home district of Burdwan.

[34] As early as the 1930s, following a spate of industrial accidents, the demand for the rationalization of the industry for safe mining and for the protection of coal and labor as national assets had gained traction. See, S.A. Dange, "Death Pits in Our Land: How 200000 Indian Miners Live and Work," (Pamphlet shared at Miners International Federation Conference, Paris, August 1945) quoted in Kuntala Lahiri-Dutta, *The Coal Nation,* 125.

where a majority of India's coal mines are located.[35] India's coal mines were finally nationalized in two phases—coking coal mines in 1971–72 and non-coking coal mines in 1973. With the enactment of the Coal Mines (Nationalization) Act, 1973, all coal mines in India were nationalized on 1 May 1973.[36]

It is against this backdrop that Hindi novels set in coal mining regions of North India began to be published.[37] Novels depicting the state of India's coal mines, such as Damodar Sadan's *Kala hira* (*Black Diamond*, 1981), Sanjiv's *Savdhan nice ag hai* (*Look Out! There's Fire Down Below*,1986), *Dhar* (A Sharp Blade (1990), Ilyas Ahmed Gaddi's *Phayar eriya* (Fire Area*,* 1994) and Narayan Simh's, *Yeh dhuam kaham se uthata hai* (The rising smoke*,* 1999) were published.[38] These novels explored a range of issues. *Kala Hira* retraced the devasting Newton Chikli Colliery disaster of December 1954 in order to assess the impact that nationalization had had on labor safety. Other writers explored the implications of nationalization from the vantage point of regional development. Sanjiv's novel *Dhar* (*A Sharp*

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[35] For instance, the Indian Mines Act was passed in 1952 with further amendments in 1959. The act contains provisions for measures relating to health, safety, and welfare of workers in the coal, metalliferous, and oil mines. Provisions such as working hours in mines, minimum wage, and other related matters are prescribed. On regional movements for autonomy in the region of Bihar, see Jaipal Singh et al. *The Jharkhand Movement,* 2003). Other resource frontiers such as oil and national gas in Assam and coal in Nagaland also revealed the fault lines between regional and national development. See, Ditee Moni Baruah, "The Refinery Movement in Assam," in *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 46, No. 1 (January 2011): 63–69; Dolly Kikon, *Living with Oil & Coal* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).

[36] Metallurgical coal or coking coal is a grade of coal that can be used to produce good quality coke. Coke is an essential fuel and reactant in the blast furnace process for primary steelmaking. The demand for metallurgical coal is highly coupled to the demand for steel. Non-coking coals have higher ash content and are typically used in thermal power plants as steam coals.

[37] The literary archive of coal is split across different regional language archives and it has been difficult to piece together a comprehensive history of fiction on India's coal mines.

[38] Hindi films transformed coal politics into cinematic melodrama by drawing working class protest into a nationalist imaginary. See Yash Chopra et. al, *Kala patthar*. Narayan Simh, *Ye dhuam kaham se uthata hai* (Allahabad: Sahitya Bhandar, 2016).

Blade, 1990) traced the informal economies of coal that sustain indigenous communities in Southern Bihar and imagined left-progressive alternatives to nationalization in small cooperatively owned mines. With the intensification of the movement for regional autonomy in Jharkhand in the nineties Sanjiv turned to questions of indigeneity and displacement in *Pamv tale ki dub* (*The Trodden Grass*,1995).[39]

Now with the influx of multinational mining interests following India's liberalization, the nexus of power between local politicos, coal mafias, and corporate interests has tended to dominate cultural representations of the social lives of coal. While the industrial-style novel has faded from view, coal continues to be depicted in popular culture through a provincial imaginary within India.[40] It also circulates through visuals in international media as a remnant of a bygone era. Coal's "Victorian past" hides its centrality to everything that defines Indian modernity.

I have addressed how periodizing coal's literary archive is contingent on a set of processes through which coal emerged as a national asset in post-independence India. This determined a different temporality for different genres. This belatedness belies diffusionist accounts of fossil-fuel modernity. However, it also begs the question of what defines a "coal mining novel." If novels set in the coal mines appeared when they did and also receded from view, what constitutes the specificity of this form and how do we read it? This question becomes significant in light of new methods of literary comparativism that suggest grouping literary texts according to hegemonic regimes of energy extraction. However, an emphasis on reading the

[39] See Sanjiv, *Dhar* (New Delhi: Radhakrshn, 1990); Sanjiv, *Pamv tale ki dub* (Bikaner: Vagdevi Prakashan, 2005).
[40] The popular Hindi film Gangs of Wasseypur is one instance of this. See *Gangs of Vasepura: Gangs of Wasseypur*, Anurag Kashyap (2012).

novel and its stylistic features as a reflection of a hegemonic energy regime merits closer attention. It is with this intent that I turn to Sanjiv's *Savdhan!*

II. Labor, Region, Cosmos: Writing the Coal Mine

Savdhan! depicts the period following the nationalization of India's coal mines in 1973. The novel, set in the fictional mining town of Candanpur, is arranged in two parts: "Below the Surface" and "Above the Surface." The central event of the novel is a mining accident in which Udham Singh, the main protagonist, perishes after being trapped in a coal pit for twenty–one days. *Savdhan!* captures an entire cultural geography of coal through a vast assemblage of characters settled in the region in successive waves of migration. The novel presents a tableau of regional and folk festivals such as the Bihari festival of *chat* and festivals celebrating local goddesses and Sufi *pirs.* Characters heatedly debate the cultural complexity of regional cultures, caste and religion in the mining encampment and joke about the mines being a perverse form of national integration. This makes the novel a polyphony of regional dialects of Hindi, Bengali, and Punjabi. Since the mining industry in this region (Jharkhand) is as an enclave economy that bears little relation to the hinterland its workforce is comprised not only of indigenous communities in the region but a large migrant labor force.[41]

Superimposed on this distinct cultural geography are individual stories that narrativize concerns of health, industrial hazard, and family planning. There are descriptions of governmental programs organized for the benefit of workers like "safety week" and family

[41] Dietmar Rothermund and D.C. Wadhwa, *Zamindars, mines*, 3.

planning programs. Through the individual stories of characters, the narrative also brings the reader up to speed on the colonial history of coal mining and the problems plaguing the mines after nationalization. Workers issues of exploitation and hazardous, unscientific mining practices and poor management are intertwined with archaic feudal forms of indebtedness to merchant and moneylenders (*seths* and *sahukars*). The issues plaguing the mine are compounded by a corrupt bureaucracy and politically compromised labor unions that are hand in glove with the coal mafia.

Coal-mining novels are often recognized by a place-specific marker that translates as coal–bearing region (*koyalamcal*) appended to a novel in order to index its theme. The descriptor – *koyalamcal* – is, however, not used for all novels set in coal mines. The term – *koyalamcal* – is not used to describe Damodar Sadan's *Kala hira* (Black Diamond, 1981) or Ilyas Ahmed Gaddi's *Phayar eriya* (Fire Area*,* 1994) though they are also set in coal mines. These tend to focus more closely on the nitty-gritties of management and labor politics even while being set in very specific regional locales.

The regional focus of Sanjiv's novels may be credited to his close engagement with the industrial hinterland of Eastern India. Born into a poor farming family in Uttar Pradesh, he worked as a chemist in-charge at the Indian Iron and Steel company for many years before taking voluntary retirement and moving to journalism. Sanjiv's work epitomizes a particular form of literary radicalism in Hindi writing that is informed by left-wing radicalization of the seventies. Several of his characters are from the industrial working class comprising of migrants and displaced communities in the industrial and mining belts in the states of Bihar and Jharkhand in East India.

Sanjiv's *Savdhan!* is the first of his novels set in the *koyalamcal* of Jharia. I have previously discussed the emergence of regionalism as the heightened attention to localization and

detail. Sanjiv's writings on the coal mines of Eastern India possess this quality and have consistently been referred to as novels about the *koyalamcal*.[42] They share with other regional novels, like Renu's *Parti Parikatha*, a wide canvas of characters, different linguistic registers, and the evocation of a rural–folk continuum.[43] In previous chapters I also dwelt on the way *amcalikta* is defined by a heightened sense of place that has often been attributed to its mimetic elements of presenting milieu (*parivesh*), locale (*deshkal*) and environment (*vatavaran*). In *Savdhan* too, the densely populated canvas of the novel is coupled with a very particular interplay of scales.

While the plot revolves around various events concerning characters an altogether different temporal and spatial effect is achieved by inventing something like a cosmology of modernity. Though a critique of the "conditions of the mine," the novel's narrative canvas weaves together several perspectives including the mythical, the extra-human and the atmospheric. The mythical references are more pronounced in the beginning of the novel where often a character in a scene is compared to a character in the epics or the scene acquires a mythic resonance. So, for example, a young woman character called Ketaki, the love interest of Udham Simh, is described in one instance as an apparition of the awe-inspiring goddess Bhairavi. Another character likens the figure of the miner to the embattled warrior Ashvatthama in the Mahabharata. These analogies extend to fascinating ways in which coal is indigenized, feminized, and anthropomorphized through such mythological stories. 'She' is referred to as the

[42] Vir Bharat Talvar, "Koyalamcal par upanyas: 'Dhar', in *Jharkhand ke Adivasiyom ke bic: Ek ektivist ke nots*, (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 2012), 435–447.
[43] Sadan Jha has examined literary regionalism as a linguistic performance of place and region, see Sadan Jha, "Visualising a Region: Phanishvarnath Renu and the archive of the 'regional-rural' in the 1950s," in *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49, No.1 (2012), 6.

dark beauty Draupadi (*krsna sundari*) and the trucks that bear her away likened to Duryodhan and Dushashan the villainous brothers of the Kaurav clan in the *Mahabharat*.

Similarly, the narrative often places characters against a non-human "backdrop" that doesn't necessarily add to the plot, or further the story or even bolster the novel's socio-political critique. Such instances often break off from the plot in order to take stock of the magnitudes, scales, and times encompassed by coal mining. In *Savdhan!* there is a striking scene when on witnessing a political rally, Udham Simh's perception shifts between watching the protesters as they spill out into the street to imagining the geological frame within which these figures are embedded:

> He estimated that this crowd must have boiled up from thousands of feet under these buildings, markets, and wilderness […] Further below fossils from millions of years ago. In dark seams of these very fossils there must still be thousands of miners (*khan mazdur*) crawling in the labyrinthian tunnels like ants […] an entire star-studded sky must lie upside down in the deep black ocean. And in this very dark ocean several ships have dropped anchor —the coal mines of Jharia. [44]

This moment where non-human time impinges on the narrative is soon foreclosed by a return to the human figures in the scene. However, there are several other moments where the immediate scene is apprehended through a sacred temporality that echoes the suprahuman temporality of geological time described above. For instance, another stunning description of the village of Candanpur is worth citing in some detail:

> The village of Candanpur is settled haphazardly on top of a hillock—as if it will rise at a touch, full of anger, staff, spear and axe in hand. Those who survive climb back up the hill; those who are maimed and can't climb back up and those who pass away have their heads threaded into *Kapalini Devi's* garland of skulls. The wheel of time (*kalcakra*) advances

[44] Sanjiv, *Savdhan!* 13.

> slowly, at times like that of a child's toy cart, at times like that of a grown up's bullock cart, deviating from the path of history, creating this path, returning to its old points.[45]

These descriptions of the village of Candanpur superimpose a very particular religio-ritual imagery of the goddess Kali with her weapons and a garland of skulls. Candanpur is compared to the goddess Kali. The reference to *kalcakra* deepens the awe-inspiring aspect of the goddess. The comparison between Kali and Candanpur is best explained through ethnographic accounts of industrial labor in India.

As Dhiraj Kumar Nite has shown it was customary in this region (Jharia) for miners to deify the mines using the image of Kali. Nite calls this the Khadan-Kali cult in which miners worshipped the mine (*khadan*) as the womb of Kali. They made offerings to the goddess to appease her and to solicit her consent for mining coal. The frequency of mining accidents, however, were often interpreted as a sign of the displeasure of the goddess, calling for a renewal of the contract between the believer and the goddess.[46]

Christopher Pinney notes something similar in his study of workers in a large rayon factory and calls this intermixture of different temporalities an "industrial chronotope" by drawing on Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope. The chronotope for Bakhtin is a unit of analysis for studying the ratio and characteristics of the temporal and spatial categories represented in various genres.[47] Pinney shows how the space of the factory is also overlaid with different temporalities

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[45] Ibid., 48, emphasis added. *Kapalini* in all likelihood translates either as wearing skulls (*kapali*) or bearing a skull as a bowl for alms and refers to one of several epithets used for the goddess Kali.
[46] Dhiraj Kumar Nite, "Slaughter Mining and the 'Yielding Collier': The Politics of Safety in the Jharia Coalfields 1895–1950," in *The Coal Nation: Histories, Ecologies and Politics of Coal in India* (Surrey, Routledge, 2014), 105–128.
[47] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes towards a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans.

with certain high-caste workers, likening machinery, to the goddess *Kali*, and industrial modernity, to the *kaliyug* (age of destruction).[48]

In the novel this cosmology of the mine is accompanied by breathtaking descriptions of the atmosphere itself. In fact, these are the novels most stunning aspects. The light in the mining encampment in Candanpur is described "as if it were the moonlight of a hundred years ago."[49] Hyperbolic images of the entrapment of supra human entities proliferate like the "sun writhing in the net of this smog."[50] Similarly, the "suffocation caused by the smoke" hangs like "a canopy in the air in that moonlight night."[51] However, just like the mythical and cosmological frames of the novel, these scenes have rarely elicited comment from critics because they can neither be understood through the tools of ethnography that Nite and Pinney suggest nor through an attention to the plot. At most these "scenes" can be understood formalistically.

