The protagonist in three novels from the fifties to the nineties: a common quest for *atman* beyond various western influences

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1. Introduction: various modes of characterization depending on the literary school

1.1. Aim of the paper

It is commonly assumed that the various stages in the evolution of modern contemporary Hindi literature correspond with the evolution of social expectations, and reflect in their own way the changes in the intellectual history of the cultural environment. "Progressivism" then fits the idealism and robust involvement of the struggle for freedom, with protagonists embodying clear values like truth, good, enlightenment and freedom against villains embodying a reactionary unjust world, whereas the subsequent "experimentalism" and "new story"[1] emphasize the detachment of a sceptic observer who no longer 'believes' and takes no active part. The so-called postmodern literature is a quite different, more ambiguous account of a number of disillusions, both at the collective and individual level. The study of the protagonist should be a good observatory for such an evolution: the novel itself being originally a foreign form, the construction of its protagonists also suggests to which extent this borrowed construct is appropriated and integrated into an Indian frame, in other words, how far the characters retain a common 'native' feature throughout the various stages of the recent literary trends apparently marked by western ideology, whether marxist, existentialist or postmodern.

1.2. Theoretical and methodological assumptions

In the mid-seventies, Culler (1975:230) complained that "character is the major aspect of the novel to which structuralism has paid least attention and has been least successful in treating". The situation has changed significantly with the leading article of Hamon (1977) on the semiological status of the character ("personnage"), largely integrated into Bal (1997:114-132)[2]. Since the protagonist is part of a semiologic system –a literary text for that matter — within a specific historical and cultural setting, it would be desirable to treat it as a semiotic object, and to include in the description every level of analysis before ordering the levels into a hierarchy and selecting some features as the most significant. The various levels of description (sexual, genealogical, economical, geographical, psychological, social, moral features, as well as characterizing and functional features, etc) aim at isolating distinctive features on the basis of significant oppositions, repetitions, and qualification (direct and indirect), in order to find the meaning (the signified) of the character as a major or minor actantial figure (several actors can represent a single actantial figure[3]); are such actantial figures subordinate to some aesthetical project, or constrained by the social environment of the time, or by some unconscious psychological input of the author ? The interpretation of the signified relies crucially on the hierarchy or identification of what signifier will be selected as more significant, which is highly variable in time depending on the particular social and

[1] In Hindi, *naī kahānī*; a good synthesis of its goals in Kamleshvar (1986). Novels as well as short stories have been written according to these principles.

[2] The traditional readings within a dramatic or a psychological model (a confusion favored by the very term "character"), or in terms of sources, keys, are still current in South Asian criticism, however.

[3] Bal (1997:118, 197-207), after Greimas (1973) and Brémond (1973).

cultural setting of the reader[4]. Such a variation is unavoidable and part of the character-effect ("effet-personnage") in the same way as the "effect of the real" can be said to be a construct, involving both the textual built-in elements and the decoding /rebuilding of the reader, within the cultural and ideological setting of both the author and the reader(s). Focalising on novels which are a good example of a given literary trend and at the same time break away from that trend by their stylistic originality will help not to restrict these settings to the expected program of the concerned trend.

1.3. Corpus and Summary

From the above perspective I selected three quite different contemporary Hindi novels. Nagarjun's *Bābā Baṭesarnāth* (BB, 1951) supposedly embodies the optimistic epic-realistic trend of the "progressive" novel of social action, set in rural India; Krishna Baldev Vaid's *Dûsrâ na koî* (DNK, 1978) the pessimistic individualistic trend of intellectual existentialism, set in a foreign urban setting, and Alka Saraogi's *Kali-kathā* (KK, 1998) the postmodern or postcolonial narrative in the aftermath of the Rushdie generation. [5]

The three novels present a relatively simple constellation of protagonists, in the sense that the main character is clearly identifiable by his qualification, function and quantitative/qualitative distribution. And the three allow this role to a non-typical character: an old tree (BB) and an old crazy man (DNK), who hold the first person in a large part of both novels (more than half of BB consists in the speech of the old Baba, almost whole DNK is the speech of the old man); and an old man transformed into a tramp at the end of an otherwise successful career, explicitly delegating his speech to a narrator (*kathā-lekhak*), in the third novel (KK). Opponents are clearly identifiable in the first two novels: the gang of the rich landlords, the *zamīndārs,* who try to encroach on the common lands, in BB, and the "mortal enemy" in DNK, both characterized with inversed features. Apart from these structural analogies, both novels seem to differ radically: one is euphoric, very much Indian, social, dwelling on non problematic heroes and villains, the other is 'negative', alien, anti-social and nihilistic, with an "anti-hero" and an abstract "villain", at least in a first reading. The third novel seems to differ from the first two in that it lacks clearly identifiable opponents, and seems to map a cycle of ideal aspirations, the failure of these aspirations and a reinterpretation of past life stages.

A closer scrutiny makes things appear a little more complex, a little more alike; it appears that the three novels each in their own way deal with the question of roots and spiritual quest, whether or not uprootedness plays a significant part. This study will attempt such a scrutiny, describing the character not only in its physical and psychological aspects (usually enhanced by its surroundings) but also in its action(s)[6], and concentrating on the main character: it becomes a main character through its opponents or helpers, its major doings and achievements, which will be presented here as far as they help to interpret the character in the abovementioned perspective.

2. Modes of characterization in Nagarjun's Baba Batesarnath: connecting humankind with nature

[4] See for instance the reappraisal of Curiace, long deemed as an anti-hero, and re-interpreted as a hero in front of Horace, in the well known play by the French dramatist Corneille, or in the Asian context, of Ravana in front of Ram. As for the notion of subject, see the conclusion in 2.4 below.

[5] Nagarjun's title means something like "The Lord (*Bābā*) saint (*nāth*) god (*esar/ iśvar*) of the banyans" (baṭ), Vaid's title something like "There is no(ne) other", an expression borrowed from Mira Bai's *padas*, Alka Saraogi's title, *Kali-kathā, via by-pass surgery*, will be commented on in section 3.

[6] Since a proper description of the character has to take that level into account (Bal 1997:116).

