

**The Short Stories of Nirmal Verma and Alice Munro: Mapping the  
transformations of a genre**

by

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**Thesis submitted to Jadavpur University for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy (Arts)**

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Certified that the Thesis entitled

The Short Stories of Nirmal Verma and Alice Munro: Mapping the transformations of a genre submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of **Dr. Debashree Dattaray** and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/ elsewhere.

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# The Short Stories of Nirmal Verma and Alice Munro: Mapping the transformations of a genre

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# The Short Stories of Nirmal Verma and Alice Munro: Mapping the transformations of a genre

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## Introduction

The foundations of this PhD thesis lay in my introduction to English-Canadian literature when I took up ‘Literatures of Canada’ as my Area Studies specialization while pursuing my post-graduation in Comparative Literature from Jadavpur University, Kolkata. It provided me with an opportunity to engage both as a reader and as an academic critic with the works of Alice Munro (b. 1931 - ) and her contemporaries like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Mordecai Richler and Mavis Gallant - ones that have been reckoned as the tour de force behind the critical acclaim and national and international recognition that English-Canadian prose fiction, particularly the short story has been receiving since the later half of the twentieth century. Engaging with her final collection of short stories *Dear Life* (2012), that was published that very year, evoked an interest in me to delve into her earlier works – for it was particularly fascinating to look into how Munro’s ‘psychological realism’ was instrumental in shifting the focus of the English-Canadian short story from the progressive social realist concerns over political turmoil and economic deprivation of the 1930s-40s to the psychological crisis faced by the small-town middle class due to the changing social, familial and gender dynamics brought about in the early postcolonial decades that followed the end of World War II and the Economic Depression of the ‘30s in English-Canada. What appeared to be most interesting is the fact that unlike her contemporaries, she chose to focus exclusively on a genre that was largely looked upon as an “apprentice genre” and a less commercially viable literary form compared to the novel by the erstwhile publishing industry of Canada - in turn helping the short story reach new heights within English-Canadian literature. Moreover, it is her experimentations with the formal and thematic aspects of the short story that bestowed upon her thrice the Governor General Award (1968, 1978, 1986), the highest literary award in Canada and ultimately made her the first ever Nobel Laureate in literature from Canada in 2013, for being “the master of the contemporary short story” (Munro 2013, 1). When I embarked upon my journey into the doctoral research a few months down the line, therefore, I was determined to make the most of the opportunity and look more deeply, more methodically and more analytically into her literary craftsmanship.

As a student of Comparative Literature, who has learnt to engage passionately, yet critically, with diverse literary traditions and thereby, establish connections across cultures,

Munro's works set me thinking about a very similar trend in the evolution of the short story closer at home in India, particularly in the context of mid-twentieth century Hindi literature. The *Nayi Kahani* (New Story) movement in Hindi literature has helped the short story, as a genre, emerge as the most potent vehicle for postcolonial 'modernity' through the literary experimentations of Nirmal Verma (1929-2005). Though Verma, the recipient of the Jnanpith (1999) the highest literary award of India, has not worked exclusively on the genre of short story, his exemplary role in the the *Nayi Kahani* movement is instrumental in shifting the focus of Hindi short story from *Pragativaad* to the exploration of the inner turmoil of the North Indian Hindi speaking urban middle class population at a juncture when the society is undergoing certain changes in familial, interpersonal and gender dynamics that find congruence with the context within which Munro has been working. One of the major areas of focus of my discipline has been the study of the evolution and transformation of a literary genre across cultures – tracing convergences and identifying divergences, thereby gaining a cross-cultural perspective on the development of that particular genre. This initial revelation made me wonder, did a comparative study of the formal and stylistic experimentations of these two literary contemporaries with the genre of short story hold the scope of such a research? Also, could it further open up new doorways of transnational and transcultural literary explorations between the two nations set geo-politically and culturally so far apart?

As I delved deeper into their works I found that both the writers in question consciously move away from the "progressive" social realist short stories that had been an integral part of the English-Canadian and the Hindi literature in the preceding decades (1920s-40s) of political instability and economic crisis in their respective nation-states. The idea of the 'progressive' emerges in English-Canadian literature with the advent of Marxism in Canada in the early twentieth century. The literary movement that strives to address the issues of poverty, unemployment, class based oppression and the political turmoil that plagued the society during the turbulent years of the World War II and the Economic Depression of the 1930s, finds its greatest champions in the stories of Dorothy Livesay, Dyson Carter, Len Zinberg and Mary Quayle Innis, who were associated with the Progressive Arts Clubs (PCA) established in cities across Canada. In India, the notion of the 'progressive' is encapsulated within *Pragativaad*, a literary movement pioneered by the members of Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) like Munshi Premchand, Upendranath Aska and Amritrai. With their strong Marxist inclinations, they harped upon the pressing issues of social injustice and political repression that invested a society battling for freedom

from colonial subjugation and suffering the repercussions of World War II, economic depressions and caste based oppressions.

The 1950s that marked the beginning of the literary careers of Munro and Verma proved to be a period of relative political and economic stability in the two nations. The attempts on the part of the newly elected Liberal Government to sever the formal ties of allegiance to the British crown, that culminated in the rejection of the Union Jack in favour of the new Maple Leaf flag, and the also neo-colonial hegemony of the United States of America on the post-war, post-Depression national consciousness of English-Canada, ushered in a wave of cultural nationalism in English-Canada. This cultural nationalism, thus emerged to be a major tool, to curve a postcolonial understanding of (English)“Canadianness” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995, 227) , that “sought to emancipate itself from the heritage of colonial mentality with regards to the motherland Great Britain and draw level with the cultural sovereignty of the United States” (Breitbach 2014, 277). A product of this age of cultural nationalism, the works of Munro and her contemporaries like Mavis Gallant, Mordecai Richler, Margaret Atwood and Audrey Thomas, give expression to a postcolonial cultural consciousness that though not completely free of British and Euro-American cultural influences, was firmly rooted in their own socio-cultural reality.

Having started their careers at a particularly significant juncture in the history of Anglophone Canada, the cultural consciousness of this generation of writers, that found expression in an experimental turn towards a phenomenon of ‘psychological realism’, can be located at the cross roads of the modernist tendencies dominating its own literary prose well into the 50s on the one hand and some of the earliest post-modernist tendencies taking shape therein the decade after. Though one cannot deny the literary and cultural influence of modernism and postmodernism as manifest in Canada’s *imperial mater* and its economically powerful neighbour on such tendencies, it is also necessary to take cognition of the fact that Munro and her peers had received such influences in a way so as to make them relevant to their own cultural experiences – that of coming in terms with the changing class, gender and familial dynamics within the post-war urban societies of the nation. These ‘psychological realist’ short stories were aimed at exploring the mental narratives of the characters – their internal struggle, dilemma and emotional response to these social changes – instead of emphasizing upon external action and event based plots that their social realist predecessors had built upon, in their works. This proved to be a crucial step towards contemporizing

English-Canadian literature that in turn helping the short story come up as the most important genre for mapping the process of the ‘postcolonial’ identity formation therein.

A very similar rationale laid the foundations of a wave of ‘cultural nationalism’ within Hindi literature at the wake of India’s freedom from British colonial domination and its eventual emergence as a sovereign democratic republic nation-state. This wave of ‘cultural nationalism’, not only prompted by the need to minimize the hegemony of colonial cultural influences upon the new age Hindi literature but also by the unprecedented importance accorded to it because of the post-independence bid to posit Hindi as the lingua franca<sup>1</sup> and the official language of communication<sup>2</sup> for an essentially polylinguistic nation, was all about contemporizing Hindi literature in a way so as to make it relevant to not only the Hindi speaking populace, but also a wider national readership. With it, came the need to look beyond the *Pragativaadi* tendencies, deemed relevant in the late colonial decades of economic depression and socio-political turmoil and instead harp upon a new-age sensibility that focused on the psychological complexities induced by the contemporary socio-cultural realities of the post-independence urban North-Indian middle-class communities. This process of contemporization of Hindi literature, never called for an outright rejection of Western cultural influences, but rather a conscious reception of the same by the literary artist, only if he/she found it to be relevant to their own socio-cultural milieu. The phenomenon that eminent literary critic Sukrita Paul Kumar would call the ‘Indian brand of modernism’ (Kumar *The New Story* 1990, 5) or the likes of Namvar Singh or K Ayyappa Paniker would simply call ‘Indian modernism’ (Kumar *Conversations* 1990, 29-30; Paniker 1989, x), was evidenced as a part of this new-age literary consciousness in Hindi literature in the 1960s. The *Nayi Kahani* movement in Hindi short story emerged as a major site which saw a proliferate manifestation of this literary phenomenon, one “that was influenced by the West, but its legitimacy and relevance came from the native socio historical context” (Singh 1990, 2). This ‘postcolonial’ reception of Western modernism and existentialism found therein, derived sustenance from the existential crisis of coming in terms with the new age social values, that posed a challenge to the pre-existing (traditional) gender, class, caste and familial dynamics of the urban Hindi-speaking educated middle class populace of North India. Nirmal Verma, the flag bearer of the *Nayi Kahani* movement, and his fellow *kahanikars* like

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<sup>1</sup> A language that is adopted as a common language for communication between speakers whose native languages are different

<sup>2</sup> The Constitution of India declared Hindi the official language of communication (and English, an associate official language ) in 1950. It remained the only official language of The Republic of India for the next fifteen years, till protests from the Tamil speaking population, resulted in English being upgraded to the status of a second official language of the country in 1965.

Kamaleswar, Mohan Rakesh, Rajendra Yadav and Mannu Bhandari displayed a strong commitment towards an in-depth exploration of such crisis of values that invests the inner (mental) landscape of the small town middle class characters caught in a tussle between the traditional repertoire of values and the changing gamut of social ethos.

Thus, the *nayapan* (newness/ novelty) of the *nayi kahani* did not lie in the rejection of the 'traditional' in favour of the 'modern', but an attempt to strike a balance between the two. Such an attempt saw a turn towards interrogating the 'traditional' in the light of the individualism, self-reflexivity, social alienation and fragmentation within interpersonal relationships that were emerging to be a part and parcel of the postcolonial urban existence in the decades following independence. In fact, it is these aspects of contemporary social reality, that made the philosophical and aesthetic principles underlying modernism relevant in the Hindi literary context, at a time when the hey-day of modernist writing was long over and postmodernism had begun to take over as the dominant cultural and philosophical movement in the West. The 'Indian brand of modernism' as manifest in Hindi *nayi kahani* thus emerged as a response to an existential crisis that led writers to search for the real meaning of life, through literature. Such a quest for the abstract truth of life, that Verma embarked upon with his 'Parinde' (*Parinde*, 1958), hailed as the first example of *nayi kahani*, was soon joined by the other members of the movement.

However, the existential crisis was at times taken to such extremes that a disillusionment about life crept into their literary consciousness, which rendered this quest almost redundant. Such moments would make them question the very existence of any absolute abstract truth about life, and instead understand and interpret the complexities of life through multiple 'truths' born out of subjective perceptions, every one of which is as valid and as authentic as the other. Though it was as late as 1978 that the term '*uttaradhunik*' (postmodern) was used to describe such a consciousness by Nirmal Verma in his conversation with Ashok Vajpayee published in *Purbagraha* (Issue 27-28) – which was the first time when this term was used in the Hindi literary context – such a consciousness had begun to make its presence felt in Hindi *nayi kahani* from the initial days of its inception, the prominence of which increased over the later decades of the twentieth century. Thus, though never theorized and legitimized as a concrete literary phenomenon as in the case of 'Indian brand of modernism', the reception of Western postmodernism in the Hindi literary context too is strongly rooted to and largely motivated by the contemporary socio-cultural reality of Verma and his literary peers.

Thus, both Verma and Munro highlight a very similar understanding of postcolonial urban existence – one that is a product of a historical conjecture that situates their aesthetic and philosophical vision at the crossroads of modernist and postmodernist tendencies within their respective literary paradigms. I would like to argue that Munro and Verma's treatment of same/similar motifs and situations not only pertain to the postcolonial idea of nationhood, cultural nationalism and regional/national identity but also emphasize upon the change in social dynamics that informed the expression of love and sexuality, marriage, familial responsibilities, physical mobility, economic self-sufficiency and career opportunities of an emerging middle class urban population of India and Canada, in the later half of the twentieth century.

They were foremost within their respective literary paradigms to have realized that the middle class concerns over self-reflexivity, individualism, fragmentation within the self and estrangement in interpersonal relationships had taken a centre stage within the postcolonial 'modernity' of English-Canada and India, and this new development needed a substantial exploration in the contemporary literature. It was now imperative to look beyond the social realist concerns of the preceding decades. Deeming a genre hitherto lacking in canonical status or commercial viability in terms of anthologisation within their respective literary cultures, to be the one most suitable for voicing these concerns of postcolonial 'modernity' and shaping it as such, has also been a remarkable achievement that would go to their credit. They were foremost among their peers to have understood, in the light of a gradually expanding 'literary market' for the genre in periodicals and literary magazines, that its economy of words and the episodic approach towards storytelling was suitable to hold the attention, concentration and interest of the contemporary urban middle class amidst their increasingly fast-paced yet lonely and estranged existence. It was these very qualities of the genre, that could be moulded to create a perfect mode of expression for the slice-of-life peek into the emotional crisis, moral dilemma, pain and desolation of this readership, and both the writers aced it with a touch of their customary subtlety and conviction. Furthermore, locating their artistic vision and literary techniques at the conjunction of modernist and postmodernist aesthetics as manifest within their own literary paradigms, in order to create a literary space ideal for the interrogation of these newly emergent sensibilities, formally as well as thematically, also brings them together as creative artists who harboured very similar ideas not only about what they aspired to explore in their stories, but also how they finally delved into it.

Moreover, their regional focus - the tendency to place the majority of the stories in

the small towns of the central Canadian province of Ontario, in the case of Munro and the small towns and especially hill stations of the North Indian neighbouring states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, in the case of Verma – addresses the contemporary tussle between the ‘regional’ and the ‘national’ within their respective cultures. They, however, had to negotiate with a very pertinent question in the process - how would this regionalism be accommodated within the-then dominant discourse of ‘cultural nationalism’ within English-Canadian and Hindi literature?

Regionalism has been an integral and intrinsic aspect of English-Canadian literature since its inception. From the earliest fictional/and non-fictional accounts focusing on the survival strategies of ‘pioneer’ settlers to the early-mid nineteenth century collections of sketches that highlighted the development of new rural and urban centres within the Anglophone colony - English-Canadian literary consciousness has been shaped by region specific landscape, culture, lifestyles and social moralities. This regional focus continued to manifest itself even after the confederation of Canada in 1867, and could be identified well up to the Progressive social realist stories of the 1940s. When the wave of ‘cultural nationalism’ hit the post-war English-Canada, a claim for ‘cultural sovereignty’ from English and American cultural hegemony led to a call for a collective cultural identity for its people. The tendency of English-Canadian writers to focus on specific regions would have been at a major risk of being looked upon as a hindrance to the formation of such a cultural identity, within this postcolonial nationalist framework. The Massey Commission (1949-51) appointed by the Canadian government to look into the probable factors that might prove to be a deterrent to Canadian cultural nationalism, identified this regionalism as such in its report. But, in spite of that report, regionalism in English-Canadian literature was not frowned upon, for this rise of ‘cultural nationalism’ in Canada coincided with her reception of European and American postmodernism – one that displayed a disdain towards master-narratives and rather preferred to focus its decentralizing energy upon the plurality of perspectives that could be offered by what French scholar Jean-Francois Lyotard would call ‘local determinism’ (Lyotard 1984, xxiv). This local determinism had much to do with highlighting voices from the small towns and rural communities – thereby offering the reader an opportunity to understand voices at the geopolitical ‘margins’ and accept the diverse perspectives offered by them to be as valid and authentic as that offered by the handful of metropolis, widely considered to be not only the geopolitical but also the social, cultural and economic ‘centre(s)’ of the nation.

It was precisely this aspect of postmodernism, the emphasis on what Rosaline Rosenthal would call ‘polyvocality’ (Rosenthal 2014, 246), that when received in the English-Canadian literary context, helped the regionalism practiced therein find relevance within the discourse of cultural nationalism sweeping across the nation. Marshall McLuhan infers in his essay ‘Canada: The Borderline Case’ , that this tendency to focus on certain regions and highlighting their unique and specific socio-cultural elements had resulted in a ‘decentralized image of flexible Canadian identity’ (The McLuhan Institute 2021) and this decentralized image appeared to be extremely cogent to the postmodernist notion of ‘polyvocality’. Taking this idea a step further, renowned scholar and critic Robert Kroetsch, who is the first to have defined postmodernism from a distinctly Canadian standpoint throws light on how the quest for ‘Canadianness’ emerged to be compatible to the understanding of postmodernism in Canada. Instead of engaging in a centralist discourse of nationalism that roots for the consolidation of a singular (and homogeneous) cultural identity to sustain itself, the wave of cultural nationalism came hand in hand with the realization that the Canadians are united by their ‘disunity’. By foregrounding ‘the diversity’ ‘the difference’ and ‘the multiple’ (Kroetsch 1989, 23, 28) that have been the defining features of the Euro-Canadian cultural conscious since its early days, the regionalism practiced by English-Canadian writers became instrumental in highlighting how the very lack of metanarratives have always held the Canadians together (Kroetsch 1989, 21-22), Thus being deemed emblematic of the very diversity and decentralization that lend an unique and special flavour to the Canadian cultural identity, regionalism was not only looked upon as suitable but also a welcome proposition within the purview of cultural nationalism. Thus many among the writers who begun their literary careers in the early ‘postcolonial’ decades of the ‘50s and the ‘60s continued to set their works within the small towns and semi-urban localities of specific provinces. The small town life of southern Ontario was one that particularly came into focus through the works of a number of writers. Alice Munro was one of the most prominent names among them, others being the likes of Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, Marian Engels and Barbara Gowdy.

Canadian fiction writer Miranda Hill, who admittedly bears and acts upon this legacy of regionalism in her short stories, placing them consciously in her own hometown, Hamilton in Ontario, has observed in a personal correspondence:

In my opinion Canada is a very regional place. People associate themselves with their homes, their landscapes, their cityscapes and I think that the stories of these writers reflect that, rather than creating or reinforcing that. I mean, if you woke up one morning on Vancouver Island, another in Dawson City, another in Saskatchewan, then Toronto, another in rural Newfoundland (and on and on), you would not immediately



think that you were in the same country – and that’s from the visuals and the weather alone! So any fiction that sets itself down in a real (or nearly real) locale is going to reflect that place....We have heard voices that received a kind of sanction because they came from people who reflected a much more homogenous society than the country actually has. And I am happy to see CanLit becoming LESS of a singular entity – and not nearly fast enough. (Miranda Hill, email conversation with author, 26 May, 2019)

The tussle between the tendency to coercively homogenize in a bid to establish a ‘singular’ cultural identity and the importance and relevance of understanding the very nature of Canadian literature - one that has always informed the Canadian cultural scenario - comes out beautifully through her words. By championing the latter and choosing to focus upon the culture, values and moralities of the small town Ontario societies, Munro who openly and proudly spoke about her regional focus, played an instrumental role in blurring the dichotomy between the ‘regional’ and the ‘national’ and helped to situate the former within the latter, without disrupting the basic framework of postcolonial cultural nationalism in Canada. No wonder her stance has gone on to become an inspiration for many of her literary successors – Jane Urquhart, Lisa Moore and Miranda Hill herself, to name a few! The ‘regional’ continues to be an intrinsic feature of the English-Canadian cultural consciousness, till date

But unlike English-Canadian literature, postmodernist consciousness was yet to make its presence felt in Hindi literary context in the early post-colonial decades, when Verma started his career as a writer. However, the legacy of having communities from different regional pockets with different languages and different cultures co-existing with mutual respect and tolerance within the Indian subcontinent from pre-colonial times, made sure that a regional/national dichotomy never came to be perceived as a major threat to the nation building process in the years after India freed herself from British domination. In fact, the pluralism and diversity deeply ingrained within her cultural consciousness, was acknowledged and revalidated through the concept of ‘unity in diversity’ highlighted in the Constitutional Act of India (1950) - one that clearly emphasized on ‘the state of togetherness or integrity despite the presence of infinite diversity’ where ‘variations in physical appearance, skin colour, caste, creed, cultural and religious traditions are not seen as a dispute, rather.....as varieties that improve the society and the nation as a whole’ (Balhara 1). Such an official stance ensured a legitimate and respectable acceptance for the various region specific cultures within postcolonial India. She did not aim to seek or forge a singular cultural identity for the entire nation, but was proud to highlight the plurality and diversity that had informed her cultural contours for centuries. Hindi being a language spoken over a large area of North India made Hindi literature a fertile ground to showcase this stance within its own

limited arena. Moving beyond the cosmopolitan culture of the main cities to explore the region specific ethics, moralities and idiosyncracies encapsulated within rural or small-town lives across the demographic spectrum of erstwhile Bihar (currently Bihar and Jharkhand), erstwhile Uttar Pradesh (currently Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand) , Himachal Pradesh and Haryana would help Hindi literary artists achieve this end. Not only would such a diversified focus help mid-twentieth century Hindi literature find a prominent place within the postcolonial cultural consciousness of India, it would be cogent to the cause of the cultural nationalism that was fast gaining momentum within post-independence Hindi literature.

Being largely predicated upon the controversial decision of declaring Hindi as the official language of communication - a stance that tended to accord special importance to one particular language within a polylinguistic multicultural nation space, Hindi cultural nationalism was made liable to face criticism for foregrounding the cultures of certain communities over the others within the postcolonial nationalist discourse. In order to minimize such backlash, it became even more imperative that contemporary that the new generation of writers took care to actively and consciously shape Hindi literature as a microcosmic embodiment of the idea of nationhood that India strove to uphold after independence. Highlighting the 'regional' was thus a crucial step towards lending a tone of decentralized and non-homogenizing inclusivity that was much needed within the Hindi literary scenario, at that time. A consciousness foregrounding of the 'regional' through the exploration of the diverse cultural values and lifestyle that informed the rural pockets of the Hindi speaking belt as found in the '*anchalik sahitya*' of Rangey Raghav or Phaniswarnath Renu was thus much welcome within the contemporary Hindi literary scenario. So was an engagement with the landscape, middle class moralities and cultural modalities peculiar to the different North Indian Hindi speaking small town existence that was evidenced in the *nayi kahani* of Nirmal Verma, Mohan Rakesh and Mannu Bhandari. A couple of decades passed, and the decentralizing energy inherent within the postmodernist consciousness that had slowly but steadily begun to make its presence felt within Hindi readership, only served to further the relevance of such regional focus in the works of Verma and many of his fellow *nayi kahanikar(s)*. The special flavour of Verma's regionalism – one that he shares with his Canadian counterpart in question – is derived from the fact it is not necessarily predicated only upon the real physical setting within which the story unfolds, but also upon the space the characters inhabit in their minds. For Munro, even the few stories set in Toronto or Vancouver, would have protagonists with small towns Ontario roots. Likewise, even when Verma set some of his stories in a major Indian city like Delhi or even in the European

cityscape of London or Prague, his protagonists too would invariably hail from small urban centres like Shimla or Kasauli, Meerut or Jhansi, Kanpur or Gorakhpur. These characters, in spite of inhabiting apparently cosmopolitan city-spaces would never be free of certain cultural nuances, inhibitions and value judgements specific to the small-town life they had once led. A temporary relocations or even permanent migration is not enough to strip them off the regional identity that colours their personality and worldview. Such stories thus emerge to be more about the regional society that shapes their consciousness than the metropolitan urban space they struggle to fit into.

It is the roots of such a regional focus that the first chapter of the thesis strives to identify in the years spent by the two authors in the small towns of Ontario, Canada and Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, India respectively. The chapter goes on to look into their important life events and the social, cultural and political milieu that shaped them as individuals and as literary artists and evoked their sensitivity towards the moral dilemma of their small-town milieu and ruptures within their own familiar and conjugal relationships make them conscious about the psychological repercussions of the crisis of values within the middle class population of the their respective urban societies in transition. It further throws light into how an early exposure to European and American modernist and existential philosophy of James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Anton Chekov, Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Laurence, Marcel Proust and William Faulkner that convinced them of the relevance of the same in highlighting the growing individualism, self-reflexivity, alienation, fragmentation, loneliness and dysfunctionality of interpersonal relationships rampant with their own postcolonial urban milieu, and induced them to receive it and shape it accordingly. It also looks into the events, personal and professional, which gradually lead the postmodernist aesthetics to permeate their artistic vision in the later years of their literary career. The chapter also highlights the ups and downs of the career graph of both the writers, interrogating the literary and extra-literary factors that made the short story – till then, held secondary to the novel - their preferred literary form to narrativise the postcolonial urban realities unfolding in and around them, helping the genre reach new heights in the process.

This biographical analysis is followed by a literature review that helped me contextualize the work of Munro and Verma within their respective literary paradigms. It reveals that while a lot of research have been done on the two authors individually, none had yet looked into the above areas of congruence that might be uncovered by tracing the trajectory of the evolution of the short story brought about by their experimentations with the

genre within their respective literary paradigms. As a student of Comparative Literature, I was thrilled to realize that my observations if explored further through proper methodological tools could build bridges across two completely diverse cultures and literary traditions. Do the thematic and formal experimentations of Munro and Verma see the short story emerge as the most potent literary vehicle for postcolonial urban 'modernity' across literary paradigms and cultures set far apart? Does that, in turn, bear testimony to the fact that literary consciousness has followed a similar trajectory of thought and expression in a particular period of history, across cultures and nations? These research questions prompts the decision to use the methodological framework of genology and thematology to look into how the thematic and formal experiments of the two literary contemporaries from Canada and India, and thereby identify and interrogate congruent trends in the evolution of the short story within English-Canadian and Hindi literature.

Accordingly, the second chapter focuses on three areas of formal congruence that informs the genre-specific experimentations of the two authors. It begins with tracing the journey of the English-Canadian and Hindi short story from the 'event plots' complete with the causality of action and reaction following a linear chronological progression of incidents to a gradual turn towards plots that do not concentrate on external actions or look for any conflict resolution, but rather map the mental terrain of an individual by harping upon a non-linear, fragmented and convoluted sense of time. Munro's "a psychological sense of time" (Blodgett 2014, 3) finds congruence in Verma's notion of "*chirantan vartaman*" (eternally contemporaneous) (Verma 2001, 26) – both harping upon the modernist understanding about the indivisible continuity of past, present and future within the human psyche. The chapter goes on to locate their use of narrativised time at the crossroads of modernist and postmodernist tendencies. By highlighting the subjectivity of memory through the use of personal recollections of a past incident by different people, photographs, letters, dairy, journals and dream sequences, both the authors harp upon the plurality of perceptions – in turn emphasizing upon the presence of postmodernist philosophy and aesthetics within their artistic vision.

In the second section of this chapter, I have looked into how Munro's notion of epiphany encapsulated within the idea of "queer bright moments" (Smyth 1992, 32) finds resonance in Verma's understanding of "*anayas samay*" (involuntary moments) (Verma 1976, 119). These moments of revelation, basking in their deeply connotative signification, often tends to underplay the absence of an action packed climax and a subsequent conflict in

their largely inconclusive and anti-closure stories. It is this preoccupation with the suggestivity of the narrative that has brought me to the final section of the chapter – the third area of analysis vis-à-vis the art of storytelling of Munro and Verma - the use of dark symbolic imagery to represent the thoughts and emotions lurking within dark crevices of the human mind. The use of nature based (region specific) imagery and optic imagery also emerges as an important narrative device to highlight the moral dilemma of individuals trying to negotiate with – ‘defamiliarizing’ the ‘familiar’, evoking a distinct feeling of discomfort within the reader. It is these imageries that account for much of the open-endedness of the narratives- raising certain questions to be speculated upon by the readers, answers of which are consciously and deliberately not offered by the author.

The third chapter looks into one of the thematic areas of congruence - the recurrent motif of the journey of a girl child into early adolescence – a period of emotional vulnerability, physical transformations and intensification of gendered socialization techniques - which finds relevance in the light of the changing dynamics of gender that was not always congruent with mental conditioning of the conservative, deeply patriarchal and morally restrictive small town communities of Munro and Verma literary universe. Both the writers strive to trace the physical, social and psychosexual determinants of “(female) childhood unfolding into the bewilderment of adolescence” (Kak 2000, 1) - within societies in transition, where the traditional frameworks of socialization faced a threat in the light of greater job and educational opportunities for women, breaking up of traditional family structures and more concrete and gender neutral laws on divorce, birth control and family planning, that offered urban middle-class girls and women more freedom of thought and action, in the post-war post-independence decades.

In the light of Gender Intensification Theory (1983) of Hill and Lynch, the cross-cultural exploration of this motif harps upon an exploration of the intricacies of how the changing body of the girl would emerge to be a site where the politics of gendered socialization would manifest itself more than ever. It takes cognition not only of the psychological repercussions of such politics on the self-esteem and self-image of the adolescent protagonists but also the resultant complications in their interpersonal relationships. One that particularly comes into focus is the equation with the same-sex-parent that is the mothers – fraught with the tussle between empathetic identification (Lerner 1981, 7) and intergenerational conflict, tradition and modernity. Delving deep into this mental terrain, this chapter goes on to interrogate similar trends in the way in which dreams, fantasy,

playacting, creation of alternative (imagined) realities/personas, reading and storytelling, wanderlust, adopting non-normative dressing techniques and engaging in socially-frowned upon artistic endeavours are used by the authors as tools of subversion, which help the adolescent protagonists to question, challenge and circumvent these forces of socialization.

This attempt to understand how the years of early adolescence lay the foundations of the future claim of those discriminated on the grounds of gender, to physical, sexual and psychological agency within and beyond the family in two societies in transition, set so far apart geographically is cogent to the postmodernist bid to give voice to the repressed and marginalized that had been sweeping over erstwhile English-Canadian and Hindi literary consciousness. It is this impetus to look beyond the master-narratives generated by power-centres that finds a more pronounced manifestation in Chapter Four of the thesis that focuses on the pioneering attempts of the two literary artists in question, in identifying and establishing mental health disorders and the struggles of the ‘mentally deviant’ as a socially relevant thematic focus of short story within their respective literary paradigms.

This thematic preoccupation is largely motivated by their experience of living within and writing about societies in transition where social stressors like small town-city migrations, estrangement within relationships, breakdown of marriages, changing dynamics of gender rendered individuals more vulnerable what Dr Hans Style calls ‘distress’ and thereby to various mental maladies. In the light of the politics of stigmatization of ‘madness’ as highlighted by Michael Foucault (*Madness: The Invention of an Idea*, 1964, 2001), T. Donnelly (“Vogue Diagnoses”, 2012) and O. F. Wahl (*Media Madness: Public Image of Mental Illness*, 1995), the first section of the chapter strives to engage in a cross-cultural interrogation of the social mechanisms of gossip, rumour, ridicule and ostracization rampant within the secretive misinformed that deprived the mentally ill from clinical attention and social cooperation that they need for a healthy recovery and recuperation. This prepares the framework to map and understand the response of these small-town societies to the rapid de-institutionalization of the mentally ill in both Canada and India since the 60s, that minimizes their involuntary incarceration and effectively shifts the responsibility of their caregiving from the asylums to the community. The chapter goes on to look into the literary representation of specific disorders – namely Schizophrenia, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Bipolar Disorder and Depressive Disorder through the juxtaposition of contradictory perspectives and use of imagery and metaphors – subtle and restrained, yet jarring enough to

force them to encounter their own insecurities, prejudices and insensitivities about this marginalized group of people, for the better and for good.

The chapter further looks into the gender differential prevalence of mental illness as perceived in the exploration of female psychology in the works of the two authors. The impact of gender skewed stressors like the tussle between domestic caregiving responsibilities and professional aspirations, domestic abuse, molestation or tradition or gender specific ones like childbearing and miscarriage on the small-town women of their fictional world along with a higher tendency in women to internalize pain, trauma, anger, anxiety and fear as established by the Invariant Dimensional Internalizing-externalizing Liability Model in mental health disorder prevalence (Eaton et al, 2011, 282), has an important role to play in it. The final section looks into the politics of the how 'madness' is used as a control mechanism to repress aspirational deviances as well as to stifle the voices of dissent, especially that of women, that might pose a threat to the patriarchal social machinery. The women artists – with their unconventional life-choices – remain particularly susceptible to such forces. Social 'anomalies' in their own ways, their social hurdles and the resultant mental health conditions, often bear testimony to areas of resonance in the authors' understanding of the life and struggles of creative minds within their own socio-cultural milieu.

The above structural framework has been integral to the articulation of my arguments. This cross-cultural research endeavour follows the Chicago Style Sheet (17<sup>th</sup> edition) author-date format. It is imperative, here, to take cognition of the fact that while the basic rationale of this thesis had come out of my academic encounter with resource materials housed at several libraries across and beyond India, its structural framework as discussed above would not have taken shape if not for the opportunity to be enriched by the insights of several scholars, being able to participate in certain eye opening seminars and conferences and being a part of certain research publications that have pushed me to challenge myself as a researcher every single day and approach my thesis with a greater conviction.

The Departmental Library, Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata, National Library, Kolkata, Library of Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras and Library of Concordia University, Montreal have been instrumental in helping me access not only my primary resource materials - fourteen collections of short stories penned by Munro and the nine

collections and anthologies of *nayi kahani* written by Verma – but also the majority of the secondary resource materials needed for this research. It is important, here, to take note of the fact that while the other genres explored by Verma – novels, plays, travelogues and critical essays – are a part of my secondary resource materials, the focus of my research is exclusively on his short stories.

A major limitation, however, came in the form of the inability to access some of Munro's stories yet to be anthologised or some of her unpublished correspondences and interviews that would have helped me structure my arguments with a greater conviction. An opportunity to circumvent this problem came up in October 2019, when I was able to travel to Canada and look into the Alice Munro Fonds housed at the Archives and Collection Section of the Taylor Family Digital Library, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada. An insight into exclusive interviews, personal letters and testimonials archived therein, has been a revelatory experience.