These aspects of the novel have often been attributed to Sanjiv's felicity in establishing setting (*parivesh*) or scenario (*paridrsya*). Critics read this relationship between setting and character through a formalistic lens. For example, critic Girish Kashid, notes how "one has the feeling (*ehsas*)" of "fear and the dark clouds of calamity" through Sanjiv's descriptions. Kashid then shifts to the outward (*bahri*) ambience in the novel pointing to the "clouds of dust," and the "burning coal resembling a charnel house" (*shamshan)* before returning to how these descriptive

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Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (1981; repr., Austin: University of Texas Press,1990), 3–40.

[48] Christopher Pinney, "On living in the kali(i)yug: Notes from Nagda," eds. Jonathan P. Parry et al. *The Worlds of Indian Industrial Labour* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), 77–106. For a similar anthropology of industrial labor and the idea of *Kaliyug*, see Shankar Ramaswami, "Souls in the Kalyug: Migrant workers' lives and struggles in Delhi (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2012).

[49] Sanjiv, *Savdhan!* 18.

[50] Ibid., 33.

[51] Ibid.,49.

details give a sense (*anubhuti*) of a wasteland.[52] Kashid interprets atmosphere as something in the form of mood (*stimmung*). Such descriptions draw the non-human world of the novel and its surrounding environs into the realm of an affective, human experience.

These different features of the mythic, the cosmological, and the atmospheric in the novel may be interpreted as the distinctive features of the Indian novel. Scholars of the Indian novel have shown how Western ideas of history, plot and character do not translate into the context of the novel in India.[53] Commenting on the analogizing of a character to a demon (*raksas*) in a novel by the Indian writer R.K. Narayan, Edwin Gerow suggests how such an analogy draws on an "Indian view of the nature of action and dramatic necessity."[54] Such readings focus on the indigeneity of the novel that is responsive to the Indian view of the "cosmos" or the "Indian mind." More recently Ulka Anjaria describes the "constitutive impurity" of the Indian realist novel that reinterprets the "standard, Hegelian historicity from the perspective of the colonized."[55] Anjaria traces the presence of two kinds of temporality in the historical novel from the colonial period —a historical temporality and the second that is "more obscure and reminiscent of the timelessness of premodern tales."[56]

But much hinges on how to read this generic contamination, if one may call it that. I am not only suggesting that the genealogies of the postcolonial novel are distinct from its counterparts in the West. What scholars of the Indian novel read as cultural incommensurability

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[52] Girish Kashid, "Upanyaskar Sanjiv: Racnatmak zamin ki talas mem," in *Kathakar Sanjiv*, ed. Girish Kashid, Delhi: Silpayan, 2008), 250.
[53] Edwin Gerow, "The Quintessential Narayan," in *Considerations* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1977), n.p.
[54] Gerow, "The Quintessential," 68.
[55] Anjaria, *Realism*, 103.
[56] Ibid., 102.

between modern conventions of space and time and postcolonial societies may also be read as an archive of fossil-fuel modernity. This is precisely where my reading of *Savdhan!* departs from recent postcolonial readings of world-literature that are framed exclusively around a resource logic of fossil-fuel extraction.

Jennifer Wenzel suggests reading a similar generic contamination in the Nigerian novel as the pressures of a "particular political ecology within a particular literary idiom."[57] Her inventive formulation "petro-magic-realism" is meant to explain the combining of elements of the Yoruba narrative traditions with the monstrous-but-mundane violence of oil exploration in postcolonial Nigeria. Wenzel insists that the phantasmagoric depictions and magic realist elements in Nigerian novels must not be read as "modernization's inevitable disenchantment of vestigial tradition, but rather in petromodernity's phantasmagoric ravagements of societies and lifeworlds."[58] Similarly the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) emphasizes that third world literature must be read in a world-systems approach in which "a consciousness of a violent capitalism," is brought to the fore through a logic of the imagination and "the proliferation of tropes of the spectral and the supernatural."[59] It is worth bearing in mind that all these approaches have emerged in the context of the political economies of oil in the Global North and its fossil-fuel entailments.

These approaches seek to ground the "irrational" elements of third world texts in globally legible readings of anti-capitalist critique. This invariably ties them to a reading of the very resource logics they seek to critique. There is no denying that *Savdhan!* is a story that can be

[57] Jennifer Wenzel, "Petro-magic-realism," 457.
[58] Ibid., 458.
[59] WReC, *Combined and Uneven,* 99.

analyzed through categories of labor exploitation and rights. However, the mythic, the cosmological and the atmospheric allow coal to take centerstage. How does one think of coal being extracted from the bowels of the earth? Like Draupadi kidnapped by the villainous Duryodhan and Dushashan in the Mahabharata. How does one figure a relation to the givingness of the earth? It is these moments where mythic time and cosmologies capture the possibilities that are lost in considering nature as resource.

III. The middle-class family and the travails of domestic energy consumption

If the *amcalik upanyas* staged questions of energy management from the perspective of the region, the short story depicted the failure of energy security in urban India. Hindi short stories set in urban India of the 1970s and 80s articulated an urban sensibility (*nagar bodh*) that has yet to be considered in the context of a domestic energy transition.

The Hindi short story from the beginning of the New Story (*nayi kahani*) period departed from the rural contexts of the Premcand generation and its moral idealism to concentrate on the challenges faced by the urban lower-middle classes. The experience of a new urban environment and social processes like migration and urbanization crystallized into a grim reading of the urban experience as characterized in Hindi criticism by adjectives such as disintegration (*vighatan*) and alienation (*tutan*).[60] By the late seventies and eighties, literary movements like the *Janvadi kahani* triangulated between the failure of urban sociality, governance, and political disillusion.[61]

[60] Gordon C. Roadarmel, "The theme of alienation," 1969.
[61] Omprakash Pal, *Athavem dashak ki Hindi kahaniyoṃ mem janvadi cetna*, (Vallabh Vidyanagar: Darpan Prakashan, 2006).

Thus far this experience of the urban, critics have argued, exemplified the breakdown of rural sociality and joint family ties (*samyukt parivar*) with the transition to the city (*shahar*) or the town (*qasba*). Though recognizing a transformative relation between rapid urbanization and forms of social life, critics are often constrained by reading these developments through the morality of individual characters. The failure of sociality is attributed to the "individualism" or "self-centeredness" typical of urban culture.

The two stories I analyze look at the challenges of the urban milieu through the experience of a transition in domestic energy use in this period. This transition is most evident in the domain of public utilities (*sarvjanik suvidhaem*) which became an object of middle-class angst and constituted a new sense of precarity. The public utility and the distribution of public goods– electricity, gas cylinders and kerosene –were central to critiques of adulteration (*milavat*), corruption (*bhrastacar*), and inflation (*mahangai*). These stories, I argue, demonstrate how the crisis of political legitimacy coupled with a crisis in domesticity and middle-classness can be re-read as modes of habitation in modern energy infrastructures.

The English title of Sanjiv's story "Load Shedding" (1984) refers to a phenomenon that involves the deliberate interruption in electricity supply to avoid an excessive load on the generation plant. The story recounts the familial and political fallout of frequent power cuts in a neighborhood in a metropolis. The characters comprise the members of a joint family consisting of, in the words of the first-person narrator, "My eldest brother, sister-in-law, Sheila my (older sister), my brother's two kids and me."[62] Initially a crisis in domesticity is indexed by fraying familial ties captured in this description:

[62] Sanjiv, "Load Shedding," *Sanjiv ki katha yatra* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2008), 186.

> We are co-dependent in this period when being co-dependent is no longer a matter of pride but of necessity. Like different planets we move in our different orbits without touching each other. Mornings that earlier began with my sister-in-law singing a *prabhati* (song sung at dawn) now begin with her incessant grumbling. This grumbling is not addressed to anyone or anything.[63]

The grumbling (*barbarana*) of the young wife is echoed in the eldest brother's increasingly short temper. This is turn engenders a range of affects including a growing unease in the two younger siblings burdened by a sense of obligation to their brother. The emotional fatigue of the family is matched by the run-down appearance of the house. Descriptions of its jaded interiors bleed into the descriptions of the eldest brother and his wife aging fast.

The significance of load shedding to these kinds of reading remains unclear. There is a general sense of economic hardship, precarity, and gloom. However, soon enough the story comes to focus on the frequent power cuts in the neighborhood. The malaise that plagued the family is now explained as an infrastructural failure. The significance of load shedding to this unfolding tragedy soon takes centerstage. Descriptions of these power cuts proliferate in a series of stunning analogies. The darkness is compared to a watery, subterranean depth:

> In the darkness something would invariably roll over, tumble down, and you would hear it smash. This sound would ripple like a pebble, outward to the corners of the darkness, and all of us would bob up and down in it like small gondolas.[64]

[63] Sanjiv, "Load Shedding,"186.
[64] Ibid., 188.

The use of the lantern as a substitute for light is compared sardonically to a cresset which flares up on being set down and "its shadows reflected off our faces as if we were aboriginal peoples in a cave about to squabble over limited resources."[65]

This comparison to "aboriginal people" (*adim log*) clearly enunciates the civilizational premise of developmentalism even as it is meant to articulate a critique of infrastructural failure. In her analysis of Satyajit Ray's urban films, shot roughly a decade earlier than the story, Rochona Majumdar points out the significance of infrastructural failure as a key component of the "atmospherics of Calcutta." These were not "mute backdrops" but played a vital role in forwarding the plot.[66] Her reading of a scene from Ray's *The Middleman* suggests how Ray calibrates the aural and visual scene during a moment of load shedding to index a moral shift in the protagonist.[67] The moral and civilizational coding of these moments begs the question: What does it mean to be without electricity?

These descriptions are significant when thinking about an "anthropology of electricity" in the Global South. Anthropologist Akhil Gupta, for example, discusses the role of modern electricity in shaping private domesticity in the West.[68] However, when he turns to analyzing rural India, he cautions against making a universal claim of the *desirability* of modern electrification. Gupta describes living in an unelectrified village in Uttar Pradesh in the mid 1980s (in the same time frame as our story) in the following words:

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[65] Ibid., 190.
[66] Rochona Majumdar, "The Untimely Filmmaker: Ray's City Trilogy and a Crisis of Historicism," unpublished manuscript.
[67] Ibid., 298.
[68] Akhil Gupta, "An Anthropology of Electricity from the Global South," *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 30 No. 4 (2015): 555–568.

> In most development trajectories, the absence of electricity would be seen as a source of deprivation. Yet the lack of electricity in this village was conducive to the creation of a lively social and political sphere [...]. With no other entertainment and with no light to elongate the working day, this time was spent in creating and maintaining a public sphere. The darkness, paradoxically, enabled a sense of community to be built in the village.[69]

As the story "Load Shedding" shows, the experience of being without electricity is very different from the experience recounted in Gupta's ethnographic anecdote. Unlike the bucolic village in Gupta's account we have an extended meditation on the complete failure of sociality due to the absence of utilities.

The failure of power is a key factor in calling the political establishment to account. Soon after a power cut, the eldest brother remarks in frustration that though India is said to be "ranked third in the world" in terms of technical know-how "there are cuts in everything". He further voices his frustration against all the "corrupt leaders, *seths* [businessmen], landlords, police officers and the shirkers in government institutions [who] will just sell and devour this country of working folk."[70]

When locals petition the sub-divisional officer (S.D.O.) to address frequent power-cuts, the officer says he is powerless. The story also introduces another facet to these frequent power cuts: the fact that a rich merchant in the neighborhood owns a kerosene-powered generator which he can run whenever the power goes off. A concatenation of events beginning with the noise and pollution caused by this generator leads to a confrontation between youth in the neighborhood and the merchant. One evening when the lights go out, a youth flings a small explosive at the

[69] Ibid., 558–559.
[70] Sanjiv, "Load Shedding," 186.

generator under cover of darkness. The story ends on this simmering note of an unresolved class antagonism.

Vijaykumar Raut reads the ending as a symbol of the radical possibilities of overturning the status quo.[71] Such political readings of the story are not disavowed in my reading. The social antagonism of the classes makes us attend to how infrastructures are entangled with questions of social inequality. However, questions of political accountability are discontinuous from the complete reliance on electricity to feel human. The attention to the social critique of the story deflects from the infrastructural protagonists of the story. Fiction elaborates what Dominic Boyer calls "energopower", a term he uses to describe the energy-demanding structures and categories of modernity.[72] The term is meant to capture the ways in which the materiality of energy shapes the articulation of political rights and critique. By foregrounding investments in "energopower" from the perspective of postcolonial subjects I also read fiction as elaborating how these "subaltern modernizers of history" *experience* the world-historical time of development.[73] Load Shedding" testifies to an experience of modernity where energy infrastructures are precarious and continually scarce.

This experience of scarcity also complicates the kinds of readings that have privileged the "energy unconscious" of literary texts. The term "energy unconscious" was coined by Patricia

[71] Vijaykumar Raut, "Ap yaham hai: sangharsh aur cetna ka racanatmak samsara," in *Kathakar Sanjiv* (Delhi: Shilpayan, 2008), 206. For a fabulous reading of the role of generators in postcolonial Nigeria and the breakdown of modernist networked infrastructures see, Brian Larkin, "Ambient Infrastructures. Generator Life in Nigeria," in *Technosphere Magazine* (November 2016) https://tinyurl.com/y3vucbew Accessed Aug 15th, 2019.
[72] Dominic Boyer, "Energopower: An Introduction," in *Anthropological Quarterly* Vol. 87, No. 2(2014): 309–333.
[73] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Planetary," 259.

Yaeger and has been taken up widely in the energy humanities.[74] Building on Frederic Jameson's idea of the political unconscious of literary texts, the term suggests a determining force that *powers* narratives. The term marries a Marxist cultural materialist emphasis on texts as products of material resources (like energy) and psychoanalytic readings of texts as products of forms of fantasy or blockage that determine conscious life. Both these senses of the "energy unconscious" have largely been understood within the contexts of oil-rich western cultures characterized by energy-rich lifestyles. In these contexts, the "energy unconscious" signifies precisely the unconscious and unthought dimensions of energy excess that have fueled western culture and forms of life.