The presentation of the old banyan, which opens the book, is quite striking: "This Shantiniketan with its thick leaves, its intertwined small branches and its crooked big branches was such that it offered shelter to a variety of people".[7] Interestingly, the tree is first presented with both a metaphor ("a *śântiniketan*") and a realistic depiction of a banyan ("with its branches full of thick leaves and intertwined foliage") in its social function as the pole of convergence and shelter of each and every villager in Rupauli. The second paragraph develops this unifying power through an enumeration of contrastive and complementary pairs depicting the congregating masses so as to evidence totality[8]. Only then the character is named, "Baṭesar Bābā", the god of the banyans. Immediately after, the second figure, Jaikisun, a young Yādav boy, great-grandson of the man who first took care of the tree, is brought forward as seated at the bottom of the tree, preparing for a nap during a magic night of full moon refreshing like "nectar" (*amrt*) after the torrid heat of the month Jeṭh. Then the reader learns about the biggest threat for the banyan, worse than the earthquake which made him crooked (*bankim* and *ṭeṛhâ*) 18 years before in 1934: the rich landlords (Ṭunâî Pâṭhak and Jaynârâyaṇ) are conspiring to sell the common pasture and lake, the "collective land" (*sârvajanik bhûmi*) to which the tree belongs. In the subsequent chapters, this half empty morpheme, to use Hamon's wording (here a name, a metaphor of peace and knowledge, a very old and huge tree), suggesting a "royal tree" (*vṛks-râj*), acquires anthropomorphic features and becomes the main speaker for 80 pages out of 110, without ever ceasing to be a tree.

2. 1. The hero

The metamorphosis happens on the first page of chapter 2 when, right in the middle of the night, a huge head appears full of long white hair and a long beard[9], a huge man (*viśâl mânav*) with huge hands like an elephant trunk, a slim tall body wearing a dirty *dhoti* and a forest of hair on the limbs, an avatar of the banyan. This enormous old man (*virâṭ vrddh*), extraordinary man (*adbhût manuṣya*) is the primordial man (*mahâpuruṣ*, BB:8), evoking for the sleepy Jaikisun the whole tradition of his local heroes of Bihar lore, like Âlhâ Ûdal, Lorîk, Kunvar Vijaî. Belonging to all the living realms, he smells like an animal (*sûnghtâ rahtâ hai*) and exhibits human limbs and emotions in a wooden body (*kâṭhîvâlâ*,10). As he starts telling his life story (*merî jâtak kâthâ*)[10] as an instruction for the young man (83), since in his 103 years he has witnessed important historical, political and social changes, he also evokes quite ordinary human emotions, like blushing of shame when people noticed his first moustache and hair (31), adolescent love for young women (32-33), pity and guilt during the great famine of 1906 (42), physical suffering when his sprouts are plucked, his relief when peasants water his dry skin during heat, compassion for a romantic *Ahîr* boy and his tragic love affair so similar to the songs he heard him sing, etc. Yet he seems eternal in his *mahâpuruṣ* form, and has a mythical genealogy (he is an avatar), so that Jaikisun can only exclaim (five times!): "immortal banyan" (*akṣay vaṭ*! 10). As such, the recurrent non evolutional feature he consistently exhibits is his will for collective welfare (10-11, 57, 81), and his confidence in

[7] The inaugural first sentence reads: *ghane pattõ, g?thî ṭahniyõ aur âr?ī tirchî ḍâlõvâlâ yah śântiniketan thâ hî aisâ ki har tarah ke log â-âkar uskâ âúray lete* (BB: 5), with the foliage in the first position in the Hindi word order.

[8] For example, thief and miser, happy and unhappy, rich and poor and, complementary, girl and boy in love.

[9] "*safed bare-bare bâlõvâlâ bhârî sir"*, "*dāṛī bhī kāfī baṛī-baṛī thī"* (BB: 8). Further references to BB are simply given by the number of the page in the section.

[10] The word *jātak kathā* is of course reminiscent of the Buddhist tradition and the enlightening function of non-human stories.

mutual help against injustice as the basis of life, reiterated in the last chapters, after an absence of one year.

2.2. The hero's human auxiliary and his friends

Jaikisun on the contrary is almost silent, not only during Bābā's speech but also during Bābā's disappearance and his own action[11]. He is defined by his listening posture (always meeting the tree in half-sleep), his action (directly inspired by Bābā's lesson of history), his human genealogy, and his co-actors. Most of them, like Lakṣmaṇ Singh, Hâjî Karîmbakś, Dayā, share many qualifications and features with him: they belong to a low caste, and Jaikisun himself, as a Yâdav, eats rats and is ironically defined as " not a Vaiṣṇav ". Most of them have illiterate parents, except for Jîvnâth, a boy who has studied longer and has a good deal of authority in the village committee, the *pancâyat*. But all of them have some common distinctive features (moral or physical)[12]. Such features are also found in their ancestors as depicted by Bābā, who makes the links between the old folk and the young generation explicit. All these youngsters had honest, hard-working, courageous and intelligent grandfathers and fathers. For instance, śatrumardan, the grandfather of Jîvnâth (himself a "thorn" in the eyes of Ṭunai Pâṭhak and Jaynârâyaṇ), is a straightforward simple householder (a *grihastha*), "a hard-working cultivator, honest, with a subtle intelligence"; as the head (the *mukhya*) of the then village committee, polite but not servile, he underwent torture for not submitting to the exactions of the zamīndār and the spoliation of collective resources[13]. As for Jaikisun, his great-grandfather, the caretaker of the banyan, was also hard-working, a devotee of Shiv, a lover of animals, not interested in money[14]. Similarly, his father (bitten to death by a snake, Shiv's snake) had little education but was very cute, honest, hard-working[15], proud (refusing the advantages of the local feudal court), and anxious to send his son to school; as a freedom fighter he went to jail; physically he had a wide forehead, thick eyebrows, white teeth, a short moustache, a hairy body, always laughing, little speaking[16].

2. 3. The opponents

The villains, symmetrically opposed to the positive heroes, have one or more aggressive features and always obey power: they represent various embodiments, each in his particular position, of the government, *sarkâr*, whatever it is -- now Congress, previously the Rajas. Their physical portrait often evokes brute strength and unfairness, with moustaches which make them look like the messenger of Hell or are raised like the tail of a scorpion, or

[11] After organizing a group of friends under the authority of Jīvnāth, the youngster launches a suit against the rich zamīndārs and their encroachments, and wins in the end.

[12] For instance, Jîvnâth is defined by his small height, neither dark nor fair skin, and round face : *nâtâ kad, sãvalî sûrat aur gol cehrâ* (83). The round face is a defining feature for most of the positive heroes, and so are the smile and honesty.

[13] *sîdhâ-sâdhâ, mehantî khetihār,īmândârî aur painî sûjh-bhûjh*, (34). As the zamindars required an immediate refund of his father's debts, which he could not pay, he was tortured with ants and whip, but still he "could not bring himself to utter a word of excuse" (*mãfî kī bāt mũh se nahĩ nilkī*), as a true Rajput (37).

[14] *Terā pardādā śiv-jī kā baṛā bhakt thā… bhaisõ kã baṛâ śauqîn thā*, says the old Baṭesar Bābā (18: "your great-grand-father was a great devotee of Shiv-ji… he cared a lot for his buffaloes"). The old man cared so much for his sick buffalo that he spent his little earnings to save its life, to no effect, until finally he required "Śhivśaṅkar, Bambholenāth" to do something and was granted an apparition of the god and the healing of the buffalo (ibid.).

