Sachchidanananda Vatsyayan (1911-1987), better known as Agyeya , was one of the key figures of Hindi modernism. Though known primarily as a poet, he wrote two of the most important Hindi novels, *Shekhar:Ek Jeevani* [Shekhar: A Life] (Volume 1 in 1941 and Volume 2 in 1944), and *Nadi ke Dveep*, [Islands in the Stream, 1951]. His editorship of *Tar Saptak* (named after a musical term for a higher octave) helped bring many new poets into prominence, most famously Muktibodh (1917-1964), who in the view of some Hindi literary critics, remains the chief ideological and semiotic counter to Agyeya’s sensibility.

It is tempting to think of Agyeya’s ceaseless experimentation through his life as owing something to his eventful youth. He was imprisoned by the British on charges of revolutionary activity, including bomb-making. The years of prison and house arrest, which included a large part of his twenties, helped him refine his sense of self and politics. Agyeya is often seen as a proponent of an intense, confessional, emotive, and cerebral individualism within the Hindi canon. His work marked a break from the norm of the more didactic social realism and conscientization that the most influential Hindi novelist prior to Agyeya, Munshi Premchand (1880-1936), aimed for.

In later years, Agyeya avoided being part of groups, even when they had aims he admired. This refusal to believe in simplistic group ideologies led Agyeya down unexpected paths in life and work — from fighting against the British and being imprisoned to joining the British Army. He believed that the war against Fascism was crucial to the future of the world and took precedence over the Indian struggle. He left the army as soon as the war was over and took to editing literary journals and, later, more mainstream media journals. He was also a great traveller within India and abroad, taking up academic positions in Berkeley in the United States and Heidelberg, Germany.

Though Agyeya is perhaps best known as poet and writer of the two novels mentioned, he remained a prolific writer in a wide variety of genres—poetry and the novel, but also short stories, reportage, travelogues, criticism and translations (from Bengali to Hindi, and from Hindi to English). His cosmopolitan and wide-ranging intelligence illuminated everything he wrote. He lived life on his term, whether in politics or personal affairs, and thus remained a visible, controversial literary figure.

Agyeya’s chief legacy remains his unique sense of Hindi modernism in its encounter with tradition. In his poetry and his novels (especially *Shekhar*), he often used a highly Sanskritised register of Hindi. This again was in contrast to Premchand’s use of a simpler, livelier, and more colloquial Hindi. But Agyeya cannot be simply put in the camp of Sanskrit revivalism due to his relentless formal and aural experimentation. To read his work is to be challenged again by the question of the precise place of the past in Hindi and Indian modernism.