However, the idea of energy excess doesn't bear out in the postcolonial context. The eldest brother in "Load Shedding" remarks in frustration that though India ranks, "third in the world" in technical know-how, yet "there are cuts in everything." A series of animal analogies are introduced in the story to further describe the feeling of being without electricity. When the lights go off, members of the family, formerly engaged in separate tasks, are compelled to spend time with each other. But this interruption is compared to "the sounds of owls and bats."[75] At another point the lack of electricity is seen as a civilizational crisis rendering members of society wolfish and predatory. When faced with recalcitrant merchant who refuses to control the noise his generator makes, members of the neighborhood are compared to a "herd of sheep" cowering in fear. [76]

[74] Yaeger, Editor's Column," 306.
[75] Sanjiv, "Load Shedding," 188.
[76] Ibid., 191.

"Load Shedding," captures an important dimension of postcoloniality as caught within a specific stadial theory of infrastructural expansion. Infrastructure becomes a metonym for modernity but instead of a linear, progressive, teleology, infrastructural development is experienced as halting and staggered. This experience is rendered eloquently by the narrator as a split in the experience of time that echoes *Savdhan* and the experience of the top gear:

> They say we are developing fast. I am not fully knowledgeable about development in other areas, but I've begun to realize a contradictory truth about development in our own home. Both time and we have retreated further into our shells like a tortoise, while we've progressively lost our grip on the space of time.[77]

In other words, even as the outward signs of development proliferate the affective life of this infrastructural advancement produces a sense of regression. Even as electricity comes to shape ideas, capacities and is framed as a political right it feels like a lag in time.

Moreover, the political subjectivity that emerges in the story invests electricity with a certain publicness that gravitates against ideologies of individualism and consumerism that have defined ideas of the "energy unconscious" in American cultural studies. Energy infrastructures figure as mediatized modes of representing political life. They become sites to test claims to development and technological advancement. In order to further substantiate this particular affect that is generated by the paradoxical presence and absence of "modern" energy I wish to turn to another progressive writer of this period–Rajesh Joshi.

Fuel resources and their commercial or often non-formalized circuits of distribution often figured in the Hindi short story from the late 1970s, especially, as the public distribution system collapsed in the face of crippling shortages. This sense of middle-class precarity becomes more

[77] Ibid.,187.

palpable in Rajesh Joshi's story "Somvar" (Monday1982).[78] "Somvar" is set in Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh where three generations of a joint family live in a small, third-floor house. The narrator is the one of three brothers who live with their aging parents. The eldest brother is married and has two children. To the first-person narrator "Our family was like any average (*ausat*) middle-class family unaffected, entertaining and filled with its own harmless bickering." [79]

Critical readings of the story have often taken it to be a critique of materialism and the possessive individualism of urban culture. However, much like in the case of "Load Shedding", an attention to an experience of energy transition gives a different insight into the story. A closer look at the plot makes this evident. The story makes clever and satirical use of the astrological beliefs and practices of the high-caste Hindu family by making domestic happiness incumbent on propitiating the malevolent god *Somvar*. *Somvar (*Monday) needs to be propitiated by a fast, kept by the devout, elderly father. *Somvar* is also a demanding day because it is the first day of the working week.

The story delves into the routine of domestic chores—cooking, heating water and making tea and breakfast—that must all be completed before the elderly father, the primary breadwinner of the family, leaves for work. This daily routine requires chores to be divvied up between family members. For example, it is the responsibility of the two youngest members of the family, the narrator and his younger brother, to light the small cooking stove (*sigri*). Both boys hate this

[78] Rajesh Joshi, "Somvar," in *Somvar aur anya* kahaniyam (Hapur: Sambhavna Prakashan, 1982, 19–42. Rajesh Joshi (b.1946) is a progressive writer, poet, playwright and journalist and winner of the prestigious Indian Sahitya Academy award in 2002 for his poetry. He is based in Madhya Pradesh and works as a freelance writer for various Hindi magazines.
[79] Joshi, "Somvar," 25.

boring task which invariably leads to tiffs between them about whose turn it is to light the stove. The story describes for the reader the daily challenges presented by traditional forms of fuel:

> There were two *sigris* and both had lost their lids. So, it was difficult to manage the fire after lighting it. Sawdust was getting more expensive day by day. Sometimes when the oil (kerosene) in the stove ran out, especially towards dusk, it would bother mother if the *sigri* was lit for tea, it would have burnt to ash by the time dinner was to be cooked. So, lighting the *sigri* would be deferred. There would be talk of going to buy oil [Kerosene oil] but everyone knew it wasn't easy to get oil... and eventually the *sigri* would have to be lit.[80]

The escalating prices of sawdust (*burada*) is not an innocuous detail. The consumption of commercial fossil fuels like coal, and oil were quite low in this period because of rising oil prices. Governmental and environmental reports noted how domestic energy consumption in urban areas continued to rely on firewood and cow dung cakes leading to increasing pressure on "traditional" energy sources. [81]

Things seem to look up for the family when the eldest brother, Jaggi, gets a job and declares that he is going to acquire a gas cylinder with his first salary. The story immediately pans out giving the reader a sense of a larger story of this transition:

> This entire saga is of the era (*yug*) when most homes had earthen stoves. There were coal stoves (*angithiyam*) and sawdust (*burada*) stoves. The gas stove had just taken off. Its purchase in an average income (*ausat ay*) household was a momentous event that was an even hotter topic of conversation among the neighbors than recent political affairs.[82]

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[80] Ibid., 25.
[81] Fuelwood Study Committee. *Report of the Fuelwood Study Committee* (New Delhi: Planning Commission, Govt. of India, 1982), n.p.
[82] Joshi "Somvar,"25.

The impending arrival of the gas cylinder takes over all discussions. The narrator describes how, even before its arrival, the gas cylinder begins to dominate "daily conversations" and its "intangible presence loomed in our house all the time." Everyone begins to believe, "that the blue flame of the gas cylinder would make all our hassles disappear in the blink of an eye."[83]

The arrival of the gas cylinder on a Wednesday (*budhvar*) – the "auspicious" day of the week – leads to much excitement. This is a period when, "Many households acquired gas" and the "gas stove became a common occurrence in middle class families."[84] The introduction of the gas cylinder is accompanied by a host of commodities that become part and parcel of the "average condition (*ausat sthiti*)" of the middle class. But the limited reach of these developments and trends in consumption are summed up in this way:

> Whenever conveniences would enter our society (*samaj*), their initial entry was swift and combative. Then their pace would slow down and eventually come to a halt […] It would not move further from here. The pressure cooker, fridge, scooter, gas stove, the entire thinking of the middle class breathed its last here.[85]

The words average (*ausat*) and middle class (*madhyam varg*) are mentioned often in the story displaying an awareness of the significance of these terms in governmental discourse. The resonance between the use of words such as average and middle-class in consumer indices and policy reports on domestic energy consumption and the short story creates an interesting counterpoint between statistical indices of development and the affective experience of the same phenomena.

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[83] Ibid.,42.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

One of the primary justifications for the introduction of the gas cylinder is it being a convenience (*suvidha*) that would absolve the women of the house of time-consuming tasks. This assumption takes root even before the cylinder arrives. For example, the narrator mentions how the elderly matriarch of the house would remark that "the gas cylinder would relieve her" from the "useless juggling of tasks like removing what was cooking to heat water for Dad's shave."[86] However, the entry of the cylinder obfuscates the exponential increase in the number of times certain tasks are performed. This is most evident in the case of the quintessential task in the Indian household: making tea. The ease with which tea can be made leads to an increase in the number of times it is made. Rather than making tea only once, it could be prepared by anyone: "depending on when someone woke up."[87]

Moreover, the new 'freedoms' ushered in by the introduction of the gas are soon outweighed by an acute destabilization of domestic finances. The entry of fossil fuels into urban domestic consumption now engender a different kind of precarity. Though the price of the cylinder increases, "it wasn't easily available" and after placing an order "it would arrive on the second or third day."[88] An entire global regime of petroleum becomes enmeshed with domestic fuel. The story depicts this acute sensibility to rising oil prices through an extended analogy of tension mounting in homes:

> In our house it began between mother and sister-in-law because father and Jaggi handed over their salaries and were spared these hassles. The world was fighting over oil. The nation was watching the flow of oil. And our home was heating up from the gas that came from that flow of oil.[89]

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 34.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

The story links the swift and combative entry of consumer goods like the scooter, fridge, and pressure cooker into the average middle-class family with processes of urbanization that accompany this new energy regime.

> At one end of the city a big electrical goods factory was being built [...] Some said it was the biggest factory in the world. Others said no, in Asia. Still others, in the country[...] Forests were being cut and the environment was changing rapidly [...] Over at Govindpur small factories and ancillaries were sprouting up [...] What was once a village of four thatched houses had changed into a full-fledged industrial city.[90]

Several compromises are made in monthly rations in order to meet budgets. The women of the house stop speaking to each other for several days because of disagreements about rising household expenditures, and finally the eldest brother secretly applies for a transfer. In a poignant statement on the breakdown of the extended family, the narrator uses the charged concept of tradition (*parampara*) to indicate a changing family dynamic and the beginnings of a new individualism:

> After a long tradition (*parampara*) of being connected together under a certain dispensation and adjusting despite the constant bickering, the sudden change was bound to cause some discomfort. Everyone wanted their own windows and doors.[91]

The narrator notes how the gas stove changes the earlier communal aspect of cooking since there is "no longer any need to heat one large pot of tea for everyone at the same time" nor is there the "same hullabaloo in the morning while getting the day started."[92]

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[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 39–40.
[92] Ibid., 34.

These changes have usually been read by Hindi critics as a breakdown in familial values and an outcome of the urban experience that engenders a selfish individualism. Instead what is perceived and experienced as a change in *values* seems more like a range of affects resembling a nervous condition. It is energy infrastructures that shape the rhythms and striations of social life. The story mentions the constant nagging (*cikcik*) or irritable murmuring (*bhunbhunahat*) of characters. These echo the constant grumbling (*barbarana*) in the story "Load Shedding." In "Load Shedding" this dispersed sense of precarity is also analogized through animalistic analogies to approximate to a sense of dread. To the narrator it seems that a menacing "speckled dog" with "sharp pointed teeth and long lashing tongue" was lurking to devour the family.[93] Joshi's story conveys a similar sense by personifying the malevolent god *Somvar* towards the end of the story. As tensions between the two women of the house reach a crescendo, *Somvar* manifests himself watches gleefully and *fuels* the fires of discontent. This strange cosmological twist to an otherwise secular tale of scarcity is reminiscent of the mythic temporality often used in Sanjiv's *Savdhan!Nice ag hai.*

Despite the erratic and fitful availability of gas "Somvar" shows that modes of comportment, attitudes to time, and definitions of convenience change indelibly. Speaking about the introduction of the gas cylinder at home, the narrator says, "after entering our homes, this convenience (*suvidha)* entered our minds and into our very muscle memory." [94] This is the paradox of energy transition in India. The story gives a retrospective account of a significant change in domestic energy consumption that reveals that this transition was more about the expectation than its realization.

[93] Sanjiv, "Load Shedding," 191.
[94] Joshi, "Somvar," 35.

IV. Energy Security and Sustainability: The Literary Lives of Biomass Fuel

In the previous sections I traced how developmentalism and paradigms of resource nationalism were premised on a transition to fossil fuels as desirable in contrast to 'traditional' forms of energy. However, a subtle shift becomes evident around rural energy use in the 80s. There was of course the seminal State of India's Environment Report that for the first time dealt with the relatively unknown field of domestic fuel consumption in rural and urban households. [95] A story like "Somvar" corroborates the findings of the report that the burgeoning concentration of urban domestic households continued to draw on large quantities of purchased firewood and cow dung from rural areas endangering the fuel security of rural households by commercializing, formerly, non-commercial resources.