[15] *paṛhâ-likhâ nahĩ thâ, par baṛâ catur, mehantî aur imândâr bhî thâ* (63). His best friend was a great devotee of Shiv and a poor poet (65).

[16] These are his last features in Jaikisun's memory: *bulãd cehrâ, cauṛâ kapâr, ghanî bhauhẽ, safed aur cikne dânt, chãtî mûnchẽ. Badan men bâl kitne the ! aur hãstâ thâ kis tarah khilkhilâkar ! zyâdâ boltâ nahĩ thâ* (66).

which are so frightening as to give a headache to the onlooker[17]. Those who have power use it in order to oppress the poor, by encroaching on the common lands and selling them, for instance. Some have had a brave ancestor in the far past, like the Pâṭhaks: 200 years ago, the first recorded Pâṭhak, Cakrapâṇî, also had courage and intelligence and heroism, when he fought alone against invaders, and his qualities are expressed in the same way as those of the positive heroes[18]. But some disorder happened – he transformed into an errant spirit, a Brahma Baba who requested one of his descendants, Jaddû Pâṭhak, to build a sacrificial area (*vedî*) near the banyan and perform rituals (a *pûjâ-pâṭh* including animal sacrifice) for the peace of his soul. A constant witness of such atrocities committed on animals he has seen playfully grazing in his shadow, Baba Baṭesarnâth started conceiving hatred for Pandits and Brahmans, their cruelty and their obscurantist superstitions which resulted in an atmosphere of fear and awe instead of love and respect for the tree (50, 53).[19] Animal sacrifices are particularly horrible to him (56) and he describes the Pandit's cruelty as supporting the Rajas' and zamindars' oppression: during the episode of Śatrumardan's torture, the banyan clearly felt a coalition between the secular power of princes and landlords and the moral authority of Pandits, as he tells Jakisūn; ladies where playing and singing in the palace, with Pandits reciting their *puja* when the poor man was tortured (48). Since then, Brahmans are for him equal to devils (*rakṣas*).

2.4. Actantial major figures and values

There is not much individualisation in characterization, but rather a combination of distinctive meaningful features and actions belonging to two opposite classes of actors each, both in the present (third-person narrative) and in the past (struggle for freedom, recalled by BB as a first-person witness). The British, Rajas, rich zamīndārs, the police and the military hierarchy of officers and soldiers which is the backbone of their power, all collapse into the actantial negative figure of the Government, *sarkār*, which is characterized more or less similarly in its modern shape of Independent India's free Government *(āzādī sarkār*). Those who oppose it are correspondingly characterized as positive (being tortured, being sent to jail

[17] The soldier who takes Shatrumardan is a *yamdût-sâ mûnchõvâlâ ek adher?bhojpuriyâ jamâdâr kor?â lie* (36 : "a bhojpuri middle aged soldier with moustaches like a messenger of Yama"), another *sipâhî* is described as having a scorpion-like moustache, stone-like wide chest, small eyes, short hair, stout and heavy gait, holding a four feet long lathi: *bicchû ke d?ãk-sî kar?ï mũchẽ, sil-sâ sapât?sînâ, chot?ï-chot?ï ânkhẽ, chote-chot?e bâl, tagar?ï d?îl aur kaddâvar daul, sâr?he câr hâth kî ûncî lat?ï?h sãbhâle* (35) ; similarly, the police commissioner (*dârogâ*) is stout, with an awe-inspiring (*robdār*) face and frightening moustache which gives a headache to the observer (77).

[18] *sûjh-bhûjh, bahādūrî, vîrgati* (intelligence, bravery, heroism) are some of Chakrapāṇī Pāṭhak (49): he fought alone against the invaders, his own prince having fled to China. Similarly another Baba, who paradoxically helped to liberate the banyan because he got a higher reputation for arranging difficult marriages, and consequently attracted the superstitious crowds which pestered Bābā Baṭesar, is portrayed in an ambivalent way*: baṛī-baṛî ãkhẽ, baṛī-baṛî mûchẽ-dãr?hî, ghanî nahĩ, cauṛâ kapâr*, "large eyes, big moustache and beard but not thick, a wide forehead", are positive features, as well as his looking like a Babu, and speaking like a Babu, although he is a low-cast Dom (54). But he is interested in money, receives all kinds of *dakṣiṇā,* takes alcohol (*dârû*), supports animal sacrifices, plays on superstitions and builds his fame on fear and money, which are negative features.

[19] *lekin Pât?hak Bâbâ kî dhvajâ jab se yahã̃ khar?ï huî, tab se mere prati sabhî kî bhâvnâ badal gaî. Śraddhâ, bhakti, bhay aur âtãk – ab mai priya nahĩ thâ, pûjnîya thâ*. "But since Pathak Baba's flag was planted here, everybody's feelings towards me changed. Reverence, devotion, fear and awe -- I was no longer dear to them, I was an object of reverence" (50).

is a positive characterization, both for the three fathers and their sons Jaikisun and Jīvnāth[20]), so that both levels, the historical narrative by the tree (his "*jātak-kathā* ") and the present struggle reinforce each other, the genealogy effect acting as a redundant, over-determining factor.

Now, if *sarkâr* is bad and if Bābā Baṭesvar's narrative helps Jaikisun to understand how to act the right way, how are we to understand the real meaning of "right", and what does it mean to have a mute actor and a speaking tree as a complementary pair for the " hero "? Or is Bābā the single hero? Jaikisun and Bābā are in a complementary distribution: when one speaks, the other listens, when Jaikisun acts, according to Bābā's indirect lessons, Bābā himself, the avatar, is hidden. Both heroes, Jaikisun with his whole genealogy and friends and the old banyan, share a lot of moral features and one and the same objective (to save the commons), but Bābā lacks the faculty of acting which involves motion. He has experience but moreover, what he delivers in the last meeting as his last message is that death is part of life: "I am going to die, but one of my seeds has grown in Hâjî Karîmbakś's garden, plant it in my place and there will be a new banyan to protect you (…) don't cry but build a village committee with bricks made out of my dry branches and let me find liberation"(116), **a** liberation (*cuṭkārā*) which will be obtained by freeing me from your attachment (*moh*), and reaching detachment (*vairâgya*) yourselves.[21] True to his first word, that life is worth living only for helping other brothers, a recurrent motive, he equates victory not specially with the fact of winning in court and successfully opposing *sarkār* but with saving the commons. Saving the collective property (pasture lands, lakes, village tanks and wells, cremation ground) of the community means not only a political fight for the oppressed classes or minorities or individual freedom, it means fighting for a specific social ethos which involves a very special relation of man with its natural environment: nature is perceived as far more than an economic resource to dominate and share, it is really the Goddess Nature (*prakṛti devî*). Man is not a dominant and central figure in the universe, he is meaningful and benevolent as long as he recognizes that he belongs to the wider natural cosmos, and participates with it in an inter-relational mode rather than submits it to his will[22]. That is why the *mahâpuruṣ* is embodied here in the banyan, and the hero of the novel is the *kâṭhîvâlâ mânav*, in conformity with the title. The novel, ecological as much as marxist, ends with *hindustân hamârâ, gulistân hamârâ*, " our Hindustan, our garden of roses ". This quote from Iqbal flavored with Persian connotations, sung by Hâjî Karîmbakś in the last chapter, takes a very special meaning when both heroes, people and tree, unite beyond classes and communities to preserve nature by conserving the sacred[23], a vision also echoed by the very title of another famous novel from Nagarjun on fishermen, *Varuṇ ke beṭe*, "The sons of Varuna".