The research has received a greater impetus from the understanding acquired through my experience of interviewing Canadian fiction writer Miranda Hill. Her first work of fiction, a collection of short stories *Seeping Funny* (2012) has won the City of Hamilton Book Award. One of the stories in it, 'Petitions to Saint Chronic' won the McClelland and Stewart Journey Prize. An ardent admirer of Munro's works, she acknowledges her own style of writing to have been influenced by literary craftsmanship of Munro. She is the founder and executive member of Project Bookmark Canada, and one of the main organizers of the Bookmark Reading Circle - projects that have been actively taking initiatives to reaffirm the relevance of Munro's works within the contemporary Canadian readership. The interaction with her has particularly helped me understand the relevance of Munro within the contemporary literary scenario in English-Canada. My clarity on this matter has been taken a notch higher through an opportunity to interview Lorraine York who is Professor of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University, Toronto, Canada and has published extensively on Alice Munro. . She is currently the Senator William McMaster Chair in Canadian Literature and Culture therein. She has been named Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2017. Her seminal works on *The Other Side of Dailiness: Photography in the works of Alice Munro*, Timothy Findley, Michael Ondaatje and Margaret Laurence (1988) and *Ethics and Affects in the Fiction of Alice Munro* (2018, co-edited with Amelia DeFalco) have explored the role of photography and affectiveness in the stories of Munro, respectively. She also looks into the literary celebrity within and beyond Canada. Interviewing her has been extremely



illuminating in terms contextualizing Munro within her own mid-twentieth century small-town Canadian milieu.

Situating, my chosen India counterpart in his own socio-cultural context of post-independence North-Indian small-town existence has been a well-informed exercise courtesy the valuable insights acquired through an interview with Ved Raman Pandey is Associate Professor in the Department of Hindi, Presidency University, Kolkata, India. He is currently the ICCR chair at the Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture, Mauritius. He has worked extensively on Nirmal Verma for his doctoral research titled ‘Adhunikatavad, Uttaradunikatavad aur Nirmal Verma’ (Modernism, Postmodernism and Nirmal Verma). The conversation with him has been particularly illuminating in terms of contextualizing Verma’s literary aesthetics at the crossroads of ‘modernist’ and ‘postmodernist’ tendencies within Hindi literature. Interviewing another Verma scholar Katerina Ruhrova, Insitute of Asian Studies, Czech Republic who has worked extensively on the author for her diploma dissertation on “Nirmal Verma and Czechoslovakia” has further helped me aquire a more considedated understanding of the aesthetics and authorial vision of the writer.

Formulating a congruent understandings about Munro’s literary aesthetics has been largely facilitated through the global response to a particular milestone in the life of the Nobel Laureate. The year 2021 marks the ninetieth birthday of Alice Munro - an event that is being celebrated with a lot of pomp and splendour by organising several literary and academic events all over the World. The opportunity to attend some of them – a lecture on “Canadian Literary Paths –the reception of Noble- prize- winning Alice Munro in Slovakia” by Jana Javorcikova, Department of English and American studies, Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica, Slovakia held in April, 2021 and ‘A Tribute to Alice Munro’ organised by the Centre for Canadian Studies at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania in November, 2021 – have been instrumental in helping me understand modernist and postmodernist aesthetics and philosophy as manifest in the works of Munro. The most poignant learning experience, however, has come as a part and parcel of presenting a paper on “Sisters in Spirit: Tracing an Ecofeminist trajectory of Interconnectedness Across the literary consciousness of Alice Munro” at the International Conference on “Alice Munro at 90: Central European Interpretations” organized by the Karoli Gaspar University of the Reformed Church in Hungary (KRE) and Eotvos Lorand University (ELTS), Budapest Hungary in November, 2021, has offered me extremely valuable and culturally diverse interpretations of the works of Munro across nations. The riveting conversations with

scholars all over the world working on Munro and the exchange of ideas have been extremely illuminating in terms of understanding the thematic and formal experimentations of the author with her chosen genre, the short story.

My experience of working on two critical essays titled “The Girl and the Mare: An Ecofeminist Trajectory of Interconnectedness” that has been published in the peer-reviewed volume on *Ecocriticism and Environment: Rethinking Literature and Culture* co-edited by Debashree Dattaray and Sarita Sharma (Primus Books, 2018) and “A Changing Mind, A Changing Body: Understanding the journey into female adolescence through *Terhi Lakeer* and *Lal Tin ki Chhat*” that has been accepted for publication in the peer-reviewed volume on *In the Name of Chughtai: One Hundred Years of Celebration (1915-2015)* co-edited by Debashree Dattaray and Epsita Halder (Orient Blackswan, forthcoming). on Munro and Verma respectively, has further helped me acquire a deeper understanding of some of the thematic congruence, particularly on issues related to gender, that may be found in the works on the two writers.

I feel that the literary and extra literary potential of my cross cultural analysis of one particular genre could open up more cultural and academic exchanges between the two nations, Canada and India. Not only will it help formulate a more holistic understanding of the development of the short story as a genre across cultures but it might also make way for more cross-cultural exchanges between the two nations in the fields of Postcolonial Studies, Gender, Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism and Mental Health.

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## Chapter 1

### Contemporary Creative Minds: Contextualizing Identities within ‘Postcolonial’ Canada and India

*When I write a story, I want to make a certain kind of structure, and I know the kind of feeling that I want to get from being inside that structure. There is no blue print for it. I have got to build up a house, a story to fit around this indescribable “feeling” that is like the soul of the story, and which I must insist upon in a dogged embarrassed way, as being no more definable than that.*

–Alice Munro, ‘What is Alice Munro?’, *For Openers: Conversation with 24 Canadian Writers*, 332

*I can see the shape of my story only in fragments. For me a story does not spring from a definite idea and seldom does it originate from the fact that I had consciously decided to write on a specific subject. To say in brief, a story for me is to view the blurred landscape of feelings in a glow of words*

– Nirmal Verma, *Sahitya ka Atmosatya*, 139-140

The primary focus of this research endeavour is on the thematic and formal innovations of the short story, as undertaken by Alice Munro from Canada and Nirmal Verma from India in an attempt to shift the focus of English-Canadian and Hindi short story from their ‘progressive’ social realist concerns of the 1930s-40s to an exploration of the psychological turmoil within the urban (small town) middle class individuals battling a crisis of values caused by changing social, familial and gender dynamics, in the early postcolonial decades following the end of World War II, economic depression and freedom from colonial domination in Canada and India.

This urban regionalism, as already discussed in the Introduction, that went hand in hand with the bid to contemporize mid-twentieth century English-Canadian and Hindi literature, thus became an integral part of the emerging postcolonial literary consciousness of their respective literary paradigms. On the one hand, it is perfectly cogent to the acceptance for region-specific diversity and plurality that has been intrinsic to the idea of India for centuries and for Canada ever since its emergence as a settler-colony – one that found a revalidation and reaffirmation within the idea of finding unity within ‘the different’, ‘the diverse’ and ‘the multiple’ that informed the wave of cultural nationalism that was sweeping over English-Canadian and Hindi literature, in the early postcolonial decades. On the other hand, it is also in keeping with the need to look beyond the master narratives emerging out of the geo-political ‘centres’, primarily cosmopolitan city-spaces – that came as a part and

parcel of the postmodernist philosophy and aesthetics that had begun to make its presence felt within their respective literary paradigms.

As mentioned before, these are stories about middle-class individuals whose value system and worldview have been shaped in such a manner by the restrictive moralities and gendered norms of the small-towns of southern Ontario, Canada and Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, India that irrespective of whether the stories are set in these towns the protagonists have their roots in, or in some larger cosmopolitan city-space within the country or even beyond it, they continue to inhabit their home-towns in spirit. It hardly comes as a surprise, therefore, when author Miranda Hill reveals in a personal correspondence, “In Munro’s works there is an acknowledgement that you don’t really leave a place behind. So many of her characters are left behind in the places they grew up, even though they once entertained the idea of leaving. And those characters that have left, carry their former home and its experiences with them.” (Miranda Hill, email interview with author, May 26, 2019) ‘Home’(town) in the Munroian world, as Hill interprets it, is not merely defined as a physical geo-political coordinate of existence of an individual but a space that shapes him/her mentally, morally and ethically for life – an idea that resonates poignantly Verma’s exploration of the effect of the ‘home’-town on the psyche of his characters.

The protagonists of Munro and Verma hail from societies whose collective mental conditioning is not very cogent to the social, economic and familial changes that have percolating organically and inevitably into its complex fabric from larger urban centres of Canada and India during the early postcolonial decades. Yet, many of the characters who had once aspired to ‘escape’ this restrictive and restricted life for ‘better’ opportunities often stay back, brooding over their failed dreams, yet strangely comfortable within the folds of the life they have always known, accepting even its most unsettling elements as an integral part of their existence. Others who are more fortunate, too, are often seen to return ‘home’ trading a life of adventure and freedom for the very moral restrictions, gossip, rumour and misinformed judgements that they had once been so desperate to move away from.

But what appears to be the most striking response amongst all, comes from those to have relocated long time ago - and return only for short courtesy visits (to family and friends) or never at all. Though far removed from the ‘region’, the ‘region’ continues to love within them – its culture shaping their worldview, its moralities clouding their judgement, the habits and idiosyncrasies peculiar to it influencing their decision making process, its memories haunting them for life. Even the local landscape and natural elements, they feel, leave an

idellible mark on their basic worldview for life. What better manifestation of this approach could one find than in Verma's own words where he says:

निर्मल वर्मा का बचपन शिमला में पहाड़ों पर बिता। प्रकृति से संगसर्ग की गहरी छाप उनके मन पर पड़ी। इसका असर उनकी कहानियों और उपन्यासों के परिबेश पर भी दीखता है। निर्मल वर्मा ने मेहसूस किया की "पहाड़ों पर एक ऐसी खामोशी है जो हमारे शहरों में नहीं है और जिस व्यक्ति ने जीवन के कई वर्ष पहाड़ों पर गुज़ारे हो बोह इस खामोशी को केबल शब्द का अभाव नहीं मानता वल्कि उसे जिने के एक 'पॉजिटिव' बिस्तर के रूप में भी स्वीकार करता है।"

*(Paharon par ek aisi khamosji hoti hain jo hamare seheron me nahin hain aur jis byekti ke jeevan ke kahi varsh paharon par guzre hain, wah is khamoshiko keval sabd ka abhav nahi manta balki use jeene ki ek positive vistar ke rup me bhi swikar karta hain.)* (Verma 1999, 12) [The mountains have a serene silence about them, one that is not to be found in our cities. A person who has spent many years of his life amidst the mountains, does not interpret this silence as a mere lack of words, but looks upon it as a magnanimous manifestation of the positibvity of life.]

His experience of growing up in a small town, a hill station in North India has shaped his own approach towards life irrevocably – his regional roots thus continues to make its presence felt even during his decade long stay in Prague, Czechoslovakia or his travels across Europe or even his later residence in Delhi and thereby, finds manifestation even in the stories set therein.

This translation of a deeply personal realization about the sense of 'home', belongingness and identity that gets reflected in his process of characterization rings true for his Canadian counterpart too. Though, unlike Verma, Munro hardly travelled beyond the boundaries of her country, her periods of relocation to other parts of Canada (particularly Vancouver, British Columbia) was never free of the nostalgia, the trauma, the ethical moorings and life-lessons learnt and inculcated through her region-specific experiences of Ontario small-town life and works set therein reflects as such. These turn out to be stories about small-town characters in metropolitan city-spaces, elated to have 'arrived', yet psychologically too invested in the 'home', 'home-town' and 'home-culture' left behind, to actually belong therein. 'Regional' is thus much much more than a mere physically situational attribute for the short stories of Munro and Verma and a peek into their life and the events that have shaped them as individuals, would be instrumental in revealing the causalities of such an approach.

For the two authors born two years apart in pre-war English-Canada and British India, this regional focus, both demographic and psychological, had its roots in their small town upbringing in Lower Wingham, Huron County, Ontario and Shimla and Summer Hill, Himachal Pradesh respectively. Their formative years were marked by a constant negotiation

with these conservative secretive morally restrictive societies that treated any moral, physical or mental deviation from the norms with a harsh judgmental attitude. Shy and introvert by nature, it was their keen observant nature, their passion for literature, their love for playacting and a deep fascination about the nature, landscape, demography and cultural geography of their hometowns that shaped their aesthetic sensibilities of both as a child and an adolescent.

Fifth among the eight children of a high ranking bureaucrat working in the Department of Defence of the British Indian government and a homemaker, Verma hardly joined his siblings in games. As his wife and poet Gagan Gill observes in her interview with Akhil Veethil recorded on June 1, 2018, his siblings remembered him as a naughty but quiet child. His was a ‘temperamental quietness’ which sprung from the way he observed what was around him. In fact, he felt “the physical act of speaking often breaks our relationship with reality and breaks your relationship with whatever is going on in your mind” (Sahapedia 2018, 6:00-6:07) It is perhaps because of this belief that he hardly socialized with his peers but preferred to find refuge either in books or in his solitary wanderings around the summer capital of British India, closely observing its nature, its climatic changes and the lifestyle of its middle class residents. In an interview with Prasant Panjjar, the author admits to have enjoyed dwelling in his world of imagination largely shaped by these mental preoccupations, often playing self-invented solitary games, one of which would require him to imagine an immediate impending death and remember the things that were most precious to him, before he died (Chaudhury 2000). This early engagement with solitude and playacting drew largely from his introduction to the rich repertoire of English and English-American literatures – especially that of Thomas Mann, William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Katherine Mansfield (Bhattacharya 1997, 2) - acquired through his convent education. As an adolescent keenly observant of and deeply sensitive towards the psychological ramifications of the restrictive small town morality of Simla upon its residents, these modernist writers fascinated him with their exploration of the deep dark depths of human consciousness. These writers would go on to exert a major influence on his future creative endeavours. So would his personal encounter with the landscape and residents of the town he called home. As Priyanka Dubey observes in “A patch of sunlight: Remembering Nirmal Verma”: “As a child, he saw residents leaving Shimla in droves before winter, when the capital shifted to Delhi. He was, it appears, haunted by the memories of the empty, ghostly winter town- its impressions would later be spread all over his writings.” (Dubey 2017) The organic relationship he shared with his hometown has found expression in his works – the setting and the *vatavaran*



(ambience) playing a paramount role in heightening the sense of alienation and estrangement that forms an integral part of his *nayi kahani*.

For little Alice Ann Laidlaw too, an explicit understanding of the nature and the townscape in and around Wingham acquired during her walk uptown from her home to her school, has proved to have formed the foundation of her literary activities. These observations would later find expression in her portrayal of the geography, demography, economic dynamics and cultural ethos of the fictional towns of Hanratty, Jubilee, Walley, Logan or Dangleish that forms the setting of many of her stories. These walks, in fact, proved to be a witness to some of her earliest bursts of creativity. As she herself states in her Nobel Acceptance Speech (2013), “I made up stories all the time. I had a long walk to school and back and during that walk I would generally make up stories. As I got older the stories would be more and more about myself, as a heroine in some situation or other, and it didn’t bother me that the stories were not going to be published to the world immediately, and I don’t know if I even thought about other people knowing them or reading them” (Munro 2013). These stories drew heavily not only from her own experiences but also the rich gamut of English, English-Canadian and English-American literatures she enjoyed especially the works of William Faulkner, Flannery O’Conner and Eudora Welty that fascinated her with their regional focus and a vivid portrayal of the small town life of American South she could so well identify with during her growing up years. Be it *Anne of Green Gables*, or *Emily of New Moon* by Lucy Maud Montgomery, be it the fairy tales of Hans Robert Anderson or the novels of the Bronte sisters and Pearl Zane Grey, books proved to be a refuge for the socially awkward eldest child of Robert Eric Laidlaw, a fox, mink and turkey farmer, and his wife Anne Clarke Chammey Laidlaw, a former schoolteacher.

Though she never had a privileged upbringing like Verma, it was her mother’s aspirations for a middle class life, her active participation in the Book-of-the-Month Club and Wingham Women’s Institute and her scholastic ambitions for her daughter that created an intellectual ambience cogent for little Alice to take up reading even before she started her formal education at the Lower Town School in 1937 (Thacker 2005, 41). A child who found it difficult to make friends and fit in, she in her own words was “the kind of weird kid who reads walking upstairs and props a book in front of her when she does the dishes” (Munro 2017, 3). A shift to Wingham Public School further uptown two years later, hardly saw any improvement in her socializing skills. Her hermeneutic capabilities, however, were sharpening day by day. As she reveals in an interview with Thomas Tausky: “For the early stuff it was mostly the excitement of the plot. But with *Wuthering Heights* I tried to capture

the soul of the story on my own” (36). As she joined Wingham High School in 1944, the sheltered life she had known as a child began to wane as the fur business suffered losses at the wake of the Economic Depression of the 30s and her mother started showing symptoms of Parkinson’s disease, forcing her to take up additional domestic responsibilities of keeping the house and looking after her younger siblings William and Sheila. These turbulent years of her life saw her finding solace in literature. Participation in cultural events like operas and Easter Literary Festivals in her school and a membership of the Wingham Public library opened up her vista of literary scholarship and with it evolved her creative sensibilities. An exposure to the works of writers like James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Anton Chekov and Katherine Mansfield, during this period, introduced her to the modernist concerns in European, Euro-American literatures. Like the young Verma, adolescent Munro, too, is known to have been deeply affected by these works. More her aspirations to be a writer came into conflict with the traditional gender roles endorsed by the society she lived in, more her mother’s illness put her at the receiving end of perpetual social contempt, more she was drawn towards these writers who strove to map the psychological terrain of the thoughts and emotions of individuals largely alienated from the society. As the world both the luminaries had known as a child began to undergo a gradual transformation at the wake of World War II and India’s independence, these modernist works exerted a paramount influence on the early endeavours of the young aspiring writers. Their earliest foray into writing saw the conscious use of modernist narrative techniques like fragmented chronology, multiple viewpoints and epiphany to highlight the mental dilemma of ‘post colonial’ subjectivities forced to negotiate constantly between a habitual adherence to the pre-war values and an urge to embrace the new age sensibilities pertaining to relationship goals, family bonding, gender roles and career aspirations. English-Canadian and Hindi literature had outgrown their social realist concerns, and Munro and Verma proved to be two of the earliest artists to represent the changed social circumstances and literary sensibilities in their short stories.

It was the early 1950s. The excellent academic records of Munro and Verma had granted them an opportunity to pursue the subjects of their choice in two reputed academic institutions of their countries. While Munro secured a two-year scholarship to Journalism and later English Literature in University of Western Ontario, London following her graduation from Wingham High School as the class valedictorian, Verma majored in History from St. Stephen’s College, Delhi. It was during this phase of their life that the writers began to divide

their time between academic endeavours and creative writing. The year 1950 turned out to be the first milestone in their literary careers as it was marked by the appearance of their first ever publication of their short stories – Verma's ('Ajnabee') in the literary magazine of his college and Munro's ('The Dimensions of a Shadow' ) in *Folio*, the under graduate literary magazine of her university. 'A Story for Sunday' (1951) and 'The Widower' (1951) soon followed suit. Verma too became a regular contributor to his college magazine. This new chapter of life had much to do with their experience of venturing out of their hometowns into larger cosmopolitan urban setups for the very first time. As they began to take cognition of increasing tendency among small town youth to migrate to cities in search of better opportunities, the breaking up of traditional family setups and the economic emancipation of women that had followed the end of World War II and the struggle for political sovereignty in their respective nations, the crisis of values they caused within the erstwhile urban middle-class youth began to find expression in these short stories. These proved to be some of their earliest attempts to shift the focus of English-Canadian and Hindi short stories from their social-realist concerns to a more middle class specific individualistic and psychological engagement with the contemporary urban realities. However, it was only after two major developments in their literary careers which soon followed suite, that the young aspirants were able to cement their positions as the foremost among the generation of writers to have to have represented these new age sensibilities within their respective literary paradigms.

It is interesting to note how both these developments had much to do with the wave of cultural nationalism that hit their respective language-literatures, helping them to emerge as some of the earliest beneficiaries of the initiatives taken by the government, academia and the publishing industry in a bid to forge 'post colonial' cultural identities within their respective literary paradigms.

For young Munro, this turning point came in the form the mentorship of Robert Weaver often hailed as the 'father of the Canadian short story' (McCraig 26). It was 1951. While Munro was busy juggling her university education, her part time jobs in warehouses and eateries and literary activities, the literary circle of English Canada was taken by storm by the publication of the report of the Massey Commission (1949-51). Appointed by the newly established liberal government, this commission helped trigger government and non-government organizations to promote Euro-Canadian literature in a way as to help it "come of age by relieving it off the need for constant patronage and validation from its mother

countries and the powerful neighbour” (McCraig 2009, 22) and thereby resist cultural colonization once and for all. As Canadian Broadcasting Services, under the able leadership of Robert Weaver took its first few steps towards discharging this responsibility, nineteen year old Munro found her story ‘The Stranger’ being selected to be narrated in the fifteen minute long CBC show *Canadian Short Stories*. This opportunity of showcasing her work on air, provided her the first ever exposure to a wider audience at a national level. When Alice quit her studies mid-way to marry her university senior John Munro and move to Vancouver at the end of that year, Weaver remained her primary connection to the literary world. Her stories began to be published regularly in his newly founded literary journal *Tamarack Review*, which saw older prestigious journals like *Canadian Forum*, *Chatelaine*, *Mayfair*, *Montrealer* and *Queen’s Quarterly* accept her stories for publication. Daughters Sheila Margaret, Catherine Alice, Jenny Alison and Andrea Sarah- were born within a span of few years. As the young homemaker struggled to strike a balance between her literary projects and domestic responsibilities, Weaver helped her secure the grant offered by the Canada Council which provided her with the financial security to pursue her literary endeavours. As she turned into a regular contributor in *Anthology* and *Saturday Night*, the other programs conducted by Weaver, and the series of Oxford anthologies of Canadian short stories edited by him, she found her place among the new generation of writers – Mordecai Richler, Mavis Gallant, John Marshall and Audrey Thomas - standing at the cross roads of modernist and postmodernist tendencies within English-Canadian literature. While she primarily addressed modernist concerns of self-consciousness, individualism and a search for an meaning of life by shaping narrativised time as an eternally contemporaneous flow of thoughts and emotions or opting for epiphanic moments over concrete conflict resolutions; early post-modern concerns over pluralism and moral relativism begun to make their presence felt from the early days of her literary career. The use of memory, dreams and fantasies to highlight the plurality of perspectives and the subjective nature of ‘truths’, has come to be emblematic to these concerns.

Use of similar formal and stylistic techniques and devices could be identified in young Verma’s experimental literary exploration of the *antarik yatharth* (Singh M. 2013, 30) (inner experiential reality) of individuals negotiating with the changing social circumstances of mid-twentieth urban India. As discussed earlier, such experimentation was primarily a result of early realization of the suitability of modernist and to some extent postmodernist philosophy and aesthetics in representing this psychological crisis born out of such

negotiations. The process of reception and a conscious adaptation of the so-called foreign cultural influences in a way so as to make them cogent to his own social reality came to light for the first time in the short story 'Parinde', a work that propelled him into prominence within the Hindi literary scenario. Like my chosen Canadian counterpart, it had much to do with the government initiatives to promote the new age sensibilities of the urban Hindi speaking communities - initiatives that had its roots in the unprecedented power and prestige accorded to the Hindi language in a bid to proclaim it as the official language of the nation. It followed saw the emergence of many new journals, the most important of them being *Kahani*, which focused exclusively on the genre of short story. In was 1956, when Verma fresh out of university was taking up teaching jobs in Delhi that the *Kahani Navavarshank* (New Year edition) spelled the need and the possibilities of emergence of the *nayi kahani* (New Story) that would usher in the a phenomenon of modernism that could be located at the cross roads of Western modernist influences and the contemporary urban realities of 'post colonial' Northern India. The end of that very year saw the publication of 'Parinde' in *Hans Ardhavarshik*. Hindi *Nayo Kahani* had finally arrived, and Verma was proclaimed to be its pioneer. Publications of his stories in journals (older but open to experimentation) like *Prateek* and *Kalpna* soon followed suite as more writers like Kamaleswar and Mohan Rakesh, with similar sensibilities, began to make their presence felt. *Nayi Kahani* movement was fast changing the contours of short story writing in Hindi literature.

But the next few years proved to be a period of struggle for both him and his Canadian contemporary in question, as the existing hierarchy between the novel and the short story within their respective literary paradigms continued to overshadow their creative endeavours. Though the broadcasting services, the magazines and the journals ensured a non-commercial market for their stories, book publication continued to elude them for years. A glimpse into this period of their careers, provides some pertinent insights into the factors pertaining to literary sociology that had shaped them as writers. A revealing experience, it has also helped me formulate a more holistic understanding of the role of the 'market', its demands and the entire chain of authors - literary agents - editors -publishers -dealers - readers -critics that sustains it, in shaping the contours of a literary genre.

Though 'Parinde' helped Verma cement his position as a short story writer to reckon with, he found it hard to get his *nayi kahani* published in the book form, for the mainstream publishers continued to be apprehensive about the shelf life of this new

experimental short fiction. It was only after he left for Prague in 1959 to work at the Oriental Institute of Czechoslovakia to initiate a project of translating modernist Czech writers like Bohumil Hrabal, Milan Kundera and Karel Capek into Hindi, that Rajkamal Prakashan, the Delhi based publishing house he had long been corresponding with, agreed to publish his first collection of stories *Parinde* (1958). It won him much critical acclaim establishing him as one of the finest short story writers of his generation. Its success however, did not result in a second collection of stories but a novel *Ve Din* (1964), which he penned on the insistence of his publisher. Largely autobiographical, it fictionalizes the experiences of his student life in Prague. Not only does the novel dwell upon his marriage and eventual estrangement from a fellow Indian student Bokul Vora through the relationship intrigues of the protagonist, it is also perhaps the earliest among the very few of his fictions that throws light upon his erstwhile Marxist inclinations.

Verma has always been an individual with very well defined political opinions. In the initial days of his college life spent in Delhi, Verma had had the opportunity to attend meetings hosted by Mahatma Gandhi and felt highly inspired by his philosophy. This admiration, however, gave way to an interest towards Marxist ideology that resulted in a membership of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM). Armed with a belief that communism had held the key to many of the solutions of the problems of economic depression, poverty, unemployment and class and caste based inequalities that had been plaguing the Indian society since the late colonial decades, he was convinced that communism would help abate many social crisis in the post-colonial times as well. His relocation to the Communist-era Prague had only helped to reinforce this belief further. But disillusionment with communism came crashing upon the young aspiring scholar at the wake of the Soviet repression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, which induced him to quit the Communist Party of India in protest. His resentment deepened as he witnessed the economic deprivation and social depression in Prague. The last nail in the coffin came in the form of the Prague Spring of 1968, after which he returned to India and lost even his last ounce of faith on communist ideals. As the Czech scholar Katerina Ruhrova confirms in a personal correspondence:

Verma experienced day to day life in a country ruled by Communists. Furthermore, he saw the hope that many people shared during the Prague Spring, the period of political liberalization, and he saw disillusion that followed the invasion by friendly countries from Eastern bloc. This incident surely played a role in his political views and strong political statements. (Katerina Ruhrova, email correspondence with the scholar, 2 February 2, 2022)

Even after giving up officially upon Communism, he continued to harbour very strong political views and make strong political statements including the once where he was openly critical about the declaration of Emergency (1975) by Indira Gandhi, or the Tibetan occupation by China. He never affiliated himself to any political party ever again, though. What one might find to be most surprising is that though he continued to be extremely vocal about his political standpoints in his interviews, essays and travelogues – barring a few exceptions like ‘Dedh Inch Upar’ (1965) and *Raat ka Reporter* (1989), one can hardly find him highlighting his political standpoints in his prose fiction, in the later years of his literary career.

As it turns out, it was a conscious and very well thought out decision on his part, as revealed in one of his interviews anthologized in *Mere Sakshatkar* (1999):

एक लेखक को अपनी राजनीतिक चेतना के द्वारा एक सतर्क नागरिक की हैसियत से हर प्रश्न को समझना और तोलना-परखना चाहिये। और ये वो तभी कर सकता है जब वहां किसी राजनीतिक दल विशेष के आईने से समाज को न देखकर उसे थोड़ा निष्पक्ष और तथस्थ दृंग से आँकने का प्रयत्न करें।  
(*Ek lekhak As a ko apni rajnaitik chetna ke dwara ek satark nagarik ki haisiyet se samaj ke har prashna ko samajna aur tolna-parakhna chahiye. Aur ye waha tabhi kar sakta hey jab waha kisi rajnaitik dal vishesh ke ayne se samaj ko na dekhkar use thoda nishpaksh aur tathasth dhang se ankhne ka prayatna kare.* (Verma 1999, 35)

[As a responsible citizen, a writer should use his political consciousness to understand, analyze and interrogate every social problem that comes his way. And he would be able to achieve this end only if he refrains from perceiving the society through the reflective lens of any particular political party and strives to paint it from a more objective and neutral standpoint. ]

This need Verma felt to assume an impartial and objective stance as a writer, did not only remain restricted to his political affiliations and opinions. Over the years, it had become an integral part of his literary vision. His decision to never provide his readers with a concrete conflict resolution was a conscious endeavour towards that end. Never before had the Hindi readership encountered such open ended stories. Raising certain questions about life and leaving the readers to draw their own inferences, form their own judgements and come up with their own set of interpretations is an artistic trait that he shares with his Canadian counterpart in question. While his personal realizations as a self-conscious individual had a role to play in this context, one cannot deny the fact that the early exposure to and a thorough exploration of the modernist aesthetics of the writers like James Joyce, Anton Chekov, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf too had much to do with it.

His project at Czechoslovakia initiated several visits to different European countries, and the consequent engagement with their respective literature and culture, provided more and more opportunities for such explorations.

As his travels across Europe further enhanced his already in-depth understanding of the works of Chekov, Joyce, Woolf, Marcel Proust and Ernest Hemmingway and his preoccupation with the existentialist philosophy of Kierkegaard, Camus, Kafka, Sartre and Octavio Paz, he began to feel more and more strongly about the relevance of modernist and existentialist philosophy and aesthetics in his contemporary Indian context. Could they not be received and adapted in such a way as to highlight the increasing fragmentation, alienation and individualism that characterized the postcolonial urban middle-class existence that he chose to focus on in his works? He continued to experiment with his *nayi kahani*, till his efforts culminate in the publication of a second collection *Jalti Jhari* by Rajkamal Prakashan, the year after *Ve Din* saw the light of the day. By the time his third collection of stories *Pichli Garmiyon Mein* came out in 1968, the Hindi readership was mesmerized by “the attractive crystalline fiction” of Verma that was impressive “in its commitment to form, in its self-awareness, its vivid, poetic imagery, its sensitive psychological texture”(Jaidev 1988-89, 26). Even after the Prague Spring forced him to return to India and settle in Delhi the same year, his association with his publisher continued for decades. Though Sheila Sandhu, the proprietor of Rajkamal Prakashan admits to “I have been close to Nirmal for over thirty years but I still do not know him. He knows everything about me, but I don’t really know anything about him” (Chaudhury 2000, 3), with reference to his reclusive nature, theirs’ was an effective collaboration, which eventually resulted in four more collections of short stories- *Beech Bahas Mein*(1973), *Kavya aur Kalapani*(1983) (that fetched him Sahitya Akademi Award,1985), *Sukha tatha annya kahaniyan* (1995) and *Gyaraha Lambi Kahaniyan*(2000). Unlike Munro, the publication of these collections of short stories were interspersed with that of four more novels *Lal Tin Ki Chat*(1974), *Ek Chithara Sukh*(1979), *Rat Ka Reporter*(1989) and *Antim Aranya*(2000) and even that of a play called *Teen Ekant* (1976). His experiences of travel, that provided him exposure to new cultures, customs and literatures, went on to find expression in his three travelogues *Cheeron per Chandni* (1962), *Har Barish Mein* (1970) and *Dhundh se uthi Dhun* (1996). His expertise as a literary critic as manifest in treatises like *Sabdh Aur Smriti*(1976), *Kala ka Jokhim*(1981) and *Sahitya ka Atmosatya* (2005) accorded him with unprecedented prestige not only from his literary contemporaries, especially his fellow *nayi kahanikars*, but also from the Indian academia. However, short story remained



his preferred genre throughout, for in his own words “(they) are best suited to project the contemporary realities – the alienation, fragmentation, moral dilemma of a society in transition. This is the age of short story”. (Sukant 2002, 2) Therefore, in spite of all these diversifications, it was predominantly the genre of short story that Verma has been keen on experimenting with, shaping *nayi kahani* in a way so as to turn it into a commercially viable “high art” form, suitable to highlight the ramifications of the crisis of values within the urban middle class Indian society. This was perhaps a befitting response to critics like Jaidev who have accused Verma of assuming an ‘elitistic’ stance (Jaidev ,31 for staying aloof from ‘Indian realities’. For while Verma does refrain from following the footsteps of his *Pragativadi* predecessors and moves away from highlighting the realities of those marginalized in terms of class or caste, his works reflect the life and struggles of a section of people though, who much more privileged, are undeniably an integral part of the late-colonial and post colonial Indian society too. It is to his credit that the problems faced by this section of the society, often underplayed as ‘elitist’ and therefore overtly self-indulgent, and thus not considered to be too ‘frivolous’ to be accorded any literary attention by the preceding social realist writers and even some of his contemporary critics, emerged to be a subjects ‘worthy’ of literary engagement.

For Munro, who never really diversified her generic focus like Verma, the path to establish the short story as not only the perfect genre for aesthetic representation of the introspective feelings of ‘post colonial’ urban middle class subjectivities, but also elevate it from the status of a “apprentice genre” (Sharma 2014, 27) to a literary form suitable for anthologization was by no means a cakewalk. With their hard hitting portrayal of the struggles of rural and suburban communities reeling under the throes of poverty unemployment and war-time ravages , the preceding generation of social realist short story writers who mainly published in literary journals and magazines had mostly found a strong reader base within their respective regional (provincial) spheres. Though already a popular name among the national audience of the CBC shows and the journals, when Munro approached the publishing house McClelland and Stewart in 1961 with the manuscript of her first collection of short stories it was turned down with a request to invest her creative energies in a novel, the more academically acclaimed and commercially successful genre in erstwhile English-Canadian literature. Seven years later, when Ryerson Press finally published *The Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), it was not a commercial success. Critical acclaim came its way through, in the form of the Governor General Literary Award, the highest award for literary

achievements in Canada. In Munro's own words "...it was difficult. I had about a year when I couldn't write anything because I was so busy thinking I had to get to work on a novel. I didn't have the burden of having produced a huge best-seller that everyone was talking about. The book sold very badly, and nobody—even though it had won the Governor-General's Award—nobody had heard of it. You would go into bookstores and ask for it, and they didn't have it." (McCullough and Simpson 1994, 26). The award, however, did manage to establish her name as one to be reckoned with, within the English- Canadian literary circle and it secured for her the support and friendship of her contemporaries, even some of the younger ones like John Metcalf, Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence.