Interestingly the report did not recommend an energy transition to fossil fuels for rural households. Its suggestions remain centered on developing renewables, like fuelwood, biogas, and solar energy. While these recommendations were probably determined by the unaffordability of certain forms of energy for rural households, the report can be read within an emergent global discourse on sustainability.[96] Sustainability discourses while critical of fossil fuel intensive development often adopted a deeply modernist disregard for non-modern practices of energy. There have been many critiques of sustainability discourses since their inception and I want to focus on how such discourses often took a pedagogical stance towards the "primitive" or the

[95] Centre for Science and Environment, *The State of India's Environment: A Citizens' Report* (New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment, 1982).
[96] Most scholars agree that the watershed moment for sustainability occurred in 1972 with the publication of the Club of Rome's paradigm-shifting book, *The Limits to Growth.* See, Donella H. Meadows, and Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

"non -modern." A story that best illustrates why any discussion on renewables must traverse these questions of power and knowledge – is "For the Living" ("Karar", 1990) by Mridula Garg. [97]

The story begins with two female researchers—one Indian and the other an American named Cherry— who are exploring rural Rajasthan after attending a seminar on traditional water harvesting practices in the region. Cherry, the American researcher, works for a UNICEF project on traditional methods of water-harvesting and has come to India for research. As the two women travel together, they break their journey in a village to see how locals practice water harvesting. The Indian narrator studies the landscape and immediately focuses on the *khejri* [*Prosopis cineraria*] tree and its significance in local ecology. The narrator notes that the *khejri* tree "truly is remarkable." She recounts its several uses for locals including providing "wood collected for fuel." It protects the crop and its "bark is medicinal." She then notes how the desert dwellers "believe that the tree cannot be uprooted or planted" and that they "consider it a divine tree that grows of its own accord." The narrator adds: "*That of course is superstition.* In the forest all trees grow on their own with a little help from the birds and the bees."[98]

The two women are spotted by a group of villagers who invite them to rest in the local temple of Pabuji where they notice a well surrounded by a grove. The well (*oran*) and the grove of *khejari* trees, they are informed, are sacred and belong to Pabuji. Both characters learn that the both the grove and the well are temple property and protected. A discussion ensues on the

[97] Mridula Garg, "Karar," *Shehar ke nam* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith Prakashan, 1990), 12–21. Mridula Garg has usually been read as a woman writer who writes about women's issues. A less discussed aspect of her work has been her interest in issues relating to local ecology, pollution and toxicity. Her oeuvre comprises of 6 novels, 8 short story collections, 5 plays, 4 essay collections and a travelogue.
[98] Garg, "Karar,"13.

chronic water shortage in the neighboring regions. The temple priest informs them that the well is the only one that has water while rest have all dried up. The reason for this is because the government has dug tubewells and deflected water to the city. To add to the skewed political economy of water, the trees in the sacred grove are not periodically trimmed owing to local superstition. Cherry finds this exasperating:

> Fate! Fate, religion, superstition! Will you people ever be able to leave these behind? This is a religious site, which is why the trees here are not even pruned, whereas in other regions the government is cutting down forest after forest. Didn't you notice there was stone mining in the catchment area of the Kailana lake? Houses built of stone are after all a sign of prosperity.[99]

Cherry's critique of the government's corruption while not incorrect elicits a different response from the narrator. The narrator never explicitly confronts Cherry's reading of the situation. Instead, the narrator offers a different reading of the paradoxical efficacy of fatalism and "superstition" to the reader. To the narrator if the trees had been pruned then the illusion of the grove being sacrosanct would have been broken and "then no power on earth could have protected it." "Either the government would have usurped the land for some development project" or some rich family would have used paid thugs to capture the land. Then "neither the grove would have survived" nor the grass that grew on it would have survived" and the "little fodder and firewood that was available to the common people" would have slipped out of reach.[100]The narrator is also critical of what she reads as Cherry's first-world critique. She adds

[99] Ibid., 18.
[100] Ibid., 19.

that the rich in India behave with the poor in the same way that "America used the third world to dump its garbage and poison."[101]

Though Cherry decides not to return to America the story deftly maneuvers a "third-world" critique of the toxic legacies of first-world development with a pedagogical stance towards the illiterate poor. This is best illustrated in the account of the *khejari* tree as it is presented in the distant evaluative voice of its Indian narrator. She identifies ecological good sense in local practices of resource use while carefully expunging the affective relations that inform them. Moreover, the villagers and the ambience of the story are consistently depicted as if caught in a temporal stasis—a timelessness that is both death-like and mysterious. The hamlet where the two visitors stop for the night is characterized by "quiescence," that encompasses the "corpse like trees." The villagers are described studying the visitors with "undemanding, dead stares" resembling "crude pieces of abstract sculpture."[102] The story acknowledges the ecological good sense of indigenous practices while depicting the village community as if they were caught in an archaic, dead past.

V. Conclusion: Aspiration and the Subaltern Subject in Post Globalization India

Thus far, I have explored the implications of energy for a reading of Hindi literature. I emphasized the discontinuities that characterize a literary history for coal in India, the very different valence of the "energy unconscious" for a reading of the short story, and the epistemic violence involved in reconfiguring "traditional" forms of energy use as sustainable. How does one read the liberalization of the Indian economy within given paradigms of energy humanities

[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 14.

scholarship? A key aspect of postcolonial energy humanities scholarship, for instance, has focused on the resource peripherality of the Global South that has fueled energy-intensive lifestyles of the Global North. While such a paradigm works very well to explain certain forms of resource extraction, that I traced in Ranendra's *Global gaom ke devta*, cheap energy continues to be tethered to forms of developmentalism and now extends to new aspirational forms of consumerism. It is possible to piece together a far more complex narrative about the transformations unleashed in post globalization India and their implications on demands for cheap energy.

The figure that has catalyzed the unique challenges of India's energy entailments can be gleaned from diverse sources. Sunita Narain, a prominent environmentalist and Director-General of the Center for Science and Environment, has often stressed the developmental challenges ahead and the need for access to cheap, affordable energy for all.[103] Dipesh Chakrabarty notes the challenges of providing cheap and plentiful energy as a democratic right in the wake of green technologies that would make certain consumer goods more expensive for lower-middle class families.[104] With regard to the implications of globalization for Dalit communities Gopal Guru, for instance, makes a distinction between economic and cultural globalization.[105] Though Guru is careful to flag the ambivalent economic implications of globalization for Dalits he also sees the potential attractions of a Dalit pursuit of modernity opened up in its wake. He emphasizes that an increase in the purchasing power of the Dalit is tied to the substantive promises of modernity.

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[103] Jason Bordoff, Interview with Sunita Narain, *Center on Global Energy Policy* Podcast Audio, 14th November 2016, https://energypolicy.columbia.edu/sunita-narain-director-general-cse-times-100-most-influential-people-indias-energy-development (Accessed 1st March, 2020).
[104] Chakrabarty, "Planetary Crises," 270.
[105] Gopal Guru, "Dalit in Pursuit of Modernity," *India: Another Millennium*? (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000), 123–136.

Similarly, Aditya Nigam points out that Dalit politics is often "heterotopic" and aggressively employs status quo mechanisms by seizing the artifices of modernity rather than building a counter discourse.[106]

It is evident that the figure that emerges from this aggregation of interventions is one that is aspirational, and it is hard to imagine how these aspirations are not premised on a demand for forms of cheap, affordable energy. In the wake of India's liberalization, Hindi literature has also turned its attention to the aspirations of an emergent post globalized subject. It has often subjected this figure to harsh criticism, gentle irony and/ or pathos.[107] It is to the exponential increase in India's ecological footprint and the recurrent critiques of consumerism that I now turn to.

[106] Aditya Nigam, "The Heterotopias of Dalit Politics: Becoming Subject and the Consumption Utopia," eds. Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash. *Utopia/dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 250–276.
[107] Uday Prakash, "Paul Gomra ka Skutar," *Paul Gomra ka Skutar: Kahani Samgrah* (New Delhi: Radhakrsn Prakashan, 1997); Pradeep Saurabh, *Munni Mobile* (Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2011); Prabhat Ranjan, *Bolero Klas* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2011).

Chapter Four

Posthuman, Post Nature: Objects and their Environmental Lives in Post-Globalization Hindi Literature

> Sometime in the middle of the twenty-first century, Galbraith's great unanswered question "How Much Should a Country Consume?"–with its Gandhian corollary, "How Much Should a Person consume?"–will come to dominate the intellectual and political debates of the time.
> —Ramachandra Guha, *How Much Should a Person Consume*[1]

> Immortal, Fatal, polythene!
> A synonym of our contemporary times
> Polythene–another name of our civilized times
> —— Jnanendrapati, "Paulithin"[2]

> Like a tightly packed, trash-filled, explosive,
> This blue orange–Earth,
> suspended in space.
> ——Anup Sethi, "Kabar"[3]

In the previous chapters I framed questions of environment in modern Hindi fiction through an attention to the region (*amcal*), indigeneity and energy infrastructures in the regional novel (*amcalik upanyas*) and the progressive (*janvadi*) short story. This chapter traces how

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[1] Ramachandra Guha, *How Much Should a Person Consume? Environmentalism in India and the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 250.
[2] Jnanendrapati, "Paulithin," in *Kavya cayanika: 101 parisithtiki kavitaom ka sankalan* (Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan, 2015), 131.
[3] Anup Sethi, "Kabad," in *Jagat mem mela* (Panchkula: Adhar Prakashan, 2002), n.p. Available at https://tinyurl.com/sxh59xj (Accessed January 4th, 2020).

critiques of post globalization consumption cultures in Hindi fiction and poetry have evoked senses of nature in order to critique consumerism and environmental degradation. A range of terms, such as commodification (*bazarvad*), consumption culture (*upbhog samskriti*) and consumerism (*upbhogtavad*), are used in conjunction with evocations of non-human entities, such as land, earth, river, to construct critiques of consumerism and commodity culture. I explore this knot of ideas of nature and naturalness as a contrastive study between fiction and poetry.

I begin with a writer who has traced the libidinal and sensory dimensions of public life around changing commodity cultures. Uday Prakash's work returns repeatedly to the comical and dismal ironies of post globalization India from the perspective of the marginalized.[4] Prakash's iconic short story "Paul Gomra ka scutar," (Paul Gomra and his Scooter, 1997) traces the shifts in metropolitan commodity cultures from the perspective of its lower-middle class protagonist Paul Gomra.[5] "Paul Gomra" is often read as an allegory of the crisis of cultural authenticity brought about consumerism and a betrayal of the anticolonial legacy of Indian independence. I argue that the fate of the story's protagonist must be read together with Paul Gomra's scooter. I read how the story constructs not just a *desi* Paul Gomra but a *svadeshi* scooter as well.

In contrast to the short story, Hindi nature poetry (*prakriti kavya*) has a far more expansive idiom.[6] Its literary strategies, such as the description of "natural scenes" or anthropomorphizing nature (*manvikaran*), are the stock-in-trade of any poet. However, through a

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[4] See Uday Prakash, Pili chatri vali ladki, 2nd ed (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2001); (*Maingosil* (New Delhi: Yatra Books, 2006); *Mohandas* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2006).
[5] Uday Prakash, "Paul Gomra ka Skutar," *Paul Gomra ka Skutar: Kahani Samgrah* (New Delhi: Radhakrsn Prakashan, 1997, 36–77.
[6] See Valerie Ritter, *Kama's Flowers: Nature in Hindi Poetry and Criticism, 1885-1925* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

discussion of what constitutes "eco-poetry," I show how new substances defy conventional senses of poetic nature. How does literature come to terms with the changing relationship between nature and poetic subjectivity in the context of new natures? I return to the overarching theme of this thesis to argue that an ecocritical reading of Hindi literature must rethink the emphasis on the literary category of "nature" or *prakriti*. Through this chapter I reinstate the significance of object culture and waste for the study of post globalization Hindi literature.

I. *Svadeshi* and Obsolescence in Uday Prakash's *Paul Gomra ka skutar*

Paul Gomra, the eponymous hero of the story "Paul Gomra ka skutar" by Uday Prakash, is a middle-aged subeditor and proofreader in a Hindi-language national daily who decides to make two changes in his humdrum middle-class existence.[7] These changes involve changing his name from Ramgopal Saxena to Paul Gomra and purchasing a new scooter. Paul Gomra makes these changes in order to attune himself to his contemporary moment. The story catalogs the epochal changes the world has witnessed: from the fall of the USSR and the liberalization of the Indian economy to the transition from analog to digital and the information revolution. The changes Paul Gomra makes are his attempt to grasp a "reality (*yatharth*) that had gone past the machine age (*yug*) into the electronic age and beyond."[8] Gomra wants to "harmonize with the continually changing technological society, the marketplace," and "a postmodern-post historical reality (*uttar adhunik- uttar aithihasik yatharth*)."[9]

[7] "Paul Gomra ka Skutar," was first published in two installments in the India Today yearly literature review in 1995–96 and 1997.
[8] Prakash, "Paul Gomra," 40.
[9] Uday Prakash, "Paul Gomra," 43.

Changing his name is the first step in establishing this synchrony with his times. The new name, an anagram of his previous one, recasts his rustic (*desi*) first name – Ramgopal – into a fashionable and westernized one – Paul Gomra. The stylish name, however, cannot really change the fact that Ramgopal Saxena works for a *Hindi* national daily, aspires to be a *Hindi* poet, and hails from a small town called Rampur in Uttar Pradesh where his father was a Hindi teacher. The story describes the predicament of its eponymous hero's lackluster existence by metonymically linking it to the fate of the Hindi language. Hindi's shrinking public sphere is reflected in the evacuation of any prestige to native names such as "Premchand, Lallu Lal, Sadal Misra," or even Ramgopal.[10] But it is no longer just these names that seem "backward, conservative, and lower class." The subalternity of Hindi and the story's protagonist is amplified by his provinciality as a native of Uttar Pradesh. A line from the Hindi poet Dhumil, cited very early on in the story, brings together the predicament of language, region and subalternity: "I am an ugly language, and a cowardly Uttar Pradesh."[11]

Paul Gomra's crisis in contemporariness is compounded by the mismatch between the objects he is familiar with and a new commodity culture. The story describes the very specific *desi* items—like "sattu" (gram flour) or locally produced "Nurani massage oil" that constitute Paul Gomra's everyday world[12] These are, however, not a match for various new consumer goods:

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[10] It is important to bear in mind that the initially Uday Prakash attributed the subalternity of Hindi to the Lohia-ite critique of the dominance of English. He has since then altered that position. He now more clearly defines Hindi subalternity more in terms of the dominance of Official Hindi, calling the latter a "vehicle of obscurantism, communalism and blind nationalism." See Uday Prakash, "No. It's now the language of liberation," *Economic Times* April 27, 2009, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/no-its-now-the-language-of-liberation/articleshow/4452768.cms.

[11] Uday Prakash, "Paul Gomra," 37.

[12] Ibid., 42.