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[20] Similarly condemned under wrong accusations of being vandals and rascals (*gun?d?â* and *badmâú*) and enemies of order (*sarkâr gun?d?agirî bardâśt nahĩ karegî*, "the Government will not bear acts of vandalism": 88).

[21] At the end, the tree becomes a preacher of *vairâgya* (*yah moh bhî ek bhârî rog hai*, "this attachment, too, is a heavy disease" (116).

[22] A truth magnificently illustrated in the beautiful *Râjâsthân kî rajat bûdẽ* by Anupam Mishra (1996), a book which is as much an environmental and social document on the present relevance of traditional water techniques as a literary masterpiece (see the presentation of the French translation, 2001:9-49, and the paper in the first issue of *Bahuvacan* (1: "bhāṣā aur paryāvaraṇ", 357-60).

[23] Another supposedly archaic notion which is now gaining more and more credit among environmentalists and supporters of "sustainable development"; see the collective volume edited by Ramakrishna a.o. (1998) and Guha (1989).

3. Modes of characterization in Vaid's Dûsrâ na koî : connecting the individual with mahâúūnya

The main protagonist in Vaid's DNK is first defined by its habitation, a classical way of characterizing in the realist tradition and its use of description (Hamon 1977). Interestingly, the very beginning of the novel is devoted to the description of the house, the hero appearing only thereafter in the text.

3.1. A strange surrounding for a strange hero

The house is presented as a "bloated monster"; not a clear-cut category, its hybridity is immediately reduplicated by the adverbial participles "about to die or to be resurrected"[24], and almost immediately contested: "I shall compare this house to a monster no more, a monster is a monster and a house is a house"[25]. Yet the comparison insists since this "huge unexciting house" is "my own lair" (7, 12). As for the physical appearance of the "I", its first presentation echoes the house, although he claims not to "belong here": the "I", too, is "about to die", and also depicted by means of a comparison which is immediately cancelled: "I could compare myself to a shrivelled old monster, but I am only a shrivelled old man" (7), "a foolish old man" (12), disgustingly coughing and cacochymic, with dentures (15). "My eyes are full of foul water, one of my hands is trembling". Further description of the same feature, each feature tending to become a leitmotiv: "the stuff oozing from my eyes is neither blood nor water", although it evokes tears of blood (40)[26].

His psyche is like his physical appearance: "I am a doddering old fool, an outcast, an exile, a solitary – outwardly scarred and inwardly bruised, friendless, who spent the better part of his blasted life in this alien arctic wasteland, who has recently stopped pining for his native sun-dried desert over there because he wants to spend his last few years in beatitude rather than in useless yearning" (29). A full portrait is given twice, in a seemingly objective way: "picture yourself a dying old man with a drooping mouth. He is bald, he is toothless. He wears a torn button-less shirt. He is naked below the waist. He will remind you of a starved beggar of a poor country" (54). The second, longer "self-portrait of sorts", in the shape of a blazon is given towards the end (93-96)[27], and most of the features become leitmotives (the being naked below the waist: 54, 68, 71, etc). He is busy crawling or sitting in awkward positions, telling the beads of his rosary (*mâlâ*), surrounded by piles of his droppings out of which he makes his rosaries (60), of books, of his own writings, "an unredeemable word-monger" (90), "a voracious woe-monger" (67), a dying spider[28]. Each feature is given as an alternative, looking for the correct viewpoint as if no objective portrait is possible, although metaphor as a trope is suspect, too. The narrator often compares himself to various objects ("I could compare myself to a sparrow but I do indeed to an old eagle" (69), "a half-alive leper" (33), his head feeling like a rotten papaya at palpation, his cheeks like dead frogs[29]), but tries

[24] Translation from the Hindi original by the author himself (*Dying Alone*, 1992). In Hindi: *mâno girte-girte sambhal gayâ ho aur sambhalte-sambhalte gir rahâ ho*, "just escaping from falling down, just falling down when securing " (5), *pasre hue piśâc* (7, 10, 12). Pages are given in brackets for the Hindi original in the footnotes, the reference to the English text appearing in brackets in the running text. When footnotes refer to the English text, the title is indicated as DA for *Dying Alone*.

[25] *makân makân hai, aur piúâc piśâc* (12).

[26] *na khûn thâ na pânî,balki gicgic-sâ koî mavâd* (25), *khūn ke ãsū* (50). The recurring qualification of the "old shrivelled man" is *bahut bevakûf* , *bahut badmâú bûṛhâ.*

[27] From head and face to toe including his now bald private parts almost insensitive, with the various habits (like pulling a hair from his nose) he has developed in order to keep feeling alive.

[28] *koī karībulmarg makare* (99).

[29] The soft papaya for the skull also is a leitmotiv from the first pages onwards*, pilpile papîte* (7), and so are the unreliable sensations it generates (*khokhlî khopṛî kisî pake hue phoṛe kî tarah* (7), "the empty skull like a swollen abcess").

to use an external viewpoint to find the correct depiction: "to an infant I would be no more than a rat or a bat", "in my sleep I often see myself as either or both" (70). The most frequent external viewpoint is that of the stranger, the impartial observer, but again uncertain and then compelled to use metaphors : "had there been a hidden observer here he would have thought that the house is occupied by a beast, or a maniac, or a monster, or perhaps by all three "[30].