The genre based hierarchy, however, had continued to dominate the literary scenario strongly enough to induce the writer who has concentrated exclusively on the genre of short story, to succumb to these biases in the early years of her career. In her interview with Jeanette McCullough and Mona Simpson titled "The Art of Fiction No. 137" she admits to have aspired to write a novel after *Dance of the Happy Shades*, till the attempt turned into a series of short stories linked by the presence of certain common characters in her second publication, a short story cycle named *The Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), that maps the myriad contours of the coming of age experiences of the Del Jordan within the fictional small town society of Jubilee in Ontario. This helped her realize that her creative thought process was tuned more towards dealing with the challenge of "overcoming the constraint of brevity and communicating not a fragment but a whole through a short story" (Munro 2013, 3) and firmly established the same as her preferred genre over the novel. But, it was this failed attempt at writing a novel that gave Munro her first taste of commercial success in the early 1970s. Author Miranda Hill would attribute much of this success to Munro's ability to circumvent the disturbing novel/short story hierarchy, by letting her spontaneous creative urge sooth the ruffled edges of the 'literary market' of English-Canada as it were: "One of the ways that Canadian publishers and Canadian readers seem to find the short story palatable is through collections of "linked" short stories. Linked stories make publishers feel less nervous about publishing a collection if it can be billed more as a novel, with recurring characters". (Miranda Hill, email conversation with author, May 26, 2019) That fact that though the book managed to make her a household name and even fetched her the Canadian Booksellers Award in 1971, this was the creation that enhanced her preference for the genre of short story and strengthened her conviction about never succumbing to the pressure of writing a novel, bears testimony to the clarity of her aesthetic vision even in the early years of her literary

career. This vision culminated in her third publication *Something I have Been meaning to Tell You*(1974) and it goes to her credit that it was an interview conducted by writer Henry Boyle on this work – far less commercially successful than its predecessor - that brought her to the notice of Douglas Gibson, the editorial director of Macmillan, Canada, a phenomenon that marked the beginning of a long standing alliance between the author and the editor.

It was a much needed boost to the career of a mother, who had just sought divorce from her husband and was trying to discharge the responsibilities of a single parent by availing the Writer-in-residence program of University of Western Ontario. While her next short story cycle *Who do you think you are?*(1978) was published under the banner of Macmillan, Canada, her fourth publication *The Progress of Love* (1986) , that fetched her the Governor General Literary Award for the third time, came out as the maiden publication of the Douglas Gibson Books, founded by Gibson after he had left Macmillan. Munro's already flourishing career got an impetus when Virginia Barber, a literary agent from U.S.A., took an initiative to help works move beyond the boundaries of Canada and reach out to an international readership. It was her perseverance that helped to create a platform for Munro to get published in leading American and European journals and literary magazines like *New Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Grand Street* and *Paris Review*. Barber also helped her secure the support of Knopf Publishers U.S.A., who published her much lauded third anthology as *The Beggar Maid* (1980), that was short listed for the Booker Prize for Fiction(1980). This marked the beginning of an effective and successful collaboration between the author, Gibson, Barber and Ann Close (editor from Knopf Publishers), that was instrumental in presenting the admirers of Munro's work with ten more collections of stories- *The Moons of Jupiter*(1982), *The Progress of Love*(1986), *Friend of My Youth*(1990), *Open Secrets*(1994), *The Love of a Good Woman*(1998), , *Hateship*, *Friendship* *Courtship*, *Loveship*, *Marriage*(2001),*Runaway*(2004), *The View from Castle Rock*(2006), *Too Much Happiness*(2009), and *Dear Life*(2013). Her latter short story cycles *Who do you think you are*, (1978) and *Open Secrets and Other Stories* (1994) - the former bestowing upon her the honour of the second Governor-General Literary Award (1978) of her literary career, the latter the W. H. Smith Literary Award (1995, UK).- were a conscious decision on the part of an author who had by that time already found a strong footing as one of the leading figures experimenting with the form and content of English-Canadian short story.

Thus, the later part of their literary career sees Munro and Verma emerging a more confident artist, as assured and assertive in her experimentations with English-Canadian short story, as her Indian counterpart is with his *nayi kahani*. The thematic experimentations drew largely from perspectives gained from the breakdown of their first marriages – the rupture in the personal commitments that both had entered into as young students, the dysfunctionality of family life, the feeling of estrangement, the resultant loneliness all found expression in their stories. What intrigues me most about this part of their career, is the way in which both the artists in question – one who has travelled internationally and lived abroad for a decade, and another who has travelled and stayed in another Canadian province for many years – continued to set the majority of their stories in their hometowns. As both their second marriages – Munro’s to physical geographer Gerald Fremlin in 1976 and Verma’s to poet Gagan Gill in 1989– brought them geographically close enough to their hometowns to be able to afford regular visits, each “rediscovered” its landscape and took cognition of the changes that had come over the social dynamics of its small towns society, since he/she had left it. This period proved to be an epiphanic one for the development of Munro’s authorial vision as well – one that came with the knowledge of his father having turned a writer in the very last years of his life. It was revealed that a man who had been a fox-mink-farmer and had even worked in a foundry in times of financial crisis was found to have been working on the first draft of a novel on Ontario pioneer life, only after he was hospitalized with a severe heart condition. Munro speaks with pleasure and wonderment about this discovery in an unpublished handwritten essay on her family currently archived at the Alice Munro Fonds housed at the Taylor Family Digital Library at University of Calgary:

When I visited him in the hospital all he wanted to talk about was his characters, and ways he had thought of strengthening his book. During the three weeks he had left he produced a second draft that I read with astonishment after his death. He had made a wonderful leap, in organization, in grasp, in love of his material. His book the *The MacGregors* was published in 1979. (Alice Munro Fonds n.d.)

Robert Laidlaw’s passion for writing and love for the small-town space that his ancestors from Great Britain who had once made their home therein, had passed unto him, became an anchor for her creative endeavour. Unlike Verma, whose hailed from a family of high-end achievers and pursuers of different cultural endeavours, Munro’s had always been a family of aspirers. Though content to have realized her dream of becoming a writer and grateful for her mother’s early interventions in forging her love for literature, the absence of any significant cultural pursuit in the family, had always made her struggles harder. The realization that not

only creative writing but a deep urge to write about her 'region' might have always been in her blood, obtained however late in life, imbued her with a sense of purpose like never before. The family and the home 'region' thus continued to play a pivotal role in their creative vision of both the authors – their perceptions on life maturing with age, their understanding of the small-town life of Ontario evolving further in the course of more in-depth exploration of its various facets.

These explorations found expression in their later collections of stories, often striving to strike a balance between their memories of times past and an acute awareness of the contemporary realities of the 'region' they wrote about. Accordingly, the thematic focus too shift from an exploration of the coming of age moments of youth, estrangement in romantic relationships and mental and physical deviations from the normative to that of the disintegrated domesticities and finally to loneliness of old age and a preoccupation with death. Fallibility and unreliability of human memory and its impending dangers with an increasing fragmented society loomed large over these stories, rendering them more and more multilayered, informed by plurality of perspectives. This emphasis on the importance of the plurality of perspectives in forming an understanding about a person or an event, and about life in general have been emblematic of the postmodernist elements that made their presence felt strongly in their literary consciousness more and more in the later years of their career.

Awards, accolades and recognitions poured in as the writers, deemed later in life stalwarts within their respective literary paradigms, continue to engage in their literary pursuits well into the '80s, occasionally accepting visiting-writer and visiting-lecturer positions in universities within their respective nations. Verma was appointed as the chairperson of Nirala Creative Writing Chair in Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal from 1980 to 1983. His book of essays *Bharat aur Europe: Pratishruti ke Skhetra*(1991) which opened up fresh debates on the politics of post colonial cultural transactions between Europe and India and fetched him the Jnanpith Trust's Murtidevi Award in 1991. The year 1999 turned to be landmark in his career as he was graced by the Jnanpith Award, the highest literary award for Indian writers in 1999. The Government of India honoured him with the Padma Bhusan in 2002. He was also invited to be a jury member for Lettre Ulysses Award for the art of Reportage in 2003. In 2005 the Government of France bestowed upon him the honour of Chevalier de l'ordre des arts et des letters. The final recognition came with the author being

honoured with the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship for lifetime achievement, a few days before he passed away on October 25, 2005, at the age of seventy six.

For Munro, however, as already mentioned, the highest award for literary excellence in her nation-state came very early in her career. Having received the General's Award (1968, 1974, 1978) thrice within a span of ten years, her selection as Foreign Honourary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, was lauded both with and without Canada. The following year, Royal Society of Canada presented her with Lorne Pierce Medal. The Rea Award for Short Story came her way in 2001, bestowing upon her an international recognition of being one of the finest short story writers of her generation. A major feather was added to her cap when she was awarded the Man Booker Prize, UK (2009) for her contribution to English fiction. A few weeks after the publication of *Dear Life* in 2013, that saw the old and ailing author announce her decision to stop writing, by introducing its "Finale" with the words: "I believe that they are the first and last- and the closest- things I have to say about my own life." (Munro 2013, 186), she was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature for being "master of the contemporary short story."<sup>3</sup> (Munro 2013, ) This called for a nationwide celebration and the Royal Canadian Mint released a silver coin in 2014 to honour this win. The following year a special posted stamp was released by the Canada Post to celebrate the event of national pride. Munro remains the only Canadian to have been bestowed with such an honour for her literary achievements.

In order to understand and analyze the works these two writers who have been instrumental in turning the genre of short story into the most potent medium to explore the post colonial literary consciousness within their respective literary traditions, it is necessary to form a comprehensive understanding of the idea of the post colonial within mid twentieth century English-Canadian and Hindi literature. Works like *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature* (2003) by Laura Moss and 'Politics of the Possible' (*The Post Colonial Studies Reader*, 1995) by Kumkum Sangari provide important insights in the areas concerned. A literary process as a laid out in time is a process of change, both "internal" (changes triggered by the internal dynamics of the literary system) and "external" (changes caused as a result of the reception of other literary system), and also that of the "continuity of themes and genres" (Das 2004, 44-45). This dynamics of "internal change",

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<sup>3</sup> Munro, Alice. *The Nobel speech: A conversation with Stefan Asberg*, Svenska Akademien, November 2013. Print

“external change” and “continuity” is rendered complex by a colonial contact between two cultures and literary systems. Hindi *bhasa-sahitya* finds its the post colonial literary consciousness being coloured by an inherited piety for the (English) colonizer’s literature and culture; at the same time it strives to forge a cultural identity that would represent the changing sensibilities of the Hindi speaking readership of the newly independent nation. The situation is no less complicated in the case of a settler colony like English-Canada, where the post colonial consciousness is informed by a cultural nationalism that emerged “as a kind of cultural-ideological protest, subversively, and often with a sheathing irony that remains mostly lost upon the central, dominant, and self regarding (British and American) cultures in which, they financially need to succeed” (Lynch 2002, 1024). Therefore, acquiring an understanding of the history of the inception and the evolution of the short story as a genre in the European and Euro-American context emerges to be of a paramount importance to any attempt of exploring and interrogating the idea of the postcolonial within English-Canadian and Hindi literature and situating the short stories of Alice Munro and Nirmal Verma therein.

Genre specific essays like “A Theory of a Short Story” by J. C. Lawrence or “Some Anomalies of the Short Story” by G. D. Howells highlight how short story emerged as a literary genre in Europe and The United States of America in the mid-nineteenth century. The earliest attempt at theorizing the short story and accepting its existence as an independent genre within the Western literary paradigm came from Edgar Allan Poe, who in his *Review* of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice Told Tales* (1848) defined the genre as a short prose narrative, which “can be read at one sitting”, a half to one or two hours being required for the purpose. He goes on to say:

The literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he (the writer) has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incident but having conceived with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents- he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect...In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency direct or indirect, is not one to the one pre-established design (Poe 1942, xiii).

By the second half of the nineteenth century, when the short story had set a strong foothold across Europe and the United States if America, the basic criterion of brevity that called for “an economy of words and expressions” (Sharma 2014, 32) was agreed upon by the majority of its practitioners, but its actual extent remained a matter of speculation since brevity may be

affected by “particular conditions, individual idiosyncrasies and culture” ( Zumthor 1983, 4). While many of the early writers of short stories like Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville prescribed to Poe’s insistence upon the need of having “a pre-established design”, others like Anton Chekov, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf consciously chose to move away from this notion to an extent of doing away with the necessity of an action based plot and a chronologically narrated progress of events. As Mansoor Nazeer observes in his essay ‘The Short Story: An Exploration’, “With writers like Joyce and Woolf....the event is often invisible, internal, as if nothing really ‘happens’” (Naseer 2004, 76). The ‘proper’ conclusion through conflict resolution, or the lack thereof, is also an important factor that governs the differential storytelling processes of artists working with the genre. Be it Joyce’s use of epiphany, be it the ‘twist in the tale’ conclusion espoused by the likes of O’ Henry or be it the ‘inconclusive endings’ of Chekov – Allan Pasco’s essay ‘On Defining Short Stories’, provides an important insight into these various approaches towards shaping the short story for what it is. A comprehensive understanding of the history of short story European and Euro-American short story from the mid nineteenth to the mid twentieth century decades, acquired through an exploration of the above discussed essays, is crucial to understanding the development of the short story as a genre from within the colonial legacy and ‘post colonial’ dynamics of cultural influence and reception within English-Canadian and Hindi literature.

Tracing the history of short-story writing in English-Canada and contextualizing Munro’s works therein, is the first step towards forming a comprehensive understanding of how the genre of short-story emerges as the most effective medium of literary expression for cultural nationalism in the 1950-60s English-Canada, and how the early years of Munro’s authorship have been shaped (in terms of its commercial success, academic acceptance and critical acclaim) by it.

According to *The Canadian Short Story (1988)* by Michalle Gadpaille and *History of Canadian Literature (2003)* by W. H. New, the earliest example of the English-Canadian short story may be found in the series of “documentary sketches of pioneer settlement” (Sharma 2014, 52) by the early settlers “designed to send impressions from the edge of civilization to an authority who stayed back home” (New 2003, 25). Be it *Letters of Mephibosheth Stepsure (1821-23)* by Thomas McCulloch or *Clockmaker (1938)* sketches by Thomas Halliburton or those written by the early women writers like the Srickland sisters who had immigrated with their husbands to Peterborough in Ontario in the 1830s - *The Backwoods of Canada (1836)* by Catherine Parr Trail and *Crowded Out and Other Stories (1886)* by Susanna Moodie - contained vivid descriptions of the topography of the early English-Canadian rural and urban



settlements and the ways of life of the early settlers residing therein. The regional focus of these early sketches established regionalism as a defining feature of the English-Canadian short story, a feature which continued to invest the genre well into the mid twentieth century. In his seminal work *The Bush Garden* (1971), the famous literary critic Northrop Frye has highlighted the importance of the region-specific peculiarities in shaping the creative imagination of the Euro-Canadian writers. The work is one of the earliest to have clearly enunciated how provincial identity had always taken precedence over the idea of a national identity in the psyche of its citizens since mid-nineteenth century. The importance accorded to region specific identities, often at the cost of the conceptualisation of a national culture, even today, ensures the relevance of Frye's observations in the contemporary Canadian context. George Woodcock, in his *Northern Spring: The Flowering of Canadian Literature* (1987), goes on to enunciate this idea further by identifying Euro-Canadian literature to "have always been fundamentally regional" (Woodcock 1987, 21), for "the experience of living in a vast country of strikingly different landscapes has inevitably led (Euro) Canadian writers to assert a primary imaginative allegiance to specific regions rather than to the whole country" (Fiamengo 2004, 141). Replete with humour, irony and local anecdotes, Halliburton's *Clockmaker*, that engages in a satirical critique of the lifestyle and manners of the pioneer settlers of Nova Scotia through the eyes of the Yankee salesman Sam Slick who travelled across the province selling clocks, was one of the earliest works to explore the idea of a "interrelated cycle of short stories" within English-Canadian literature.

The potential underlying the idea of writing a series of short stories linked by a common regional setting and the recurring presence of one or more than one characters was also explored through a series of fictional letters by Thomas McCulloch that chronicled the experiences of the protagonist-narrator Mephibosheth Stepsure, "in which the thriftlessness and the unstable character of a rural Maritime community (of Nova Scotia)" striving to negotiate with the economic depression of the 1830s "are held up for laughter and scorn" (Stouck 1988, 1). Though primarily published in local magazines like the *Acadian Recorder* (Halifax, Nova Scotia) or *The Literary Garland, Montreal*, the major target readership for these sketches were either the countrymen back "home" or the Euro-American population residing in the politically and economically powerful neighbouring country U.S.A. In their attempt to examine the impact of distinctive topography and climate on the pioneer settlers and the region specific economic, social and cultural dynamics that informed their early settlements, the pre-confederation English-Canadian short story writers often posited

regionalism as a defining feature of “Canadianness”, a feature that continued to invest the idea of (Euro)Canadian nationhood and national identity well into the twentieth century.

The turn of the century saw the emergence of the modernist short story in Canada, a phenomenon the earliest theoretical enunciation may be found in the article titled ‘Democracy and the Short Story’ (1920) by Raymond Knister. This phenomenon that harped upon the reception of modernist tendencies in European and mainstream American literature in keeping with the socio-cultural realities of contemporary Canada (Nischik 2008, 194), found some of its champions in Kristen and Morley Callaghan. With the success of the suffrage movement in England, it also struck a chord with a generation of women writers like Ethel Wilson, Sime Jessie Georgina and Gabrielle Roy who in the words of Jameela Begum, used modernist techniques to turn the short story into a “privileged vehicle for the self expression of a women [writers of Canada] because its protean and undefinable nature lent itself readily to paradoxes, probings, self-reflexivity and questionings” (Begum 1995, 148). This self-reflexivity that emerged to be the first step towards mapping the myriad contours of the female psyche, often repressed by the patriarchal machinery, was an essential feature of modernism in English-Canadian literature. Their stories lacked a linear action driven plot, frequently using modernist narrative techniques to highlight the thoughts and the emotions of the protagonist.

*The Inner Voice: A Study of the Fiction of Alice Munro*, the doctoral thesis of Mala Sharma, explores how Munro and her female contemporaries like Mavis Gallant, Audrey Thomas and Margaret Atwood, built upon the foundations laid by these women writers in terms of the exploration of the human, especially the female, psyche and at the same time experimented with storytelling techniques helping the genre reach new heights. The use of memory, epiphany and symbolic imagery as crucial narrative tropes and the deliberate interlinking of stories through the presence of common characters and common (regional) settings inform some of these experimentations, in the context of Munro. The tendency to explore the evil within the human soul through the use of symbolic (often dark) imagery, have induced some of the earliest critics of Munro’s work like Judith Miller (*The Art of Alice Munro: Saying the Unsayable*, 1884) and W. R. Martin to indentify the author, along with her friend and contemporary Margaret Atwood, as one of the practitioners of the “Southern Ontario Gothic” style of writing, that had first taken shape in the works of novelist like Barbara Gowdy, Marian Engels and James Reaney in the early decades of twentieth century.

JoAnn McCaig’s thorough exploration of the correspondences between Munro and her writer friend John Metcalf, her editors namely Douglas Gibson (Macmillan and later

McClelland and Stewart), Sherry Huber (Norton) and Ann Close (Knopf), her literary agent Virginia Barber and mentor Robert Weaver preserved in the Alice Munro Archives, University of Calgary, Canada as documented in her dissertation titled *Reading In: Alice Munro Archives* provides valuable insight into the process through which Munro and her contemporaries shifted the focus of the English-Canadian short story from its social realist concerns to more psychologically introspective ones. Understanding social-realist concerns and their manifestation in English-Canadian short story is therefore of paramount importance in this context.

The 1930s-40s, dominated by two major historical events – the economic depression of the 1930s and World War II - was a period of economic instability and social and political turmoil in English-Canada. The contemporary writers of short stories felt the need to reflect these realities in their stories. Literary journals like *New Frontier* and *The Canadian Forum*, published the works of Albert Laberge, Harry Bernard, Louis Dantin, Ted Allen, A.M. Klein and Sinclair Ross – stories that had a regional focus and had a primarily society-oriented realist approach. The linear, tight-knit, action driven plots of these stories harped upon the evils of poverty, unemployment, social inequality and atrocities of war that plagued the erstwhile society. A failing economy ensured that literary publications were few and far between. Short story as a genre was commercially successful to some extent, being published in popular literary magazines which were targeted at region-specific readerships, with hardly any exposure to a national/international readership. Its popular appeal ensured that it was not treated as a “high art form” by the critics, academicians and publishers, but rather as a rudimentary exercise in creative writing for aspiring writers, one that would eventually pave the way for one or more novels. The lack of a commercial market cogent for book publication deprived the stories of the long shelf-life, that proper anthologization can bestow upon literature.

The end of the Economic Depression followed by that of World War II in 1945, brought about economic, political and social stability in the lives of the Euro-Canadians. As the Liberal government came to power in Canada, it initiated a process of severing the administrative ties with Great Britain that began with the appointment of the first Canada-born Governor- General, Vincent Massey, without the permission of the British government in 1949 that culminated in the hoisting of the Maple-leaf flag in 1965. English-Canada, now, strove to forge a cultural identity independent of the “imported and inherited piety” for British culture. The report of the Massey commission (1949-51) went on to highlight the century old marginalization of Euro-Canadian writers by the Euro-American writers in the

international literary scene. All these factors triggered a wave of cultural nationalism which saw the government and the academia taking initiatives to promote the ‘new age’ English-Canadian literature, that encapsulated the post colonial sensibilities of the erstwhile society. Moreover, as the Canadian universities changed their approach towards literary criticism from Historicism to New Criticism, short stories became to the major pedagogic tool to teach the students of literature how to read, analyse and understand a text. This academic acceptance bestowed upon the English-Canadian short story a new found prestige. In his seminal work *Alice Munro: Pasradox and Parallel*, W. R. Martin, who looks into Munro’s early publications in periodicals like *The Tamarack Review*, *Fiddleheads* and *Chaterlaine* , highlights how the government grants for the literary artists, the writers-in-residence programmes and the CBC radio programmes that showcased the works of the English-Canadian short story writers and the initiatives to anthologise them shaped the career of Munro and her literary contemporaries like Margaret Atwood, Mavis Gallant, Margaret Lawrence, Mordecai Richler and Audrey Thomas.

Munro’s interviews, specially her Nobel Acceptance Speech, provides valuable insight into Munro’s struggle to establish her identity as a Canadian women short story writer- her nationality, gender identity, choice of career as well as her preference of literary genre being fraught with social, political, economic and cultural implications that have informed the postcolonial consciousness in the English-Canadian context. Her stories dwell upon the feelings of alienation and disillusionment within individuals striving to break free of the morally restrictive small town Ontario societies and embracing the ‘new age’ sensibilities pertaining to family, career opportunities, relocations and the changing dynamics of gender and class that informed the post-war, postcolonial English-Canada. Regionalism, as mentioned earlier, had been considered as a defining feature of English-Canadian culture since the pre-confederation years. Robert Thacker, in his essay “Short Fiction” (*Canadian Literature*, 2004), highlights how the post-colonial consciousness of the 1950s opened up a fresh debate as to whether regionalism should be looked upon as a negative force of fragmentation within the new discourse of cultural nationalism. Munro’s personal stance towards cultural nationalism and regionalism becomes extremely important in this context. Not only does she set the majority of her stories in small towns of southern Ontario and acknowledges to have drawn heavily from her own experiences of growing up in this region but she also goes on to identify herself as a regional writer, even going to the extent of looking at the concept of cultural nationalism as one that threatens to curb the cultural diversity of Canada. Much this deliberate dismissal if the discourse of cultural nationalism,

that too at an age when it has come to be closely associated with the conceptualisation of a national identity, I feel, was primarily prompted by a need to safeguard essentially regional focus of her literary works from critical speculations. The reasons that she chooses to articulate in her interview with Jean McCullough and Mona Simpson titled “The Art of Fiction No. 137, however, opens up the space for interrogating her choices and stances from a different light. Here she discusses how her preference for the short story as a genre is closely associated with her identity as a Canadian woman writer who hails from a small town and her empathetic identification with the works of women writers of American South like Flannery O’Conner and Eudora Welty: “The thing about the Southern writers that interested me, without my being really aware of it, was that all the Southern writers whom I really loved were women. I didn’t really like (William) Faulkner. There was a feeling that women could write about the freakish, the marginal. Yes, I came to feel that was our territory, whereas the mainstream big novel about real life was men’s territory” (McCullough and Simpson 1994, 12). These attempts to forge connections between her national, gender and professional identity is an skillful attempt at emphasising upon, and at the same time refuting the dichotomy between the national and regional, thereby drawing upon a legacy that has been an essential aspect of mainstream Canadian psyche since the nineteenth century. However as already discussed in detail, in spite such an ambiguous stance on the part of the author regarding her regionalism, one cannot deny the fact the decentralizing energy of the newly emergent postmodernism in Canada, had been instrumental in helping such a regional focus find legitimacy and relevance within the postcolonial cultural-nationalism evidenced in English-Canadian literature.

Thus, by locating Alice Munro at the crossroads of the various social, cultural, political and economic forces that shaped and sustained her as an individual and as a writer, I have been trying to understand and interrogate her literary experimentations at the interface of the discourses of gender, regionalism, nationalism and post colonialism as explicit in late twentieth century Canada. It is only by locating Nirmal Verma at the crossroads of these discourses within his own national and cultural paradigm, that I would be able to embark upon a cross-cultural research with conviction. Understanding the history of short story writing in Hindi literature, and contextualizing Verma within it would be the first step to achieve this end.

Mansoor Nazeer identifies “the genesis of the ‘idea’ of short story” in the Indian context in the “grand repositories of oral tales” (Nazeer 2004, 70) ( like *Kathasaritsagara*, the

tales of Jataka, *Panchamantra*, *Betal Panchavingsatika*, *Hitopodesh* and *Brihatkatha* and also in the rich gamut of stories that informed the ancient epics and the Vedic and the Puranic traditions and also the *quissa* tradition that had its earliest exponents in medieval Perso-Arabic culture . Unlike many other *bhasa-sahityas* of India, where the earliest examples of short narrative fiction drew heavily from rich corpus of Vedic mythologies and the *katha* literatures, the Hindi short story had its earliest precursors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century collections of short prose narratives like *Premasagar* and *Nasiketopakhyan* or in the *quissa(s)* (the most notable one being *Quissa Tota-maina*) that were primarily based on the secular theme of human love, the explicit descriptions of physical love and romantic sensuality therein, being instrumental in enhancing their ‘popular appeal’. Both their premises and their subject matters, however, were far from being in keeping with the contemporary realities of the Hindi readership. In order to understand the inception and evolution of the ‘modern’ short story within Hindi literary paradigm it is imperative that one takes cognition of the colonial and post colonial encounter between European literature and the Hindi language-literature. At the same time, it is also necessary to keep in mind that the “assimilation of ‘foreign’ (?) genres in Indian literature like the novel, the tragedy, the short story and the sonnet” (Das 2004 “The Assimilation of Foreign Genres” 17) needs to be addressed in the light of the awareness that “genres being firmly grounded in history, emerging and receiving shape in specific historical situations, are necessarily transformed as they find their way into the history and the literary traditions of other cultures” (Chakraborty Dasgupta 2004, iii). It was through the English educated Hindi speaking population’s exposure to the works of the contemporary English, French and Russian fiction that the ‘modern’ short story came to be a part of Hindi literature in colonial India.

An exploration of works like S. H. Vatsayana’s “Hindi Literature” (1959) and Indu Prakash Pandey’s *Hindi Literature: Traits and Trends* (1975) provides a comprehensive understanding of the emergence and evolution of the Hindi short story in the first half of the twentieth century. Though Bharatendu Harishchandra and his contemporaries like Raja Shiva Prasad Siterahind wrote “story-cum-essays or reportage which were more concerned with the events than the characters” (Pandey I.P. 1975, 175) in the late nineteenth century, it was only in the beginning of the twentieth century that short stories in the proper sense of the term began to be written and published in journals like *Saraswati*, *Sudarshan*, *Indu*, *Bharatmitra* and *Hindi-pradeep*. ‘Indumati’ written by Kishori Lal Goswami and published in *Saraswati* in 1900 is credited to be the first short story of Hindi *sahitya*. Many of this first generation of writers of the Hindi *kahani* like Goswami, Madhav Prasad Mishra,

Raja Radhika Raman Prasad Singh and Vaidya Nath Sharma often harped upon tales of Hindu mythology or were engaged in explicit depiction of love affairs. By then “contact became direct (with English) and other European influence (through the medium of English) became active also..... He (the Hindi writer) knew the work of Hugo and Dumas, and to a lesser degree of Moliere, Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant and Zola. Tolstoy, Turgeniev, Chekov were becoming familiar names” (Vatsayan 1959, 83-84). Cultural contact that resulted in a conscious (or not so conscious) reception the Western writers ensured that these early Hindi short stories had a well-structured plot but were overtly descriptive, some of them being reminiscent of the early nineteenth century collections of Hindi stories like *Premasagar* and *Nasiketopakkyan* in terms of their subject matters and their treatment. It was from the publication of Jayasankar Prasad’s ‘Gram’ in *Indu* followed by the publication of Chandradhar Sharma Guleri’s ‘Usne kaha tha’ in *Saraswati* in the years 1915 and 1916 respectively that the life of the rural Hindi speaking population of North India emerged as the major focus of the Hindi short story. But while Jayasankar Prasad (better known as a Chhayavadi poet), often called “an idealist with a romantic attitude...whose stories try to record what happens inside the mind of the characters, rather than outside” ( Pandey I. P. 1975, 181), and others belonging to the same school such as Rai Krishna Das, Chandi Prasad Pandey ‘Hridayaesh’, Govinda Vallabh Pant and Vinod Shanker Vyas continued to use a highly ornate Sanskritised ‘poetic’ prose to give voice to their tendency of romanticizing not only love but also the stark realities of life, well into the second decade of the twentieth century.

It was the Pragativad movement which came up as a response to the contemporary social and political turmoil plaguing colonial India that helped the Hindi short story to come of age primarily in the hands of one of its chief exponents Premchand. With the advent of Marxism in India came the idea of ‘Progressive’ which induced a group of writers to take a stand against the existing literary trends of many of the *bhasa-sahityas*, Hindi, Urdu and Bangla to name a few. *Pragativad* shifted the focus of Hindi short story towards the pressing issues of political repression and social injustices. The first manifesto of the Progressive Writers’ Association (PWA) adopted in the Foundation Conference held in 1936 sums up beautifully the essence of the ‘Progressive’

It is the duty of Indian writers to give expression to the changes taking place in Indian life and to assist the spirit of progress in the country by introducing scientific rationalism in literature...We believe that the new literature of India should deal with the basic problems of hunger, poverty, social backwardness

and political subjugation. That which drags us down to passivity, inaction and unreason, we reject as reactionary. All that arouses in us the critical spirit that examines customs and institutions in the light of reason and helps us to act, to organize ourselves, to transform, we accept as progressive. (Pandey I.P. 1975, 66)

Though strongly rooted in contemporary realities of colonial India, much of this vision had its roots in reception of Marxist philosophy within the Indian intellectual and political scenario. Premchand, the earliest writer to have shaped and endorsed such a vision too had strong Marxist inclination and has acknowledged to have been influenced by Russian writers like Tolstoy and Gorky. His first short story 'Pancha Parameswar' was published in *Saraswati* in 1916. In more than three hundred short stories that he wrote in Hindi (and Urdu), Premchand strove to give voice to the 'voiceless' and bring the marginalized to the centre. The subject matter and its treatment, being integral to the form, certain formal changes too strove to inform the Hindi short story, as it emerged as a potent medium for the articulation of Progressive thoughts and ideals. With a thorough knowledge of Realism that informed much of mid-late nineteenth century (Victorian) England and France as well as the Marxist literature of Russia (as mentioned above), Premchand was instrumental in making the Hindi short story *samayak* (pertaining to the contemporary social realities) and presenting the situation of the poor, deprived and exploited as it was without romanticizing it. Unlike the stories of Prasad and his followers in which hardly any action would take place and where the 'outside' that is the society remained only as a backdrop to explore the 'inside' that is the workings of the mind of the characters, Premchand's stories were highly society oriented. With a linear, chronologically progressive, action driven *kathanak*, these were third person narratives that consciously refrained from being overtly descriptive or sentimental. The tight-knit *kathanak* had no place for digressive sub-plots. The "pre-established design" would be such as to let stories like 'Kafan' or 'Sangati' end with an element of subversion that bestowed the protagonist(s) with an agency to protest against perpetual domination either through a direct act of defiance. At times the ending would be made poignant with a hard-hitting irony which in the writer's own words as articulated in the Presidential address of the first conference of PWA held in 1936 "agitates and moves our minds to fight" ( Premchand 1974, 1).



The Hindi short story continued to be shaped by *Pragativadi* writers like Bhagawati Charan Varma, Kaushik Sundershan, Upendranatha Ashka and Yashpal till the late 1940s. Published in the leading literary journals like *Hans*, *Prateek* and *Kalpna*, along with the *Pragativadi kavita*, these short stories were not only showered with popular appreciation, but also critical acclaim. Yashpal, a strong advocate of *samajvad* (socialism) and perhaps the most prominent *Pragativadi* writer in Hindi after Premchand, took the exploration of the stark realities of the lives of the socially, economically, politically deprived to a more complex level by his treatment of the subject matters concerned - his stories often addressed multiple number of issues pertaining to exploitations based on caste, class, religion, gender and even species, connecting them by a common thread of empathy and identification in the end. The complexity of the stories comes out through the “depth of implication” (Pasco 2017, 410), ensured by the use of narrative similes. With Yashpal’s stories like ‘Admi ka bachcha’ and ‘Parda’, the use of narrative similes emerges as a crucial element of storytelling in the *Pragativadi* Hindi *kahani*. The movement of the *kathanak* towards a conclusive hard-hitting climax, is often touched by a note of optimism, one that spells hope for the oppressed and marginalized.