> Delhi had become a kaleidoscope. Hundreds of different kinds of soaps, thousands of toothpastes, crores of watches, thousands of cars, panties, creams, brassieres, dildos, sanitary napkins, compact discs, rifles, remotes, cosmetics, designer condoms, tranquilizers, telephones, fax machines, massage parlors, gyms.[13]

The most important aspect of this deluge of things is a shift in what constitutes the meaning of contemporariness (*samkalinta*). Paul Gomra realizes that the poet or writer is no longer the "avant-guard" and that the "pulse of the present moment was in technology."[14] This is both a literary and sociological crisis. As an aspiring poet he finds that instead of being an avant-garde writer "with a torch in hand striding at the head of society like Kabir or Premcand, he had become a tortoise, a snail, a centipede or a worm" that trailed behind."[15] This backwardness of the poet/writer is contrasted to the new emphasis on automobility. The vanguard of the contemporary moment, are all the cars that have entered the market including the "Maruti, Esteem, Cielo, Sierra, Zen, Sumo, Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki, and whatnot," while Paul Gomra had not even learnt to ride a bicycle.[16]

It is in this context that Paul Gomra makes the second decision to buy a Bajaj Chetak scooter[17] The Bajaj Chetak was a popular Indian-made scooter produced by Bajaj Auto company. Originally based on Italian Vespa Sprint, the Chetak scooter was an affordable means of transportation for millions of Indian families for decades and was lovingly called *Hamara Bajaj* (Our Bajaj).[18] The purchase of this indigenously produced scooter, however, is *ill-timed* given the

[13] Ibid., 63.
[14] Ibid.,50.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 50.
[17] The Chetak is named after Chetak, the legendary horse of Indian warrior Rana Pratap Singh.
[18] In the face of rising competition from bikes and cars, the Chetak lost ground in India, and its production was discontinued in 2005.

aspirational shift to automobility. This is already evident in the numerous foreign luxury cars listed previously. To add to its redundancy Paul Gomra has no clue of how to ride it. The scooter gathers dust for almost six months before Paul Gomra can find someone to teach him how to ride the scooter. When this too fails, he begins to hitch a ride home with another friend, but this requires Paul Gomra to wait even longer hours in order to get a ride back home. This defeats the very purpose of purchasing the scooter which was to save Paul Gomra a long time-consuming commute from Ghaziabad to central Delhi every day.

The story begins to describe Paul Gomra's steady descent into insanity. The continuing irrelevance of the poet is reflected in the garbled poetry he churns out from time to time. It is difficult to tell "whether they are expressions of anarchy, frustration, frenzy and insanity or the profound but helpless contempt" and "sterile anger" at the present.[19] At this point the story is abruptly interrupted by its narrator who declares a stasis in the story caused by "digressions and digressions within digressions" and who decides that it is time to wrap up the tale since what is now really left is a "conclusion."[20]

The story now hurtles towards its ironic catharsis. Paul Gomra is invited to attend a function to felicitate a well-known bureaucrat and poet who has received several awards. The events of that evening are first narrated through a news report of the who's who attended the event. This is followed by third-person accounts, pieced together by the narrator, of the ruckus created at the event by Paul Gomra. Different sources reveal that Paul Gomra execrates against American multinationals. Others mention his attack on Delhi's elite declaring that he will lay siege against the city of Delhi.

[19] Prakash, "Paul Gomra,"68.
[20] Ibid.

Paul Gomra, aspiring poet of Hindi, meets his end that very fateful night in an accident on the Delhi-Ghaziabad highway. There is no conclusive information on how the accident occurs. Soon after, there are reports of a lunatic on the highway between Delhi-Ghaziabad. It is said that the lunatic entertains onlookers by referencing the Dandi March and singing the marching song of the Azad Hind army.[21] He is heard giving speeches announcing that he is the "Dalit Hindi poet Ram Gopal" and that he is from "Rampur and Ghaziabad not Delhi." He declares that he is "going to lead a *Svadeshi* movement." [22] That lunatic is none other than Paul Gomra.

Before turning to the significance of this invocation of *Svadeshi* and the Indian national movement in the context of my argument it is important to understand how this story has been read in the context of post-liberalization India. Critics hail "Paul Gomra ka Skutar" as a milestone in the history of the Hindi short story and emphasize the uniqueness of Uday Prakash's craft. His stories, for some, resemble the tradition of *kissagoi* because of their strong narratorial presence that subsumes events and plot development into a diagnosis of the contemporary.[23] Archana Verma points to the several layers of meaning that Prakash weaves into the text of his stories. She points out how Prakash's stories often read like the essay, the newspaper, the report, the survey, and the document that compile and list information that is easy and accessible. Simultaneously his stories

[21] The song Paul Gomra sings called, "Qadam Qadam Badhaye Ja," was the regimental quick march of Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army. Written by Pt. Vanshidhar Shukla and composed by Ram Singh Thakuri, it was banned in India after World War II as "seditious", which was subsequently lifted in August 1947. The song has since become a patriotic song in India and is currently the regimental quick march of the Indian Army.
[22] Uday Prakash, "Paul Gomra," 76.
[23] Jyotish Joshi, "Introduction" in *Srijanatmkta ke ayam: Uday Prakash par ekagra* (Delhi: Nayi Kitab, 2013), v–xiii.

comment on the contemporary through the most startling allegories (*rupak*). It is the allegorical nature of Prakash's craft that has lent itself to various readings of this story.[24]

Critical readings of the story rehearse its own stated critique of "globalized consumerism", and "market imperialism."[25] The story, according to Tina Thomas, sums up the "destructive transformations" in "life and milieu" (*parivesh*) unleashed by the adoption of "western culture". She identifies "Paul Gomra" as the tale of the common man (*am admi*).[26] Prabhat Ranjan observes that the story marks a turning point in the Hindi short story and interprets it as an allegory of the decline of the public sphere in Hindi in which merit is ignored and nepotism and power hold sway.[27] Sudhish Pacauri reads the story as an allegory of the vernacular writer as a dying breed (*lupt prajati*).[28] Paul Gomra stands in for the predicament of the everyman (*am admi*) in a moment of technological acceleration, the free market, rampant corruption and globalizing patterns of consumption.

However, critics have rarely dwelt on the object that forms the cornerstone of the story—the scooter. The reason for this elision has to do with reading the scooter as simply a "symbol." Niranjandev Sharma sums up this tendency when he says that "the scooter is itself a symbol of the marginalized common man."[29] An allegorical reading of the scooter misses the fact that the fate of the *desi* scooter and the *desi* Paul Gomra are intertwined. This *desiness* is, of course, constructed through region and language, as I described earlier, but it is also constructed through

[24] Archana Verma, "Vikas ka duhsvapnlok" in *Srijanatmkta ke ayam: Uday Prakash par ekagra* (Delhi: Nayi Kitab, 2013), 17–32.
[25] Uday Prakash, "Paul Gomra," 55.
[26] See Tina Thomas, *Janvadi Kahanikar Uday Prakash* (Kanpur: Vidya Prakashan, 2017), 45.
[27] Prabhat Ranjan, "The 'Truth' and 'Lies' of Uday Prakash," in *Srijanatmakta*, 97–103.
[28] Sudhish Pacauri, *Uttar-adhunik sahityik vimarsh* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan: 1996), 198–199.
[29] Niranjandev Sharma, "Hamara Samay aur Uday Prakash," in *Srijanatmkta*, 117.

an attention to commodities.[30] My use of the word "desi" in this instance is distinct from its use in Indian diasporic contexts. It addresses two senses that are significant for my argument. The first that "desi" is not confined only to naturalization like "native" or "indigenous" or linguistic senses like the word "vernacular." More importantly the word "desi" extends to people, cultures and *products* in precisely the senses in which I read the intertwined fates of Paul Gomra and his scooter.

This is evident from the very beginning of the story that analogizes the ancestry of its protagonist to a global history of commodities. The narrator introduces his *desi* protagonist by observing that on first introduction the name — Paul Gomra — might suggest a transnational ancestry. "Like potato, tobacco, chili or the guava that reached India from Brazil or Peru via the Portuguese," people wondered if Paul Gomra's genealogy lay in South Africa or Cuba. Others speculated if he might not have "originated from Malaysia, Indonesia, or Java Sumatra like the coconut." Or perhaps he was like "paper that made its way from China via Turkey and Iran."[31] The truth, of course, is that Paul Gomra relishes "*arhar* dal, rice, *caukha*, mango pickle, *kadhi*, coriander chutney."[32] Again, the suggestion is not only that Paul Gomra likes eating this very local cuisine but that he is what he eats.

Similarly, at a certain point in the story Paul Gomra looks at his scooter and notices that "it has a light greenish color–very light–like the new shoots of a tree. Newborn, innate, natural."

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[30] *Desi* is borrowed from Hindi-Urdu *desi* meaning 'national', ultimately from Sanskrit *desiya*, derived from *desa* meaning 'region, province, country'. The first known usage of the Sanskrit word is found in the *Natya Shastra* (200 BCE), where it defines the regional varieties of folk performing arts, as opposed to the classical, pan-Indian *margi*. Thus, *svadesh* refers to one's own country or homeland, while *paradesh* refers to another's country or a foreign land.
[31] Uday Prakash, "Paul Gomra," 36–37.
[32] Ibid., 37.

The scooter was "an extension of nature itself"—its parts and limbs are made of earthly elements (*dhatu*) like iron ore and rubber —and even the petrol it guzzles is decomposed fossilized living matter from millions of years ago.[33] Its technology, including the wheels that, by rotating, make it move, are the same technology harnessed by Gandhi's spinning wheel (*carkha*)–a symbol of anti-colonial protest. The scooter is thus a symbol of the resistance against this "neocolonial, consumerist, market driven imperialism." If Gandhi had the freedom to believe that the *carkha* was not only a mode of resistance against British industry but "a natural extension of the hands of weavers and craftsmen," then Paul Gomra too had the right to believe that "in this age the scooter is in reality a natural extension of the human leg." He is convinced that at the current rate of technological change" the scooter had every possibility of "becoming a part of Ayurveda."[34]

This tongue-in-cheek reflection on the scooter becoming an extension of the body reflects, what Ravi Sundaram has called, Prakash's "muted left-nationalist critique of the commodity" and the "deep discomfort and trepidation of some of the Hindi cultural elites with globalization and the new commodified city."[35] Sundaram further notes that it is "significant that Gomra [the character] chose a Bajaj scooter, a nationalist technological icon. Almost like a modern shaman, Gomra summons the magical powers of nature in the scooter to lead the fight against globalization and consumerism."[36]

"Paul Gomra" grapples with the epochal transformation in which consumerism is part of a pervasive libidinal incitement of desire that veils the origins of the commodity. The story then

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[33] Ibid., 54.
[34] Ibid., 55.
[35] Ravi Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism* (Routledge, 2009) ProQuest Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uchicago/detail.action?docID=446936 (Accessed February 2020), 141.
[36] Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity*, 140.

tasks itself with unveiling or returning to the roots or origins of the commodity. The story mentions a series of brand ambassadors whose stories are interwoven with that of Paul Gomra. As a sign of the power of the commodity these people have become the commodities they advertise. The story traces the small-town roots of the "real" people of these "iconic symbols" of popular brands, including their tragic fates.

Along with a critique of advertising and its incitement of desire through overtly sexualized images, Prakash sprinkles references to Hindi poets, Gandhi, Indian nationalism and the Svadeshi movement throughout the story. They are reminiscent of "values" such as frugality, the sublimation of desire and sacrifice. However, its own moralized approach fails to contain the seduction of commodities and the transformations in libidinal desire underway in the contemporary moment. Its own principal character is an example of how subjective and objective environments are shaped in the libidinal zone of the dream and fantasy.

The story critiques the structure of the dream and fantasy that underpin the desire for new commodities and attempts to subvert them. For instance the same night he buys the scooter Paul Gomra sees a commercial for a scooter that is set in some Adivasi area "like Bastar, Abujhmar , Kirar of Mayurbhanj," in which a party of tribals, armed with bows and arrows, come across a strange animal in the jungle.[37] As one Adivasi impetuously mounts the "steel horse" he jumpstarts it by mistake and the steel animal roars into life and he is hurled "into a new galaxy of speed, pleasure, travel, and mystery."[38] However, when Paul Gomra falls asleep his dream inverts the triumphant structure of the commercial. This time Paul Gomra dreams that as he is riding through the streets of Delhi he feels as if he has a "bow and a quiver of arrows hanging from his shoulder,

[37] Uday Prakash, "Paul Gomra," 51.
[38] Ibid., 52.

a sheepskin around his waist, black skin, fat lips, flat nose… and that whenever he tried to talk all that came of his throat were guttural sounds like "ghon, ghon, khango-khonga." [39]

This vivid description suggests the profound non-contemporariness of Paul Gomra. It echoes a similar primordialism that was evident in Sanjiv's story "Load Shedding." The story ends with a description of Paul Gomra's diary that is locked away in the trunk of his scooter. On the last page of the diary is written:

> Let us not assist the destruction
> Of species that are going extinct
> Whose existence the present is slowly erasing.[40]

These last lines fuse together anthropological discourses of extinction and cultural loss of a "species" (*lupt prajati*). The poem is a dirge to the mentalities and values of anticolonialism and a critique of the emergence of new affects. The anachronism of its protagonist becomes a metaphor of waste and excrement. Another poem by Paul Gomra enunciates his sense of being the refuse of history:

> I cannot become a sewage pipe,
> I won't let pass through me
> All this filth, the excrement of this haggard century.[41]

Less evidently, "Paul Gomra," is also a story of technological obsolescence. The scooter's origins are traced back to the iron ore and rubber mined from the earth. These constitute the *earthiness* of the *desi-made* scooter. However, the scooter is a short-lived technology whose obsolescence is

[39] Ibid., 53.
[40] Ibid., 77.
[41] Ibid., 68.

quickly sealed in the age of automobility. It lies abandoned in the local police station all mangled up with its "broken fenders and twisted wheels."[42] "Paul Gomra"– the story – demonstrates the draining away of meaning from the object as a precursor to its obsolescence. The scooter's *life* has shared in the fate of Paul Gomra. The story has traced the roots of the scooter to the iron ore and rubber that made it just as it traced the genealogy of its protagonist back to Rampur in Uttar Pradesh.