3.2. Indecision as the main thematic and stylistic feature

The description of both house and occupant develops into a more and more disgusting picture but keeps oscillating between possible interpretations (beast, bat, sparrow, eagle, spider, maniac), and what rules this shift is not the various viewpoints but the degree of consciousness of the descriptor, who is most often discarded yet maintained, mostly in the non-assertive modality ("could", "might"): the reason for this constitutive impossibility is that it is impossible to characterize a monster in a straightforward way, since it belongs to no clear category, no more human than bestial. Even age, which is a recurring feature, is indefinable. In one of its first occurrences, this feature is reversible: the next-door old lady looks "two or three times older than me, not to deny that, to me, I look old enough to be her old brother, if not her father or her grandfather. An impartial observer might be able to tell who is older, but I have no intention of dragging this hypothetical monster into all this" (9). In fact it is expressly stated that a "correct" objective and exhaustive viewpoint is a pure delusion of traditional old fiction (98). The same is true for the qualification and actions of the character: "I call my sitting sitting only for the sake of convenience. Just as I do my standing standing. Just as I do my lying lying. Just as I do my walking walking" (24). Since clear-cut designations and oppositions are no longer reliable, the stylistic mania of "likelihood", as well as the discarding of likelihood, gets fully legitimate[31], the assertive modality being ruled out.

Functionally, too, the character is a non-initiator ("I never initiated a conversation"), a non- achiever, a solitary who wishes to cut himself from any contacts[32] and lacks the requirements for being a hero – yet he has a love affair, although sarcastically narrated and altogether messed, with the old lady whose "back has been aching for half a century" (22)[33]; yet he is always busy or wishing to do something ("I must carry on" is a leitmotiv), with the aim of fulfilling the desire of extinguishing any kind of desire (sex, love, fame, thought), significantly represented in the non-assertive modality of the "must" or "can/cannot" rather than of the "do".

3.3. The meaning of indistinctiveness

The humming of Mira Bai's verse, *dûsrâ na koî*, "there is none other", recurring after the first quarter of the narrative, is the only fulfilment the protagonist finds. The more we progress in the novel, the more the pattern of hesitation and uncertainty regarding any possible categorization reaches to the only clear opposition left in the beginning: "that mortal enemy of mine" (62), the Emperor of fundamental issues (28)[34], the "he", superior to "I", preaching non-attachment (*vairâgya* 37), always speaking and ordering ("that mentor of mine" 74) is for a long part of the journey the perfect opponent of the "I" (he acts, initiates

[30] See also: "had there been a hidden observer around, he would have thought: poor old wretch" (DA: 25): *agar koî chipâ dekh rahâ hotâ to kahtâ bûṛhe kâ hâl bûrâ hai* (34); such an observer would compare the hero to "an old spider" (DA: 74) (*koî karîbulmarg makre*: 99).

[31] "There is no limit to likelihood… No, it is not. There is a limit to likelihood" (DA: 44): *mumkin kâ koî ṭhikânâ nahĩ̃ ... mumkin kâ ṭhikânâ hai* (58f).

[32] *Sambandh sab samâpt ho gae* (27).

[33] *pichlî âdhî sadî se kamar mẽ dard* (23). As for the physical portrait of the old lady, it is an image of his own in the fat and greasy mode.

[34] *janm-janm kâ duśman* (83), *buniyâdî savâlõ kã badśâh* (36).

speech, is authoritative, aggressive, never hesitating). But at the end both "he" and "I" start becoming undistinguishable[35], and finally "he" draws "I" "across the bridge", although "I have not been able so far to decide whether he is or not, I am about to cross the bridge after which the difference between he and me will become negligible" (74)[36]. What does this bridge amount to? It is said that from that point one can have a "glimpse of the great void" (*mahāśūnya*), where all discriminating features vanish, like pain and panacea, ordinary and extraordinary, anything and nothing (74)[37]. The reader then understands that the whole process of blurring the distinctions and the choice of non-assertive mood was a preparation for this undiscriminating stage where "I" and "he" cease to be distinct (and specified states also loose their specificity: laugh and smirk, cry and moan, 96). The genealogy of "I" has long been similarly blurred (53: "I am undistinguishable in my mind from my father and my mother"), and even solid hard parts of the body are almost undistinguishable from soft parts (nails as limp as my flesh, bottom bones soft (71), skull as a soft papaya, etc)[38].

Crossing the bridge, then, simply represents the fulfilment of the initial program, involved in the very term of "monster" and of "not belonging", "belonging nowhere" (5); it is like reaching this state "too high to discriminate between this and that" (39), a point where life and death are one (80), between upstairs and downstairs, here and nowhere (79-81)[39]. The bliss obtained in such a state is according to the I's interpretation of Mira's verse, *dûsrâ na koī*, "a sense of fearful freedom, profound emptiness" (23)[40], close to the *mahâśûnya* fully obtained later (99). This verse, the major intertext of the novel, hints at the devotional attitude of *bhakti*, where the devotee loses his individual ego and fuses with the divinity and absolute principle in a common *ātmā.* Here the feature "exile" gets its full meaning as mapped both in the frame of the *bhakti* reference (*nirguṇtâ*, lit. "being without attribute, qualification", is the asymptotic line which tends to blur every clear qualification of the character, as *vairâgya*, the absolute detachment, blurs the limits of self and non-self) and in the classical philosophy of aesthetics of Abhinavagupta. The rasa of serenity (*śânta-rasa*) put forward by the Kashmiri philosopher, the ninth rasa generated by the non-transient emotion of peace (*sthâyī bhâva* of *śam*), is cognate with the desire for liberation (*mokṣa-kâma*), and central to aesthetic emotion according to Abhinavagupta. As a number of theoreticians have put it, like Bhaṭṭa and Mammata commented by Abhinavagupta, "the self identification with the situation (obtained in aesthetic emotion) is devoid from any relation whatsoever with the limited self, as it were impersonal", and is based on the elimination of the singular knowing subject (hence its "generalized" nature, *sâdhâraṇya*, a pure present, with past and future irrelevant, hence the

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[35] *ab main us had ke âge baṛh jâne ko ho rahâ hũ̃ jiske bâd śâyad uskâ aur merâ âpsî bhed nazar aujhal ho jâe* (100). Already their age makes them akin: they have known each other since time immemorial, the age difference is so fuzzy that a third one would be at odds distinguishing who he is and who I am (*ab hamârî umr itnî zyâdâ ho cukî hai ki koî tîsrâ śâyad hî sarsarî nazar mẽ yah batâ sake ki vah kaun hai aur ma? kaun hũ̃* (48).

[36] This mysterious stranger and the "I" start identifying as soon as "he" starts preaching liberation (*muktibodh*) by detachment and renunciation (*tyâgnâ honā*) in order to "reach the great void you look for" (*mahâśûnya ko pâ sako jiskî tumhẽ talâś hai*).

[37] *jahã̃ se sâmne se sab kuch sâf nahĩ̃ dikhâî detâ hai, jahã̃ pahunckar dard aur davâ se koî tamîz nahĩ̃ rahtî… âm aur khâs kâ farq miṭ jâtâ hai…*(99).

[38] Already in the very first pages, the narrator indicates that "there is no longer any difference between nails and flesh": *nâkhûnõ aur mã̃s mẽ ab koî farq nahĩ̃* (7).