In his path-breaking work, *Kahani: Nayi Kahani* (2009), literary critic Nanvar Singh highlights how the experimental works of the *Nayi Kahani* writers emerged as a force to reckon with at a time when *Pragativad* had begun to lose its relevance vis-à-vis the new age sensibilities of the urban middle class Hindi readership who strove to contemplate upon their ‘post colonial’ consciousness about nationhood, individual/social identity, regional/national identity, cultural nationalism and the changing gender dynamics, in the light of the social and cultural changes that informed the post-war, post-independence decades of mid-twentieth century India. The establishment of a sovereign secular democracy, marked an end to a long drawn political turmoil and brought about a period of social and economic stability that not only demanded but also encouraged literary experimentations. As mentioned before, the unprecedented power and prestige showered upon Hindi *bhasa*, through an attempt to declare it as the official language of the nation-state, bestowed Hindi literary artists with a responsibility to forge a cultural identity that spells cultural nationalism in the face of colonial and neocolonial Western cultural influences. The year 1954 saw the publication of *Kahani*, the first Hindi periodical meant exclusively for the short story, and with it emerged a new generation of short story writers, who turned Hindi *kahani* into the most effective medium of literary expression to explore the crisis of values faced by the Hindi speaking

urban middle class individuals of North India who were struggling to negotiate with the far reaching consequences of phenomena like the disintegration of joint families, economic emancipation of women, large scale migration from small towns to cities in search of better career opportunities and were also facing the challenges of coming in terms with changing notions of love, marriage and sexuality in the light of the changing dynamics of gender within the contemporary society. Of the older group of periodicals, *Kalpana* was one of the few that stood the test of time as it continued to reinvent itself in accordance with the changing sensibilities of the age, *Prateek* soon followed suite, being one of the first periodicals to understand and articulate the need to move away from the stories being written by the likes of Amritrai that were heavily influenced by the school of ‘*Krantikari romanticism*’ (Singh N, 2009, 17) of the Urdu writer Kishen Chander. Kamaleswar, in his *Nayi Kahani ki Bhumika* (1991), throws light on the very first words of formal recognition and appreciation for the *nayi kahani* as articulated by Chakradhar in ‘Sahitya Dhara’ (*Kalpana*, April 1954) clearly harps upon the conscious decision of the *nayi kahanikars* to not only move away from the storytelling techniques, themes and the (by then) formulaic characterizations of the *Pragativadi* short story writers, but also what C. S. Jossan calls (in his ‘Hindi Short Story and the Nayi Kahani Writing’) the “formalistic, over-intellectual” stories of writers like S. H. Vatsayan ‘Ajneya’ and Jainendra Kumar that were informed by an “over-indulgence in (individual) psychology” (76) :

एक लंबे समय के बाद छोटी कहानियां फिर से अपनी तरफ पाठकों का ध्यान आकृष्ट करनी लगी हैं। प्रेमचंद के बाद जैनेंद्र, अज्ञेय और यशपाल को छोड़कर सहसा पाठक हिंदी कहानियों में किसी भी ऐसी स्थान पर रुकने को बाध्य नहीं हुआ , जहा थमकर एक पीड़ी ऐसी मिली है , जिसने छोटी कहानियों की वस्तु और शैली समृद्धि की हैं।(Singh N. 2009, 176)

*Ek lambe samay ke bad chhoti kahaniyan phir se apni taraf pathako ka dhyan akristh karne lagi hain. Premchand ke bad Jainendra, Ajneya aur Yashpal ko chhodkar sahasa pathak Hindi kahaniyon mein kisi bhi aisi sthan par rukne ko badhya nahi hua, jaha thamkar ek pidi aisi mili hain , jisne chhoti kahaniyon ki vastu aur shaili samridhhi ki hain.* (Singh 176)

[The story stories have begun to attest the attention of the readers after a long time. Never after the times of Premchand , Jainendra Kumar and Ajneya have they come upon a generation of writers who have enriched the short story in terms of its subject matter and (formal) stylization.]

Both Ajneya and Jainendra Kumar who began their literary careers in the nineteen thirties were heavily influenced by Premchand. A close reading of Ajneya's *Pratinidhi Kahaniyan* reveals many of his early stories to have displayed a close affinity with the *pragativadi* tendencies, in terms of their subject matter as well as the story telling techniques. But at the same time, some of his early stories like 'Santi hansi thi'(1934) and 'Harsimgar' (1934) also harp upon the theme of alienation, loneliness and lack of effective communication with the society, making them some earliest predecessors *nayi kahani*. In spite of Ajneya's typical tendency towards overt philosophisation, intellectual ruminations and the lack of 'suggestiveness' perpetuated by an explicit expression of authorial intentions, one cannot deny the significance of such stories in shaping the literary premises for the emergence of *nayi kahani* two decades later.

The attributes pertaining to *nayi kahani* become even more prominent in a few of the twelve stories that Ajneya writes in the early 1950s, just before the *Nayi Kahani* movement had already started making a mark in the Hindi literary scenario. A story like 'Vedusre'(1950) that deals with alienation caused due to estrangement in arranged marriage, or a story like 'Samp'(1950) that highlights alienation in love caused due to incompatibility of lovers, not only address issues commonly taken up by the new generation of writers like Nirmal Verma, Kamaleswar and Mohan Rakesh but also, the nature of the *kathanak* and the narrative chronology and the use of symbols and épiphanic moments finds strong resonance with the story telling techniques of the *nayi kahanikers*. It is interesting to note that, the early 1950s sees such stories of Ajneya coexisting with his *pragatisheel* stories on the plight of the refugees and the devastations of war, at the wake of the partition of India. Though Ajneya consciously chooses to end his literary career with an articulate confession of his increasing difficulty to reinvent himself as a writer in accordance with the changing sensibilities of the age in 'Kalakar ki mrityu' (1954), "*Keval sandharma naya hota hain, aur wohi naya arth deta hain. Jo naye sandharma ko pahachanne ko taiyar ho, wo apne ap naya ho jata hain, or usme se naya arth bolne lagta hain*" (Singh 2009, 177) [There is a new way of looking at things, and it is this new sensibility that imparts a new meaning to everything, One who is ready to identify and accept this sensibility, automatically evolves into a new entity who exudes new understanding of life] it is he who emerges as a major source of inspiration for the writers of *nayi kahani*, acting as a major intermediary between the *Pragativadi* Hindi short story and the former.

The second issue of *Kahani* (Navavarshank 1956), edited by Bhairavprasad Gupta, emerged as a landmark in the history of Hindi short story writing by successfully putting an end to what Sripat Rai calls '*gatirodh*' (stagnation) that had come over the post-war Hindi short story. (Singh N. 2009, 176) But it was *Hans ardhavarshik* that published the short story 'Parinde' which is hailed as the pioneering text of Hindi *nayi kahani*. In his 'The Modern Hindi Short Story and Modern Hindi Criticism', G. C. Roadarmel identifies the major criteria that qualify a story as *nayi kahani* (in keeping with the enumerations of the *nayi kahanikars* themselves) as:

....authenticity (the author writes about the areas of life of which he has personal experience), the reflection of a 'modern consciousness' (meaning in practice that the author writes from a sense of disillusionment about life, though not despair, and poses questions rather than giving answers), newness (manifesting itself mainly in technique of writing characterized by involuted chronology, the use of symbols rather than similes, an emphasis on atmosphere rather than plot and climax.... (Damsteegt 1986, 217)

In an attempt to understand the nuances of this 'modern consciousness' which emerges to be the factor determining all the formal features he identifies to be salient to this new kind of short story in this definition, it is necessary to contextualize Nirmal Verma at the crossroads of the contact between Western modernism and postmodernism and mid twentieth century 'postcolonial' Indian realities. Though firmly grounded in his own philosophical and literary traditions, Verma's post colonial consciousness has been dismissed by Jaidev in his "Brilliance Sans Significance: The Fiction of Nirmal Verma", as an act of 'cultural relativism' (Jaidev 1988, 27). His interviews compiled in *Mere Sakshatkar* (2010) and his collection of essays like *Bharat aur Europe: Pratistruti ke Kshetra*(2003) throw light on the fact that his short stories have been shaped to a great extent by his reception of the western cultural influences acquired primarily through his formal education and an opportunity to enhance his understanding of Western modernism and existentialism during his stay in Europe. These Western influences along with a deep rooted understanding of the contemporary sensibilities and moral dilemmas of the urban middle class Hindi speaking community, forms the premises of his *nayi kahani*. The stories encapsulate Verma's experimental literary exploration of the *antarik yatharth* (Singh 2014, 30) ( inner experiential reality) of individuals oscillating between a habitual adherence to the traditional norms of the society and the desire to embrace the new age consciousness that comes at the wake of the

changing social circumstances in the mid twentieth century decades. Jaidev would identify Verma's literary endeavours to be examples of 'cultural pastiche' (Jaidev 1993, 32) - a complete (blind) emulation of the cultural codes of one culture into another without contextualizing it (36). However, with reference to my close reading of the stories and an understanding of Sukrita Paul Kumar's view on the same as articulated in his *New Story* (1990), I would like to argue that Verma does not imitate the cultural codes of Western modernism and postmodernism but rather receives them to an extent he finds them relevant to his own socio-cultural realities. Use of the so-called modernist techniques of "involved" (non-linear) narrative chronology, epiphany and the use of memory as a crucial narrative trope or the tendency to harp upon a postmodernist belief in the plurality of perceptions by highlighting multiple versions of the same event through photographs, dairies, letters or personal recapitulations are used consciously as and when deemed suitable to highlight the crisis of values within the contemporary North Indian urban society.

It is necessary to take cognition of the fact that, Verma's regionalism in the above discussed stories is distinctly different from the exploration of the '*anchalik*' in the works of Phanishwar Nath Renu or Markandeya. While the latter strives to make the voice of the region specific culture of the rural pockets within the Hindi speaking belt of North India, the former looks into the morally restrictive small town societies provides a suitable premise for the interrogation of the dilemmas of middle class individuals torn between the 'tradition' and the 'modernity'. However, as mentioned earlier, interrogating these two approaches towards regionalism reveals a common agenda of helping Hindi literature emerge as a microcosm of a postcolonial India that hails the idea of 'unity in diversity' as the underlying principle of its nation building process. Moreover, the impetus to explore the rich cultural diversity within the Hindi speaking population of India that came hand in hand with the rise of postcolonial consciousness within Hindi literature, further strengthened the call for such regional foci, in the later decades of the twentieth century. Works like Ved Raman Pandey's doctoral thesis on *Adhunikata Uttaradhunikata aur Nirmal Verma* and essays on Verma by the French scholar and translator Annie Montaut- 'The Politics and Stylistics of Nirmal Verma: From the Grammar of Indefiniteness to the subversion of gender oppositions' to name a few - have been instrumental in helping me formulate my understanding in the matter.

They have also helped me understand and acknowledge the significance of identifying some basic differences in the storytelling of Verma and his fellow practitioners of the *nayi kahani*. Verma's decision to make events unfold in quaint little cottage in an hillside

or a sparsely populated alley, bus stand, park, bar and library or a serene natural setting within these small towns was also a conscious one, for he found such locations to be ideal for uncovering and exploring what he wanted to: the inner gloom, loneliness and fragmentation within the contemporary urban Indian middle-class. It is necessary to take cognition of the fact that though of Verma's fellow *nayi kahanikars*, Mohan Rakesh, did have an affinity towards placing his stories in similar settings, Kamaleswar consciously chose to explore the mental estrangement of his protagonists from within the bustling, vibrant urban setups, where the superficial exchange of niceties could barely disguise the lack of real emotional investment in interpersonal relationships. Using symbolic imagery to evoke the 'grotesque' in order to explore the evil within the human soul lends a strong 'Gothic' undertone to his stories, especially the ones that are placed in the hill stations of North India. While both the writers display similar tendencies in terms of the nature of the *kathanak*, use of narrative chronology, and the other story telling techniques, Kamaleswar consciously avoids the explicit use of symbols. It is conscious decision on his part, for as he clearly states in his Introduction to *Mans ka Dariya and Other Stories*, he strongly feels the necessity of a *nayi kahanikar* to have a "practical" approach towards life in general and literature in particular. Thus the use of symbolic imagery renders the stories of the former multilayered, leaving much to the reader's imagination and interpretation, a feature that can hardly be found in the works of the latter.

Thus a comparative analysis of the respective biographical timelines of Alice Munro and Nirmal Verma coupled with a thorough exploration of the already existing body of scholarly work that looks into their literary endeavours, have helped me contextualize the short stories of the two authors within their respective literary traditions. It has also helped me draw parallels between their literary approaches – their conscious decision to shape the short story as the ideal genre to interrogate the 'postcolonial' urban middle class consciousness within their respective literary paradigms, their propensity towards situating themselves at the crossroads of modernist and postmodernist tendencies as manifested within English-Canadian and Hindi literature and their tendency to focus on the 'regional' and still find relevance within the postcolonial nationalist discourse informing their respective nation spaces - to name a few. Such revelations have provided me with a motivation as well as a basic foundation to embark upon a comparative cross cultural study of the formal and thematic experimentations undertaken by the two stalwarts and identify areas of congruences that would further help corroborate the above findings. In the following chapter, I would look

into three such potential areas of formal congruences – the use of narrativised time, epiphany and symbolic imagery in the short stories of Munro and Verma - thereby building bridges across cultures, nations and literary traditions.

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## Chapter Two

### **Narrative Techniques of Alice Munro and Nirmal Verma: Interrogating the generic contours of the short story across cultures**

A short story is not explicitly concerned with what came before its 'beginning' and what shall follow its 'end'. It stands separate and self-sufficient - a small perfect piece, sliced from the continuous strand of human experience. It is through this deliberate and necessary isolation that the short story first creates its own event and then endeavours to give it a shape and meaning. No other genre accommodates this difficult coexistence of the experience of indefiniteness, uncertainty and vagueness, on the one hand and sense of the finite, the limited and the particular on the other- at both the spatial and the temporal level. (Nazeer 2004, 76)

The words of Mansoor Nazeer as quoted in his essay 'The Short Story: An Exploration' beautifully enunciates the challenges that the need for the economy of words and expressions, poses for the practitioners of a genre that harps upon brevity as one of its defining features. The genre specific formal and stylistic experimentations of Alice Munro and Nirmal Verma have been essentially aimed at not only circumventing these "limitations" by employing narrative techniques that would help achieve "a certain unique or singular effect" (Poe 1942, 20), but using this very economy of words and episodic nature integral to the genre to arrest the attention and hold the interest of a postcolonial urban middle class English-Canadian and Hindi readership battling the pain of loneliness, fragmentation, alienation and modernisation in their increasingly fast paced life. These techniques are instrumental in providing a formal framework that is cogent to the theme(s) that the two literary stalwarts strive to explore in their works.

In her attempt to interrogate the 'postcolonial' within English-Canadian literature, Alice Munro consciously moves away from the social realist short stories with their tight-knit action driven plots and linear progression of narrativized incidents – ones that were being penned by the likes of A.M. Klein, Albert Laberge, Louis Dantin, Sinclair Ross and Henry Bernard in an attempt to look into the socio-political turmoil and the economic crisis that had plagued the nation at the wake of World War II and Economic Depression of the 1930s. With an aim to explore the psychological workings of the minds of individuals caught between an urge to fall back upon the morally restrictive pre-war values of their small-town Ontario societies and the longing to embrace the new age sensibilities pertaining to regional and national identities as well as the gender and class equations in the mid twentieth century decades, Munro experiments vividly with her storytelling techniques. Her unconventional



approach towards narrative chronotope, her tendency to harp upon symbolic ‘grotesque’ imagery to explore the dark crevices of human mind and her use of memory, remembrance and epiphany as crucial narrative tropes and all come together to achieve the desired singular effect. It is interesting to note how Nirmal Verma, whose *nayi kahani* marks a radical shift from the linear action driven *kathanak* of the social realist *Pragativadi* Hindi short story, uses similar narrative tropes and strategies to look into the “*gahan antarik samasya e*” (Singh 2009, 56) [problems deep within the mental terrain of thoughts and emotions] of middle class individuals of North Indian small town societies oscillating between a desire to adhere to the age old social and moral values and the post-independence ‘postcolonial’ consciousness pertaining to class and gender dynamics and regional/national identities. While the importance of memory and remembrance in shaping the narrative chronotope is encapsulated within the notion of time being “*chirantan vartaman*” (Verma 2001, 26) (eternally contemporaneous), the idea of epiphany finds a resonance in Verma’s notion of “*anayas samay*” (Verma 1976, 119) (involuntary moments). Use of symbolic ‘dark’ imagery, too, emerges as a crucial storytelling device to delve into the “often unfathomable depths of human personality” (Sharma 2014, 53) in his stories. Working within the methodological framework of genealogy, this chapter aims to understand the art of storytelling of the two literary artists in question, with special reference to these areas of intersection vis-à-vis their use of formal and stylistic devices, thereby establishing connections across two cultures and literary traditions.

I seem to turn out stories that violate the discipline of the short story form....What do I want to do? I want tell a story – what happens to somebody. But I want that ‘what happens’ to be delivered with quite a bit of interruption, turnarounds and strangeness. I want the readers to feel, something is astonishing, not ‘what happens’ but the way everything happens. These long short story fictions do that best for me. (“Reading Group Centre”, 1)

It is these ‘interruptions, turnarounds and strangeness’ Munro refers to in her interview titled ‘Reading Group Centre: A Conversation with Alice Munro’ which defies the ‘discipline’ belying the social realist short stories of the 1930s-40s - essentially informed by what William Boyd would call an “event plot”(Boyd 2017, 20) , where material tangible events unfold in the orderly sequence of exposition, complication, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution – that has shaped Munro’s art of storytelling for what it is . As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the generation of writers consisting of the likes of Ethel Wilson, Sheila Watson and Gabrielle Roy that emerged at the wake of the suffrage movement has been one of the earliest to have made an attempt to shape the English-Canadian short

story as an effective medium for exploring the myriad contours of human, especially female psyche. Munro, who builds substantially upon the foundations laid by these writers, emerges to be one of the earliest practitioners of the English-Canadian short story to have done away with this ‘event plot’ that strives towards an action-packed climax and seeks a proper conflict resolution. Though well aware of and firmly invested in her own literary tradition, Munro’s ‘postcolonial’ literary consciousness has been largely shaped by cultural influences of *imperial mater* England on the one hand, and that of the economically powerful neighbor United States of America on the other. Not only does Munro acknowledge the writers of the American South like Flannery O’Conner and Eudora Welty to have been a major influence on her writings (Nobel Acceptance Speech 4), but she also identifies the likes of Anton Chekov, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield to have played a significant role (Thacker *Alice Munro* 128-129) in governing her approach towards the genre of short story. Her approach shows a strong affinity with the Chekhovian plot as found in his stories like ‘The Bet’, ‘Ward No. 6’ and ‘The Lady with the Dog’, later taken up and made their own by the likes of Joyce and Mansfield. For Munro, the ‘event’ “is often invisible, even internal, as if nothing really ‘happens’ (Nazeer 2004, 76). This ‘internal’ event is all about mapping certain significant present and past experiences in the lives of the protagonists, the past often relived in their memory, and the thoughts and emotions that these experiences evoke at retrospect.

This idea of an ‘internal’ event finds a strong resonance in the way in which the *kathanak* of Hindi *nayi kahani* takes shape through the creative endeavours of its pioneer Nirmal Verma. His stories that in his own words are nothing but an attempt to explore the “*antarik yatharth*” (inner experiential reality) of the protagonists and “view the landscape of (their) blurred feelings” evoked by present and (recollected) past sensory experiences “in a glow of words” (Verma 2005, 139). The *ghatna sangathit kathanak* (Verma 2004, 140) [a plot based on external events] of the Hindi short story till then shaped by Premchand and his school of *Paragativaadi* writers like Yashpal, Upendranath Ashka and Amrit Rai, therefore, undergoes a complete transformation in the works of Verma, soon to be followed by his fellow *nayi kahanikars* Kamaleaswar and Mohan Rakesh. As already discussed in the previous chapter, the legacy of Ajneya and Jainendra Kumar, whose stories serve as the thematic and formal intermediary between the two literary movements in question, helps lay the cornerstones of such a transformation. But it is also necessary to take cognition of the fact that the ‘postcolonial’ literary consciousness of Verma has been greatly shaped by his ten

year long stay in Prague and his travels across Europe that not only introduced him to the existentialist philosophy of Kierkegaard, Camus, Kafka, Sartre and Octavio Paz but also enhanced his understanding of European modernism, as enunciated in the literary works of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust. The reception of the same in the Hindi literary context, as mentioned earlier, was not a mere act of cultural pastiche born out of what Jaidev refers to as ‘cultural relativism’ (Jaidev 1988, 26) but one born out of the relevance of the same in Verma’s own socio-cultural context. The ‘Indian brand of modernism’ (discussed previously) is nothing but a response to the crisis of values plaguing the middle urban postcolonial existence. His concern over the way in which the contemporary Indian society, governed by both socialist and capitalist forces and driven by technology and industrialization would impinge upon the agency and the basic dignity of an individual (Verma 1999, 38-39) and go on to generate “*bhayanak amanabiya mulya*” (grossly inhuman values) within him/her, is palpable in his interviews. What could be a situation more cogent for the reception of Western modernism and existential philosophy, than one where they would be deemed as relevant?

Times were changing, and it was imperative that literature registered these changes with honesty and integrity. The resultant transformation in the *dharana* (concept) of the *kathanak* in Hindi short story brought about by Verma has been speculated upon by the renowned literary critic Namvar Singh:

किसी समय नाटकीय और कौतुहालपूर्ण घटना संघटन को ही कथानक समझा जाता था। आज बहुत सी श्रेष्ठ कहानियाँ ऐसी मिलेगी जिसका कथानक चरव-उतरी, जिसमें पहाड़ी सरको की तारहा तो कदम कदम पर अकस्मिक मोड़ मिलेगा और न उचाई-निचाई हैं। इसे कुछ लोग "कथानक का हास" कहते हैं। परन्तु वस्तुविकता यहाँ हैं की हास कथानक न नहीं हुआ- वलकी जीवन का कोई एक प्रसंग, प्रसंग - खंड, मूड, विचारविशिष्ट व्यक्ति - चरित्र ही कथानक बन गया है। (Singh 2009, 14)

*Kisi samay natakiya aur kutuhalpurna ghatana sangathan ko hi kathanak samjha jata tha. Aj bahut si srestha kahaniyaan aisi milegi jiska kathanak charav-utarheen, jisme pahari sarkon ki tarhana toh kadam kadam par akasmik mod milega or na uchai-nichai hai. Ise kuch log "kathanak ka hras" kehte hain. Parantu vastavikta yaha hain ki hras kathanak ka nahi hua- balki jeevan ka koi ek prasanga, prasanga-khand, mood, vichar athva vishit byakti-charitra hi kathanak ban gaya hain*

[There was a time, when a sequential arrangement of dramatic and interest-evoking events was looked upon as a plot (of a story). Nowadays, one might come across many a great story whose plot is not invested with rising and falling actions. Neither do they come up with sudden twists and turns as one might encounter at every step of a hilly terrain, nor do they record any major ups and downs in action. Some call this “the depreciation of plot”. But in reality, there has been no depreciation of plot, rather a particular context or sub-

context of life, a mood, a thought-process or even the character sketch of an individual is now enough to constitute a plot.]

The notion of a *kathanak* being informed by the ‘*utar-charav*’ of action, as found in the *Pragativadi* short stories has a strong resonance in the structured sequence of rising action, climax and falling action, that is encapsulated within the Western concept of ‘event plot’. The very fact that a particular emotional crisis, mood or thought of an individual or even his/her basic subjectivity becomes synonymous to the plot of *nayi kahani*, as the above quote enunciates, accords for Verma’s approach towards narrative chronotope. Both the literary stalwarts, thus, harp upon a narrative structure that is not informed by a linear progression of incidents and tends to oscillate between different spatial and temporal realities, thereby mapping the complex web of thoughts and emotions of an individual. Instead of providing an emphatic resolution of conflict(s), such a narrative structure often renders their stories open-ended - somewhat inconclusive- leaving much to the reader’s imagination and interpretation. It is this approach towards narrativized time, that has been identified as the first of the three aspects of the art of storytelling of Munro and Verma that this chapter would focus on.

Some of the finest examples of Munro’s approach towards narrativized time may be found in her early short stories, many of which deal with the coming-of-age experiences of children and adolescents within the small town Ontario societies that looked upon any act of deviation from its norms and any ambition to transgress its conservative moral boundaries with suspicion and contempt. ‘The Peace of Utrecht’, that was published as a part of her first collection of short stories *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) is perhaps one of her earliest literary endeavours to exemplify this notion of time. The story focuses on the feelings of a young mother Helen, who returns to her hometown Jubilee after ten long years, to mourn the loss of her long-suffering mother. It moves to and from between the protagonist’s present reality and her memories of growing up within a socially and morally restrictive small-town society and her longing to escape for “much bigger things than Jubilee” (Munro 1968, 192).

At half past ten a bus goes through the town, not slowing much: we see it go by at the end of our street. It is the same bus that I used to take when I came home from college, and I remember coming into Jubilee on some warm night, seeing the earth bare around the massive root of some trees, the drinking fountains surrounded by little puddles of water, on the main street, the soft scrawls of blue, red and orange light that said BILLIARDS AND CAFÉ; feeling as I recognized these signs a queer kind of oppression and release, as I exchanged the whole holiday world of school, of friends and, late on, of love for the dim world of continuing disaster of home. Maddy making the journey four years earlier must have felt the same thing. I want to ask her. But I don’t. We never talk about such things. (Munro 2000, 192)

In the above quoted section, the narrative follows the train of thoughts evoked within the protagonist at the sight of a bus from the balcony. One cannot forgo the unmistakable affinity of this approach towards narrativized time with the ‘stream of consciousness technique’ employed by Joyce or Mansfield, two of the major influences on Munro (as mentioned above). For Helen, a present experience opens the Pandora’s box of the past and the memory of ‘oppression and release’ that marked her feeling of coming home to a cranky and chronically ill mother as a college student overlaps with her current guilt of shirking her responsibilities and forcing her elder sister Maddy to give up on her dreams and aspirations to take care of their mother all by herself. It is this guilt that ultimately induces her to confront her estranged sister in an attempt to bridge the long-standing gap of communication between them. This notion of narrativized time is predicted on what E. D. Blodgett would call “a psychological sense of time” (Blodgett 2014, 3) in his paper on ‘Time and Fallibility in the Narration of Alice Munro’ – one that resonates with Henri Bergson’s modernist idea of understanding time as *durée* (duration). Duration, as enunciated in the seminal work *Memory and Matter* (1896), harps upon an indivisible continuity between the past, present and the future within human psyche. Munro’s art of storytelling, invites the reader to conceive every moment in time as a synthesis of the past and the present and with a view to future. Helen’s memories when revisited through the lens of her present realizations, attains new significances which in turn influences and governs her future actions. As the author herself points out in ‘The Ottawa valley’ (*Lives of Girls and Women*), the human mind is such that “scenes from the past were liable to pop up at any time, like lantern slides, against the cluttered fabric of the present.” (Munro 1971, 74). It is these complex pathways of human thought process that she strives to traverse through her use of memory as a crucial narrative trope.

The above quoted section of the story section highlights the organic relationship that exists between an individual’s memory and the history and the landscape of the region that forms the setting of Munro’s stories. Much of this relationship is predicated upon autobiographical elements pertaining to her personal experience of growing up in Wingham, a small town of south western Ontario. The way in which her identity as a ‘regional writer’, as she considers herself as one (McCaig 14), shapes her notion of time is even more clearly enunciated in her short story cycles – be it *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) or the *Beggar Maid* (1980) – that consist of stories linked not only by a common setting but also the recurring presence of the same characters, a form experimented with by some of her most

prominent contemporaries like Margaret Atwood, Sandra Birdshell and Margaret Lawrence too. The way in which the subjective nature of individual memory eludes documentation, is beautifully expressed through the frustration of writer Del Jordan in 'Epilogue: The Photographer', the closing story of *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), at her failed attempt at chronicling the "history" of Jubilee of her childhood. While she could list the names of the streets, the stores and their owners, the tombstones in the cemetery and even the titles of the movies that played in the Lyceum theatre in her years of childhood and adolescence, "no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark and walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together – radiant and everlasting" (Munro 1971, 236). As she realizes from her first-hand experience – memory is special, specific and individual, she understands how every lived moment encapsulates with it much more than mere physical coordinates of existences. These physical coordinates change with time, altering the external contours of the setting within which an event had once unfolded. Those who had lived through it, however, preserve things as it were, in their remembrance. It their nostalgia or at times even trauma (depending on the nature of the memory) triggered through a re-visitation of that location that bridges the gap created by those external changes. This approach elevates Huron Country, Ontario where Munro places her fictional towns like Tuppertown (*Dance of the Happy Shades*), Jubilee (*Lives of Girls and Women*) and Hanratty (*The Beggar Maid*, 1980) from being a mere geo-political backdrop for the unfolding of the narrative, to a living, ever changing entity that forges connections between the 'past' and the 'present' of the characters residing therein. The 'spacial' and the 'temporal' coordinates get interconnected within the invisible yet emotionally palpable landscape of the human mind, and few could trace this connection as poignantly as Munro.

As already discussed, the *Nayi Kahani* movement as ushered in by the literary endeavours of Nirmal Verma sees a transformation come over the nature of the *kathanak* of Hindi short story. No longer is it informed by the chronologically linear progression of real tangible events, as it had the most potent vehicle of *Pragativaad* in the preceding decades. The twelve stories that Ajneya writes in the early 1950s, act as the thematic and formal intermediary between the two movements. A story like 'Ve Dusre'(1950) that deals with alienation caused due to estrangement in arranged marriage, or a story like 'Samp'(1950) that highlights alienation in love caused due to incompatibility of lovers, not only address issues commonly taken up by the new generation of writers like Nirmal Verma, Kamaleswar and

Mohan Rakesh but also, the nature of the *kathanak* and the narrative chronology and épihanic moments finds strongly anticipates with the story telling techniques of the *nayi kahanikers*. In keeping with the themes Verma strives to explore in his stories, his approach towards narrativized time builds on the foundation laid by Ajneya and the Western modernist writers he had been exposed to, and is predicated primarily on a subjective psychological notion of time, where memories of the past and the present sensory experiences form a colourful tapestry of thoughts, emotions, aspirations and realizations. It is this notion of time that shapes his art of storytelling for what it is. As expressed beautifully in his own words: “Certain snatches of conversation, certain glimpses, certain sounds, which though, later lost in the maze of routine bound years, return as if with a vengeance, just when a person, unaware, walks down a street or waits for a bus or lies in bed over a moment suspended between sleep and wakefulness.”(Verma 1999, 10) The earliest manifestation of such an approach may be found in his path breaking story ‘Parinde’, published in *Hans Ardharshank* in the year 1956 and later anthologized in his first collection of short stories *Parinde* (1959). The story, credited to have ushered in the *Nayi Kahani* movement in Hindi literature is undoubtedly a product of the phenomenon of the ‘Indian brand of modernism’ in Hindi literature and bears testimony to a strong presence of modernist aesthetics in Verma’s understanding of narrativised time. The story offers an insight into the mind of Latika, a warden of a residential girls’ school in a hill station who leads a solitary life avoiding explicit socialization with her colleagues and acquaintances and choosing rather to live with the memories of her deceased lover Major Girish Negi. The crucial role played by memory as a major narrative trope of *nayi kahani* becomes apparent through the frequent evocation of Latika’s memory of falling in love with Major Negi in the first year of her service.

पियानो की खानिक् 'pause' में लतिका को पत्तों का परिचित मुर्मुर् कहीं दूर अनजानी दिशा से आता हुआ सुनाई जाता है। और उसे लगा की पियानो का सुर अतीत की धुंध को भेड़ते हुए स्वयम उस धुंध का भाग बनने जा रहा है। एक पगली सी स्मृति, एक उद्भ्रांत भावना - चैपल के शीशों के परे पहाड़ी सुखी हवा, हवा पे ढुकी हुई वीपिंग् विल्लोस की काप्ति तहानिया, पैरों तले चीड़ के पत्ति की धीमी सी खाद- खाद..... वही पर गिरीश एक हात मे मिलिट्री की खाकी लिए खड़ा है। चार्ल्स बोयेर, यह नाम उसने रखा था, गिरीश धोपकर हँसने लगता। " तुम्हे आर्मी में किसने चुन लिया? मेजॉर् बन गए हो लेकिन लड़कियों से भी गये- बीते हो, ज़रा ज़रा सी बात पर चेहरा लाल हो जाती है। "..... यह सब बे केहती नहीं, सिर्फ सोचती भर थी - सोचा था कभी कहूंगी, बह ' कभी' कभी नहीं आया (Verma 2008, 119)

*Piano ki khanik 'pause' me Latika ko patto ka parichit murmur kahi dur anjani disha se ata huya shunai jata hain. Aur use laga ki piano ka sur atit ki dhundh ko bhedte huye swayam us dhudh ka bhag banne jar aha hain. Ek pagli si smriti, ek udhbrants bhavna – chapel ke shishon ke pare pahari sukhi hawa , hawa me dhuki*

*huyi weeping willows ki kapti tahaniya, peyeron tale cheed ke patti ki dhimi si khad-khad....., Wahi par Girish ek haat me military ka khaki hat liye khada hain. Charles Boyer, yeh naam usne rakkha tha, Girish dhopkar hasne lagta. "Tumhe army me kisne chun liya? Major ban gaye ho, lekin ladkiyon se bhi gaye-bite ho, zara zara si baat par chehra lal ho jati hain." .... Yeh sab vah kehti nahi , sirf sochti bhar thi – socha tha kabhi kahungi, vah 'kabhi' kabhi nahi aya. (Parinde 119)*

[In the momentary pauses offered by the chiming piano, Latika can hear the familiar rustling of leaves drifting towards her from an unknown far-off terrain. And it seemed to her as if the strains of the piano, in its attempt to penetrate the mist of memory, was itself becoming a part of it. A sweetly arduous memory, an unrestrained thought – the refreshing mountain winds encircling the chapel windows, the shaking branches of the weeping willow bent double in the wind, the soft rumble of leaves being crushed under the feet....there stands Girish, his brown military hat held in his hands. Charles Boyer, she would call him. Girish would blush and break into laughter. "Who inducted you into the army, I wonder? You are a Major, yet more coy than any girl - turning scarlet at the slightest provocations!"....She had never really said this aloud, it was just a thought that she had dreamt of articulating someday. That 'someday' never came.]