In reinstating the significance of the scooter, my reading privileges the objects through which social meaning circulates in the story "Paul Gomra." Arjun Appadurai has developed this relationship between the social and cultural aspects of commodities and their commodification.[43] He shows how the "social life of things" is far more dynamic than a narrow economistic reading of the commodity would allow. Value doesn't inhere in the commodity form but is shaped by its circulation. By reading the story through the objects that signal contemporariness and non-contemporariness I illustrate Appadurai's method. However, is it possible to imagine the scooter's *social life* after its owner's demise?

Recently the environmental impacts of objects have added a previously unknown dimension to the "social life of things." In the Indian context, often the focus on environmental pollution is socialized through invoking the ethics of consumerism or the attribution of culpability for environmental pollution. While pollution and environmental harm are centered on questions of complicity and negligence, they fail to capture more pervasive dimensions of discard, obsolescence and waste. A growing body of work within the broad rubric of political ecology has

[42] Ibid.
[43] Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

focused on the changing landscape of waste management in post globalization India.[44] Here issues of caste and labor are significant concerns. In their marvelous account of the challenges of waste management in contemporary India, anthropologists Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey have drawn attention to the relation between caste and India's late arrival to the discard economy of globalized consumption.[45]They, especially, draw attention to a series of mundane acts of consumption that are part of the globalization of techno-fossils – such as petroleum-based plastics and other objects – that are not subject to the natural decay. How does one think of India's newly acquired throwing away habit in the context of literature?

Significantly, it is Hindi poetry that has attended to the discards of post globalization consumption culture in India. It is possible that because poetry is able to telescope a "message" and possesses an imagistic virtuosity that it can attend to the "life" of things too. It is also the case that conventions of nature poetry and strategies of anthropomorphism have lent themselves more readily to crafting an eco-aesthetics of nature.

II. *Kura, kacra, aur dharti:* Towards a Poetics of Waste in Hindi eco-poetry

Hindi poetry has been central to crafting an eco-critical awareness which is evident from the fact that ecocritical anthologies of Hindi poetry have preceded any comparable initiative for fiction. However initially terminology poses some issues. For instance, the first ecocritical

[44] Kaveri Gill, *Of Poverty and Plastic: Scavenging and Scrap Trading Entrepreneurs in India's Urban Informal Economy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010; Vinay Gidwani and Rajyashree Reddy, "The Afterlives of "Waste": Notes from India for a Minor History of Capitalist Surplus" in *Antipode* Vol 43. No. 5 (2011): 1625–1658.
[45] Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey, *Waste of a Nation: Garbage and Growth in India* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018).

anthology Radheshyam Tivari's *Prthvi ke paksh mem* (In Defense of the Earth, 2006), an anthology of Hindi poetry, is simply called a collection of "earth poems" (*prthvi ki kavita*). Tivari's definition of "earth poems" is deceptively simple: "anything in which nature is present in some form or the other."[46] Since then the terms eco-criticism, eco-philosophy (*paristhitik darshan*) and eco-consciousness (*paristhitik sajagta*) seem to have entered circulation in Hindi critical discourse with the publication of K. Vanaja's *Sahitya ka paristhitik darshan* (The eco-philosophy of Literature) in 2011.[47] More recently, Pramod Kovprat's *Kavya cayanika: 101 paristhitiki kavitaom ka sankalan* (Selected Poetry: A compilation of 101 ecological poems, 2015) focuses exclusively on contemporary poetry of the last two decades.[48] Kovprat calls the poems in the collection eco-poetry (*paristhitiki kavitaom*) and explains the significance of these poems as a response to the "consumerist culture" (*upbhogtavadi samskriti*) and the "pollution of values" that have driven "man" in a blind race to see the world as a "means" (*sadhan*) to an "end"(*sadhya*).[49]

At first glance it is apparent that there is a slippage between nature-poetry and eco-poetry. The title of Tivari's anthology translates as "on earth's behalf" (*prthvi ke paksh mem*) and it is evident that he wishes to capitalize on its more "contemporary" environmental senses. Tivari evokes the "planet" as a scientific object of concern when, in his introduction to the anthology, he mentions a series of international conventions on global environmental governance as well as the United Nations Millennium Ecosystem Report.[50] However, neither Tivari nor Kovaprat arrange

[46] Radheshyam Tivari, *Prthvi ke paksh mem* (Delhi: Indraprastha Prakashan, 2006),10.
[47] K. Vanaja, *Sahitya ka paristhitik darshan* (Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2011.
[48] Pramod Kovprat, *Kavya cayanika: 101 paristhitiki kavitaom ka sankalan* (Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan, 2015).
[49] Kovprat, *Kavya cayanika,*7.
[50] These include the 1972 Stockholm Conference, the 1989 Helsinki conference, the 1990 London conference, 1992 Rio de Janeiro conference, 1997 Kyoto conference, 2002 Johannesburg conference, and the 2004 Stockholm conference. He also cites the Millennium Ecosystem Report

individual poems in their anthologies according to when they were published. It is, therefore, impossible to synchronize a history of environmentalism and the poetry anthologized in these anthologies.

The anthologies require a new form of reading. To read most of these poems as "eco-poetry" involves a process of imputing a new literalism to symbolism; substituting environment for nature and grasping the implications of environmental degradation through the pathos of an anthropomorphized nature. In order to understand how this polyvalence is a function of the way the poetic idiom of Hindi has evolved it is important to pay closer attention to nature poetry as well.

For instance, Tivari's anthology begins with the *Chayavadi* poets who brought about a series of innovations that define much of the quotidian poetry written in Hindi till today.[51] Two important features of the "perspectival revolution" the *Chayavadi* poets brought about in Hindi poetry were that they "foregrounded voice" and the "personification of natural objects."[52] Most of the poems in *Prthvi ke paksha mem* are defined by poetic subjectivity in relation to the

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by the United Nations that conclusively showed how 15 out of the 24 ecosystem services globally had been degraded. These suggest the scientific senses of "planet" that *prthvi* is meant to evoke.

[51] The term *Chayavad* was originally a derogatory term, intended to mock the nebulous, shadowy and mystical style of a group of Hindi poets writing in the 1920s. These included Sumitranandan Pant, Jaishankar Prasad, Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala' and Mahadevi Verma. Often seen as the progenitors of a distinct Hindi romanticism they soon came to be the most celebrated and canonized voice of Hindi poetry. Signaling the importance of *Chayavad* in the history of Hindi poetry, the literary critic Hazariprasad Dvivedi, credited this movement for establishing the centrality of love of nature (*prakriti prem*) and personal freedom, see Hazariprasad Dvivedi, *Hindi sahitya: unaka udbhav aur vikas* (Delhi: Attaracand & Sons, 1955); Valerie Ritter, *Kama's Flowers: Nature in Hindi Poetry and Criticism, 1885-1925* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

[52] Valerie Ritter, *Kama's Flowers*, 222.

personification of natural objects. The subject or the "I" of the poem enunciates a personal relation to nature either through nostalgia or the quotidian.

The emphasis on the singularity of the poetic "I" is matched by the singularity of a particular natural object. Scholars have commented on this emphasis on the singularity of a particular natural scene or object in Hindi poetry. Hindi scholar Mariola Offredi, for instance, traces the significance of mountains in contemporary Hindi poetry.[53] There is also a tradition of publishing anthologies around a particular natural object. Anthologies such as Prayag Shukla's *Kavita nadi: kavya sancay* (River Poems: A Collection, 2002) or anthologies on prominent Hindi poets have often been thematically arranged according to a particular subject matter.[54]

Along with the *Chayavadi* innovation of poetic subjectivity the other significant feature of the poems in Tivari's collection is the extensive use of anthropomorphism. This involves the attribution of human characteristics to more-than-human entities beyond just the imagistic flourish that typifies personification. It is possible to read this tendency to anthropomorphism as the figural counterpart to the pictorial history of what Sumathi Ramaswamy has called the national "yearning of form" that underwrites the emergence of "Bharat Mata" (India Mother) as a "novel deity of nation and country."[55] Ramaswamy identifies two regimes of patriotic visualization as the scientific-geographic and the anthropomorphic-sacred. She shows how the

[53] Mariola Offredi, "The Mountains in Contemporary Hindi Literature," in *Archiv Orientalni* Vol.79. No.3 (January 2011): 281–312.
[54] For a reading of this form of singular attachment to a natural object see, Prayag Sukla, ed., *Kavita Nadi: Kavya Sancay* (New Delhi: Kitabghar Prakashan, 2002); Kedarnath Simh, *Pani ki prarthana: paryavaran vishyak kavitaem* eds. Sandhya Simh and Racana Simh (New Delhi, Rajkamal Prakashan, 2020).
[55] Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–2.

mapped form of the nation representing the geo-body came to be linked with the anthropomorphized mother/goddess of Bharat Mata.

For the purposes of this argument it is important to note that the figurative vocabulary of poetic nature is also crafted through such a nationalist idiom. The vocabulary of Hindi nature poetry similarly conflates the scientific with the anthropomorphic/sacred. Valerie Ritter also confirms that the meaning of "nature" (*prakriti*) in the sense of an essence or intrinsic qualities of something recedes from use. Instead the complex of meanings that come to signify poetic nature or *prakriti* are resolutely meant to index the material and phenomenal world in its range of implications from the realm of scientific inquiry to theological entity. And it is this indeterminacy that makes poetic nature (*prakriti*) and poetic subjectivity amenable to recoding.

So far, I have contextualized anthologies of Hindi eco-poetry and outlined the structural features of nature poetry that lend themselves to being recoded as eco-poetry. The relation between poetic subjectivity and poetic nature is often singular and abstract. It is for these reasons that nature poetry has more recently also been read by scholars as eco-critical. Danuta Stasik and Alessandra Consolaro both read the poetics of trees in contemporary Hindi fiction and poetry ecocritically.[56] In order to query this equivalence of nature poetry with eco-poetry, I want to turn to some poems from the *Kavya Cayanika* that revolve around trash (*kura*) and rubbish (*kacra*) since they seem most antithetical to the idea of poetic nature. How does the structural idiom of Hindi poetry adapt to these new natures?

[56] Danuta Stasik, "My intimate neighbor: Kunwar Narain's poetics of trees," in *Pandanus* Vol 14. No. 2 (2014): 21–36; Alessandra Consolaro "Dying trees in globalizing Hindi literature: environment, middle classes, and posthuman awareness," in *Kervan–International Journal of Afro-Asiatic Studies* No. 20 (2016): 107–124.

The first poem is Baldev Vamshi's "Kura-kacra aur kompalem" (Trash and the New Leaves).[57] The poem comprises of five stanzas of irregular length and is written in free verse. The first two stanzas describe the discovery of several things buried under the soil:

> Under the pile of rubble, buried for years,
> there were many things
> that on removing the layers of time
> revealed
>
> in metropolitan waste
> such varied combinations of the elements
> new civilized products—chemical
> and polythene—
> that the earth was unable to digest
> with time. Even after all these years.
> Trapped. Helpless. Ashamed
> That she was unable to fulfill her duty
> Of being the earth…[58]

The anthropomorphism of earth (*dharti*) as feminine is introduced in the second stanza. It is a poetic figuration that stems both from the genealogy of nature poetry that I have traced so far, as well as more agrarian contexts. Its meanings cohere around senses of a sustaining, even enduring, earth in proverbial use. It also connotes a more mundane sense of tilled land. Lastly it can also connote a distinction that emerges in contrast to the world (*duniya*).[59] It is significant that in this

[57] Baldev Vamshi, "Kura-kacra aur Kopalem," in *Kavya cayanika: 101 parisithtiki kavitaom ka sankalan* (Allahabad: Lokbharti Prakashan, 2015), 50–51. Baldev Vamshi (1938–2018) is the author of 15 collections of poetry. While identifying himself as a progressive (*pragativadi*) poet he is also an accomplished scholar of the Saint poets, particularly Kabir. He has also led one of the longest protests around the recognition of India's several languages.
[58] Vamshi, "Kura," Ibid.,50.
[59] For an overview of these senses of *dharti* I have relied on S.W. Fallon's Hindustani dictionary published in 1879. See S. W. Fallon, *Fallon's A New Hindustani English Dictionary: With*

instance a particular aspect of *dharti* – soil (*mitti*) is emphasized. The Indic term "*mahabhut*" used for the four great elements (earth, water, fire, and air) is excellently juxtaposed to these newly arrived inorganic substances such as plastic and chemicals that redefine organic materiality.

The feminine connotations proliferate with the idea that "she" is not able to fulfill her duty (*dharm*). The invocation of "pati dharm" or "pati vrta" that both refer to the dutiful wife and the conjugal duties of the woman are unmistakable.

The figuration of long-suffering earth (*prthvi*) is then further accentuated in the fourth stanza comprising of only three lines:

> The earth stands shamed (*lajjit)*
> Before these modern
> Dimensions of human life.[60]

The connotations of the fertility of the soil – a function of its ability to compost – are now interrupted by its inability to digest (*paca*) this new nature. However, the poem ends with affirming the regenerative possibilities of the soil in the fifth and last stanza:

> Yes!
> But for one fact
> That on that reticent earth,
> Now there are
> Some tender shoots
> that rise proudly from that pile of dirt.[61]

Illustrations from Hindustani Literature and Folklore (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1989).

[60] Vamshi, "Kura," 50.

[61] Ibid., 51.

Is this an archaeology of garbage or an archaeology of ruin? Much hinges on how one reads this moment in the poem. While the former indicates a triumph of anthropogenic artifacts the latter reinstates the power of nature. This latter relies on a poetics of cyclical time and the regenerative possibilities of the land. However, chemical and polythene waste represent a new form of materiality and historicity of the human that must be foreclosed by a somewhat formulaic organicism.