[39] "why am I still stuck with this distinction between upstairs and downstairs? I have finally reached a point where life and death are one" (DA: 80) ; "the truth is that I have always succumbed to him sooner or later . Which is why I am here, which is why I am nowhere, which is why I have never been anywhere" (DA: 83).

[40] Both when the "I" unites with the "he" as well as when he hums Mira's verse, he has the exhilarating "feeling of flying in the open air" *mahasûs hotâ hai mâno khulî havâ mẽ uṛ rahâ hoũ̃* (69).

state of inner rest of conscience, of the same nature as the supreme *brahman*) [41]. Abhinavagupta describes it as freeing the self from the stupor (*moh*) of *tamas*, which is also the major objective in DNK. It is not only the explicit content of most of the book (trying to get free from personal desires) and the secret of elation and rapture in the last pages, but its requirements are exactly those fulfilled by the weird characterization ("he", "I", and their fusion) always casting some doubt on the I-ness of "I". This sense of freedom and peace (*lysis*, in Gnoli's translation) characterizes art as life itself, pacified and detached from all passions, accompanied by a "sense of wonder" (*vismay*), as victory against *moh* (the specific stupor aroused by *tamas*) is achieved by the revelation of aesthetic experience[42]. There is a similar elation and joy (anticipated in the humming of the favourite tune) in the last chapter when both in one and the same form fly higher and higher in an unknown sky[43].

And such states get transmitted to the true *rasik*, in the fantasized tradition of the scholar becoming the disciple of the old monster in his old age, after having exhausted the scrutiny of his manuscripts, in his turn to be read and commented by other scholars… [44]

Far from being a mere rehashing of Beckett[45], such a questioning of the narrative representation through the de-characterization of the main protagonist, such an aggression against syntax itself as the embodiment of meaning and 'onto-theo-logocentrism'[46] has to be understood in the context of *bhakti* and *vairâgya*. Certainly it is a superb representation of melancholia in the technical meaning of the term[47], the never ending grieving over the un-namable thing, pointing to the un-localizable un-healable pain – a *dard lādavâ*[48]. The thing escaping representation certainly amounts to the pre-objectal grief and ultimately to an archaic narcissism, beyond signification, as exemplified in the short story "*us cîz kî talâú* / the quest for the thing" [49]. But it is as much a grieving process, where sublimation is achieved by writing as an elaboration of the double intertext of *bhakti* and classical aesthetics. Given the fact that this novella in Vaid's work opens a new cycle after *Uskâ bacpan* (His Childhood) and *Guzrâ huâ zamânâ* (Past Time), both considered by the author as his realist stage, we may relate this grieving process to both the family setting disclosed in the first novel (an evanescent father and a 'bad' mother), and to the traumatic experience of Partition in the second which reinforced the feeling of being cut off, displaced, uprooted. The Indian

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[41] See Masson and Patwardhan (1969:119ff).

[42] In the *Sahṛdaydarpan?a*, Bhat?t?a (commented and paraphrased by Abhinavagupta) states that *rasa* procedes from a revelation (*bhâvana*), which "has the faculty of suppressing the mental stupor occupying our consciousness" (translation by Gnoli, XXI).

[43] *ab ham ekâkar hokar uṛ rahe ho… uṛân aur ũcî hotî jâ rahî hai* (136), *ab main ek ajnabî âkâú men ur rahâ hûn* (135).

[44] .. . "until he is able to discover a suitable scholar, willing to devote the rest of his days to them. And then that scholar should, at some advanced stage of his scrutiny, give it all up. And imprison himself in a monstrous house like this one and spend the rest of his life in filling his own notebooks with ideas he has gleaned from mine. And he too should have an old woman living next door to him… And he too should, in due course, accumulate tons of droppings and scores of notebooks. And after his death, the discovery of his remains, literary and mortal, should arouse a similar rumour in literary circles all over the world until… " (92).

[45] Vaid has been Beckett's translator (*Waiting for Godot*) and DNK is often considered to be an experimental transposition of Beckett's style and contents.

[46] Only free words without syntax end the meditation of the narrator in DNK (134).

[47] Best commented in its literary expression by Kristeva (1986:25f). On melancholy and archaic narcissism in Indian psyche, see Kakar (1978:130) and Lannoy (1975:108-112).

[48] The title of another story of the same period by Vaid.

[49] Beyond the stage of the distinction object/subject corresponding to the symbolic order, a stage which allows for articulated thought and logical judgment. In the short story (translation into English by the author under the title "The missing thing"), both protagonists become obsessed by the quest for something which they cannot name or even remember, and they end up loosing any individual characterization other than this shared anxiety of the lacking (lost ?) Thing. For more details on the relation between the two first novels and DNK, see Montaut (2002).

intertext, classical and medieval (*bhakti* and sufism), which is literary, religious and philosophical at the same time, helps to regain the lost non-separateness in a very specific way which owes nothing to the Western concept of the absurd and existentialism.

4. Modes of characterization in Alka Saraogi's Kalikathâ: connecting politics with history

Finally, a third novel, *Kali-kathâ* (1997) by Alka Saraogi, soon after publication honoured with a major literary national award, will illustrate the 'indianness' of an apparently very modern Western technique of narration.

4.1. Structure of narration and the hero's embedded lives

This novel immediately struck the Indian readership by the novelty of its narrative technique[50]: the narration of the story of the main character, Kishore Babu, the patriarchal figure of a Marwari family in Calcutta, is delegated to a *lekhak*, a *kathâkâr,* a writer, a narrator[51]. And this process of delegation is explicitly related to the influence of the new modern novel: it is after reading a good number of highly modernistic compositions[52] that Kishore Babu himself asks the narrator to write his story, in such a way that his presence should be like the two impure carats mixed with the twenty-two carats of pure gold in the traditional art of Bengali jewelers[53]. But this very metaphor, which links the tradition of local jewelry to that of Indian story-telling, *qissâgoî*, suggests that this utmost modernity (*âdhuniktam*) is also rooted in ancient local traditions: the Persian tradition (*qissâ* is the Urdu word borrowed from Arabic through Persian, and *goî* is typically Persian) and the pre-Mughal Indian tradition (*kathâ* evokes the *kathâsâritasâgara*, the "ocean of the rivers of stories", famous in Sanskrit story-telling), both evoking a storyteller handling many embedded stories. Similarly, the title itself includes a play on words and re-segmentation reminding of the classical *śleṣa* (double meaning) of Sanskrit poetics, whereas the English segment (*vayâ bâipâs* "via by-pass") evokes in a second *śleṣa* the latest advances in heart surgery as well as the double meaning of 'bypassing' events or facts we want to suppress from conscious memory. As for the first *śleṣa*, it links the name of the city Kalkatta to the story of modern times, the *kathâ* of *kali yug*, the last and worse era in the traditional cosmogony, eventually evoking also (with a lengthening of both vowels) the central role of the goddess Kâlî, both in Bengali culture and in the novel[54].