The rustling of leaves and the tune of the piano in Latika's present, reminds her the of the rustle of the leaves of a particular weeping willow heard long ago, evoking a *smriti* of Girish standing elegantly under it – one that would govern Latika's future response towards the romantic advances of her colleague Hubert. Her thoughts then move on to things she wished she would have said to her lover in happier times. Throughout the narrative, *smriti* (recollections), *vastavikta* (reality) and unfulfilled desires and aspirations come to be enmeshed within a tapestry of thoughts, highlighting the psychological dilemma of an economically emancipated so called 'modern' woman with a successful career, torn between the desire to feel loved again and a need to adhere to the conventional notion of Indian womanhood, that extols a lifelong faithfulness towards a single partner as one of the greatest female virtues, thereby exemplifying Verma's notion of narrativized time beautifully. As he enunciates in his essay 'Kala, Mythak or Yatharth', time for him is "*chirantan vartaman*" (Verma 2005, 26) (eternally contemporaneous) where the past present and future are so closely intertwined that the independent existence of one becomes meaningless without the others. This notion of eternal contemporaneity of time that shapes his art of storytelling too, resonates deeply with the Bergsonian notion of duration, thereby testifying to the unmistakable presence of modernist aesthetics in his conceptualization of narrativised time. What Munro strives to convey about the characteristic feature of her narrative chronotope through her analogy of lantern slides is manifest in Verma's "world of similarities and associations, in which one object reminds us of another, where one memory emerged from another like a peel of an onion" (Verma 1976, 119). The way in which words that Latika had



wanted to say to her beloved someday, but never actually did, initially fits smoothly into her memory of a past experience she had actually had (its authenticity questioned only as an afterthought), brings to light the issue of reliability of memory, one that informs Munro's art of storytelling too.

As discussed previously, though never a self-declared 'regional writer' like Munro, most of Verma's short stories set in the small-towns particularly hill stations of North India (with only a few set in Delhi or Prague), have a strong regional focus, that harps upon his experiences of his own life of observations on others' lives unfolding within the mid-late twentieth century realities of those small-town spaces. The organic continuity that exists between the temporal consciousness of an individual and the nature, landscape of his/her spatial location, that informs Munro's short stories, is instrumental in shaping Verma's notion of narrativized time, too. As he himself says in "Samvaad ki Maryadayein":

I feel deeply fascinated by the invisible relationship between the action of the story and its ambience – where it is taking place – and the process through which a larger relationship is established between the individuals and an unformulated but very sensual and tangible sort of environment in which they are operating. Whether it is the mountains or the cityscape, this depends on the theme I have chosen. (Verma 1999, 15)

The way in which the dry autumnal winds and withering vegetation of the hills connects Latika's exuberant past with her bleak present in her thoughts exemplifies this aspect of Verma's storytelling beautifully. Many of his stories are set in a sparsely populated alley/park/bar/library or a serene natural setting or dilapidated houses or even the confinement room for the sick – ones that provide a minimal opportunity for social interactions, thereby opening up the vista of thoughts, retrospections and reminiscences of individuals, each connected with and often overlapping the other, thereby involuting the narrative chronotope rendering the *kathanak* multi-layered. Perfect examples may be found in the stories like 'A Splinter of the Sun' (*The Last Exit* 1999) or 'Dedh inch upar' (*Jalti Jhari* 1965) where a woman sitting all by herself in a park bench or a man drinking alone in a pub are seen to strike up a conversation with random strangers occupying the seat beside them. The readers, who only get to hear (read) the protagonist's side of the conversation and are only left to guess the response from the other side, are struck by the tone of familiarity that these individuals assume, sharing the most intimate details of their lives – the pain of surviving a broken marriage and childlessness and the social taboo associated with them for one, and the hurt of not being confided about the active involvement in revolutionary politics of a wife he had always known to be a homemaker, for the other- with people they have just

met. This strategy of mapping the thoughts process of an individual through a one-sided conversation imbues the narrative with a sense of mystery. One almost begins to doubt the presence of a second entity in the conversation - the protagonists might as well be thinking aloud. Such an approach induces the narrative to constantly move across time and space, offering the readers a glimpse into the way the human mind works. This comes out beautifully through the way in which the protagonist of the first story talks about the church that could be seen from the park, the same church she had been married in fifteen years ago:

Look, some cops have joined the (wedding) group outside the church. If it goes on swelling like this it will hold up the traffic. We have warm sunshine today but I have seen shivering people standing around expectantly on cold days. I have seen all this for years now. Sometimes I suspect the men in crowd over there are those who came to my wedding in this church fifteen years ago. Yes I was married here. My father was with me. My heart pounded like mad. Do you think if one of those men who watched me walk to the church in my bridal white saw me now sitting on the bench he did recognize me? I don't know about the men, but that brace of horses (drawing the bridal carriage) would surely recognize me? Yes, horses puzzle me. Have you ever looked into their sad mournful eyes? It seems there is no greater misfortune than becoming used to your lot. (*Munro 1999, 9*)

The above quoted section not only sees Verma's belief in the eternal contemporaneity of human conscious being woven into his narrative structure, but also highlights the importance of the setting in which the story unfolds in shaping the narrative the way it is. The inner turmoil and the feeling of alienation of an economically emancipated woman who takes the decision to end her marriage for the lack of love and loyalty therein, yet cannot completely forgo the age-old notion of looking at marriage as a sanctified eternal bond between two individuals that has traditionally induced Indian society to frown upon divorce, comes out beautifully not only through the flow of her thoughts but also through the setting of the story. The park, though a seemingly 'public arena', offers a view of the church, that evokes the 'private' and the 'personal' in myriad shades of recollections and emotions. It is necessary to take cognition of the fact that though Verma's fellow *nayi kahanikar*, Mohan Rakesh and Mannu Bhandari, did have an affinity towards placing his stories in similar small-town settings, Kamaleswar consciously chose to explore the mental estrangement of his protagonists from within the bustling, vibrant urban setups, where the superficial exchange of niceties could barely disguise the lack of real emotional investment in interpersonal relationships. Largely reminiscent of Munro's intertwined spacio-temporal consciousness, a poignantly evocative relationship between space and eternally contemporaneous time, thus comes to inform the Hindi literary consciousness through *nayi kahani*, in a much needed

attempt to make to relevant to the contemporary modernist concern over finding the one real abstract meaning of life for the lonely alienated urban middle class readership.

But, though both Verma and Munro play with time in a way that throws light on a very strong presence of modernist aesthetics therein, doubts regarding the presence of any one singular meaning of life had already begun to creep in within both their respective paradigms. As discussed previously, postmodernist philosophy and aesthetics, with its emphasis upon plurality of perspectives and contingently on multiple subjective meanings of life, had already begun to make its presence felt in English-Canadian literature and Hindi literature, and Munro and Verma began to inculcate it with as much depth and intricacy as the modernist worldview, it strove to question. Truly conjectural in terms of their aesthetic standpoint, both the authors locate their approach towards narrativised time at the crossroads of modernist and postmodernist beliefs – thereby emerging to be a true representative of the transitional literary consciousness of their times. It is precisely because of this reason that both the authors are weary of affiliating themselves with any particular movement or school of thought. While it was Namvar Singh, and not Verma, who described the stories of *Parinde* (1958) as the first expression of *nayi kahani* for “the sensibility and language of Verma's stories was unique. Singh felt that these marked a major shift from the kind of stories that Hindi literature had seen till then - not only in terms of form and content, but also sensibility. Nobody before Verma had been able to create such a *parivesh* (ambience) through his storytelling!” (Ved Raman Pandey, email correspondence with the scholar, December 27, 2021); his Canadian counterpart too tried to steer clear of literary categorizations and compartmentalizations of any sort. As Professor Lorraine York highlights in a personal correspondence: “Few (writers) wish to be pinned down, restricted to a particular aesthetic. Part of this has to do with the desire for openness and experimentation, and even in the case of Munro who seems to have such a well defined aesthetic, there have been significant shifts in her methods and styles” (Lorraine York, email correspondence with the author, July 8, 2019) This ‘shift’ when it came to modernist and postmodernist aesthetics was not necessarily a one way traffic – but a journey to and fro, where both would co-exist playing out their respective roles as deemed relevant to the storytelling process. Looking at time through memory as encapsulated within personal recollections, photographs, journals, dairies and even dreams emerges to be the ideal way to highlight subjective, pluralistic nature of lived and remembered time, and thereby the that of the ‘truth’ (truths?) arrived at through it.

For Munro, Such a tendency becomes apparent in Munro as early as her very first collection of short stories - one of the most intricately complex enunciations being identified the 'eace of Utrecht'. While memories of their mother being a source of social embarrassment unites the two sisters in an unspoken bond of empathetic understanding, the memory of her pre- Parkinson's disease days (or the lack of it) builds an invisible wall between the one who managed to "escape" her responsibility and the one who could not:

*I ask Maddy, "Do you remember what she was like before?"*

*"No", says Maddy, "No I can't"*

*"I sometimes think I can," I say hesitantly, "Not very often."*

*Cowardly tender nostalgia, trying to get back to a gentler truth.*

*"I think you would have to have been away," Maddy says, "You would have to have been away these last- quite a few- years to get those kinds of memories. (Munro 1971, 202)*

The very lack of conviction in the protagonist's tone calls upon the reader to question the suitability of memory as a reliable source for the factual documentation of the past. The phenomenon of selective remembrance made possible through the subjective nature of memory, often used as a defence mechanism to negotiate with shame and trauma, is embedded deep within language, shaping the narrative chronotope accordingly. This is exemplified beautifully in one of her final creation, the story 'Gravel' from *Dear Life* (2013), which begins with a woman reminiscing about the turbulent months of her childhood immediately following the separation of her parents, that were spent living in a trailer with Pete, the erratic and irresponsible lover of her mother – months that led up to her elder sister Caro drowning in a gravel pit. The narrative then goes on to highlight how the incident of Caro's death has shaped her as an adult, harping upon the role of trauma in connecting the past and the present in a seamless continuum of duration. Her memory of the incident already affected by the guilt not being quick enough to intimate the elders about Caro's fake act of trying to save Blitzee, the dog, from drowning in the pit, attains a new dimension when the first-person narration of a blurred memory gives way to a dream sequence. This sequence provides an alternate version of event, not as it had happened in reality, but the way the narrator-protagonist wished it had:

In my mind I can see Caro backing up to take a run at the water. But I can't recall the sound of the slashes as they (Caro and Blitzee), one after the other hit the water. Perhaps I had turned towards the trailer by then – I must have done so. When I dream of this, I am always running – not towards the trailer but back towards the gravel pit. I can see Blitzee, floundering around and Caro swimming towards her, swimming strongly on the

way to rescue her....All I have to do is watch and be happy – nothing required of me at all. (Munro 2012, 102-103)

However, the protagonist insists to have known it for a “fact” that she had returned to the trailer and had she not wasted so much time sitting outside without knocking on the door, her sister would have been alive. Yet, what immediately follows this assertion is a confession on her part to have let her counsellor convince her about the authenticity of another version of the incident, in which Pete and her mother engaged in lovemaking had refuse to open the door in spite of her vehement knocking, thereby absolving her of the feeling of guilt. It is this unique feature of placing one after the other multiple versions of the same incident as created in the mind of an individual that lends the narrative “onion skinned layers of multiple meanings and levels of reality” (Rasporich 1990, 164). Such dream sequences, interrupting the linear narration of events, in an attempt to reconstruct the traumatic past in a more positive light in the minds of the individuals is found in other stories too. In the dreams of Doree of ‘Dimensions’ (*Too Much Happiness*, 2009) who had run up to her house to meet the horrific sight of her children lying murdered by her dominating husband Lloyd to teach her a lesson for defying him, one of the kids suddenly sits up and starts laughing. The entire incident is proved to be a prank her family has played on her. Juxtaposition of this dream sequence, that is nothing but the projection of a shocked and bereaved mother’s wishful thinking, with the actual incident involutes the narrative chronology, lending the narrative a multi-layered structure.

Many of Munro’s stories play with the subjective nature of memory to interrogate its reliability through a juxtaposition of multiple retellings of a past incident from the perspectives of different individuals. As the author herself admits in an interview with David Macfarlane: “What I want is a lot of overlap. I want things to come in as many layers as possible, which means that stories have to come from as many people as possible, with their different baggage of memories. And then I have to hold them still in one frame” (Macfarlane 1986, 54). For many of the early years of her childhood, the young protagonist of ‘Progress of Love’ (*Progress of Love*, 1986) had known her maternal grandfather to have been an unfaithful husband who had almost driven his wife to suicide. Her mother Marietta who had been sent all the way down to her father’s workplace to intimate him about her mother’s attempt to hang herself, hated her father for this incident, refusing to acknowledge him as his guardian thereafter, to the extent of burning her inheritance in fire. But a sudden visit from the protagonist’s aunt Beryl, reveals the same incident in a different light. In Beryl’s version

of the story, the entire incident had been nothing but a joke taken too far - a prank played on her father by his slightly eccentric wife for being popular with the members of the opposite gender in his workplace – for she had noticed that the noose of the rope had not been tied to the beam at all and heard her mother laugh and joke about the whole thing thereafter. The different versions of the same event as encapsulated in the memory of each of the sisters, have not only shaped them as individuals but have also govern their basic attitude towards life. The conscious decision of the author of not prioritizing the truth claim of one version of the incident over the other highlights her attempt at using time and memory in a way so as to acknowledge the plurality of human perception in her stories. The narrator, and in turn the reader comes to realize that Beryl, whose memory is unmarked by the trauma her sister had to go through, can afford to take a much more light-hearted stance towards the incident than Marietta. One of the unique qualities of Munro’s storytelling, thus, emerges to be the ability to accommodate different perceptions of ‘reality’, thereby “enclosing disparity and contradictions within the same fictional space, while always recognizing that there is an “outside” that resists the accommodation that her fiction offers” (Fernandes 2004, 349). Such juxtaposition of different, often conflicting versions of the same incident imbues the stories with an open-endedness, leaving much to the reader’s speculation and interpretation. As the author herself notes in her tribute to editor William Maxwell in the *New Yorker*, “there is something new with each telling, some new action at the periphery or some revelation in the centre, a different light or shading, a discovery, as there must be in the stories at the heart of our lives “. (Munro 2000, 40-41) Dream sequences also come up as an important narrative device to establish connections between a happy past and a bleak present, or a traumatic past with a more emotionally stable present of an individual as found in the story ‘Beside the Lake’ (*Runaway*, 2004) , where a woman confined in a mental asylum relives the happy memory her last day spent outside the asylum in her dream. The narrative begins with the middle-aged protagonist undertaking a journey in to meet of her doctor, goes on to describe her experience of driving across towns, meeting new people and connecting with the regional nature and landscape till she finally lands up in a claustrophobic asylum. It is only at the very end that the entire narrative is revealed to be a dream sequence, when the protagonist, now a frail old woman, is shaken awake by a nurse of the asylum.

Verma, too is found to experiment with dream sequences that help the narrative to traverse across time and space, often blurring the boundaries between the past and the present, emphasizing in the process the postmodernist belief in the subjectivity of ‘truth’ and

plurality of perspectives. As in the works of Munro, such a sequence emerges as a window to the past, connecting various strands of lived experiences of an individual in a thread of psychological continuity as found in the story ‘Crows of Deliverance’ (*The Lat Exit*, 1999). A meeting with a much-loved older brother, who had left home ten years ago, evokes mixed mixings in the middle-aged protagonist. On one hand his heart is flooded with relief and affection and a sense of awe for the man who had turned into an ascetic revered by the people of the hill station he now resided in, and on the other he cannot help but dwell upon the memories of the traumatic experiences suffered by his dear ones at the wake of the sudden disappearance of the eldest son of the family. As he observes disciples seeking his brother’s blessing in the courtyard, from within the shack, he drifts off to sleep. It is interesting to note that the dream that follows thereafter – one that emerges as a projection of the protagonist’s ambivalent attitude towards his brother – is not identified by a break in the narrative or italicization. In fact, it appears to be a continuation of his thoughts in his state of wakefulness, and is only revealed for what it is when his brother shakes him awake:

And then my mind floated back across several years to the time I’d done the rounds of morgues in search of him. It seemed to me I was one of the many lining up in front of the platform to receive his blessings...to catch a glimpse of him from close up. But it was another time, another place: instead of the platform there were slabs of ice on which corpses lay like dead fish....I was jostled and pushed and carried onwards, on and on up through the next ten years. I imagined I was lying on a cold slab of a floor and he was leaning over me concerned.

“*Chhote!*” he was calling out to me. I sat up startled. (Verma 1999, 132)

His brother’s attempt to wake him up appears to him to be his imagination till the moment he actually sits up startled. This overlapping of the past and the present as facilitated through a dream, blurs the boundaries between the ‘alternate reality’ projected through it and the ‘reality’ that his brother-turned-ascetic endorses.

The dream lets the story end in an inconclusive note, letting the reader dwell upon the idea that he would perhaps never be able to get to reconcile himself with the loss of his brother, but also with a subtle hint he might not ever give up on him either. While the vow of asceticism spells colours of senerenity, peace, freedom from worldly coordinates and love aand respect of the disciples and local villagers for the elder brother, it spells the trauma of searching for a missing dear one, perpetual anxiety over his whereabouts and wellbeing and the burden of shouldering the familial responsibilities all by himself. Each lives with and believes in his version of ‘truth’, none less valid than the other. Dreams, thus emerge to be an

effective narrative device to highlight the co-existence of multiple 'realities', multiple 'truths' and multiple 'meanings' of life – in a way that largely resonates with the purpose of dream sequences within the Munroian universe. This affinity holds true in the case of photographs too.

Both the writers highlight the presence of postmodernist aesthetics in their perception of reality through the use of photographs. As writers “experimenting with fictional forms which emphasize non-linearity (of lived experiences)” (York 1988, 17) they tend to use the apparent ability of a photograph to freeze a moment in time, without taking cognition of even the moments before and after, to interrogate the nature of ‘truth’ in human life. For Verma, two of the earliest and finest of such interrogations may be identified in ‘Dairy ka khel’ and ‘Andhere me’ from *Parinde* (1958). While the world perceives Bitti from the former as a ‘plain’ (not beautiful enough for the ‘marriage market’) looking ailing small-town girl from Kanpur who seeks to and needs to validate her existence by getting married into any family that would accept her, to her cousin Babu she is the girl she loved to dream, believed in future prospects other than marriage and wished to live life in her own terms and the smiling photograph of Bitti he had pasted in his scrapbook made him understand this. He knew (perceived) a different ‘reality’ about Bitti that none knew, just as the Bachchi for the latter story did for her schizophreniac mother Pono. The townspeople, her family and even her husband perceived her as an unloving uncaring infidel mentally deranged woman, who needed to be controlled and restrained, but Bachchi’s discovery of the photograph of a younger Pono from her college days reveals lonely woman trapped in an unhappy marriage, struggling to reclaim her agency through the maze of mental disorder. Such an approach continues to make its presence felt in his later stories like ‘Sukha’ (1995) and ‘Here and Hereafter’ [translated title] (*The Last Exit*, 2009) as well – each one highlighting the contingent and subjective nature of ‘truth’ through a journey very similar to one Munro embarks upon through multiple perceptions of the ‘reality’ of the dead girl Marian Sheriff, judged for alleged teenage pregnancy as perceived through her photograph hanging on the wall of the High School in Jubilee in *Who do you think you are?* (1971) The protagonist Del’s perception of Marion as merry young girl with athletic aspirations acquired thus, later finds expression in the fictional representation of Marion’s character, Caroline, in her book. Similar experiments continue through stories like ‘Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You’ (1974), ‘The Turkey Season’ (1982) or ‘Privilege’ (1974) – highlighting the plurality of perspectives not only amongst different people but also within a single person and



emerging to be an acute reminder of how the meaning of life keeps changing for an individual with the passage of time and the change of circumstances. Photographs would often remind of being “someone I don’t even remember being or pretending to be.” (Munro 1982, 72) Postmodern aesthetics deems ‘truth’ to be varying, transformative and contingent and what better to emphasize upon this but through a photograph?

Thus, dream sequences, one sided conversation, juxtaposition of the same incident from the viewpoint of different individuals and the use of photographs as a crucial narrative trope highlighting postmodernist aesthetics, shapes their stories in a way that has a strong affinity with the art of storytelling of each other. So do their conscious choice to use moments of revelation, as an important narrative strategy – one that the next section of the chapter would look into.

The word epiphany has its epistemological roots in the Greek word *epiphania* that may be translated as a sudden revelation about life, an enlightening realization that may turn out to be a life changing experience for an individual. The word originally had a strong religious connotation, being used to refer to a Christian feast day, celebrating the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God by the three Magis. James Joyce, is credited to have accorded the word a secular significance, and imported it into literature to signify “a moment of clarity in an otherwise chaotic and troubled setting that provides a more profound understanding of what can be called the quintessential truth, which until that precise moment lay beyond one’s grasp” (Gadhiraju 2016, 114) in his critically acclaimed autobiographical novel *Stephen Hero* in the first decade of the twentieth century. However, it is with Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914), that epiphany emerges as a perfect narrative device to achieve the desired singularity of effect in the genre of short story. The Joycean notion of epiphany was taken up and further developed by Katherine Mansfield in her stories like ‘The Garden Party’ (1922) and ‘At the Bay’ (1922) and D. H. Lawrence in his stories like ‘The Horse Dealer’s Daughter’ (1922). The idea finds resonance in Virginia Woolf’s concept of ‘moments of being’, which offer a sudden glimpse into a larger truth about life, as highlighted in her 1928 short story by the same name. It is through Munro’s reception of these writers that epiphany enters the English-Canadian literary paradigm as a crucial narrative device for the short story. Her early experimentations with literary epiphany may be found in the three stories – ‘The Dimension of Shadow’, ‘Story for Sunday’ and ‘The Widower’ - that were published in *Folio*, the literary magazine of University of Western Ontario during her student days (1950-51). Its first mature expression, however, may be found in the title story of his first collection

of short stories *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), in which the mesmerizing strains of piano played by Dolores Boyle, a student of the Greenhill School for children with special needs, in a party thrown by their aged music teacher Miss Marsalles, hits hard against the wall of revulsion and prejudices that the townspeople felt for the ‘little idiots’ (Munro 1968, 222):

We are accustomed to notice performances, at Miss Marsellas’s parties, but it cannot be said that anyone has ever expected music. Yet this time the music establishes itself so effortlessly! What she plays is not familiar. It is something fragile, courtly and gay, that carries with it the freedom of a great unemotional happiness. And all that this girl does – and this is something you would not think could ever be done – is to play it so that it can be felt, all this can be felt, even in Miss Marsellas’ living room on Bala Street on a preposterous afternoon. All the children are quiet. The mother’s sit caught with a look of protest on their faces, a more profound anxiety than before, as if reminded of something they had forgotten they had forgotten .... (Munro 2000, 222)

It is in these “queer bright moments” (Smythe 108) created by the ethereal music, that the members of the small town Ontario society that tends to treat any individual who deviates from their standard parameters of ‘normalcy’ in a harsh judgmental manner, are accorded with a sudden glimpse into the beauty that belies every human life. The knowledge of this truth that lay hidden deep within them, its existence ‘forgotten’ or rather denied, comes to the surface taking them by surprise. These “oxymoronic moments, both bright and luminous and odd or shadowy” (Smythe 1992, 108) leaves them with an inexplicable sense of fulfilment not unmingled with a distinct sense of discomfort and shame. The moments pass as the piano stops and the festivities resume, but the effect of the music prevails, and so does the realization it has evoked. None of the guests openly acknowledge the dawning of this realization. But none can go back to looking down upon the child or taking pity on the old lady, whose party they had attended only to humour her, for Miss Marsellas and her student had proved a point. What is most interesting about Munro’s art of storytelling is that the moments of epiphany do not necessarily come at the end of the story, nor do they always aim to provide a closure in the form of conflict resolution to them. Epiphanic moments may pop up suddenly anytime and anywhere in the narrative, the magnitude of profoundness often underplayed by according minimal narrative space to the actual realization, rather moving on swiftly to the way the realization propels the action of the story forward.

The evocation of epiphany due to a direct sensory experience is often closely associated with the nature and the landscape of the region the story is set in. Much of the suggestiveness that is an essential feature of the Munroian epiphany harps upon this feature

as found in the story 'Floating Bridge' (*Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, 2001) in which one such magical moment of revelation helps a terminally ill cancer patient, trapped in an unhappy marriage, regain her will to live and to love again. When Jinny is kissed by Ricky, a man she had just met, while a log of wood, functioning as a 'floating bridge' that helped cars commute across one of the numerous little lakes that dotted the landscape of Borneo swamp in Ontario, "what she felt was a light-hearted sort of compassion, almost like laughter. A swish of tender hilarity, getting the better of all her sores and hollows, for the time given..." (Munro 2001, 83) The 'floating bridge', emblematic of hope and the strength to fight against all odds, creates a perfect premise for the emergence of the magical moment. The story ends on an inconclusive note, without providing the reader an answer to the questions raised as to whether Jinny survives cancer and whether she leaves her husband Neal for the man who had restored her faith on life. But the reader is left with a feeling that her newly acquired optimism would help her transcend every difficulty and encourage her never to give up on life. Epiphanic realization attains a new level of subtle suggestiveness in 'Pride' (*Dear Life* 2013), that harps upon the author's sense of the complexity and the mysteriousness of the so called "ordinary" day to day life. When a young man with a pronounced harelip and a subsequent speech problem, who has always been at the receiving end of the town's ridicule and contempt for being "not man enough", finds hitherto denied companionship in a beautiful young lady Oneida, he falls in love with her. The way in which he supports her through her financial crisis and she cares for during his illness brings them closer, till she offers to move in with him "and look after each other like brother and sister", for "nobody would think a thing about it" (Munro 2012, 148). What he initially interprets as a reciprocation of his feelings, taps on the most sensitive spot of his heart, hurting his pride and forcing him to prevent this by putting his house up for sale. While the girl does not wish to be a liability on her friend, the protagonist preferred not to suffer the indignity of being turned down by the woman he loves. The story culminates in a moment of epiphany, derived from a group of skunks frolicking in the bird bath in the backyard of the protagonist's home – a very common scene for the residents of the small towns of south-west Ontario – as the now estranged confidantes are about to part ways forever:

How beautiful! Flashing and never getting in each other's way.... they lifted themselves up one by one and left the water and proceeded to walk across the yard, swiftly but in a straight diagonal line. As if they were proud of themselves but discreet. Oneida's face looked dazzled. "Have you ever come across such a sigh?" I said no. Never.

I thought she might say another thing, and spoil it, but no, neither of us did.

We were as glad as we could be. (Munro 2012, 153)

This behaviour of the skunks that emerges to be emblematic of their own state of mind, lifts the weight of the unspoken words off their hearts, bringing with it a sudden insight into the pride that has prevented both of them to reach out to each other. The story ends in this note, abruptly, never stating explicitly what becomes of their relationship, but leaving the reader with a sense of both the characters being finally at peace with each other. It emerges as a brilliant example of two individuals divided by an acute emotional crisis bonding over a shared moment of epiphany, a rare moment when each of their hearts – their secretly harboured passion, fears and insecurities - are laid bare for the other to see.

The evocation of epiphanic moments, is often predicated upon the indivisible continuity of the past, present and future that informs the narrative chronotope of Munro's short stories. Her technique of storytelling is such that the narrative that move effortlessly from one time frame to another in a bid to map the psychological terrain of an individual's mind, often sees the evocation of a memory leading to a moment of self-discovery, as it happens in the case of Marietta's daughter in 'Progress of Love', now a real estate agent, who visits her childhood home many years after she has left it for good. The complexity of the narrative, already rendered multi-layered through a juxtaposing different versions of the 'story' of her grandmother's attempted suicide, as told and retold by her mother and her aunt, reached new heights as the exposed sections of the cauliflower printed wallpaper put up in the guest room for the purpose of Beryl's visit, evokes a memory of afternoon when her mother was confronted by her indignant aunt for burning her entire inheritance from her father to assert her hatred towards him. Though Marietta's husband had acted surprised by this news, the daughter remembers her father being her accomplice in the act, a memory that she shares with Bob Marks, the colleague accompanying her. The feeling of pride evoked by the memory of an event largely emblematic of everything she had always been bitterly critical of - her parents' rigid moral principles, 'uptight' ways and the insistence on leading a 'simple life' in spite of being able to afford certain luxuries – comes as a surprise giving rise to emotions, she never thought she, the rebel daughter, would feel:

How could I even say that I approved of it myself! If I had been the sort of person who approved of that, I wouldn't have done all I have done – run away from home to work in a restaurant in town when I was fifteen, gone to a night school to learn typing and bookkeeping, gone into a real estate office and become a licensed

agent. I wouldn't be divorced. My hair would be white, as it has been naturally for years, instead of a colour called Copper Sunrise. (Munro 1986, 30)

The realization that she had always approved of her parents' vision of life at some unconscious level, makes look at her own in a different light. The newly realized dignity in the traditional codes of propriety she had worked all her life to transgress, takes her a step forward towards making peace with many a childhood grievance that had shaped her life choices as an adult. The feeling of alienation and loneliness that had come hand in hand with her choice to live life in accordance with the new age sensibilities pertaining to love, marriage and career stares her in the face as she uncovers her latent appreciation for the bonding within joint families and commitment and adjustment to make marriages work that had marked the pre-war conscious small town southern Ontario societies. Thus epiphany, emerges as a crucial narrative device in Munro's writings, one that prevents the inconclusive endings from being abrupt and jarring- never quite resolving the emotional conflict(s), yet heightening the reader's consciousness of the "coexistence of strangeness and ordinariness, so that everything is at the same time both touchable and mysterious" (Fernandes 2004, 350)

Munrovian epiphany, that emerges out of a direct sensory experience in the present or a sudden evocation of the past, finds a strong resonance with the idea of *ananyas samay* (involuntary moments) that enters the Hindi literary paradigm with the publication of Nirmal Verma's *Parinde* in 1959. The idea of a narrative culminating in a moment of illuminating realization of the protagonist was first introduced in Hindi short story by Ajneya in some of his early stories that displayed a close affinity with the *pragativadi* tendencies, in terms of their subject matter as well as their formal structure. An ideal example would be his *samayak* story titled 'Satru' (1935) in which God appoints Jnan, the protagonist, as his representative to fight against religion, poverty, corruption and foreign rulers, the enemies or *satrus* of Man, and reform the contemporary society. His violent agitations the power structure lands him in the prison where he decides to end his life. The story however ends in Jnan's sudden insight into the basic problem of human existence that dawns on him when his reflection appears before him and asks "Have you fought against yourself already?" in order to achieve one's goals it is necessary to consciously move away from the tendency to be attracted to that which is easy (*asani ki or aktrat*). Though the story has a tight knit *kathanak* with linear, offers a stark portrayal of the contemporary socio-political reality and has a distinct semi-religious moralistic undertone, it is this moment of self-reflection and self-realization makes it distinct from the works of his contemporary *Pragativadi* writers. Similar moments of life-

changing realizations informs some of his more psychologically oriented and introspective stories like story like 'Ve dusre'(1950) that deals with alienation caused due to estrangement in arranged marriage, or a story like 'Samp'(1950) that high lights alienation in love caused due to incompatibility of lovers, not only address issues commonly taken up by the new generation of writers like Nirmal Verma, Kamaleswar and Mohan Rakesh. These stories with their non-linear *kathanak* and involuted narrative chronology, as already mentioned, are looked upon as the early precursors to the Hindi *nayi kahani*. Not only the foundation laid by these stories, but also Verma's reception of the Joycean notion of epiphany and the Proustian idea of *moments privileges* (N. Singh 2009, 23), have been pivotal in informing his *nayi kahani* with the *anayas samay* that provides a sudden, often unsuspected glimpse into the hitherto unrealized, often bringing upon a radical change in the protagonist's perception of life.

As in the case of Munro the moments of epiphany are closely associated with the way she perceives time as duration, Verma's *anayas samay*, too needs to be understood with reference to the author's approach towards the narrativized time. The concept theorized by Verma in his literary treatise *Shabd aur Smriti*, spells certain moments of revelation that light up the eternally contemporaneous terrain of thoughts and emotions of an individual. Verma receives Proustian *moments privileges* (privileged moments) and turns it into his own in the form of the idea of "*anayas samay*" the earliest and one of the finest examples of which is may be found in 'Maya ka Marm' (*Parinde*). The concept of "privileged moments" defined as "moments of enigmatic ecstasy or euphoria, strange joy or sudden revelation as a result of the direct sensory experiences" (M. Singh 2013, 32) was first explored by Marcel Proust in the autobiographical 'Swann's Way' (*In Search of Lost Time* Volume 1, 1913), through the sensation that takes hold of an adult Marcel, struggling to recapture certain childhood memories, when he tastes a madeleine dipped in a cup of lemon tea:

No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touching my palate an exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory – this new sensation having the effect, which love has, of filling me with a precious essence; not rather this essence was not in me, it *was* me. ( Proust 1991, 60)

This 'sensation' in turn evoked a happy childhood memory for, that of Sunday mornings spent in his village Combray, when his aunt would dip a madeleine in her tea and offer it to him. This moment that has come to be iconised in literature as the 'madeleine moment' accords him a momentary respite from the mundaneness of day-to-day life and negotiate with

the feeling of alienation and fragmentation, which had been an integral part of European modernist consciousness. Such a “near epiphanic” moment that dawns upon an unemployed disillusioned young man, the protagonist of the story ‘Maya ka marm’, wandering aimlessly in the streets on a rainy morning when he suddenly chances upon a young girl sailing her paper boat in a roadside canal with a firm belief that it would reach her imagined world. A glimpse into this world of imagination of the child helps the depressed man look beyond his troubles by reliving his childhood days spent in the village playing a similar game - a carefree life he had left far behind the day he had migrated to the town for work, only to keep visiting the Employment Exchange Office in vain:

एक शाम मुझे लगा की बीते हुए दिन बीत गए हैं, बड़ती हुई उमर पीठ से उतर गयी हैं..... समय की धुंधले सीमांत पर मेरा बचपन, मा का चेहरा..... सब कुछ भीगी धूप की काप्ति, शिहारति आँचल पर नीली धुंध की सीपियों सा उड रहा था। सपनो की वासी गंध मानो तितली की रंगीन परो से बूंद बूंद धुराक्कवृष्टी की कब्रों पर उगे हुए पीली घास में खो गयी हैं..... जहाँ कुछ फुल उस आये हैं, भीगे से फुल.....