Another poem in the *Kavya cayanika* that figures waste in relation to non-human nature is Rag Telang's "Plastik."[62] "Plastik" is a poem in seven stanzas written in free verse. In the first three stanzas the poem uses a series of anthropomorphisms to describe plastic:

> On melting all the vessels
> Of metal and glass
> Out of nowhere emerged plastic
> Dodging every flame
>
> Where is he running off to this plastic?
> Having trapped all the fresh air
> In his see-through bag
>
> After covering all books and pictures
> He has now covered the map of the entire world
> A sea of plastic flows on the entire land. [63]

[62] Rag Telang, "Plastik," in *Kavya cayanika*,148–149. Rag Telang is primarily a poet from Madhya Pradesh. He has published seven collections of poetry and one collection of essays. He received the Raza Award from the Madhya Pradesh government for his collection of poems titled *Kahin kisi jagah*.
[63] Telang, "Plastik," 148.

Here anthropomorphism is coupled with the naturalization of plastic.[64] Plastic is not only personified through human characteristics, but it is also a new nature. It flows, burns and it engulfs. The pervasiveness of plastic is, however, also coded as social critique:

> Plastic trees, Plastic flowers
> Plastic faces, Plastic relationships
> Plastic language, Plastic dialect
> Love is plastic
> All Plastic is plastic.[65]

This equivalence between the ubiquity of plastic and a culture of artifice is a rhetorical strategy that has resonances in cultural critiques of globalization more generally. The material nature of plastic becomes a *symbol* of all that is wrong with contemporary culture. For instance, the first stanza of Kunwar Narayan's iconic poem "Bhasha ki dvasth paristhitiki mem," (In the devastated ecology of language) begins with a series of manufactured materials:

> plastic trees
> nylon flowers
> rubber birds.[66]

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[64]The Indian plastics industry makes an appearance in1957. It took more than 30 years for it to pervade Indian lifestyles. By 1979, "the market for plastics" was just being seeded by the state-owned Indian Petro-Chemicals. The impetus to ban plastic begins around the 1994 plague scare in Surat when people in other cities decried the state of public sanitation and urged regulatory bodies to ban the production, distribution and use of plastic bags. India's plastic consumption at 11 kilograms is still only a tenth of the US and less than a third of China's, according to PlastIndia 2015. But, the projected high growth rates of GDP and continuing rapid urbanization suggest that India's trajectory of plastic consumption and plastic waste is likely to increase.

[65] Telang, "Plastik," 148.

[66] Kumvar Narayan, "Bhasa ki dhvast paristhitiki mem," in *Kavya cayanika*, 166.

The poem proceeds through a series of natural metaphors to index the immiseration of cultural life. Interestingly, Narayan's poem is also anthologized in the *Kavya cayanika* as an eco-poem. Again, eco-poetry involves a process of imputing a new literalism to symbolism made possible by the range of natural metaphors and symbolism the idiom of Hindi poetry allows.

Returning to Telang's poem one notices how the poem invests in plastic – an agency that it has wrested from "us":

> On what new wheel is the world taking shape
> How did this plastic society come to be
> In front of our very eyes.
>
> Is this what we gained
> from crafting plastic
> it looks like it will not stop at this
> turning everything into plastic.[67]

The poem concludes, however, with the obligatory tipping of the hat to the power of natural processes and reinstating "our" agency. The last stanza of the poem states:

> After all it is plastic
> and someday a gust of wind will blow it away
> or some fire will bury it forever.
> Or else
> We'll carve
> Once again, some stone tool
> To scratch out all forms of plastic."[68]

The stone tool is a primitive image to end with as if to get rid of plastic would literally be starting anew at the beginning of human civilization.

[67] Telang, "Plastik," 148–149.
[68] Ibid., 149.

My interest in drawing attention to the structural closure of these poems with the regenerative promise of nature is to emphasize that waste can only figure as the antithesis to poetry. Nature must be restored. This structural closure circumvents the problem of the inorganic in both poems. Plastic as anthropogenic ruin is, in Elizabeth DeLoughrey's words, a "figure of history that is no longer permeable to decay and now oddly decoupled from nonhuman nature."[69] The ruin that should catalyze a sense of decay and the temporality of human history now is oddly interrupted by the perduring of these elements.

A poem that adopts a different approach and poetic style to render the hybrid "nature" of plastic is Jnanendrapati's "Paulithin" (Polythene).[70] It is significant that the poem doesn't focus on the *material* – plastic – but the very specific object –the polythene bag. There is a political significance to the increasing focus on a particular embodiment of plastic – the plastic bag. In the case of Delhi, for instance, environmental groups appealed for wide-ranging ban on plastic from the mid-nineties. The narrower focus on the plastic bag – especially the recycled plastic bag – according to Kaveri Gill, was an outcome of a political compromise given the economic fallout of a total ban on plastic.[71]

"Paulithin" was originally part of a collection of poems written by Jnanendrapati on the Ganga which also explains why the river figures prominently in the opening stanza.[72] The poem is arranged in three long stanzas interspersed with three shorter segments that follow after every

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[69] Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Accelerations: Globalization and States of Waste," in *Allegories of the Anthropocene*," (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 122.
[70] Jnanendrapati, "Paulithin," in *Kavya cayanika,* 130–132.
[71] Kaveri Gill, "Deprived Castes and Privileged Politics: An Urban Informal Market in Contemporary India," in *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 41, No. 2 (Jan. 14–20, 2006): 133–141.
[72] Jnanendrapati, *Gangatat* (New Delhi: Radhkrsn Prakashan, 1999).

longer stanza. The shorter segments allow for a transition into three different spaces to describe the ubiquity of polythene.

The poem uses an elevated style resembling an ode, when it begins with, "Polythene! Polythene." In the first long stanza the poem focuses on the relation of polythene to the river Ganga. In several exclamatory sentences it builds a sort of frenzied pace, noting the different points at which the polythene invades the river:

> Look there! there it floats on the Ganga,
> Look! In the blink of an eye,
> It leapt into
> The Ganga[73]

By using the Hindi masculine pronoun to refer to polythene, the poem suggests a subtle personification such that the reader imagines polythene "jumping into the Ganga after man"–a reference to the practice of making offerings (often wrapped in plastic) to the Ganga for the deliverance of souls:

> That polythene, he came humbly to immerse
> flower offerings to the gods in the Ganga
> And following the offerings
> He jumped in behind men
> Granting them *sadgati*
> Began choking the life breath of marine life.[74]

The familiar literary strategy of personification gains added meaning because it is the river Ganga:

> Poor mother Ganga
> As soon as the weightless polythene drops in
> Her heart grows heavy.[75]

[73] Jnanendrapati, "Paulithin," 130.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 131

The next long stanza shifts focus to the geographical, temporal, civilizational ubiquity of polythene. The poem captures the versatility and agency of this descendant of plastic (*plastik-vamsaj*) that wipes out "leaf cups (*donom*), utensils (*thomgom*), baskets (*daliyom*), buckets (*dolchiyom*)." Its agents are everywhere: from the village to the metropolis and it extends from "the village in Jharkhand to the low-income flat in the heartless city."[76] This "skin of capitalism" insinuates itself in various ways including the things people buy and carry away from the market. The speaker laments, berates, rants at the several qualities of polythene – how it wafts gently, balloons out, is resilient and can be easily compressed. The poem juxtaposes words with their antonyms, repeats words, and uses rhyme (*tukant*) and alliteration (*anupras*) to create an idiom and syntax that echoes the tensile nature of polythene.

It is only towards the end of the second stanza that the reader learns that the speaker is male when he says:

> One day irritably, I tell my wife
> Oh! Polythene
> Wherever you look, polythene
> Everywhere you look
> Every nook and cranny are covered in polythene
> Is this a home…[77]

The third and last stanza comes as a surprise with a shift in registers and a new gendered perspective on polythene when a new poetic voice is foregrounded. The male speaker is interrupted by his wife who draws attention to the daily struggles of running the household:

> Without giving me a chance to find the words to express my anger
> My wife says:

[76] Ibid., 131.
[77] Ibid.

How would you know,
For the house to run
How many battles women wage
Against numerous enemies!

It is a challenge
To save the grain and the sugar and other things
From the worms and the ants and termites
The world is a fruit
Nibbled at one end by the worms and rats
And at the other end by us.

The male speaker realizes helplessly that there is truth to this perspective:

I look at it helpless,
It appeared in the fray of life
on man's side,
Now this very murderous plastic
threatens to choke the life breath of the Earth.[78]

This conclusion leaves the reader on a different plane than the poems discussed earlier. While they attempt to foreclose the eruption of the inorganic in poetry, Jnanendrapati's poem gives it free vein and grapples with how intimately it is interwoven with human lives.

What separates this poem stylistically from the ones I have considered above is that this poem doesn't rely exclusively on an organic resolution to inorganic waste. It carves out a cadence and syntax by which it approaches something like what philosopher Jane Bennett has called the "vital materialism" of matter. Bennett characterizes this vital materialism as one that presents non-human natures as themselves "bona fide agents rather than as instrumentalities, techniques of power, recalcitrant objects, or social constructs."[79] The poem also recognizes that polythene escapes human purpose and intent and pursues its own trajectory.

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[78] Ibid., 132.
[79] Jane Bennett, "A Vitalist Stopover on the Way to a New Materialism," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, eds. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 47.

What is striking about these poems is how they move between a critique of plastic or waste as both social commentary and environmental critique. Must the environment represent an objective relation, or can one approach it through humanist categories of social critique, interrelatedness and subjectivity? These questions become more challenging in the transition from local environmental issues to concerns over global warming.[80] I examine two poems in the following section that provide tentative answers to how Hindi poets have figured a *global* environmental crisis.

III: *Prthvi* or Planet: Figures for eco-poetry

Mangalesh Dabral's "Ghatati hui auksijan" (Decreasing Oxygen, 2012) is also anthologized in the *Kavya cayanika*.[81] In this instance its actual publication date is known since it was originally published in a collection of Dabral's poetry titled *Naye yug mem shatru* (The Enemy in New Age, 2013).[82] The poem references growing global concerns over ozone

[80] The constitution of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992 first made the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions an agenda for global governance. Mark Maslin points out that from 1988 onwards the use of the phrase 'global warming' and 'climate change' gained support, while 'greenhouse effect' lost its appeal and by 1997 was rarely mentioned see Mark Maslin, *Global Warming : A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2004).
[81] Mangalesh Dabral, "Ghatati hui auksijan," *Kavya cayanika*, 66–67.
[82] Mangalesh Dabral, *Naye yug mem shatru* (New Delhi: Radhakrsn Prakashan, 2013). Mangalesh Dabral is one of the most well-known Hindi poets of contemporary India and an astute commentator on the contemporary moment. He has published 5 collections of poetry, 2 collections of essays, and a travel diary. He received the Sahitya Academy Award in 2000 and is an accomplished translator as well.

depletion following the discovery of a hole in the ozone layer in Antarctica.[83] That this was a global concern by the mid-nineties is evident in poems such as Ramanika Gupta's "Ozon mem surakh" (The hole in the Ozone) and Madan Kashyap's "Prthvi divas, 1991" (Earth Day, 1991) that both evoke global initiatives around environmental governance and increasing concerns of global warming and ozone depletion.[84]

"Ghatati hui auksijan," begins with referencing this global concern:

> Often, we read
> that the world's oxygen is running out
> And at that moment one can see how speedily it is indeed running out.
>
> Nitrogen and Sulphur carbon oxides are increasing
> And dangerous, shining particulate matter hangs in the air,
> Hatred and oppression are on the rise, along with some sly kinds of happiness
> In every direction heat sprays and perfumed sprinklers are increasing.[85]

The poem goes on to discuss images of hospital beds with oxygen cylinders, senses of both being physically short of breath and the claustrophobia of contemporary culture, where "everything has its own coop/ and every man is trapped in his," and onto the high-rises of the rich and powerful and onto the makeshift shanties with poor ventilation. Scientific facts of ozone depletion and global warming are caught up in a thicket of idioms related to air and metaphors of socio-political critique.

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[83] The discovery of ozone depletion is often dated to a 1985 paper published by Joe Farman, Brian Gardiner, and Jonathan Shanklin. They reported large and unanticipated decreases in stratospheric ozone levels over the Antarctic.
[84] Ramanika Gupta, "Ozon mem surakh," in *Adim se admi tak* (Delhi: Shubham Prakashan, 1997), n.p.; Madan Kashyap, "Prthvi divas, 1991," in *Kavya cayanika*, 145–147.
[85] Dabral, "Ghatati,"66. Dabral is making a reference to chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) that were considered the main culprits in ozone depletion.

Oxygen becomes linked to breath, congestion, claustrophobia, urban sprawl, and even the failure of language: "The oxygen in language is running out/The very breath of words is being throttled."[86]

The ozone is a hyperobject—a term Timothy Morton uses for entities that are non-local, phased, and interobjective.[87] In other words, its temporal and spatial scales escape human perception. Morton emphasizes the cognitive dissonance between hyperobjects and their apprehension. However, it is possible to argue that Dabral's poem does something interesting with this dissonance. The poem turns the cognitive dissonance between hyperobjects and their apprehension into an extended metaphor. It activates several symbolic registers of breath, life and air as related terms for oxygen. In doing so the poem links disparate time frames and actors much in the way Bruno Latour notes the constant hybridization of the realms of nature and politics or discourse.[88] Describing a newspaper article on the growing public concern about the hole in the ozone, Latour observes:

> A single thread links the most esoteric sciences and the most sordid politics, the most distant sky and some factory in the Lyon suburbs, dangers on a global scale and the impending local elections or the next board meeting. The horizons, the stakes, the time frames, the actors — none of these is commensurable, yet there they are, caught up in the same story.[89]

[86] Mangalesh Dabral, "Ghatati," 13.
[87] Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
[88] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[89] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never,* 1.

Dabral's poem too links disparate registers of socio-political critique to ozone depletion. Rather than the former explaining the latter or being *truer* the poem yokes one "abstraction" such as the ozone layer to other abstractions such as the "rich" or the "poor."