Like the title, the narrative structure and characterization of the main protagonist is seemingly very 'modern', on a par with a number of Western polyphonic embedded stories and flashbacks, with an external narrator, but at the same time deeply rooted, not only in the ancient traditions of story telling but in a specifically Indian way of accounting for the various

[50] Most of the reviews emphasize this modernity, like Harish Trivedi's (1999) ("no one had used such a fictional form before", "a novel written with the knowledge that Rushdie has gone before"): embedded stories, various styles depending on the level of embedding and viewpoint, free indirect style, interior monologue and stream of consciousness, large quotes from diaries and various documents, etc. Satya Pal Sahgal even says in a paper for the *Tribune* that "discerning readers may …point towards foreign sources": manuscript given by the author). (French translation by A. Montaut, Paris, Gallimard, 2002).

[51] Clearly distinct from the author since it is a *lekhak* (masculine) and not a *lekhikâ* (feminine).

[52] *Darasal kuch ekdam naî âdhuniktam racnâon ko paṛhne ke bâd is kathâ likhvâne ke pahle Kiśor Bâbû ne lekhak se aisâ kaul karvâya ki…* (10) : "In fact, having read new very modern compositions before having this story to written, Kishore Babu had the writer promise that ...". The *naî kahânî* itself is known to have been influenced by the Western readings of its leaders.

[53] *Bâîs bâî bâîs kairaṭ śuddhi ke gahnon jaisî…do kairaṭ kî milâvaṭ* (10).

[54] Kâlîmandir, located in Kâlîghat, plays a very determining role in the novel as an abode for Ramvilas, Kishore Babu's great-grand-father, who helped a devotee of this temple, herself the mother of John Hamilton, Ramvilas's protector.

identities and life-stages (*ashramas*) in one's life: out of the canonical four stages -- the first is devoted to study and celibacy (*brahmacharya*), the second to family life and profession (*grihastha*), the third to ascetic life in the woods (*vanaprastha*) before total detachment (*vairagya*) -- the novel emphasizes the first three[55]. Kishore Babu has had three distinct lives –hence the three layers in the novel, freely interplaying sometimes within the same chapter: childhood, youth and great expectations during the immediate pre-Independence, until his twenty-second year (three chapters are entitled 1940, another one describes 1942 events, "The great killings of Calcutta", describes the riots of 1946)[56]; his second ashrama coincides with maturity, family life and success and extends up to the by-pass operation (1997), without the slightest reflection of his first life[57], clearly suggesting that the *grihastha* stage has been achieved by forgetting the *brahmacharya* great expectations ; the third ashrama is related to right now (post-operation life) and opens to a dreamed future (2000, which gives the title of the last sections, is beyond the present of writing) and is dominated by the inner transformation of the character into a wanderer, *avârâ,* a street vagrant, a tramp (*saṛakmâp, saṛakchâp*), evoking the *vanaprastha* leaving his home for the forest[58].

The last two stages stand together apart, thanks to a narrative artefact (the by-pass surgery) which reminds us both of the modern techniques of movies or cheap stories (a blow on the head triggering a series of flashbacks and forgotten memories) and of the traditional 'enlightenment' which suddenly opens one's eyes to an entirely different vision of the world in the mystical path (sufi traditions, buddhist illumination, yognath etc.). The internal reason for this narrative device, which of course is not a mere artefact, lies in Kishore Babu's re-reading of his own past. As a character, he assumes in his third and present life features radically opposed to those of his second life. His love for cars, 'hitlerism' as a powerful *pater familias*, interest in money and social earnings, integration in the selective notability of economic success: all these features suddenly transform into the opposite values and behaviour as he starts walking through the city as a tramp; he comes back to the ancient family home of Bara Bazar in the native part of the city, has intercourse with lower class people and discards the new style of consumerism, hypocrisy, opportunism and lack of political and ethical faith recently developed in postmodern India.

4.2. Embedded family stories and the ethics of diaspora

The characterization of the protagonist is also conveyed by his connection with his ancestors and descendants. Like his great-grandfather Ramvilas, the first Marwari to settle in Calcutta, Kishore Babu is extremely attached to his widowed mother –young widows lend the family setting in both cases a definite coloration of tragic fate and uncompletedness as well as the untimely death of men[59]. Like Ramvilas, Kishore Babu has to struggle hard to succeed in the family business, continuing and developing in a way into full achievement that which his great grand father started, who had himself started afresh what his own father had left unachieved[60]. In a significant chain, which unites the migrants from the Marwari desert to the

[55] For the last of these stages, see Montaut (1998).

[56] Chapters 4, 7 and 10 bear the date 1940 in their title, chapter 12 the date 1942, chapter 11 relates to the great famine in 1943, and chapter 14, "The great Calcutta killings ", to 1946 events.

[57] *is dûsrî zindagî men pahlî zindagî kî koî châyâ tak nahîn thî* (106)"in this second life there was not the slightest shadow of the first life".

[58] Eventually we may interpret the last chapter, significantly entitled *punaśca*, as the fourth and last ashrama (realisation, accomplishment, detachment and obtaining unity of the three time divisions, the *trîkâl bhed*).

[59] Lalit Bhaiyyâ, the elder brother of Ramvilas, Kedâr, his son and Kishore Babu's father, died at 20 and 31 respectively.

[60] Râmvilâs's father attempted migration to Calcutta (initial success with Hamilton Sahib, subsequent failure and coming back to the village with the unfulfilled dream of the *haveli*), an attempt later fulfilled by Ramvilâs who,

lavishly watered city of Calcutta and to the Ganga, the three major male figures in these five generations are equally in love with the generous monsoon and with the sacred river[61]. While still adhering to the traditional values of Marwaris (honesty and hard work, the two pillars of their business success, frugality, strict maintenance of the women's reputation)[62], they reshape their inner landscape according to the new surroundings: if Ramvilas's father, the first of the three, could not fully achieve his goal, Ramvilas and Kishore try their best to enlighten their women by means of education, comparing the conservative superstitious behaviour of Marwari uneducated women and the open-mindedness of their Bengali equals[63], yet jealously protect their family honour (*izzat*) and specially the widow's reputation, keeping a balance between liberal Bengali ideas and traditional Rajasthani principles which well fits the ethics of the rising business man who enters the modern industrial world by the sheer strength of his traditional values; and both convert their ancient love for scarce water in the desert into love for generous water, their rapture in the spectacle of the Calcutta monsoon and the Ganga fulfilling a never ending love for the sacred water. From one end to the other, from the first two migrants from Marwar to the Bengal born Kishore Babu, there is continuity and change, maintenance of the Marwari traditions[64] and at the same time integration of new values, typical of life in the diaspora.