और मुझे लगता है, जिंदगी कितनी हल्की है. (Verma 2008, 34)

*Ek sham – mujhe laga ki beete huye din beet gaye hain , badti hui umra peeth se utar gayi hain...samay ki dhunle simanta par mera bachpan, ma ka chehra.... Sab kuch bheegi dhup ki kapti , siharti achal par nili dhundh ki chhippiyon sa ud raha tha. Sapno ki bashi gandh mano titli ki rangeen paron se bundh bundh dhurakkarvishriti ki kabron par uge huyepeeli ghas me khon gayi hain ....jaha kuch phool ug aye hain, bheege se phool....*

*Aur mujhe lagta hain, zindagi kitni halki hain. ( 34)*

[ For a moment, I felt as if the past was really a past now, the drudgery of cumulating age had really come off my burdened shoulders ..... my childhood shimmering at the blurry edges of time, the face of my mother.....everything was floating around like the blue flakes of mist that tremble upon the veil of dewy-wet sunbeams. It was as if, the stale odour of crumbling dreams was oozing drop by drop from the colourful wings of a butterfly, unto the yellow grass that had sprung upon the gloomy graves of eternity....where only a few flowers had bloomed, a few moist flowers....]

It is interesting to note how the evocation of *anayas samay*, too, is closely associated with *vatavaran* and the natural setting of the stories. While the incessantly drizzling rain becomes emblematic of the gloom in his heart, the soft rays of the sun that gradually spreads over the landscape as he comes upon the little girl engrossed in her game emerges to be symptomatic of the sudden ethereal happiness that engulfs him in the process. Though end of the story does not see any improvement in his material conditions, there is a definite improvement in his mental one. This fleeting moment has a long-lasting effect, helping him acquire a more optimistic approach towards life.

Verma, defines time to be “a spiral in which the climactic points are illuminated by *anayas samay* or involuntary moments which glow at small intervals across the entire landscape of the past” (Verma 1976, 119). The author, thus, identifies an organic relationship between individual memory and *anayas samay*, an idea that also informs Munro’s idea of epiphany. This relationship has, in fact, not only been an integral part of his storytelling but also the very process through which a story took shape in his mind. The earliest, best known and most path-breaking story of his career and the Nayi Kahani movement bears testimony to this facet of his creative process. Dr Ved Raman Pandey reveals the real life experience that Verma himself told him about in a personal conversation:

He had been to Ranikhet once. He had strolled out for a walk when he chanced upon a group of girls. A radio was playing and they were laughing to their heart’s content. They had no idea he was there. But he stood mesmerized by the scene - and that was what sowed the seeds of 'Parinde'. We find a similar scene unfolding in the story when a group of girls are discovered laughing together in a hostel room by Latika. (Ved Raman Pandey, Google Meet correspondence with the scholar, December 27, 2021)

The memory of an apparently insignificant incident from the past suddenly comes back in a flash, glowing as an ‘involuntary moment’ in his terrain of thoughts inducing him to give expression to it through the story of Latika. Within those girls of Ranikhet lay the seeds of the girls from a boarding school in Simla – divided in terms of their spacio-temporal context, united by their eagerness to circumvent their small-town moral restrictions and innocent exuberance, not yet marred by the complexities of adulteration – and out came the pain and loneliness of the protagonist, the hostel warden, who cannot fit herself into this frame. The juxtaposition of the girls’ laughter with Latika’s inner gloom is what lends the story with a poignancy rarely seen in Hindi short story before! The sound of the radio attributes to the signature ‘*sangeetmayata*’ (musicality) of his storytelling – weaving the real event with the fictional one into a seamless flow of connectivity.

This creative process that took shape for the first time with ‘Parinde’ has made its presence felt in many of his later short stories, and even his first novel *Ve Din* (Ved Raman Pandey, Google Meet correspondence with the scholar, December 27, 2021) that was born out of the guilt and discomfort induced by a sudden recollection of a seven year old memory of the guilt of not being able to keep a date with a woman he had met during his stay in Czechoslovakia. It hardly comes as a surprise, therefore, that a creative artist for whom epiphanic moments propelled by memory have taken the shape of a major authorial inspiration, would use the same as a crucial narrative device for his storytelling – a rationale



that holds true for Munro too. A writer who openly admits to ‘finding’ her stories in sudden recollections of heard anecdotes, realizations acquired by memories of personal experiences or even an object or physical setting of her small-town Ontario milieu- the “queer bright moments” of epiphany lighting up the pathways of her literary universe. “It (the story) seems to be already there, and some unlikely clue, such as a shop window, or a bit of conversation, makes me aware of it” (Munro 1982, 36), she says in her article on “What is Real?” in *Canadian Forum*. Writing itself has thus never been an act of creating something completely new through a planned and structure endeavour for the two writers. They believe in ‘discovering’ stories in sudden, though not unwelcome moments of revelations. No wonder such an approach would reflect in their basic narrative structure and their characterizations to a great extent. Like their creators, memory induced epiphanies play a pivotal role in the lives of the characters. At times, the relationship between memory and epiphany thus emerges to more than a mere narrative device, establishing itself as the basic foundation of the story.

Few stories could exemplify this literary phenomenon with such a clarity as one of the last but by no means the least *nayi kahani* of Verma. For recently divorced Meenu of ‘Dhaage’ (2003) , visiting her sister and brother-in-law in their hometown Simla after a year spells discomfort. When her hosts make plan to go for a picnic to the same spot, they had visited last year, she is plagued by the memory of disclosing the news of her potential separation from her then husband to her family, rendering her reluctant to take part in the festivities. Though relieved to be free of the burden of an unhappy relationship and perfectly capable of supporting her child and herself financially, she is torn between the traditional belief in the sanctity of marriage and the ‘post-colonial’ sensibilities pertaining to the gender dynamics in the Indian society that comes with the economic emancipation of women in the mid twentieth decades. The night before the picnic, a conversation about the importance of space in human life brings a distant look in the eyes of her brother-in-law Kesri which suddenly illuminates one particular moment in the firmament of past – the memory of a similar look in the eyes of the English caretaker who once prevented her from entering a cemetery with the words “Let the dead lie in peace” – one which brings with it a realization of the necessity to let go of a relationship that is no longer able to breathe life and love within an individual. It is this moment when “the story breaks free of its referential particularities and speaks in a language that is universal” (Nazeer 2004, 77). Though none of her external conditions undergo a change, the reader is left with a feeling that she would be able to move on and evolve into a more confident, positive and emotionally self-sufficient individual. Thus

‘epiphanic’ moments in the works of Verma, with their intrinsic suggestively, resonates with Munro’s aim of bestowing the protagonists, and it turn the readers with a sense of fulfilment, thereby underplaying the absence of an action-packed climax and the ‘inconclusively’ of the story in terms of conflict resolution. In the words of Munro: “It’s more like the spirit, the centre of the story, something there’s no word for, that can only come into life when words are wrapped around it.” (Munro 2006, 300).

It is this preoccupation with the ‘spirit’ of the story that brings me to my third area of analysis vis-à-vis the art of storytelling of Munro and Verma: the use of dark symbolic imagery to represent the thoughts and emotions lurking within dark crevices of the human mind. As mentioned earlier, the short stories of Munro delve deep into the psychological workings of dissident subjectivity- the dissidence a product of either choice or compulsion – striving to fit in and at the same time break free of the morally restrictive, superstitious and secretive mid twentieth century small town societies of south-west Ontario. It is a society that treats every individual that does not abide by its standards of ‘normalcy’, physically or mentally, with a harsh judgmental attitude. Quite unforgiving of even a single act of ‘moral lapse’ and social indiscretion, it harbours a peculiar contempt for its deviant members whose conscious life choices are driven by an acute awareness of the limitations of career opportunities from within their spatial location and the changing dynamics of gender, class and sexuality that comes at the wake of the Economic Depression of the 1930s and the World War II. Much of this contempt is a defence mechanism, a façade to camouflage the fear for the unknown, for what lies beyond their sphere of their everyday thoughts and actions. The use of dark imagery, emerges as a crucial storytelling technique, to accentuate what Joyce Carol Oates identifies in her Review of *Too Much Happiness* (2009) as “this deep suspicion of people who seem to deviate from the norm, who threaten the protocol of narrow domesticity” (Munro 2010, 4) in the stories of Munro. One of the finest examples may be found in one of her earliest stories ‘Walker Brothers Cowboy’ (*Dance of the Happy Shades*) in which sales personnel Ben Jordan of Tuppertown takes his children along with him on a professional visit, only to find his potential customer to be his old flame, Nora. In the company of the vivacious women, little Del Jordan sees her father who has always been “too much of a gentleman” (9), transform into someone who laughs out loud, drinks whisky and dances with a flamboyance she never thought he was capable of. His subtle indication to keep the accidental encounter a secret by buying them candies, brings with it an awareness of the ‘forbidden’ for the child. The realization that her father had found happiness in something

that transgresses the boundaries of moral propriety of their small-town society, estranges her from one the most familiar entities of her life. Her discomfort, emblematic of the social mindset gradually infiltrating her psyche and colouring her thoughts finds expression in a symbolic imagery that harps upon the landscape of the region:

So my father drives and my brother watches the road for rabbits and I feel my father's life flowing back from our car in the last of the afternoon, darkening and turning strange, like a landscape that has an enchantment to it, making it kindly ordinary and familiar while you are looking at it, but changing it, once your back is turned, into something you will never know, with all kinds of weathers, and distances you cannot imagine. (Munro 1968, 18)

One cannot but notice an element of incredulous wonderment and thrill mixed with an acute sense of foreboding that informs the natural imagery, symbolizing Del's feelings towards her father, thereby highlighting an ambivalence that lies in one's feelings and attitude towards such 'socially unspeakable' events. Thus, the symbolic imagery based on the regional landscape emerges as a projection of human fears, insecurities and 'forbidden' desires in Munro's stories. It is this aspect of Munro's storytelling that emerges as one of the major reasons that prompts critics like Robert Thacker ("Canadian Short Fiction" 2004, 150) and Judith Miller (*The Art of Alice Munro* 1984, 128) to categorize the author as one of the practitioners of 'Southern Ontario Gothic', a special category of English-Canadian prose fiction, that harps upon the elements of the 'gothic' to interrogate the dynamics of race, class and gender in novels and short stories set in the mid twentieth century small towns of Southern Ontario "with its decaying and destructive social order and its residents, whose spirits are being imprisoned and perverted by the very context in which they live." (Andrews 2001, 3) Pioneered by James Reaney in his seminal works 'The Box Social' and 'The Bully' in the early 1950s, the scope underlying 'Southern Ontario Gothic' short stories has been further explored in the works of Marian Engels, Barbara Gowdy, Jane Urquhart and Margaret Atwood. The tendency to harp upon symbolic imagery based on "the bleak, empty, indeterminate landscape" (Jackson 1981, 42) of the region and also the use of optic imagery like the eyes, portraits, mirrors and reflections to look into deepest and darkest thoughts and emotions of the characters is one of the crucial stylistic devices that informs their stories. It is through these imageries that narrative chronotope often oscillates between different time frames, weaving the past present and the future into a seamless thread of emotions, recollections and realizations in the minds of the characters. Though Munro never declares herself to be a practitioner of the 'Southern Ontario Gothic' short stories, her works are

informed not only by a number of thematic elements but also certain formal features and stylistic devices characteristic of the short stories penned by the aforementioned writers. Rendering the regional landscape symbolic of the ‘uncanny’ and the ‘strange’ in which “strangeness is an effect produced by the distorted and the distorting mind of the protagonist” (Jackson 1981, 23), as exemplified in the story discussed above, is one of the latter. Another example of this feature may be found in one of the last and reportedly autobiographical stories of the author, ‘Night’ (*Dear Life* 2012), where the sleep deprived nine-year-old narrator-protagonist during her night time wanderings is frequently overcome by an urge to strangle her younger sister Catherine in her sleep. Munro’s use of symbolic imagery in her own words is predicated upon the realization that “we live among riddles and mysteries – the most obvious things that come in our way, have dark sides, which the quickest sight cannot penetrate into” (*Selected Stories* 1996, xvii). This realization comes out beautifully when the protagonist notices her houses to be strategically located between “two different worlds” - the town with “houses in rows, with street lights and running waters” (Munro 2012, 278) to its east and the wilderness, “the long curve of the river and the fields and the trees and the sunset” that “had nothing to interrupt them, in my mind, or to do with ordinary life ever” (Munro 2012, 278) - an imagery where the house emerges to be symbolic of the child’s psyche caught in between her irrational desire to hurt her sister born out of sibling rivalry, suppressed within her subconscious, symbolized by the wilderness and the urban centre, that stands for her sense of logical reasoning that tries to prevent her from succumbing to it.

It is not only such acts of transgressive desires, but also any physical and mental ‘abnormality’ in people, that when disclosed are brutally condemned in the smalltown Ontario societies of Munro’s stories. Yet, the way in which these chronicles of deviances find themselves subjected to endless provocative speculations and coloured by individual idiosyncrasies and imagination in each of their numerous telling and retellings. The way in which Flo of ‘Royal Beatings’ (*Beggar Maid* 1980) chooses to narrate the ‘story’ of the death of Rose’s mother, who had actually been killed by a blood clot in her lungs, is not only predicated upon a malice for her husband’s first wife and a sadistic pleasure she feels in hurting the feelings of her step daughter, but also her strange fascination about the process of death in general:

She (Rose) had nothing to go on but some egg cups had bought. No books, or clothes, or picture of her mother remained. Flo’s only story about her mother, the story of her death was oddly grudging. Flo liked the details of death: the things people said, the way they protested or tried to protest, or get out of bed or swore or

laughed (some tried to do it), but when she said that Rose's mother mentioned a hard-boiled egg – "I have a feeling that is so hard to describe. It's like a boiled egg in my chest with the shell left on" – she made the comparison sound slightly foolish as Rose's mother was a kind of person who might think you could swallow an egg whole. (Munro 1978, 4)

The sequence of narration ensures that the reader does not miss out on the unmistakable dig at Rose's feelings towards the egg cups and what they stand for. The girl has no way to verify the authenticity of Flo's 'story' for she herself had been too young to remember anything. But even Flo had heard the details from her husband. The imagery of the boiled egg that borders on the grotesque, therefore, is nothing but the reflection of the dark crevices of Flo's psyche. Not only does it throw light on her anger towards a long dead woman she has to compete with for the affection of her family but also looks into her attitude towards death in general that highlights human tendency "to seek even the ones they appear to shrink from" (Palmer 1991, 65).

Like the practitioners of Southern Gothic short stories, Munro frequently uses optic imagery of mirrors, glasses, portraits, eyes and reflections in order to help the characters move beyond what William James calls 'self-opacity' in his *Will to Believe* where he postulates: "The bottom of the being is left logically opaque to us as something which we simply come upon and find, and about which if we wish to act, we should pause and wonder as little as possible" (Poirier 1997, 279). A perfect example may be found in 'The Peace at Utrecht' in the way in which the protagonist's guilt of internalizing and replicating the town's attitude towards her Parkinson's ridden mother - with her eyes rolling back into her head, drooling mouth and slurred speech – and the social embarrassment and disgust that went into branded her as "our gothic mother" (*Dance of the Happy Shades* 195) finds expression in the image "a recognizably Young Mother" (198) when she looks into a mirror in the living room of her childhood home . The image goes hand in hand with the protagonist's expectation of hearing her mother calling her from the couch she always lay on, when alive. The use of optic imagery is also exemplified beautifully in 'The Eye' (*Dear Life* 2012), where the horror of the narrator's first ever encounter with a corpse at her cousin Sadie's funeral, manifests itself in her mind in the form of an image of the dead girl opening her eyelids and staring at her through her lashes. The sight scares her, but she cherishes it a "special experience" meant only for her eyes - the authenticity of which she would not question that till years later:

Long, long afterwards, when I was not at all interested in any unnatural display, I still had it in my mind that such a thing had happened. I just believed it easily, the way you once believed and in fact remember that you

once had another set of teeth, now vanished but real in spite of that. Until one day, one day I may have been in my teens, I knew with a dim sort of hole in my insides that now I didn't believe it anymore." (270) (Munro 2012, 270)

Such nature-based or optic imagery, especially ones that come at the very end of the story as in the case of 'The Eye' or 'Walker Brother's Cowboy' lends an element of mystery and uncertainty to the narrative, that accounts for the 'inconclusivity' of Munro's stories. Unlike the epiphanic endings that provide the reader with a closure of sorts, such endings open up their vista of speculations and interpretations.

*Nayi kahani*, as shaped by the creative endeavours of Verma, harps upon *sanketik chitrakalpa* to look into the inner world of individuals caught between a habitual adherence to the traditional norms of pre-war pre-independence small town societies of the North India and the aspirations brought about by the changing values pertaining to the notion of love, marriage, career, sexuality and gender roles. Such *sanketikata* has rarely informed the linear 'event plots' of the Pragativadi short stories. As observed by Namvar Singh:

अभी तक जो कहानी सिर्फ कथा कहानी थी या कोई चरित्र पेश करती तहितव्य एक विचार का झटका देती थी, वही निर्मल के हाथों जीवन के प्रति एक नया भावबोध जगाती हैं; साथ ही ऐसे दुर्लभ अनुभूति चित्र प्रदान करती हैं जिन्हे हम कम से कम हिंदी कहानी के माध्यम से प्राप्त करने को अभ्यस्थ नहीं थे। (54) (Singh N. 2009, 54)

*Abhi tak jo kahani sirf katha kahani thi ya koi charitra pesh karti thiathva ek vichar ka jhatka deti thi, vahi Nirmal ke hathon jeevan ke prati ek naya bhavbodh jagati hain; sath i aise durlabh anubhuti chitra pradan karti hain jinhe hum kam se kam Hindi kahani ke madhyam se prapt karne ko abhyasth nahi the. (54)*

Till now, a short story would narrate an event, or focus on the characterization of an individual, or jolt the reader into interrogating certain values and thought processes. But Nirmal crafted his stories a way so as to evoke a new a consciousness about life. Moreover, they provide the readers with such rare and picturesque ensemble of emotions that they had not been accustomed to encounter at least within the oeuvre of Hindi short stories.

The use of 'dark' grotesque imagery emerges as the most potent narrative device to enhance the this '*anubhuti-chitra*' born out of the feelings of alienation, estrangement and loneliness within the protagonists. As mentioned earlier, many of his stories are set in a sparsely populated alley/park/bar/library or a serene natural setting of the quaint little hill stations or some dilapidated houses or even the confinement room for the sick – settings that provide a minimal opportunity for social interactions, thereby opening up the vista of thoughts, retrospections and reminiscences of the protagonists. Such *vatavaran* plays a crucial role in shaping his use of *sanketik* imagery too, one of the finest examples of which may be found

his seminal story ‘Jalti Jhari’ (Jalti Jhari 1965) which highlights the feelings evoked within a man lazing in a sparsely populated grassland beside a *tapu* (small lake) at the outskirts of an unnamed hill town, at the sight of a young man and a young woman walking into a dense bush right beside where he has been sitting idly for hours. He realizes that he should not impinge upon their privacy. But as the product of a hypocritical society that has traditionally condemned sexual intimacy outside the folds of marriage, and yet harboured an inexplicable curiosity and fascination for sexual escapade of any kind, he finds himself unable to move away from the spot. He lets his imagination run wild as he visualizes them engaged in sexual intercourse. The noises overheard keep fuelling this imagination to an extent that this mental image soon gets replaced by him being intimate with the girl. An unexpected showdown with the girl and her probing questions, opens up a space for self-reflection and self-exploration that prompts him to confront the feelings governing his voyeuristic curiosity like never before:

झरी काप्ति हैं, जैसे उसके भीतर कुछ ज्वल रही हैं..... और मुझे लगा जैसे उस शाम दूसरी बार किसी ने मुझसे अपना 'सच' का प्रमाण मांगा था। झरी मुझसे सिर्फ तीन कदम दूर हैं.... मुझे वहा जाने में बहुत कम समय लगेगा। इसमे कुछ भी मुश्किल नहीं, की डर नहीं। यह इतना सहज और आसान हैं की मेरा दिल तेज़ी से घबराने लगता हैं। मै भागने लगता हूँ और पीछे मूरकर नहीं देखता। मेरे पीछे झरी हैं, और उसकी भिवात्स भूतऐलि हँसी, जो देर तक मेरा पीछा करती रही हैं, लहु की कत्रो की तरह मेरे भागते पैरों के पीछे टपकती रहती हैं। (Verma 2008, 99)

*Jhari kapti hain, jaise uske bhitari kuch jal rahi hain.... Aur mujhe laga jaise us sham dusri bar kisi ne mujhse apna 'sach' ka praman manga tha. Jhari mujhse sirf teen kadam dur hai – mujhe waha jane me bahut kam samay lagega. Isme kuch bhi mushkil nahi, koi dar nahi. Yah itna sahaaj aur asan hain ki mera dil tezi se ghabrane lagta hain. Main bhagne lagta hoon aur piche murkar nahi dekhta. Mere piche jhari hain, aur uski vibhatsa bhutaili hasi, jo der tak mera piche karti rahi hain, lahu ki katro ki tarha mere bhagte pairon ke piche tapakti rahti hain. (99)*

[The bush keeps shaking, as if something within it was on fire.... And I feel that it was the second time that evening that I had been asked to prove my 'truth'. The bush is just three step away from me – it would not take much time to reach there. There is no difficulty in it, neither anything to be afraid of. It is so very easy that my heart begins to beat fast in apprehension. I start running and never look back. Behind me, lies the bush and its horrifying unearthly laughter continues to trail behind me, dripping like drops of blood under my running pattering feet. ]

The crackling flames, the eerie laughter and the trail of trickling droplets of blood - all figments of imagination of a troubled mind – transform the landscape that had been his comfort zone since morning into something uncanny. The winter evening and the serene bank of the lake is suddenly rendered mysterious and foreboding as his deepest and ‘darkest’

sexual fantasy of an individual, his strange fascination for the ‘forbidden’, his guilt of trespassing upon the private moments of the young couple and his fear of facing persecution from a society, that has traditionally frowned upon transgressive sexual desire, finds expression in the grotesque imagery that harps upon the landscape of the region. The use of such dark imagery informs the works of other *nayi kahanikars* too. One of the best known example would be that of ‘mans ka dariya’ (an ocean of (human) flesh) in the Kamaleswar’s story of the same name, used to symbolize the densely populated mid-late twentieth century urban centres where individuals inhabit the same geo-political space physically, yet suffer from an acute sense of mental alienation and lack of long lasting emotional attachments.

Not only transgressive desires, but existential crisis that emerges out of being far removed from the real coordinates of one’s day to day existence – both physically and emotionally – and engaging in or even witnessing any ‘deviant’ behaviour that does not abide by the parameters of ‘normalcy’ of the society, comes out beautifully through Verma’s use of *sanketik* imagery. This imagery may often draw upon the familiar and the mundane, resonating Munro’s belief in the extraordinary underlying the ‘ordinary’ everyday experiences of life. An ideal example would be the imagery of the moth used to highlight the fear and insecurities that takes hold of the protagonist of ‘Crows of Deliverance’ as he leaves behind the familiar din and bustle of Delhi and the comfort of his home to travel to the outlands of Simla, climbing uphill on a dreary rainy afternoon. The unfamiliarity of the natural setting littered with relics of quaint little English cottages, emblematic of the bygone colonial settlements on the one hand, and his inability to come in terms with his beloved brother’s transformation into a dissident subject – a social recluse, a naked ascetic living in dismal ‘cell’ - plagues him with a sense of existential crisis like never before:

From these misty heights the familiar and the known seemed suddenly to fade into unreality....and then without forewarning, a fear gripped me: What would happen to me if in a convulsive moment, my world were to turn inside out? I’d probably beat the darkness in vain with my inadequate winds like an insect nipped from the living room between thumb and forefinger and thrown out of the window at night, unable even after to find its way back in. (Verma 1999, 128)

In a desperate attempt to combat this fear he looks up his bank passbook in his pocket and the photographs of his children in his wallet and has to remind himself of his Delhi house and the numerous books written by him – “the incontrovertible proof of my earthly existence” (Verma 1999, 128). Unlike ‘Jalti Jhari’, the imagery has nothing overtly dramatic or gory in it. Yet, a day-to-day occurrence appears sinister, almost bordering on the grotesque,



highlighting the feeling of suffocation, bewilderment and alienation that threatens to overwhelm him.

The use of optic imagery also emerges as an important narrative device to highlight the moral dilemma of individuals trying to come in terms with the changes coming over out the urban societies of North India with the breaking up of joint families, annulment of marriages, increasing economic emancipation and physical mobility of women in the decades following independence. The presence of a mirror or a water body, as found in 'Parinde' and 'Jalti Jhari' or the play of light and shadow, as found in 'Andhere me' (*Parinde* 1959) or 'Dhaage', emerge as sources of optic imagery that. 'Andhere me' represents Pono, a patient of epilepsy who is trapped within her home and in an unhappy emotionally abusive marriage, through her daughter's gaze. Her desperate attempt at escaping both earns her the reputation of being a mad woman. For, in the morally restrictive smalltown society of Simla, which treats physical and mental 'anomalies' and acts of moral indiscretion with suspicion and contempt, Pono's illness is an ill kept secret. So is her extramarital affair with her neighbour Viren. The world comes apart for the narrator-protagonist, who has always been torn between her love for her mother and a fear for the woman who transforms into a terrifying entity during her high end phases of schizophrenia, when she comes to know about her mother's affair. As she overhears her parent's heated arguments just behind the door leading to her room one night, the curtain is suddenly drawn apart and, in the light, reflected from the street lamp on the wall between her bed and the window, she sees her mother's hands stretching outwards. A *chhaya* (shadow) appears behind those hands for a fraction of a second, terrifying in its grotesqueness, leaving the child thoroughly shaken:

पीछे एक छाया है, भुखी, फ़टी- फ़टी दो आँखें हैं। पर्दे को नोचती लंबी पतली काप्ति उंगलियाँ हैं और बीजली मे चंचमाती नाक की लौंग, जो बार बार फर्फरति होठों के उपर नारे सी तिलकी हैं..... यहाँ सबकुछ मैं ने एक छोटे से क्षण में देखा था। और फिर अंधेरे ने मुझे चारो तरफ से घेर लिया था। (76) (Verma 2008, 76)

Pichhe ek chhaya hain, bhukhi, phati-phati si do ankhein hain. Parde ko nochti huyi lambi-patli kapti ungliyan hain aur bijli me chumchmati nak ki loung, jo bar bar pharpharati hoto ke upar nare-si tilki hain....yah sabkuch mein ne ek chhote se kshan me dekha tha. Aur phir andhere ne mujhe charo taraf se gher niya tha, (76)

[ Behind her, looms a spectre, one with a pair of enormous greedy protruding eyes. Long bony quivering fingers clawing at the curtains; the slender tip of the nose flashing bright in the flickering strains of lightening, nestled strongly upon a pair of trembling lips....I saw all this within a fraction of a second. And then, a deep penetrating darkness engulfed me from all sides. ]

The shadow on the wall should logically reflect nothing but the outline of her mother standing behind the curtain. The monstrous face framed by that outline that the child sees is symbolic of the feelings of fear, shame and embarrassment that her mother evokes in her. This imagery of the grotesque face recurs in the story when the child sees it staring at her from the cracked walls of a dilapidated English cottage, she sneaks into during one of her trysts in the mountains. The recurrence this imagery continues to inform the narrative till the very end of the story, when Pono is liberated from her confinement and the family finally leaves Simla for Delhi. Thus, in stories which primarily focus on the thoughts and emotions of individuals, Verma tends to harp upon symbolic imagery to highlight the deepest fears, most acute insecurities and socially transgressive human desires, Like Munro, he uses nature, light, sound and even objects of day to day use to shape these imagery – ‘defamiliarizing’ the ‘familiar’, evoking a distinct feeling of discomfort within the reader. It is these imageries that account for much of the open-endedness of the narratives- raising certain questions to be speculated upon by the readers, answers of which are consciously and deliberately not offered by the author.

Thus, through a comparative analysis of the short stories of Alice Munro and Nirmal Verma, using the methodological tool of genealogy, this chapter has tried to look into three formal aspects of their storytelling identifying the areas of intersection, while taking cognition of the differences and deviations. Building upon the foundation of these findings I aim to embark upon a comparative analysis of the major themes and motifs explored by the literary artists in question, in the next chapter.

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### Chapter 3

#### A Gendered Journey into Adolescence: A Thematic Trail of Congruence Across Literatures and Culturess

When Amelia DeFalco lauds Alice Munro for her “unflinching investigations into the by turns suffocating and satisfying world of the domestic” (DeFalco 1999, 378), she harps upon her tendency to look within and beyond the forces of socialization which operate within the South-Western Ontario small town societies in the mid-twentieth century decades. These have been morally restrictive, patriarchal essentially heteronormative societies that have traditionally striven to maintain an oppressive hold on the life and behavior of its female members. Pubescent girls struggling to come in terms with the rapidly changing contours of their body and mind have been particularly susceptible to such forces. Absence of men at home, diminishing employment and business opportunities, economic emancipation of women and the breaking up of traditional family structures at the wake of World War II and the Economic Depression of the ‘30s sees a gradual change in gender equations therein. Many of Munro’s stories aim to trace the transformative experiences undergone by a female child at the brink of attaining puberty, in the light of these changing dynamics of gender that informs the life of the small-town residents in this particular historical juncture.

As the pioneering writer to have shaped Hindi *Nayi Kahani* as a medium of literary expression ideal for the exploration of the “*gahan antarik samasyae*” (N. Singh 1990, 52 ) of individuals struggling to negotiate with the crisis of values caused within the small town middle class Hindi speaking population in the post-war post-independence North Indian societies, Nirmal Verma too strives to unpack the changing dynamics of gender within these societies and how it impacts the lives of his female protagonists. His *nayi kahani* often sees “his masterful pen dip into the palette of senses and repressed feelings” of female protagonists, thereby highlighting the conjectural moments that see “childhood unfolding into the bewilderment of adolescence” (Kak 2000, 1). An interrogation of the social, cultural and psychosexual determinants that shape gender conditioning and the awakening and expression of sexuality in the female adolescents, thus, emerges to be a recurrent motif in his works

In his work *Caring for your Teenager: A Complete and Authoritative Guide* (2003), Philip Bashe, an eminent member of American Academy of Pediatrics, has identified the period from eleven to fourteen years as that of early adolescence (American Academy of Pediatrics 2012 , 1) - a stage of mental and physical development that begins with the onset of puberty. As both the writers trace the mysterious pathways of a girl child's journey into early adolescence, within societies in transition, they look into the intricacies of the gender based socialization process that informs this journey. One of the important aspects of this process of socialization, as observed by the sociologists Hill and Lynch in their Gender Intensification Theory (1983) is the imposition of certain gender specific behavioral norms upon young girls, as soon as they reach puberty, that threaten to throttle their freedom of movement and expression. Moreover, the coercive silence that these mid twentieth century secretive close-knit societies maintain on the subjects of female anatomy (especially the sex organs), sexuality and sexual desire and certain biological phenomena like menstruation, female orgasm, pregnancy and childbirth- the very issues that plague the minds of young girls reveling in the first taste of puberty. Unanswered or evaded questions about these physical and mental changes from the side of the elders, often prompted by the patriarchal notions of sin, shame and chastity, may turn their journey into adolescence into an alternately thrilling and traumatic one. While the emotional upheavals go largely unnoticed (consciously or unconsciously) by the adults, the bodily changes are greeted with the imposition of certain gendered codes of conduct, saddling them with social expectations pertaining to "feminine" behavior without an initiative to explain the significance of these changes in real biological (and psychological) terms. To what extent does this process of socialization within the smalltown societies in question manage to hold its ground in the face of the increasing foray of middleclass women into various arenas of professional excellence and their increasing physical mobility towards the metropolises in search of better opportunities? How do the years of early adolescence lay the foundations of their future bid to both sexual and psychological agency within conjugal relationships and their claim to a substantial (if not equal) share in the decision-making processes of the family as their male counterparts? How does the tussle between the compulsion to adhere to pre-war notions of gender roles and the desire to embrace the new age sensibilities regarding the female body, sexuality and life-goals within societies geographically and culturally far apart, shape the consciousness of the female adolescents in the works of both the writers? These are some of the issues that a cross-cultural interrogation of the thematic of a female child's journey into adolescence in the short stories of the authors concerned, would strive to address. The relevance of the same lies in

understanding how Munro and Verma have helped the English-Canadian and Hindi short story to emerge as instrumental in exploring the ‘postcolonial’ dynamics of gender within their respective socio-cultural milieus, by mapping the workings of the female psyche at a stage of physical and mental development, when one is most vulnerable to the forces of gender differential socialization.

