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 in 1951. His editorship of *Tar Saptak* (musical term for a higher octave) helped bring many new poets into prominence, most famously, Muktibodh (1917-1964), who in the view of the some Hindi literary critics, remains 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,—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 as 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 as well as, 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, as well as 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 terms—whether in politics or personal affairs—and thus remained a visible, controversial literary figure. This is of significance as Hindi criticism often did not think personal affairs irrelevant to the literary work.

Agyeya’s chief legacy remains his unique sense of Hindi modernism in it’s 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.

Nirmal Verma

Nirmal Verma (1929-2005) was among the most prominent and distinguished Hindi novelists, essayists and short story writers of the second half of the 20th century. He was born in Shimla, a Himalayan town that the British used as summer capital. His father was posted there as a government officer and Verma spent a large part of his childhood there. Shimla was to remain an important character in several of his works. He later went on to do a Masters in History from the elite St. Stephens College in Delhi. Though he was briefly enamored of the ideals of Communism, he lost his faith in the mid-1950s, especially after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. This was compounded later by the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968. Eastern Europe was important to Nirmal Verma, as he lived in Prague from 1959 to 1968, where his work at the University’s Oriental Institute included translating prominent Czech writers into Hindi. As a result of his work, certain Czech writers (most famously Kundera) became known to Hindi readers before achieving fame in Western Europe and the United States.

Verma also used his stay in Prague to travel widely across Europe, including Western Europe, and some of his works (travelogues, and novels such as *Those Days*) are set in those various European countries. His return to India caused him to re-evaluate Indian traditions, and many of his later works directly thematised Indian traditions and modernism, causing some to accuse him of idealising and sentimentalising tradition. In all this, he had much in common with Agyeya (1911-1987). Both were accused by Hindi critics of being deeply westernised and elitist. Perhaps because of this they both, especially in their essays, sought probingly for what was deepest in Indian tradition, including what might have to be excised, what might have to be rehabilitated, and what might be resilient and worth preserving. Verma’s long drawn-out literary and intellectual trajectory is especially fascinating as he, with his many years in Eastern Europe during the height of the Cold War, reveals a distinctive, rare and deeply nuanced facet of what it means for an Indian intellectual to retain a critical kinship with Left politics over a long time, and in a foreign country. This continued after he returned to India with his criticisms of the Emergency, but his later sympathetic treatment of tradition (when his critics began to accuse him of leaning to the Right) revealed a controversial evolution of political and literary thought.

More concretely, and in literary terms, Verma’s achievement was that, at his best, in short stories like *Parinde* (Birds, 1959*)*, and in novels like *Lal Teen ki Chhat* (The Red Tin Roof, 1974), he was able to write in such a way that there was only a transparent line between, on the one hand the mundane and on the other hand an elusive but palpable accumulation of mood. Reading Verma repeatedly, one is still amazed at how the everyday where so little happens and so little is said, nevertheless manages to amass such intricate, unbearable and insistent affect.

Nayi Kahani (New Story)

The New Story in Hindi literature is associated chiefly with the names of Nirmal Verma (1929-2005), Rajendra Yadav (1929-), Mohan Rakesh (1925-1972), Kamleshwar (1932-2007), Mannu Bhandari (1931-) and Bhisham Sahni (1915-2003) among others, and the period referred to is approximately from the late 1950s to and end-date in the early 1960s that remains unclear and open-ended.

The stories dealt chiefly with problems between the sexes, especially with the emergence of the working woman. The newness was compound by the fact that the context was a newly independent, rapidly urbanising and industrialising India. Independence had solved none of the problems of unemployment or underemployment, housing and petty corruption that plagued the growing but still small and unprotected middle class.

The style of the prose mirrored this sense of the difficulty of everyday negotiations of urban life and work. The movement in this sense defended its middle-classness against a certain hectoring from the Party Left that required them to write more on the problems of the peasantry and organized or unorganized labor. To validate middle-class difficulties, and especially ones related to gender and family, was itself no easy task. The critique from the Right was that the *nayi kahani* movement was impatiently disbelieving of the potentialities of tradition in moderating their sense of anomie.

*Nayi Kavita* (New Poetry)

*Nayi Kavita* (New Poetry) is associated with Agyeya (1911-1987) and the seven poets published in Agyeya’s 1943 collection *Tar Saptak*  musical term for higher register). Agyeya went on to edit three other anthologies titled Second (1951), Third (1959), and Fourth (1979) *saptaks*. The prefaces written by Agyeya and the poets became famous in their own right. Here, Agyeya probed the place of modernism and tradition, of literary groupings and manifestos, of form and registers of language. Agyeya also insisted that no single criteria or aim unified their diverse formal and thematic experimentations. All the other poets of that collection were to become venerable figures in Hindi literature—Nemichandra Jain, Bharat Bhushan Agrawal, Prabhakar Machwe, Girirajkumar Mathur and Ramvilas Sharma. But perhaps the most famous find of the first anthology was the young Muktibodh(1917-1964). Muktibodh’s theorizations of many of these questions that engaged Agyeya, were to give the New poetry in Hindi a robust intellectual infrastructure from where poets of later generations in the 1960s and 1970s could initiate points of departure. Though New Poetry is often contrasted to the poetry of the Progressives which engaged social inequality, it is more meaningful to contrast New Poetry with the generation of the 1920s and 1930s—the Chayavadi poets (Chayavadi literally means poets of shadows). That older generation, writing in the noon of nationalism, asked the same questions of tradition, appropriate thematics, language and sound, and came up with a very different set of answers.