4.4. Historical and ethical view of "the nation"

By inserting the protagonist into a chain of family figures struggling for economical and intellectual progress during a century and a half, the narrator, a projection of Kishore Babu's new consciousness, makes his identity part of a ramified whole rather than a single unit embodying the success story of human will power. A Bildungsroman, indeed, but one wherein the individual is intimately linked to his social history, to nature (water) and to the gods (Ganga and Kali, who dominates the love story between the great-great-grandfather and Hamilton's mother). The fusion of two geographically extreme worlds – Marwar and Bengal -- supports this integrative vision. On the other end, the split of Kishore's identity into three layers of time and aspirations is also paradoxically meaningful with regard to non-separateness: if the last layer appears as a total break with the second one, and the second one with the first one, the last one is an occasion for the protagonist to revisit his previous selves (the by-passed ideals of his youth, epitomized by the symbolic figure of the Gandhian friend Amolak, whose spirit enters Kishore's body in the last chapters, the by-passed guilt of collaboration with the British in the interest of the family business) and to overcome the guilt feeling[65]. Re-reading both his personal history and the complete family history through

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with the support of Hamilton Sahib's son, explicitly achieves what his father failed to do (building the *haveli*, settling definitively in Calcutta for love of the rain, the clouds, the river Ganga).

[61] The attraction of the sacred river on Ramvilas's father, Ramvilas and Kishore Babu is described in a particularly lyric way (15, 32-3, 34).

[62] See, in the sixth and fore-last chapters, the energy he uses to protect the "white sari" from the slightest stain, forbidding male company to all the women in the house with the rule of never opening the cage to the bird.

[63] The first girl school opened in the Marwari community is the result of such men's efforts to develop their community. Shanta Bhabi, Kishore Babu's sister in law, with sophisticated literary tastes and education, is praised as a Devi by Kishore in the early years of his marriage and put as an example to his poorly educated wife.

[64] Significantly, their birth-place is systematically "*deś*", "the country", for the family.

[65] Guilt is present in Kishore as early as the forties, when young Kishore is provoked by his friend Shantanu, a devotee of Subhash Chandra Bose, who blames the Marwari merchants for the enslaving of the nation. At that time the boy revisits the historical beginnings of the Marwari diaspora and its political role starting from the battle of Plassey onwards and finds some relief in his discoveries at the College library: this historical battle which handed Calcutta to the East India Company was not in fact lost because of Marwari merchants. But later during the struggle for freedom he has to work in his uncle's company which collaborates with the British

memories, diaries, witnesses, with its successes as well as its forgotten flaws[66], Kishore comes to the conclusion that suppression, oblivion and denial is only a way of delusion. To understand the present, his personal present as well as the nation's present, he has to look at it as the result of the past. To remember all the complexities of the past then amounts to an ability to face the challenges of the future: his friend Shantanu's denial of his own past as a fanatic follower of Subhash Chandra Bose[67] leads only to a distressing opportunism (shifting from one NGO to the other), an embodiment of the national failure to establish real democracy and independence.

The formal complexity of the novel, both in the artefact of the by-pass operation and in the embedded story of various family figures, then appears as a means to reshape Indianness in the new globalized and communalised India built on oblivion[68]. This oblivion is significantly echoed by the satisfied indifference of the world in front of Kabir's pain and vigil, voiced in a song Kishore Babu recites to overcome his repulsion for the modern materialist and forgetful culture. Embedded stories as well as this kind of intertext – Anupam Mishra's description of nature-god-traditional social life and religious frugality is another important intertext[69], and so are the nationalist songs – aim at understanding and representing the full historical depth of the modern culture, localizing in the process the kind of denials on which it builds a certain success, and the achievements of liberalization. Even minor details such as the insistence on the newly renamed streets are significant for the general process of oblivion. Along with many unspoken complexes[70], they result in by-passing the positive features of the past (like the merchants' honesty, or the Gandhian social thinking of Amolak, the old friend who comes back as a ghost in old Kishore Babu). Both the losers and the winners are here intertwined in Kishore's inner landscape and story telling. The whole canvass helps to present the genesis of the nation in such a way that revisiting the by-passed components may help to build a more conscious and truly social democracy based on a specifically Indian conception of the self as including all his avatars as well as respect for his religious and cosmic surroundings.

5. Conclusion

We may conclude that these three very different novels, although each frames its protagonists according to very different requirements of time and readership and each seems to show a good deal of 'western' ideology, also present a strikingly common perception of the

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government and he can hardly bear his forced alienation from patriotic ideals. Still later, after he has become a successful businessman, he intellectually dismisses each and every memory related to pre-independence times.

[66] Like the rebel Kedar, Kishore's grandfather (who was the shame of his family because of his nationalist feelings at a time when the family business required good relations with the British, and Ramvilas's father had among his best friends not only Hamilton Sahib but the Police Officer Taggart). This ill-fated grandfather (who died at 31), forgotten by all, never mentioned in the family, suddenly appears to Kishore as part of his ancestry after the by-pass operation, and he manages to find back his diary.

[67] Subhash Chandra Bose, "Netaji", a Bengali nationalist who chose to fight against the British in the Second World War and tried to ally with Germany and Japan, and founded his own army (the Indian National Army, *āzād fauj*) which was crushed in Burma in 1945, while the leader himself mysteriously disappeared. Although he was celebrated as a freedom fighter during the Independence ceremonies, his memory is somewhat spoiled in the eyes of many by his relations with the "bad" side during the Second World War.

[68] The new ways of international trade which make the nation economically subject to world decision makers, as well as the destruction of the Babur Mosque (Babri Masjid) by Hindu militants in Ayodhya in 1992, are part of the embedded stories.

[69] There is a very faithful rendering of Mishra's description of desert and its love for water (28), which emphasizes the devotion of the first Marwari migrants, Ramvilas and his father, for the generously watered Calcutta, see note 61 above.

[70] The guilt of 'collaborating' merchants is only one, Shantanu's forgetting his Subhash Chandra's past is another one, Kishore's discarding of Gandhism for its utopian and irrelevant principles is still another one, etc.

self which owes nothing to modern techniques[71]. Differentiated as it is in the three texts, the core of the self- representation and its projection in building an idea of mankind is ultimately rooted in a traditional dialectics of non-separateness and detachment for achieving a connection with all beings and the cosmic system, viewing, as sociologists and psychologists show (Kakar 1978, Lannoy 1975), human individuality and action as only a part of an interrelation with nature and cosmos.

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[71] Similar conclusions were borne out by my studies of Agyeya and Jainendra (Montaut 1992, 1998).

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