This vulnerability comes out beautifully through the dilemma faced by the smalltown Ontario anonymous protagonist of Munro’s ‘Red Dress, 1946’ (*Dance of the Happy Shades*, 1968), the night before her first Christmas dance in school. As her mother fusses over the red dress, she had made for her daughter specially for this occasion, all the insecurities born out of an awkwardness over her changing body and the social pressure to seek validation through her ‘desirability’ in the eyes of her male counterparts threaten to engulf her, giving her first taste of the gender intensification that requires boys and girls to conform to some culturally sanctioned gender roles within the society. Uncomfortably self-conscious in the earliest throws of gender conditioning, “I counted hours. Above the couch on the wall paper, were old games of Xs and Os, old drawings and scribbling my brother and I had done when we were sick with bronchitis. I looked at them and longed to be back safe behind the boundaries of childhood” (Munro 2000, 151). It is at the crossroads of this yearning for the uncomplicated days of childhood, an eager anticipation for the new experiences of puberty promise to bring with it and an acute awareness of the gender conditioning it entails that Munro locates this transitional phase in the lives of her early-adolescent female protagonists across various fictional small towns of south-western Ontario.

Though reportedly fascinated by the earliest work of English-Canadian literature to have looked into the social and psychological implications of the journey of a girl child into adolescence, *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) by L. M. Montgomery (and *Emily of New Mon* (1928) that followed years later) as a teenager, Munro’s approach towards this motif has had its roots in the legacy of writers like Sime Jessie Georgina, Ethel Wilson, Gabrielle Roy and Marian Engels who entered the literary scene of English-Canada at the wake of the success of the suffrage movement in Canada in 1929. The social transformations that ensued post the granting of voting rights for women, was further reinforced by the need for women to play more significant roles within the public domain, in the conspicuous absence of their male counterparts, most of whom were away at war. A product of such times, this new generation of writers emerged to be the earliest in English-Canadian literature to focus on gender issues in a way so as to “portray the aspirations and ambitions of the ‘new woman’ and her

yearnings for independence and liberation from the limited constraints of the patriarchal society” (Salat 1993, 62) over the tumultuous decades from 1920s to 40s. The earliest presence of this ‘new woman’ in the literary scenario of English-Canada may be traced to Sime Jessie Georgiana’s short story cycle *Sister Woman* (1919), which highlighted issues of gender, sexuality and social restrictions in the lives of teenage girls and women in Montreal who began to pursue vocations like tailoring, corporate secretariate and munitions construction. This ‘new woman’ struggled to balance her domestic responsibilities with her professional ambitions, in the face of an intensification of gender role identities that made its presence felt at the very onset of puberty. It was with the emergence of the group of writers mentioned above that an explicit interrogation of the politics of gender intensification emerged to be the major focus for literary artists who chose to take up this motif in their works.

The earliest example may be found in the physical and emotional journey of Frances ‘Frankie’ Burnaby into and through adolescence in the novel *Hetty Dorval* (1947) by Ethel Wilson. Set in a small town society of Lytton in British Columbia, just before the outbreak of World War II, it is the first work of English-Canadian prose fiction to have traversed the changing contours of the body, newly awakened sexuality and psychological turmoil of a girl entering her teens through her wide-eyed fascination for her enigmatic neighbor, Hetty Dorval, a woman who refused to abide by the gendered norms of behavior prescribed for women within the 1940s’ Lytton society and chose to live life in her own terms. The perception of Dorval as a “negative presence, wherein an adolescent child is being tempted away from the values of her family and community” (Thomas 2012, 165) among the townspeople and Frankie’s eventual acceptance of this dominant view, highlights the gender specific constraints that strive to condition the socio-sexual behavior of young girls at the threshold of adolescence in the contemporary times. The motif also received some critical attention through an English translation of French-Canadian writer Gabrielle Roy’s *Street of Riches* (1957) - a collection of linked short stories that traced the emotional turmoil of a young girl moving towards adolescence within the smalltown society of St. Boniface in northern Manitoba. However, it is not until the publication of the stories ‘Red Dress, 1946’ and ‘Boys and Girls’ as a part of Munro’s first collection of stories *Dance of the Happy Shades*, that unpacking the physical and psychosexual development from childhood to pubertal/ early adolescent girls in the light of gendered socialization processes, emerges to be one of the most important thematic focuses of English-Canadian short story.

Munro largely bases both these stories and also the two collections of interlinked stories that follow thereafter, on her own experience of growing up in Wingham, Huron Country, Ontario. Be it Tuppertown where the girl in the red dress resides, be it Jubilee where the coming-of-age story of Del Jordan of *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) unfolds or be it Hanratty which sees the journey of Rose of *Who do you think you are?* (1978) from infancy to adulthood, each one is a fictional representation of her hometown from the 40s to the 60s. Secretive, superstitious, rumor driven close knit communities, where “everyone knew everyone” - these were societies where “aspirations that went beyond those of sexual stereotypes were not simply wrong, they were taboo” (Blodgett 1988, 33). Moral dissidences were bound to be treated in a harsh judgmental manner. The act of investing turns out to be one of the subtle, and often not so subtle techniques of moral policing and controlling female sexuality from the earliest moments of its inception within a girl. Thus, the tightly zipped “princess style” dress with its layers of lace and Victorian neckline made her feel like “a golliwog, stuffed into red velvet, wide-eyed, wild-haired with a suggestion of delirium” (Munro 2000, 152). The constant supervision of her mother emerges to be emblematic of the inherent dichotomy within the society, which steadily conditions a young adolescent to conceive her self-worth in terms of her physical ‘desirability’ for the members of the opposite sex on the one hand, and abide by the gendered expectations of ‘prudence’ and ‘modesty’ in her deportment, conduct and manners on the other. Less parental supervision in the life of her friend Lonnie deems her “vulnerable and at the same time privileged” (Munro 2000, 148) in the eyes of the protagonist, and she would gladly endure the former to be able to enjoy the latter.

She shares an ambivalent relationship with her mother -one where she is genuinely concerned about the earliest symptoms of Parkinson’s disease manifesting themselves in her, yet feels embarrassed when ‘sophisticated’ Lonnie chances upon her mother wearing her farmer’s high-wedged boots and ankle socks and fears that she would be made fun of for her creaking knees, heavy breathing and the knotted blue veins on her stockings-less legs. She is afraid that Lonnie would find even the squatting position she assumes while fitting the dress to her daughter’s pubescent frame to be ‘obscene’. Such a mother-daughter equation has had its roots in the one that young Alice shared with her own mother Anne Clarke Chammy Laidlaw. Having been a schoolteacher before her marriage to the fox and mink farmer Robert Laidlaw, Anne’s aspirations to move beyond the social circle of her working-class neighborhood in Lower Wingham and get inducted into the more upscale society on the other

side of the town, had shaped the gender intensification techniques applied on her firstborn to a great extent. Being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease a year after she moved her daughter from the Lower Town School near home to Wingham High School across the bridge, saw her pinning her hopes on her daughter. In Munro's own words:

Oh, my feelings about my mother were very complicated, because she was sick and she needed a lot of help, and yet she was a very gregarious person, who wanted very much to be part of a social life, and of course that wasn't possible. So I was embarrassed by her, I loved her but in a way perhaps didn't want to be identified with her, I didn't want to say the things she wanted me to say and do the things she wanted me to do, it was difficult in the same way that any adolescent would think of a person or a parent who was maimed in some respect. (Munro 2013, 1)

The gender specific restrictions imposed upon her looks, clothing and general demeanor during social visits, dances and school plays were aimed at protecting her from persecution and judgment of the conservative society on the one hand, and help her become more 'ladylike' and help her climb up the social ladder, on the other. The conflicting emotions such a situation gave rise to within Alice shapes many of the mother-daughter relationships portrayed in her stories, the very first being the story in question. Social embarrassment of a female adolescent over a terminally ill mother, coupled with the coercive need to fulfill her aspirations, finds resonance in *Rhoda* (1995), a collection of interlinked stories by the American writer Ellen Gilchrist, that maps "the lies, fantasies and pretensions of adolescence" (Grumbach 1982, 673) as it unfolds within Rhoda, growing up in a small town of American South. A literary contemporary of Munro, she espouses the legacy of the writers of American South like Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty and Katherine Ann Porter, who have admittedly been a major source of inspiration for Munro, for their role in shaping the American short story as an ideal genre to highlight the trials and tribulations of female protagonists within the conservative smalltown societies of the American South in the 1930s-40s. As Munro herself admits in her interview with McCullough and Simpson:

The writers of the American South were the first writers who really moved me because they showed me that you could write about small towns, rural people, and that kind of life I knew very well. But the thing about the Southern writers that interested me, without my being really aware of it, was that all the Southern writers whom I really loved were women. I loved Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Ann Porter, Carson McCullers. There was a feeling that women could write about the freakish, the marginal....I don't know why I came to have this feeling of being in the margins, I was never *pushed* to the margins. Maybe, I grew up in the margins. (Munro 1994, 2)



This feeling of ‘growing up in the margins’ had as much to do with her smalltown premises as her identity as a girl and as her experience of being the daughter of a woman suffering from a disease that affected her physical appearance as well as her social interactions. For both the smalltown societies of Gilchrist and her predecessors and that of Munro, it was such deviations from the ‘normal’ that would be treated with suspicion, in turn relegated to the domain of the ‘freakish’ and subject to contempt and ridicule.

The shame and disgust that Gilchrist’s Rhoda feels when her cancer ridden mother shows her post breast-amputation chest to some guests at their home in the story ‘Indignities’, resonates with the earliest symptoms of internalization of the standards of perfection Munro’s fictionalized smalltown society sets for girls and women, any deviation from which is treated with contempt, or worse still ridicule. The girl in the red dress from Munro’s story knows that Lonnie, adept at mimicry, was bound to make a caricature of her mother. The consequent shame may be understood in terms of the Gender Intensification Hypothesis, where Hill and Lynch postulate how sex-role orientation in the formative years of early adolescence conditions a child to start identifying, consciously or unconsciously, with the same-sex parent (Lerner 1981, 7). For a thirteen-year-old, caught between the desire to live up to the gendered expectations of the society and a desperate urge to free herself from constant social supervision, moral policing and censorship it entailed, such an attack on the public image of her mother is detrimental to her own self-image. Such an identification, where the social approval garnered by the mother becomes almost synonymous to the daughter’s claim to social acceptance thus emerges to be an integral part of the socialization process.

It is interesting to note how her own pubertal body becomes the site where this politics of socialization plays itself out. Made to feel uncomfortable in her own skin during the menstrual days of the month and petrified of spotting bloodstains on her skirt, she suffers from bouts of nervousness that affects her self-esteem so badly as to render her unable to engage in public interactions in school in ‘those days of the month’. She rubs snow on her chest and sleeps in her wet clothes the night before the dance, to avoid taking part in it. Her reactions – strongly reminiscent of the habit of social debutants of American South to make themselves sick by drinking salt and lemon to stop menstruating during their first ever ball as described in ‘Old Mortality’ penned by one of Munro’s personal favorites, Katherine Ann Porter. The girls are afraid that the unpleasant smell, the clammy palms or the bags under the eyes might put off their potential partners. This undue pressure to conform to certain ideas of

perfection and the adolescents' reaction to such pressure has been looked into critically by the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in the section on 'Formative Years' of her seminal work *The Second Sex* (2010) :

It is difficult to play the idol, the fairy or the remote princess when one feels a bloody piece of material between one's legs and more generally, when one knows the primal misery of being a body. The adolescent girl is condemned to the lie of pretending to be an object. Make-up, false curls, corsets and padded bras are lies. The face itself becomes a mask. Spontaneous expressions are produced through calculated machinations...for she learns at this age that her future depends on men's good offices. (Beauvoir 2010, 49)

The politics of objectification is such that aspiring 'social butterflies' are ready to trade not only their spontaneity, but also their personal hygiene, health and comfort to fit themselves into certain implausible molds of perfection created by the male gaze. Adolescence brings with it an acute awareness of the imbalance of power between the two sexes and some of the earliest occasions in which the judgmental smalltown societies in question accords limited opportunities for the intermingling of the members of the opposite sex, are the once that make such inequities most tangible for young girls.

Thus, for each of these girls – be it Munro's protagonist or be it the aspiring social belles by her American predecessor - the dance itself, supposed to be her first formal socially sanctioned stepping stone into adolescence, hardly helps her embrace her physical and psychological changes with the grace and confidence they deserve. The fear of not being able to 'catch' a handsome dance partner and incur the disapproval of her peers, her mother and the town at large is detrimental to her self-esteem, and so is the dress that enhances her discomfort with her fast-changing body: "As she zipped up the dress and turned me around to the mirror, I saw how my breasts in their new stiff brassiere, jutted out surprisingly, with mature authority, under the childish frills of the collar" (Munro 2000, 152). Lonnie's figure seems to be more 'mature', her dress helping her to look more 'grown-up' than her. The relief that floods her on being asked to dance by a popular school senior, brings with it the realization that the dance was never meant to a spontaneous physical expression of her emotions, but rather a social exercise in conforming to expectations that the society has of adolescent girls. Her mother's eager face, that reflects these expectations, makes her weary, prompting her never to divulge the details of the dance and revel in the satisfaction of her first, however insignificant, act of protest against the escalating pressure to succumb to gender-based conditioning within the society.

Among the works of Munro's contemporaries, who have also explored the dynamics of gender with small town Ontario societies, the one that sees the most explicit exploration of the relationship between dance as a social activity and the self-esteem of a female adolescent may be found in *Lady Oracle* that looks into the psychological repercussions of a being put into a ballet class by her mother to match the social standards of beauty the society imposes upon girls at the very onset of puberty on twelve year old Joan Burdened with the pressure of being named after her mother's screen idol Joan Crawford, 'Fat Girl' Joan works hard to forge a 'Thin Girl' persona, only to hate the latter and seek refuge in the former. Imbued with Gothic Realist elements, the novel pits the two doppelgangers against each other, positing formal dancing spaces as emblematic of a social setup that objectifies girls from the earliest years of adolescence. Munro addresses very similar concerns in her 'Changes and Ceremonies' and 'Lives of Girls and Women' (1971), by delving deep into the pain and humiliation suffered by young Del Jordan of Jubilee for not being selected as one of the dancers for the "Peasant's Wedding Dance" in the operetta *Pied Piper* to be staged in her school. Fifth in order among the eight interlinked short stories that constitutes her experimental *Lives of Girls and Women*, the story "draws the reader into the smells and tastes of the vulnerability, ignorance and venality that is adolescence" (Beer 2001, 125) through the first-person narrative of its young protagonist. Just as the girl in the red dress, one of the spaces where this vulnerability plays itself out most prominently is Del's pubescent body. Her eager, yet anxious anticipation, during the entire selection procedure had more to do with being validated for her physical appearance and 'feminine' appeal than anything else, both within and outside her family. Though her "expression remained bright and non-committal for pride's sake" (Munro 2001, 118), she is terrified of being found wanting in the department of physical attractiveness to her peers of both sexes, and disappoint her mother Ada Jordan who considered her selection to be one of the stepping stones towards the social validation of her 'femininity'. The fat girl/thin girl trope makes its presence felt in her laments:

I was in pain then. Suppose I only got to be a member of the crowd, pushed to the back of the stage? Suppose I never got on the stage after all? Some members of the class would not, like the fat girl and the albino boy. But not me! *Not me!* I had to walk home alone. My mother said "How goes the operetta?", meaning, did I have a part? "They are not doing anything yet. They haven't picked the parts yet". (Munro 2001, 118-119)

Munro strives to unpack this patriarchal politics of exclusion that deems ‘fat girls’ unsuitable and the girls like Alma Cody and June Gannett who meet the standards of normative beauty suitable for taking part in formal dance performances and induces the likes of Del to suffer from pangs of self-doubt over her pubescent body, but none over her talent of dancing. Before long she subjects others to body-shaming, attributing the selection of her friend Naomi in the role of a mother to her “rather short chunky figure” (Munro 2001, 119) and poking fun at the dance teacher for being “painfully skinny” (Munro 2001, 119) as a revenge for not selecting her for the dance. Her attitude finds social validation in the appreciation Alma Cody, with her curvy and well-toned figure, receives through her attempt at loosening her blouse to hint at the “impudent beginnings of her bust”. It finds further validation in her final selection in the dance, for it happens only because she is taller than the girl she is replaced with. The relief that floods Del thereafter, resonates with the “obligation to be happy” that the girl in the red dress feels burdened with - her ‘happiness’, a social construct that leaves her feeling trapped and wanting.

Interestingly, it is the same year as ‘Red Dress, 1946’ that sees the body of a dancing adolescent emerges to be the site of confrontation of conflicting forces of spontaneous exhilaration and socially sanctioned behavioral censorship in ‘Pichli Garmiyan Mein’(1968), the title story of the third anthology of short stories by Nirmal Verma. Set in the small hill station of Simla, the story chronicles the experience of homecoming of the protagonist Nindi, who is settled in Vienna– highlighting how his short visit impacts his family members. Like Munro, the social setup is largely based on the author’s own experience of growing up in Simla and returning there over the span of years lived in various European countries for over a decade. His portrayal of female characters especially those in the early throws of adolescence, based on his understanding of the dynamics of gender within the morally restrictive society of his hometown, is imbued with a sensitivity towards the effect of gender intensification techniques within the society. For Bulu, the lively inquisitive niece of Nindi at the brink of puberty, the decision to dance Charleston with her uncle, emerges to that moment when the earliest twinges of gender intensification makes its presence felt. As a girl who has never stepped out of the domain of her small town, the visit from her uncle excites Bulu. The much awaited reunion with the uncle she rarely got to meet, imbues her with a celebratory mood, that leads up to a proposal to dance. When Nindi came to India three years back they had waltzed together. But she was a child then, and as Hudson and Alvarez observes: “Social pressure for gender appropriate behavior is relatively benign

during childhood, particularly for girls. With the onset of puberty, however, both psychological and social forces act to increase awareness of gender roles and the efforts to adhere to them” (Alvarez and Huston 1990, 158). A female child dancing to her heart’s content even within the close quarters of one’s home and in the company of other family members- once exempted from social judgment as an act of childish fancy, tends to be considered gender ‘inappropriate’ behavior once she attains puberty. Her spontaneous excitement, flushed cheeks and uninhibited laughter, therefore, incurs the disapproving glances of her mother Neeta. Matters complicate further when Nindi, who had been happy to indulge his niece the previous time, is visibly uncomfortable to accept this proposal in the beginning, only to be deeply captivated by her adolescent nieces’ body, gait and demeanor during the dance. Bulu is no longer the ‘child’ he had known, and he is acutely aware of that:

As Bulu whirled around and kicked her legs and looked up at him, he was carried away. They danced closer and more briskly. Bulu ran into his arms. Her lips parted in a beautiful smile, so strikingly like what he had seen during his early days in Vienna on the lips of girls almost as young as Bulu as they sketched the heady steps of Charleston for the first time. “Faster uncle!”, Bulu whispered in his ear, her eyes bright on her flushed face. Nindi was both surprised and frightened by her intensity. He looked into her eyes and said on impulse “Come Bulu, let’s waltz” (Verma 1999, 64)

It is interesting to note how Bulu’s spontaneity reminds her uncle about a dance he had attended in Vienna. Largely unaware of the problematic gender politics underlying this process of ‘debuting’ in the society, he had marveled at the so-called freedom of movement and expression that these girls enjoyed. As the members of an upper-middle class family of the former summer capital of the British, the formative years of Nindi, her siblings and his childhood friend-turned-sweetheart Aruna though not completely uncoloured by the desire to embrace certain ‘Western’ cultural practices and social etiquettes - acquired through convent educations and frequent visits to clubs and ‘parties’ –had largely been governed by the ‘traditional’ gender specific norms operating within the 1930s-40s’ Simla society. This early encounter with the young girls in Vienna had made him dwell upon his sister or sweetheart who were much more restrictive (and socially restricted) in their interaction with members of the opposite sex. He had been drawn to them like he had never been to Aruna before. Such spontaneity in his niece, therefore, takes him completely off guard. It makes him look at her in a new light and he is suddenly hesitant to waltz with the girl he had danced numerous times over her childhood. As the physical proximity makes him more and more aware of her changing body and though “the sweetness of childhood” (Verma 1999, 66) still lingers on her

breath, she suddenly appears to be much older than her age in his eyes. He is not ‘frightened’ by her ‘intensity’, rather the reactions it evokes within him, for after a point he no longer wants this proximity to end, suggesting one dance after the other. Even in the semi-darkness of the room, his inner turmoil reflected in his face and body language silently communicates itself to his sister Neeta, transforming her initial indulgence to disapproval.

Bulu, yet to suffer the onslaught of gendered conditioning, initially displays a lack of inhibitions that could come only out of a girl yet to be made overtly conscious about her changing body and the restrictions it entailed vis-à-vis her interactions with a member of the opposite sex, even if it he was a close relative. Her mother’s gentle, but firm rebuke for what she considers to be gender inappropriate behavior, emerges to be her earliest brush with gender conditioning. It is hard to tell whether this rebuke comes as a response to the sexual undercurrent that emanates from her brother, or it is actually prompted by the complete lack of reservations on the part of her daughter. It takes Bulu by surprise, for it is not the first time that she has danced with her uncle. She is aware of the sudden change in Nindi’s attitude towards her, and also that her mother somehow holds *her* responsible for it. He is a family elder who she had always been extremely close to and comfortable with. The inability to fathom how puberty could have altered this equation cuts her enthusiasm short. Like the girl in the red dress or Del Jordan, Bulu too is somewhat shamed into ‘prudence’, her dancing body emerging to be the most potent site within which the gender politics would play itself out.

A similar incident of being shamed into ‘appropriate’ behavior comes the way of young Munni in *nayi kahanika* Rajendra Yadav’s ‘Pass aur fail’ too. The youngest of among four siblings, she continues to be the ‘bacchi’ (baby) of the household, even at the brink of adolescence. A vivacious girl known to add life and laughter to the family, her first lesson at gender conditioning hits her hard one evening as her father Professor Bhargav admonishes her with a sudden ruthlessness for dancing to the tunes of her favorite Hindi film songs. Though never particularly close to her father, she had always known him to be a man of principles who never discriminated amongst his children on the grounds of gender. Therefore, it comes as a surprise to not only Munni but also the readers that the man who had scolded his wife for making their elder daughter Bitti do housework the day before her college examination, would react so violently over this matter. As the generally softspoken man screamed,

“मुन्नी की बच्ची! इस रेडियो में आग लगा दूंगा एकदीन। सुबह सुबह पूजा नहीं, भजन नहीं ..... अब यहां वजह ‘C A T cat’ की ‘आजा रे परदेसिया’ होने लगा! यह घर है या होटल?” (Yadav 2000, 95)

“Munni ki bacchi! Iss radio mein aag laga dunga ekdin. Subah subah puja nahi, bhajan Nahi.... Aab yahan bajah ‘C A T cat’ ki “aaja re pardeshiya” hone laga! Yeh ghar hai ya hotel?”

*Munni, you naughty scum! I shall set this radio on fire! People are supposed to begin the day with prayers and bhajans ...instead ‘C A T cat’ and ‘Aje re pardesiyaan’ are being played here. Is this a house or a hotel?*

the radio turns silent abruptly, so does Munni’s spontaneously pattering feet. The negative connotation associated with the word ‘hotel’ and its juxtaposition with ‘ghar’ highlights how such a behavior is uncalled for from a ‘respectable’ girl, and how it would eventually be counted as a slur upon her family. What remains unknown to her is how her father secretly regrets not having made her sit on his lap while she was still a child. The onset of puberty in her body, makes him painfully aware of the near future when she would have to follow the footsteps of her elder sister in undergoing the harrowing experiences that arranged marriages entail within the society. It pains him that in spite the wave of women’s emancipation that has swept over the “old and decaying small towns of the Hindi speaking belt of 60s and 70s India” (Pande 2013, 1), the traditional gender values that perceive marriage as the ultimate goal of a woman’s life, still prevails therein. He wants the society to spare her this humiliation. Yet his own gender consciousness is marked by a certain tussle between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’, that restricts Munni’s movements and thwarts her spontaneity like never before. He wishes with all his heart that he would someday be able to establish effective communication with his children, particularly Munni, and make them comfortable enough to confide in him. But his action just serves to alienate the girl further from him. Just as it happens with Bulu, the incident defamiliarizes whatever the adolescent has deemed to be ‘familiar’ to her – her body, her dance and even her family.

However, unlike Munni who withdraws into a shell, Bulu’s pleading eyes beseech her mother to allow her to continue dancing. The hurt and bewilderment etched in them strongly resonates with that of the aspiring opera dancer Del or the social debutante in the Red Dress – one that comes with the acute awareness of the sexualization of their body and

the consequent onslaught of gendered behavioral censorship both within and outside the family. Never again would she be able to enjoy dancing with the same unadulterated exuberance as before, never again would she enjoy the same camaraderie she once shared with her uncle and most importantly, never again would she expect her mother to understand her needs, desires and aspirations as before.

What Bulu never comes to know is that, her mother later scolds her brother too for indulging her “pretty excitable” (Verma 1999, 67) daughter and it was not only her dance that prompt Neeta to describe the child as such. She is an inquisitive girl whose interests transcend the sphere of domesticity traditionally ascribed to girls and women within the smalltown society she resides in. She is already a very well-read child, with a keenness to know about the countries visited by her uncle. She is eager to gather as much information as possible about the topography, architecture and culture of those lands and can hardly wait for Nindi to present her with the coins collected over his travels across the world. She had specially requested for them – for the coins were not mere collectibles for her, they were emblematic of the cultures they represented:

“Are these all for me?” she chimed. Rather than a question it was an exclamation of joy at the certainty that all these coins belonged to her. He pulled his chair close to the table and launched into a commentary on the coins – the Australian shilling, Italian Ira, krone of the Faeroe Islands, and so on. “Did you go to the Faeroe islands also? You did not mention that in your letters. Are those islands as small as they appear on the map?”, she asked carried away by her curiosity. He placed his cheek to his palm. “They are each smaller than your palm, my dear”. (Verma 1999, 64-65)

Her hobby of coin collection is prompted by a desire to broaden her horizon beyond her immediate realities and Nindi emerges to be her gateway to the world outside. The nascent seeds of travel goals and professional aspirations that is encapsulated within her passion for collecting coins provide an insight into the effect of changing social circumstances upon the adolescent girls growing up in the hill towns of North India in the decade after independence. With the towns trying to recover from the onslaught of economic depressions from the decades before, with the migrations to cities becoming the norm for the towns’ youth, with breaking up of joint families with nuclear units and with more and more women seeking economic emancipations comes a crisis of values within these societies. While Bulu’s mother, representing the voice of the society struggles to negotiate with this crisis, continues to impose gender specific expectations on the girl that deem the mere act of asking questions



to be unbecoming in a girl, to say the least of her ‘unfeminine’ hobbies and interests, Bulu chooses to stand by her aspirations. Unfortunately, it is this choice that deems her ‘excitable’, a quality that might pose a threat to the patriarchal machinery of gender conditioning. Caught between the fear of being judged for being too assertive, too comfortable in her own skin and too eager to step into the world outside the sphere of domesticity within her morally restrictive smalltown society, and a desire to embrace the newly emergent consciousness pertaining to gender roles within it, Bulu is a product of a society in transition. It is during the emotionally vulnerable journey from childhood to adolescence that the ramifications of this transition come out in the most explicit manner, through intergenerational conflicts.

The role of such conflicts in creating and perpetuating alienation both within and beyond the family emerges to be one of the major thematic focuses of Hindi *nai kahani* through the creative endeavors of Verma or Yadav. Such estrangements and alienations bear testimony to the changing dynamics of gender within the small-town societies of the Hindi belt of North India. It is within the complex folds of this newly emerged gender dynamics that Verma situates his female adolescents of his *nai kahani*. So does his fellow *nai kahanikars* like Yadav, Kamaleswar, Mohan Rakesh and Mannu Bhandari. But it is much before the possibility of such changes in gender dynamics dawned upon the urban Hindi speaking population of the newly independent and sovereign nation-state, that the interrogation of gender politics within the society had emerged as an important thematic focus within Hindi prose fiction.

It comes about with the emergence of the voice of Munshi Premchand as a force to reckon with, within the early twentieth century Hindi literary scenario. It is through his *Pragativadi* literary endeavors that strives to address and interrogate the evils (which included class struggle, caste-based inequalities and political subjugation) that plagued the erstwhile Indian society, that gender-based oppression and discrimination begin to be highlighted in Hindi novels and short stories. The pubescent body and emotional upheavals of his early adolescent female protagonists turns out to be the site where the physical, social and psychological ramifications of such oppressions are most explicit. Be it ‘Prema’ that highlights the earliest moments of awareness within child-widow Prema about her changing body and the alternate bouts of thrill and guilt that arises from her sexual encounter with the priest of the temple she is forced to visit in order to practice spiritual abstinence, or be it thirteen year old Kailash of ‘Nairashya Lila’ (1923) whose inability to realize the social implications of widowhood induces her to lead to maintain a happy and carefree demeanor,

much to the embarrassment of her family, Premchand delves deep into the psycho-sexual repercussions of widowhood on early adolescent girls in an extremely sensitive manner. Stories like 'Nirmala' (1924) or 'Nark ka Marg' (1924) highlights the trials and tribulations of girls at the brink of puberty, trapped in marriages with much older men. Other stories like 'Shaadi ka Vajah' problematize the objectification of the body a young girl in the name of proving her desirability within the 'marriage market' and highlight its adverse effects upon the self-esteem of adolescent would-be bride. But though a strong advocator of property rights for women and deeply averse to child marriages, he "cherished the idea of a traditional Hindu woman" (G. Pandey 1986, 1283) one that expected them to be self-effacing for the sake of their family and to uphold the 'essential virtues' of sacrifice and chastity even at the cost of their physical and mental wellbeing. Therefore, an ashamed Prema ends her life in self-pity, Kailash ultimately resigns to her 'fate' and begins to practice abstinence with a heavy heart and Nirmala remains obedient and loyal to a husband who brings nothing but misery to her life. Thus, in spite of having a subversive potential, these stories never manage to break away completely the traditional patriarchal values that strive to control and repress the desires and sexuality of girls from the very moment they attain puberty, and often even before that. Moreover, Premchand concentrates upon rural communities and endorses the traditional gender roles within the erstwhile society that relegates the contribution of girls and women to the arena of the domestic, often projecting the 'modern' 'Westernized' women with aspirations beyond the domestic as the morally degenerate 'Other' to the former, as found in his stories like 'Shanti' (1928) and 'Do Sakhiyan' (1928). The only agency he accords to women in the public sphere is that of an advocator of the cause of nationalism in a country battling colonial domination. His later works like 'Juloos' (1930) or 'Cricket' (1936), therefore, lay the foundations of a female consciousness that though deeply embedded within the traditional norms of the society, is imbued with a new-found awareness about the nationalistic zeal brewing within the country and a keen interest to be a part of the movements and protests taking place across the firmament of the British colony.

As slightly younger contemporaries of Premchand and fellow *Pragativadi kahanikars* who do not restrict their works to rural communities, Yashpal and Upendranath Ashka, often resonate the vision of Premchand in their attempt at exploring the scope of resistance for girls and women from within the traditional domain of the household. Voices of resistance emerge, only to be subsumed within the dominant patriarchal discourse of ideal womanhood. But as Yashpal delves deep into stories like 'Karwa ka bhrat', where thirteen

year old naive Lajwanti learns to negotiate with the physical and emotional repercussions of ‘pleasing’ her husband at the cost of her own self-respect, he also harps upon the importance of formal education in the formative years of a girl child. Married off while studying in the eighth grade in Aligarh by her “पुराने सोचवाले” (old school) family members, she is perpetually caught between her unfulfilled dreams of pursuing her studies and the obligation to take up the mantle of domestic responsibilities and discharge them with sincerity. The tussle takes on a more serious form in ‘Santanki machine’, where a debate over young Munni’s future ensues within her family. The little bungalow in the hill station of Dharamsala sees heated arguments on whether she should continue with her studies or be married off. The discussions lead to an overhauling of the traditional gender values which commoditize the body of a newly pubescent girl, reducing it to a mere property of the father to be handed over to a ‘suitable’ husband as soon as possible. She would eventually be turned into a reproductive machine. The arguments problematize the traditional belief that education would lead a girl astray and the ultimate resolution comes with a strong message from Munni’s brother:

“बच्ची को अच्छी शिक्षा मिलेगी तो परिवार टूट नहीं जायेगा। परिवार की रूप और क्षेत्र भी सदा एकसी नहीं रहे। परिवार तो प्रतिष्ठाओ की साथ बनते थे और बनेंगे” (Yashpal 1997, 127)

*“Bacchi ko acchi shiksha milegi to paribar tut nahi jayega. Paribar ki rup aur khestra bi sada eksi nahi hai. Paribar to pratishtayo ki sath bante the aur banenge.” (Yashpal 1997, 127)*

A girl being provided with proper education would not propel the family towards destruction. The structure of a family and the social premises within which it operates keeps changing. Family has always been shaped by circumstances extraneous to it, and so it shall be.

Circumstances were indeed changing, at least at the policy level. The year 1927 sees the establishment of All India Women’s Congress (AIWC) in Delhi. The organization continues to engage in effective activism to promote women’s rights with special emphasis on women’s education. The enactment of ‘Child Marriage Restraint Act’ (popularly known as Sharda Act) of 1929, legally raises the minimum age for marriage in girls to sixteen. These legal interventions reflect certain changes vis-à-vis the perception of girls, at least within the urban

space of India, changes that find expression in the works of the second generation *Pragativadi* writers.