I want to illustrate this mode of linking the atmospheric to the social through another instance before situating these in a broader argument about how my reading of Hindi eco-poetry is distinct from the way critics have read nature poetry. The poem I now turn to is not a part of the two anthologies I have discussed above. However, it is an apt poem to end with it because it returns to the invocation of the Earth (*prthvi*) in Tivari's anthology as well as links it directly to a critique of consumerism.

Anup Sethi's poem, "Kabar" (Trash, 1997) begins with describing new practices of consumption and disposability that were ushered in by the liberalization of India's economy. The poem has an open form and is in free verse. It comprises of seven stanzas of varying length:

They made several things
And taught us how to use them

They made many more bewitching things
And taught us how to consume them.[90]

They cast our body, mind and soul in their molds
And we squandered everything.

And that which entered homes, our very souls

And shamefully we learnt

[90] Anup Sethi (b. 1958) is a Hindi poet and has been writing for 30 years. He has an anthology of poems *Jagat mem mela* and more recently the translation of Noam Chomsky's work *Satta ke samne* to his credit. He is also a theatre-critic, has translated a few plays and edited a cultural & literary journal *Himachal mitr* from 2006 to 2011. He has received the Sane Guruji award for his literary contribution from the Maharashtra Sahitya Academy. Originally from Himachal Pradesh he now lives in Mumbai.

to throw it like trash.

The *kabarivala* took it for a fee
And they gave a new shape, color, smell and taste
And we squandered all again
Only to discard it again.

This business tore the world from within
And stitched it up like a football
Like a tightly packed, trash-filled, explosive,
This blue orange–Earth,
suspended in space.[91]

The poem is characterized by indirection using the personal pronouns "they" and "us". Its repetition simulates several acts of production and consumption. The move from use (*upyog*) to consume (*upbhog*) is accompanied by the 'bewitching' power of these things that make consumers give their all (*sarvasv*). The poem also illustrates the recycle economy in India by weaving together earlier senses of trash (*kabari*), what Julia Corwin has termed "economies of reuse and repair," to new habits of disposability.[92]

It is the last stanza of the poem that links this ceaseless making and consumption to to the earth (*prthvi*) that is significant. The poem ends with juxtaposing these collective habits of consumption and discard to the "blue orange" suspended in space (*antriksh*). At first, this image seems overdetermined with more contemporary, extraterrestrial views of the planet as seen from outer space. This final image of the "blue orange" seems to render an ecological footprint that is

[91] Anup Sethi, "Kabad," http://kavitakosh.org/kk/कबाड़_/_अनूप_सेठी (Accessed February 1,2020).
[92] Julia Corwin, "Nothing is useless in Nature: Delhi's Repair Economies and value-creation in an electronics "waste" sector," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* Vol. 50, No. 1 (2018): 14–30.

planetary. The image seems to cross-reference – in an ironic register– two other images of planet Earth that came to be known as Earthrise and the Blue Marble.[93]

These extraterrestial images have often been the subject of postcolonial critiques. For instance, Sheila Jasanoff has traced these images to the beginnings of space research and the race to conquer space during the Cold War.[94] She notes that as these images morphed into the icons of the global environmental movement the assumptions that often-guided American ecologists was that the sublimity of this view—seeing the same Earth and seeing it whole—could not but obliterate differences among human beings. She argues that this placeless image of the space-based view of Earth remains a uniquely American achievement not shared by most other nations.

Jasanoff also compares the visual styles of American and Indian environmentalism by analyzing the differences in iconic images they use. From this she then refers to a different figure for the earth used by Indian environmental organizations. She writes:

> Even when Indian environmentalists represent the whole Earth, it is not the space age icon, Carl Sagan's "pale blue dot," that occupies their imagination. Rather, it is an altogether more ancient and mundane representation, the globe not the planet, recognizable most often from the circles of latitude and longitude that are clearly inscribed on its spherical form.[95]

[93] "Earthrise" is a photograph taken by astronaut William Anders from the Apollo 8 space mission and became an icon of the global environmental movement. The "Blue Marble" is a photograph taken of the Earth on Dec 7, 1972 by the crew of Apollo 17 spacecraft ren route to the Moon.

[94] Sheila Jasanoff, "Heaven and Earth: The Politics of Environmental Images," in *Earthly Politics: Local and Global in Environmental Governance* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 31–54.

[95] These images are currently not available due to lack of access and copyright issues.

In the Indian context, that "ancient and mundane" representation of the "globe and not the planet" is the sense in which Anup Sethi's poem evokes "*prthvi*." This is evident in use of the term "blue orange" which is in fact a common image in early nineteenth-century Hindi geography textbooks, where the shape of the earth was often explained to school children through the image of an orange.[96]

Jasanoff emphasizes that Indian environmentalism derives emotional force from people's attachment to particular places, landscapes, and livelihoods, and to an ethic of communal living that can sustain stable, long-term regimes for the protection of shared resources. Jasanoff's reading of this figure of Planet Earth echoes the deep-seated antagonism toward emerging world institutions and the shape of the future they allegedly represent in anti-globalization movements at the turn of the twentieth century.

This seeming antipathy to planetary thinking and the privileging of local attachments is also evident in some Hindi poems that evince a similar skepticism towards global environmental governance by citing the intensification of social inequality and evasive geopolitics of deferral in matters of environmental degradation, injury, remediation, and redress. Poems like Madan Kashyap's "Prthvi divas, 1991," (Earth Day, 1991), Achyutanand Misra's "Akhir kab tak bachi rahegi prthvi," (Earth, How long will she survive, n.p.) Jnanendrapati's "Yeh prthvi kya keval

[96] I thank Professor Ulrike Stark for drawing attention to this terminology in geography textbooks prepared in vernacular languages during the colonial period. See Shivaprasad, *Chota Bhugola-Hastamalaka*, (Allahabad: Govt. Press, 1877). For the significance of the globe as a physical object and visual imaginary, see Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Terrestrial Lessons: The Conquest of the World as Globe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018). For more on Shivaprasad and the role of Indian educators in the colonial period, see Ulrike Stark, "Knowledge in Context: Raja Shivaprasad (1823-95) as Hybrid Intellectual and People's Educator," in *Trans-Colonial Modernities in South Asia*, edited by Michael S. Dodson and Brian A. Hatcher (Routledge, 2012), 68–91.

tumhari hai," (Is this Earth only yours, n.p.) all criticize first world attempts to save the *planet* while pursuing policies that impoverish the third world.[97] Misra, for instance, subverts the relation of the "Earth" as an object of concern turning to the other affective staple of Hindi poetry –the soil/land (*dharti*) and the figure of the farmer (*kisan*).[98]

"Kabar" practices a certain economy of juxtaposition in which it links a series of mundane acts of consumption to an ecological footprint that is not experiential but seems to evoke a "view from nowhere." I contextualized the "blue orange" as not evoking the planet in more contemporary senses but an older terrestrial understanding of the globe. This move from world to earth is also a part of a deeply humanist commitment to the human imagination and the power of literature to figure an entity that approaches that sense of alterity that Spivak calls "planetarity" or "prthvi" in this case. [99]

For Spivak, a planetary disposition is a transcendental figuration of what "we think is the origin of this animating gift" that in her opinion can cultivate a *disposition* that counters the abstract globe of globalization. [100] Evoking the earth or *prthvi* is an attempt to locate the imperative of an indefinite radical alterity of the other space of a planet. She expressly contrasts this idea of "planetarity" from "planet-talk," the latter which Spivak, much like Jasanoff, reads as an undivided natural space that works in the interest of globalization. Spivak's "planetarity" also

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[97] Madan Kashyap, "Prthvi divas, 1991," in *Kavya cayanika: 101 parisithtiki kavitaom ka sankalan* (Allahbad:Lokbharati Prakashan, 2015), 145–147; Achyutanand Misra's "Akhir kab tak bachi rahegi prthvi," accessed January 5th 2020, https://tinyurl.com/rqqwa6v ; Jnanendrapati, "Yeh prthvi kya keval tumhari hai," in *Kavya cayanika: 101 parisithtiki kavitaom ka sankalan* (Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan, 2015), 178–180.
[98] Mishra, "Akhir kab." (online)
[99] Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 73.
[100] Spivak, *Death*, 72.

evokes that "ancient" entity that "*prthvi*" connotes. "Spivak's "planetarity" is of the same order as Jasanoff's "earthly politics."

This planetary consciousness is definitely human-centric or a "humanist category" as Dipesh Chakrabarty points out in making a distinction between the human-centric idea of sustainability and the non-anthropocentric idea of habitability.[101] The questions one is left with are numerous. Is it sufficient to say that environmental concerns signal the end of transcendental figurations of literature "outside" of physical reality? Or can one say that poetry and literature more generally demonstrate how to think of the relation between non-human and *in*human nature and the social in new ways?

This question can be answered in two very different ways. The first is the kind of understanding of "posthumanism" that Alessandra Consolaro assays in her reading of Hindi literature's penchant for attributing personhood, subjectivity and voice that can and has been extended to more-than-human entities. In some senses this is culturally more acceptable, as Alessandra Consolaro points out, since in the Indian context animals and plants are often invested with human attributes.[102] Consolaro emphasizes the significance of literature in crafting posthuman approaches that "redefine the boundaries of the human and the sense of coexistence between the human and non-human living."[103] Her ecocritical approach reads anthropomorphism as an important literary strategy since it attributes subjectivity and personhood beyond the human.

The second would be to ask what have these forms of "post nature" — garbage, plastic, consumer goods, scooters etc.— taught *us* about being posthuman? In this chapter I have explored

[101] Chakrabarty, "The Planet as a Humanist Category," in *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 46, No. 1 (Autumn 2019): 1–31.
[102] Alessandra Consolaro, "Dying trees," 121.
[103] Ibid.,121.

this moment not simply as one of *extending* human subjectivity. Instead through tracing poetic nature and ideas of the natural or the authentic in Hindi literature I explored the changing relation between nature and history. I showed the blurring lines between nature and history even as Hindi literature continues to be read within critiques of the nation-state and socio-political critiques of globalization and commodification.

Conclusion

Perhaps it is fitting to return to that meeting with Radheshyam Tivari to pay closer attention this time not to the sensibility of the poet but to that of the researcher. At the outset the choice of the word "displaced" was a diagnostic one. However, the intent of this study has not been to diagnose reparative modes of being as symptoms of something more sinister or a sign of naïveté. Nor has it been to discover previously unnoticed and politically pernicious meanings that lurk in the idea of nature. What disposition or sensibility then does *Nature Displaced* adopt?

This dissertation foregrounded the "environment" as a key concern for the study of modern and contemporary Hindi literature. While critical of the genealogies of official environmentalism in the subcontinent, it retained the use of the word "environment." It is important to emphasize that this choice was made in contradistinction to the general common sense in ecocriticism that considers the term environment anthropocentric. In Indian ecocritic, Nirmal Selvamony's words, the environment not only puts "the human subject it envelops in the center but also dichotomizes the relation between the human and the environment."[1]

My choice of the term "environment" has to do with the nature of the Indian postcolonial. Modernity has such a deeply contested legacy in the subcontinent that it has been characteristic to denounce the embodiments of this modernity. Its contested legacy has often led to the exaggerated dichotomy between "modernizers" and their "critics." This has also led to a peculiar blind spot in Hindi language criticism with regard to histories of objects and technologies that are constitutive

[1] Selvamony, "Introduction," xi (see intro., n. 29).

of India's modernity. This blind spot is an outcome of the straitjacket between being either a compromised modernizer or a prescient critic of modernization. The limitations of these approaches became most apparent with *amcalikta* which has progressively been read either as a repository of the folk or as a politically compromised literary register that romanticizes the rural. Is Renu a modernist or a critic of modernization? The answer was clearly neither.

It was for these reasons that throughout the dissertation it is possible to trace two related strands. The first was to *re*inscribe material history into the study of Hindi literature. For instance, rather than read the debates on *amcalikta* in the context of claims and counterclaims about representativeness, this study read *amcalikta* in conversation with agricultural modernization and the Green Revolution. In other words, this project inscribed a history of postcolonial environment-making into its literary studies approach.

The second strand was to consistently reemphasize that this environment-making did not happen in isolation and was in every instance being shaped by the agentic powers of non-humans. It is here that the project consistently reconfigured the emphasis on human agency, character and plot. It did this in several ways. The first was by drawing attention to the mismatch between human subjectivity and what it designates as "nature." The second was through tracing moments of failure to mastery, such as in the case of Renu. The third was to rehabilitate forms of "non-modern" cosmologies that are better able to rehabilitate this loss of sovereignty of the human. It is this second strand that differentiated this project from simply being a social history or cultural history. Though informed by environmental history this dissertation did not simply *contextualize* Hindi literature within this history. Nor did it seek to be a cultural history of "senses of the environment" archived in literary texts.

Though historically bookended by the era of decolonization and concluding with contemporary literature, this project did not proceed chronologically but conceptually. Instead it focused on the possibilities opened up by the idea that literary modernity is now scalable to altogether different templates and temporalities. The fury of a tumultuous river, the toxic afterlives of radioactive uranium, the detritus of consumption, and the exhaust from thermal power generation inscribed their own history and temporality into this study. By doing so this dissertation has traced the significance of those aspects of Hindi literature that seemed most remote from its critical concerns.

The strategies of reading I adopted in this study were also significantly different from readings by Hindi critics. Where sociological readings resolved the alienation and ennui of environment to psychologized feelings or social causes, my reading was more displaced and focused on the broader range of affective life produced by built environment. Where critics were more likely to read an artifact as possessing symbolic value for a particular plot, I often read it literally thereby reversing the order of influence and force. These were strategies that made it possible to trace moments that had been foreclosed in previous readings.

The project also sought to reconfigure postcolonial critique in order to counter the return of singular histories of industrial modernity or capitalist globalization in comparative literary and cultural studies. This was most evident in the chapter on energy which "provincialized" such scholarship by foregrounding the significance of postcolonial histories for any global debate on world literature.

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