It is, however, the advent of Jainendra Kumar and S. H. Vatsayana (Ajneya) within the Hindi literary scenario that laid the foundations of the way in which the journey of a girl child into adolescence began to be dealt with within Hindi *nayi kahani* two decades later. As the social-realist concern for interrogating the social evils began to give way to psychological exploration of human emotions in the works of Jainendra Kumar, *Tyagpatra* (1937) delved deep into the mind of the protagonist Mrinal to map the excitements and insecurities that mark her pathway into puberty. The fourteen-year-old orphaned girl who lives in her brother's household and constantly suffers the onslaught of his wife's criticism, gives vent to her newly awakened sexuality through a physical intimacy with her nephew Pramod, slightly younger to her:

"I don't want to be your aunt, how dreadful! Call me Jiji. Look, see how high those birds fly. I want to be a bird. She spreads those wings and flies off wherever she wants to go. What fun, isn't it?" She was restless the whole day. That night she hugged me for a long time. She asked me, "Pramod, do you love me?" I heard her, but I didn't reply, only buried my face deeper into the nest of her breast. At this she said, "Pramod, I love you very much".  
(Jainendra Kumar 1999, 12)

Pramod, who has always adored his Bua, is old enough to realize that "nature of her love for me has changed" and yet reciprocates spontaneously. As children they had spent numerous nights upon the roof in each other's company; but this encounter has somehow transgressed the boundaries of childhood intimacy into something more and both are aware of it. By delving deep into the psycho-sexual implications this incident this holds for both two children trying to come in terms with the changing contours of their body and mind, Jainendra imbues the literary exploration of early adolescence in Hindi literature with a sensitivity and sensibility like never before. Though it is a mutually reciprocal encounter, it is only the girl who suffers the dire consequences of this encounter, being brutally beaten and shamed by her sister-in-law, stopped from attending school and finally married off early. Mrinal's ardent wish to be like a bird or fly kites is emblematic of her desire to live a life free of social constraints and behavioral censorship - a desire that remains far beyond her reach even in the throes of adulthood. The effect of such rigorous and repressive socialization upon the adult life of a woman is explicit in one of the earliest short stories, 'Roz' (1934), penned by Jainendra's contemporary Ajneya too. 'Roz', identified to have been "very close to *nayi*

*kahani* in its atmosphere of alienation” (Rodermal 1969, 38)), the narrator keeps juxtaposing the carefree exuberance of his childhood friend Malti during her early adolescence with the dispassionate aloofness with which she leads her life post marriage in a small hill station where her husband works. Meeting her after many years makes him look into his memories that shock him into realizing that the girl he had once known no longer existed. He laments losing his friend to the grueling process of turning a girl into a ‘woman’, where the latter does not refer to a biological category but an ensemble of social expectations a biologically female person is supposed to abide by. Her husband arrives very late for lunch and she waits for him and eats only after he has finished with his meal, thereby abiding by the traditional gender role ascribed to her as a married woman. Yet her complete emotional alienation from him and her child and her peculiar habit of keeping count of every hour she spends in domestic drudgery (up to midnight when she finally goes to bed) aloud, speaks of a woman who needs a life beyond the ‘domestic’ arena to add meaning to her existence. The bits and pieces of the newspaper the grocery comes wrapped in, is her only window into this world and her reads them with an eagerness she hardly displays while doing her household chores. The theme of alienation thus becomes emblematic of the tussle between the ‘traditional’ and the emergent ‘modern’ sensibilities vis-à-vis gender.

This tussle emerges to be even more explicit in the stories penned by him in the following decade, culminating ultimately in works like ‘Ve dusre’ (1950) and ‘Saap’ (1950) that dwell upon women protagonists who strive to take charge of their own lives in the arena of love, marriage and relationships. Such stories effectively lay the foundations of a new age gender consciousness. As the decade progresses “the post-independence travails, economic aspirations, the fast crumbling of traditional norms and the impact of Western culture posit the urban Hindi speaking woman’s consciousness in a spate of awakening against male-dominated, tradition hidden society” (Kumar 1990, 47), and it is with the publication of Nirmal Verma’s *Parinde* (1959) followed by that of *Jalti Jhari* (1965) and *Pichli Garmiyon Me* (1968), that this ‘awakening’ emerges to be a major focus of Hindi short story. Highlighting the struggles of this ‘New Woman’ struggling against traditional social conditioning in order to curve a self-identity beyond the domestic effectively accounts for one of the most important areas of thematic *nayapan* (newness) that makes *nayi kahani* what it is. It is within such a tug-of-war between tradition and modernity that one might place the inter-generational conflict between Bulu and her mother in ‘Pichli Garmiyon Me’. The girl’s ‘unconventional’ interests foreshadow certain future aspirations that undercuts the traditional

patriarchal conceptualization that deems marriage and motherhood to be the ultimate end of a woman's life and looks upon her attainment of puberty to be the right time to start conditioning girls towards that end.

The snubbing that comes her way through her mother, finds resonance with the standpoint of Ada Jordan in 'Change of Ceremonies' and 'Lives of Girls and Women' (1971), who reproaches her daughter time and again for her ambition to become a writer. Jubilee is after all a fictional representation of Wingham, where, as Munro herself states in her Nobel Acceptance speech: "If you had aspirations beyond the norm, they would say, "So, you think you are smart? It is better not to be that smart" (Munro 2013, 2). Any non-normative gender aspirations are met with cynicism and a girl wanting to pursue a career is definitely one of them. As "one of those heavy, cautiously moving, wrecked survivors of the female life with varicose veins, a dropped womb, inflammations, cysted ovaries, discharges, lumps and stones in various places and numerous stories to tell" (Munro 1974, 38), Ada realizes how the lack of an identity independent of a man (husband, father or son) tends to reduce a woman to a 'domestic animal'. She ardently desires that her daughter's life be driven not only by physical but also intellectual imperatives. She wants her to have an identity of her own. But even this idea of a 'better' life charted out in a city (free from the confines of her own provincial existence) does not really look beyond a successful marriage and a fruitful motherhood as the ideal life-goals that young pubertal Del should start working towards. She is after all a part of that generation who had been put through gender conditioning in such a way that they had internalized and normalized it in a way as to look at gender roles to 'innate', 'natural' and therefore sacrosanct, inducing them to perpetuate it in their young ones. But times are changing and Del has more choices regarding her life-goals than her mother ever had and she refuses to conform to her mother's expectations, conceptualizing her future in a way her mother never could:

Her speaking of my children amazed me, for I never meant to have any. It was glory I was after, walking the streets of Jubilee like an exile or a spy, not sure from which direction fame would strike, or when, only convinced in my bones that it had to. In this conviction my mum had shared, she had been an ally, but now I would no longer discuss it with her. She was indiscreet and took too blatant a form. (Munro 1974, 134-135)

The desire for this 'glory' is all about forging an identity for her own self that she has always had as a child and had believed Ada to be on the same boat with her. But disillusionment comes with the onset of puberty, when Del identifies her mother as a member of the older

generation who has certain misgivings about their young ones breaking the gender role stereotypes within the society. The boys are sent to play hockey while the girls are detained to help the teacher clean the messy classroom, adolescent boys with half-baked (mostly erroneous) knowledge about the changing bodies of her female classmates are not judged for passing derogatory remarks on their private parts while Del and her friends retorting back is considered to be inappropriate. A girl is expected to take full responsibility of consensual sexual encounter between two members of the opposite sex for “My mother says we can control our urges better than they can. A boy can’t help himself”. (Munro 1974, 126) Such gender role allocation and the consequent discrimination bring out the hypocrisy and the double standards that infuriate Del for its adverse effect on her self-esteem as a girl. Furious at the differential treatment meted out to boys and girls of her age, unsettled and upset by the sense of entitlement it bestows upon the members of the opposite sex and the lack of self-confidence it instilled within their female counterparts, she turns to the dance teacher Miss Farris for inspiration. Del’s formative years unfold at a historical juncture of smalltown Ontario milieu when women, though only a few, have started making their mark in different professions. Her dance teacher Miss Farris or the post office clerk Miss Fern Dougherty though exceptions, manage to set an example for young adolescents like Del urging her to aspire to carve an identity beyond the domain of family. The juxtaposition of the wide-eyed awe of the young adolescents for these women with the endless speculations over their ‘unconventional’ fashion sense, bitter criticism of their unmarried status and preposterous rumors over their alleged love affairs circulating within the older generations all reflects the struggles of a society trying to negotiate with the changing dynamics of gender that called for the breaking of gender role stereotypes. Not only the exemplary life-choices of these working women, the books from the library of the Town Hall, too, are instrumental in shaping the self-image of these young adolescents. While the ‘girls’ mystery books’ provide an early insight into the intricacies of sexual intercourse, pregnancy and birth-control that the adults are reluctant to divulge, books like *Forty Years A Country Preacher* or *The Queen’s Own in Peace and War* open the windows to the world outside the narrow confines of their smalltown existence. Moreover these “walls of printed pages, evidence of so many created world” (Munro 1974, 111) come to be her comfort zone – a place of respite from the claustrophobic social life informed by increasing gender intensification. She marvels at the writers’ ability of creating theses ‘worlds’. She finds it empowering, and deems it one of the most exciting ways through which she might reclaim her fast-eroding agency. Her spirit of

adventure, her desire to travel the world and her aspirations to find 'glory' in being a spy or an exile, all find culmination in this new dream.

But while Verma's short story leaves the fulfillment of Bulu's aspirations to the readers' imagination, Munro's short story cycle follows its protagonist to adulthood where the 'Epilogue' shows her to have established herself as a writer in spite of all social adversities. Janet Beer lauds this attempt of "fracturing the preoccupation that the story of a young woman's teenage years must incorporate a natural and inevitable movement towards the married state or the attainment of romantic love or that there is any one dominant chord in a woman's life" (Beer 2001, 126) on the part of Munro. Del does manage to have a life beyond the domestic drudgery her mother had been conditioned to succumb to. This deliberate dissidence from traditional gender roles directly reflects how the dynamics of gender is changing within her smalltown society. Verma's narrative, though left open-ended has enough potential to highlight similar transformations within his own smalltown milieu. In spite of not having the narrative space of an entire short story cycle accorded for the development of Bulu's character, Verma too manages to identify the seeds of a strong-willed, free-thinking, economically emancipated woman in the spunky girl that his protagonist is. His story almost foreshadows his very next publication *Laal Tin ki Chat* (1974), a novel that delves deep into the remembrance of the adult Kaya by inviting the reader to embark upon a journey through her memories of that one year that marked her passage from childhood into adolescence. It traverses the physical and psychological terrain of eleven-year-old Kaya's journey into puberty, one that is bogged by cumulative forces of social conditioning, moral policing and body shaming and yet marked by her indomitable spirit to circumvent each of them to embrace her physical and mental transformations with grace and confidence.

In the light of the changing dynamics of gender in the Simla society, the novel highlights the importance of taking cognition of the fact that while puberty brings an onslaught of restrictions and behavioral censorship for the girls, so comes an urge to look beyond the patriarchal discourse of equating 'self-respect' of a girl with her ability to abide by the codes of propriety vis-à-vis her expression of sexuality. With her mother struggling with a difficult pregnancy, her father away in Delhi for work for most of the year and her brother Chhote too young to be her confidante, Kaya is mostly left to the care of the manservant Mangtu, her Bua and her neighbour, old Mrs Joshua in the last few pre-pubescent months of her life. Mature for her age, introvert and imaginative, it is her solitary wanderings in the mountains or the night time strolls in and around her house that help her to take stock of her



life and seek answers to the numerous questions that are mostly evaded by the adults in her life. “Kaya did not fear the loneliness; she was just a little mystified, as though it grew within one like a sickness, out of sight of people – of Chhote, of Mother, of Mrs Joshua. She was growing up unnoticed, unlike Mother, whom everyone noticed” (Verma 61 )She hates the way old Mrs. Joshua body-shames her pregnant mother, she detests how the people in the locality brand her fiercely free-spirited cousin Lama a ‘witch’ for resisting the coercive attempts to marry her against her will and she absolutely abhors the way she is packed off to her uncle’s place because of the lack of people in her own home to discharge the crucial responsibility of monitoring and controlling the activities of a girl, whose body had already started showing signs of pubertal change. A familiar childhood role-play involving the offering of adulation to goddess Chandika transforms unconsciously into her very first attempt at dissidence from the restraints imposed upon her in the form of self-pleasuring:

Kaya had a strange feeling that the hands that stroked her were Kali Ma’s, not her own. *What a courageous devotee! This little girl, braving the cold naked.* Kaya’s hair flowed down , her hand slid down from her throat to her small breasts, Massaged, pinched, a wave of intoxication bearing her along without her realizing that she had gone beyond play-acting to enter a messy world where she was her own witness....”Orre Kaya , don’t you even have an iota of shame?”- It was Chandika Ma. Kaya scrambled into her clothes, casting about in utter despair. (Verma [1974] 2013, 107)

The goddess emerges as the reflection of her inner turmoil, representing her sexuality that seeks expression on the one hand, and the patriarchal social norms that strive to repress it on the other. As her body and mind takes cognition of her first stirrings of sexual desire for her cousin (Chacha’s son) Beeru, the ‘forbidden’ finds expression in dreams and fantasies, in which the crucified statue of Christ she had seen in a dilapidated church, becomes one with Beeru in her mind:

I have grown up, she told herself. Her eyelids drooped with sleep. Her dry scaly lips mumbled *Beeru Beeru*, while she led herself into believing that he might just hear her. Her thoughts were in turmoil buffeted by nebulous longings. There was a sudden gnawing memory of a body nailed to a swinging piece of wood. It stood near her pillow - utterly silent, but pleading. (Verma [1974] 2013, 166)

It is interesting to note the way in which female sexuality and sexual desire is understood through religious metaphors in the novel. What prompts the writer to make his young protagonists take the likes of Jesus Christ or Devi Chandika, who are emblematic of institutionalized religions, that have traditionally frowned upon sexual encounters outside the

‘sanctity’ of marriage, particularly any assertive expression of female sexual desire, as the points of reference to come in terms with her newly awakened sexuality? This deliberate and conscious act of subversion strives to overhaul one of the most important power structures of the patriarchal machinery that threatens to smother female sexuality and sexual desire, under an overtly judgmental shroud of ‘shame’ and ‘sin’. Through the final moments of the novel that sees the feeling of emancipation that floods an exhilarated Kaya running alongside a train as she starts bleeding for the first time, menstruation, too, is projected as a life-force that empowers rather than delimits Kaya from claiming her agency from within social forces that pose a threat to her freedom of thought and actions. It is with such a portrayal of self-pleasuring, menstruations and sexual fantasies that the exploration of early adolescence in a girl child comes of age in Hindi literature. In each case, the feeling of guilt is overridden with a sense of achievement that strives to drive home the need to accept them as natural psycho-sexual phenomena that puberty brings with it in a girl.

Penned almost two decades after the story that has been responsible for imbuing the Hindi short story with the much-needed *nayapan* of form and content and establishing Verma as the pioneer of the Nayi Kahani movement in Hindi literature, this story highlights the way in which the treatment of female adolescence has evolved over the years in the works of the writer. ‘Parinde’ first published in the literary journal ‘Hans’ (Ardhavarshank, 1956) and later as the title story of Verma’s first anthology *Parinde* (1959), sees fourteen year old Julie, the first ever female adolescent character created by Verma, being shamed and ‘disciplined’ by the music teacher and hostel warden Latika for receiving a letter from an admirer from the nearby army cantonment. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Latika, in spite of being an economically emancipated ‘modern’ woman, is perpetually caught between a compulsive need to adhere to the deeply internalized notion of traditional Indian womanhood that posits life-long allegiance towards one partner (even after his death) as the most important female virtue and the natural urge to find happiness in a new romantic relationship. Much of this attitude is predicated upon the patriarchal notion about female ‘virtue’ that vests a girl’s ‘respect’ and ‘respectability’ upon the ‘purity’ of her body and effectively refutes the sexual and emotional need of companionship in a woman. The stain that gossips and rumors circulated within the close-knit small-town community about any ‘transgressive’ behavior of a girl is bound to bring upon her ‘reputation’ further reinforces this mindset. This is clear from the way in which she treats Julie. As the narrative maps the thought processes of Latika, it is revealed that her admonitions have not sprung from a

concern for the well-being of a minor but rather from certain mental health hazards plaguing her existence and also an acute fear of the social judgment and shame that the rumor of Julie being spotted with a young army officer might bring with it. The unopened blue envelop that Julie is denied access to, emerges to be emblematic of the autonomy denied to the mind and the body of a girl-child ever since the onset of puberty. Latika is not insensitive to what the letter might mean to the girl. She realizes

“शायद जुली का यह प्रथम परिचय है, उस अनुभूति से, जैसे हर लड़की बड़े चाह से सजोकर , संभालकर अपने में छिपाए रखती है , एक अनिर्बचनीय सुख जो पीड़ा लिए है।”(Verma 2010, 131)

*(Shayad Julie ka yeh pratham parichay hai, us aubhuti se, jaise har ladki bade chah se sajokar, sambhalkar apne mein chipaye rakhti hai, ek anibarchaniya such jo pira liye hai.)*

It is, perhaps, the very first time that Julie gets a taste of that special feeling which every girl treasures and preserves with utmost care in some secret corner of their hearts. An ethereal pleasure that is never free of sorrow.....one heartache that overflows with happiness, and sings with pain.

This must be Julie's very first encounter with the special feeling, an overwhelming happiness tinged with sorrow, that every girl secretly harbors within her heart with a lot of love and care and yet she withholds the letter from her. The generally truthful girl's momentary decision to claim it to be a letter from her brother comes out as a final and desperate attempt to resist the onslaught of ruthless interrogation and moral policing that comes her way. Julie's humiliation, in the name of schooling her in the codes of propriety 'good' girls are expected to follow, sees the lively, teacher-friendly girl transform into a shaky, white-faced and secretive child. She is burdened with the guilt of having shamed herself in the eyes of an essentially unforgiving society, largely represented by one of the most important guardian-figures in her life. The hurt and the humiliation experienced by her is congruent to that of every female adolescent who is shamed into normative behavior within the smalltown premises of Munro's stories. The boundaries between the public and the private get blurred and in the process, even the most person actions and the presumed intent behind them are subject to public speculations and judgments. Such discussions often see facts being twisted,

even fabricated, and events being exaggerated to serve the ‘unhealthy’ interest of inquisitive individuals in the lives of their fellow townspeople.

Thus, gossip and rumor emerge to be major tools to communicate and reinforce the taboos and stigma around female body and sexuality within the impressionable psyche of the young adolescents in the small-town world of Munro’s stories too. Superstitions and a general lack of awareness about the physical and mental health of children crossing the threshold of adolescence coupled with the conservative mentality of the society ensures an attempt to thwart the awakening sexuality of young girls both within the public and the private sphere of Jubilee. Del’s world is frequented by men like Naomi’s father who posit virginity as the greatest virtue of a girl in the garb of imparting the sermons of *The Bible* to them or the music teacher Mr. Chamberlain who considers even giggling to be ‘inappropriate’ behavior among young girls that might ‘distract’ and ‘provoke’ their male classmates. She has in her life women like Naomi’s mother, who though herself a nurse, consciously perpetuates the misconception of pregnancy out of wedlock leading to the birth of a ‘deformed’ baby and exploits her position to dig up the deepest and most carefully guarded secrets in the lives of girls and women to ascertain social embarrassment for them. The negative publicity that is garnered by gossip and rumor in the lives of the Kayas or the Julies of mid-twentieth century small towns of North India, is a part and parcel of Del’s adolescence too. In a society where gossip about the most intimate details of people’s lives spreads like wildfire and the expression of female sexual desire is liable to various degrees of (unofficial) persecution, it is because of individuals like her that suppression of sexual and emotional needs of girls becomes the ‘norm’. Dissidence incurs heavy penalty. Del’s friend, young Violet is shamed for a sexual encounter with a fellow classmate Dale to an extent that her entire family has to leave the town. As for Dale, it just helps to increase his desirability quotient among the girls in his school. Fern Dougherty’s teenage pregnancy outside wedlock costs her position at the conservatory and earns her the scorn of the entire town, a scorn that continues to plague her through adulthood. It is an incident that is used to pull her down every time she strives to claim her agency as an economically emancipated woman. No wonder a woman like Ada Jordan, who has the tenacity to advocate the need to distribute prophylactic devices (for birth control) among the women of Jubilee in the face of rampant social ridicule, is obliged to discourage any consensual sexual encounter of her daughter in the name of ‘honor’ and ‘dignity’. Her concerns mirror that of Latika— both women, both conditioned to predicate their guardianship upon the parameters of the small-town morality

that they had come to accept as a part of their own life and strongly believed that their wards would eventually have to as well. Thus, not only Del's professional aspirations but also her early attempts at coming in terms with her sexuality are met with responses that exemplify the differential social conditioning that puberty brings with it for the members of the opposite sex:

I felt that her advice was no different from all other advices handed down to girls, advice that assumed being female made you damageable, that a certain amount of carefulness and solemn fuss and self-protection was called for, whereas men were supposed to be able to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn't want and come back proud. Without even thinking about it, I had decided to do the same. (Munro 1971, 165)

Her claim to physical mobility and the freedom of sexual expression, thus, emerges to be almost as important as her steadfast commitment to her professional goals, in terms of overhauling the patriarchal discourse that looks upon adolescent girls as 'fragile' creatures in constant need of protection and supervision of the members of the opposite sex, and bolsters the confidence of the boys by casting them as the 'protectors' and by default the guardians of their female counterparts. Her assuming the role of a spy or an exile in her fantasy, thus emerges to be a subconscious subversion of the traditional sex-role orientation structure operating within her society, just as the imaginative role-play and dreams of Kaya emerges to be within hers. These are often cathartic in their attempt to construct for the adolescents 'alternative realities' in which they have the freedom to live life outside the coercions of the patriarchal machinery. Thus, dreams, fantasies and childhood playacting-turned-sexually charged role-plays often serve as some of the major thematic tools to look into the contours of the adolescent minds for Verma and Munro. For many, such actions and expressions contain the seed of resistance against social forces that strive to cast them into a stereotypical mold of normative 'femininity'. For others they emerge to be the manifestation of the gradual tendency to succumb to such forces of gender differential socialization through which, as Heath Priess, Sarah Lindberg and Janet Shibley Hyde points out in her 'Adolescent Gender Role Identity and Mental Health: Gender Intensification Revisited', independence, autonomy and self-confidence are encouraged in male adolescents, their female counterparts are encouraged to be more accommodating and compliant in their relationship with others, even at the cost of their own wellbeing (Shibley Hyde et al 2009). It comes as a major blow to the self-worth of girls as they are schooled to stifle their needs, desires and dreams and gradually learn to accept adjustment, sacrifice and dependence on their male counterparts as an intrinsic

part of their identity. A girl child who might once have had the courage to take charge of her own life, is gradually conditioned to look up to their male counterparts as the ‘protectors’ and ‘saviors’ and the earliest manifestation of such conditioning takes place in changing dynamics of gender-roles in the games and fantasies through which she takes cognition of her self-definition.

This is poignantly exemplified through the evolution of the night-time self-addressed storytelling sessions of the anonymous protagonist of one of Munro’s earliest literary creations ‘Boys and Girls’ (*Dance of the Happy Shades*, 1968). For the daughter of a fox and mink farmer of Jubilee, these stories are fantasies that provide a welcome relief from the gradually intensifying sex-role orientation that she faces at home on a daily basis from the moment she hits puberty. As her attempts to help her father with the running of the farm - is increasingly frowned upon in the family and she is expected to help her mother with the household chores, she resorts to fantasizing about imaginary crisis situations that cast her in the traditionally ‘masculine’ role of a warrior who has complete charge of her life and a ‘protector’ and a ‘savior’ who had completely charge over that of others’ too. In her personal utopia she rescues people from bombed buildings, saves her schoolteachers from the attack of wolves and rides gallantly on horseback through the streets of Jubilee showcasing her prowess in a regal manner. Such fantasies take place in a world that presents “opportunities for courage, boldness and self-sacrifice as mine never did” (Munro 2000, 113). Even when she internalizes and replicates the gender biases of patriarchy to such an extent that she looks down upon her mother who for her is the embodiment of all “feminine” and therefore ‘inferior’ personality traits, she strives to forgo the familial conditioning that aims to cast in the same mold as her mother. Though she finds her mother to be much more caring, kind, friendly and easy going; it is her slightly aloof, stern and intimidating father whom she admires, for it is he who upholds the “masculine” and therefore “superior” personality traits. Since the process of pelting is a part of her father’s sphere of work, she considers the only “real work” as opposed to her mother’s domestic chores. Being schooled to look upon her mother’s general discomfort over the entire process of pelting as a sign of ‘weakness’ typical to a woman, she consciously allows herself no emotional attachment to the foxes and the farm-horses she takes care of throughout the year in an attempt to emulate her father’s cold indifference towards them and their eventual killing for their fur and meat respectively.

But all her attempts to project herself as the upholder of the legacy of her favorite parent go downhill, as soon as the farmer’s daughter approaches puberty. Her grandmother

comes to stay with them for a few weeks and she begins to be told things such as “Girls don’t slam doors like that.” “Girls keep their knees together when they sit down.” And worse still, when I asked some questions, “That’s none of girls’ business.”” (Munro 2000, 119). As she is saddled with certain expectations (or the lack thereof) that go against the way in which she has been conceptualizing her future all through her childhood, her psychosocial conditioning becomes exemplary of one that scholars Ann Crouter, Beth Manker and Susan McHale perceive in their essay “The Family Context of Gender Intensification in Early Adolescence” (1985, 317-18). Their analysis primarily focuses upon families like the one in this story where the parents strictly adhere to the traditional gender roles patriarchy subscribes for a man and a woman and a girl child is constantly pitted against and found wanting in comparison to her opposite-sex sibling. Though it is she who diligently helps her father with his work in the farm, it is believed that her little brother Laird would be of a “real help” to him when he would grow up. Moreover, the repeated use of the phrase “only a girl” only serves to trivialize the existence of the protagonist with respect to that of her brother. As the protagonist herself comes to realize –“It [a girl] was a definition, always touched with emphasis, with reproach and disappointment. Also it was a joke on me.” (Munro 2000, 119) Being introduced as “my new hired man” by her father saves the girl from the “shame” of being “only a girl” in the eyes of a salesman. Even a man of a lower social and economic status, Henry Bailey, considers it perfectly within his rights to mock and humiliate the daughter of his employer for losing a physical fight against her brother. Her initial reaction to the forces of conditioning is resistance and denial – one that finds expression in the self-empowering role-play in the bedtime story-telling session. Over the months such blows on her self-esteem, brings about a sea change in her imagined role in these stories. The crisis-situations remain the same, but now members of the opposite sex – boys from the school or the teacher Mr. Campbell who often takes advantage of his female students, are the ones who do all the saving. Her degeneration into the socially sanctioned role of the ‘damsel-in-distress’ comes as a direct repercussion of her father’s growing disapproval of her. The fox-farmer is marginally appreciative of his daughter, that too only till the time she tows his line. But as soon as he comes to know that she had deliberately set free the mare he was about to shoot, he dismisses her with “good humor” for being emotional and compassionate, that is for displaying some so called “feminine” and therefore “inferior” character traits. Her final shaming comes at the wake of her role of a care-giver getting the better of her lifelong hankering for her father’s approval and affection.

It is fascinating to note how similar dynamics of father-daughter relationship unfolds through Verma's attempt at delineating the contours of Kaya's journey into adolescence from within a very similar family structure that puts the traditionally 'masculine' sphere of work, frequented by the father, on a higher pedestal and accords differential access to rights and privileges to the siblings on the basis of their sexual identity assigned at birth. Being born a boy, albeit much younger to their sisters, is reason enough for Laird or Chote to be considered more dependable, reliable and the 'true' inheritor of the legacy of their parents, particularly the fathers. Like Munro's protagonist, Kaya's pre-pubertal years are driven by a deep adulation for her father - a feeling with intensifies as she takes tiny and faltering steps into adolescence. While she loves her homebound mother – burdened with domestic responsibilities and unwanted pregnancies – she is not someone whom she looks up to. It is her Babu's annual visits to Simla from his workplace (Delhi) that her thoughts are centered around. Yet the feeling that her little brother is the preferred child in the family including her father is a nagging pain perpetually haunts her, in the process intensifying her craving for his love even more. The discrimination, though not as stark as with the farmer of Jubilee, is no less jarring. In fact, the unique 'Nirmalesque' (Shree 2005, 1) quality of storytelling – that is all about approaching the most emotional moments with a 'subtlety of touch and ambiguity of appearance' - makes such a discrimination even more hard-hitting:

She saw how he swooped over Chote's bed and stroke his forehead lightly so as not to awaken him; she watched him in the darkness, holding her breath, trying hard not to give herself away even as a fear gnawed at her heart that he might walk out, without noticing her. At such moments she felt as if she was on fire, and would sit up to call out to him in agitation: 'I'm over here'. Her father would turn around at once. 'I know, I know', he would say hurriedly. 'I didn't realize you were awake'. (Verma 2013, 13)

The uncanny inkling and the doubts that she has about her father's affection are thus often proved right in the most common and day-to-day situations ever since her childhood. The extra effort that the girl puts in to 'dress right', 'talk right' and 'behave right' in her father's presence emerges to be a direct result of a belief that unlike her little brother, she needs to work hard to secure his affections. Though she does not realize it till much later, this pressure to behave 'rightly' sows the earliest seeds of gender conditioning within the child. More her father withdraws his affection as she approaches puberty – she hankers for it with a desperation that is heartbreaking.



Her psychological trauma is strangely congruent to that of the farmer's daughter in one of the earliest among the very few stories that delve deep into the intricacies of a father-daughter relationship in an attempt to understand the social and psychological complexities that inform female adolescence. For an author who is primarily known to have thrived upon the mother-daughter relationship as a major thematic to explore the ups and downs of adolescence, this story emerges to be special in its own right – till much later, when she comes up with a story like 'Fathers', that published in *New Yorker* in 2002. This yet-to-be-anthologized story, though penned decades after, looks into the myriad contours of the relationship between three teenage girls – the narrator and her classmates Dahlia Newcombe and Frances Wainright and their fathers from with a similar small town Ontario social milieu, that of Shelby Township of the 1940s. The story particularly focuses on the repercussions of what the narrator would describe as an act of 'invasion' on the part of the fathers – a tendency towards deliberates, authoritative and often coercive tampering with the sense of autonomy and the newly acquired need for privacy of their pubescent girls. Though Mr. Newcombe seems most atrocious in establishing his domination through beatings, the narrator's father's method of 'disciplining' his daughter through more 'pragmatic' acts like confiscating her movie magazines or drowning the kittens she finds in a barn are no less menacing. Mr. Wainright's 'sloping-over of attention' towards Frances and her friends, on the other hand, sums up to a shaming and humiliation of a different nature – one that makes the narrator uncomfortable, 'almost as if someone had taken a peep into my pants'. The unmistakable sexual undertones of this type attention, oversteps certain boundaries that makes the daughter and her friends feel violated in a strange and inexplicable manner. Munro hits the right chords with response of the girls – some like Frances and the narrator are conditioned to accept this 'invasion' as a part and parcel of hitting puberty and others like Dahlia rebel against that very conditioning in stark ways. But while these fathers are guilty of overt interference in the lives of their daughters, the fox and mink farmer is guilty of perhaps an even greater fallacy – that of indifference and negligence towards his daughter at a stage of life when she seeks his validation the most. But while Munro tries to understand the psychological ramifications of such an in-your-face discrimination and neglect suffered by a daughter by mapping the fantasies that sees her self-image transform from the valiant to the meek, from the self-reliant to the dependent and from the savior to the saved; Verma falls back upon his customary use of symbolic imagery to highlight the same. *Vatavaran* (ambience), pertaining to natural and seasonal elements specific to the region, as discussed in the previous chapter, has often been used to as a metaphor to throw light upon the varying states of human mind.

The way in which the changing dynamics of Kaya's relationship with her Babu as etched in her mental landscape coincides with the landscape of Simla speaks volumes on the organic relationship she shares with the nature surrounding her. In her carefree days of childhood, whenever she thinks of her Babu "the train pulled in at the Summer Hill Station, sun-flooded, nestling among pines, the needle leaves honed to dazzling sharper points" (Verma 2013, 14). Her father is synonymous to the happiest and most vibrant albeit short-lived season in her hometown – one that exudes positivity and endows Kaya with a sense of purposefulness, bringing with it a consciousness of self-worth that makes her feel important within her family. While certain misgiving regarding her parent's, particularly her father's, affection towards the siblings tend to bother her from time to time, she dismisses it with the nonchalance of a child not yet schooled into the hierarchical understanding of gender. As the gulf between the treatments meted out to the siblings from Babu's end widen starkly over the last few pre-pubescent months summer gives way to autumn in her mental terrain of thoughts and emotions. The gradual breakdown of communication between the daughter and the father finally culminates in the day immediately following her first cycle of menstruation – one in which "the town lay under snow in what people said was the most terrible spell of cold in years" (Verma 2013, 223) – when Babu informs her of his decision to send her off to hostel. It marks an end to the spontaneity, which comes out of Kaya's solitary wanderings across the hills and valleys of her hometown and her initiatives to exercise the freedom to give vent to her curiosity and explore her potential as a child entering a new phase of life, in favor of an institutionalized upbringing where "girls of your age" (as her father put it) are schooled in gender based social learning. Though there is hardly a showdown as happens with Munro's protagonists, the gloom of the harshest and the most long drawn season her region has ever known spreading through her is enough to highlight her shock and disappointment. Kaya's father never tries to pull off the brash dominance of a Mr. Newcombe, or the cruel jibes of the Jubilee fox-farmer – yet his softly spoken words underline a disappointment with his daughter that is more poignant in its subtlety. It is, however, intriguing to take note of the fact that the rejections from the fathers in each case help the daughters to evolve into more mature individuals. It sees them gain a certain perspective on the actions of not only home-maker mothers but also, as the victims of patriarchal social conditioning and in turn helps them understand the psychology that prompts them to perpetuate it through their daughters. For these small-town girls, crossing the threshold of childhood from within spacio-temporal realities that make them aspire for a greater freedom of thought and action than their previous generation of women, this resultant realization emerges to be at the first step towards

embracing their physical and psychological transformations through the turbulent years of adolescence.

But are things any different for daughters whose formative years as an early adolescent are spent in the company of mothers who have managed not to restrict themselves to gender role stereotypes? Does it alter the gender equations within the family, and in turn help shape their worldview accordingly? As mentioned already, Munro admits Anne Laidlaw to have constituted “the central material in life”, who “if I just relax, that is what will come up (in my writing)” (Shapton 2017, 3) and predicates most of her fictionalized mother-daughter relationships on the one she shared with her own homemaker mother. It is however very interesting to note that though the author speaks about the challenges of bringing up three daughters Sheila, Catherine and Jenny as a while pursuing her career in writing in many of her interviews, not many of her stories actually seeks to explore the equation between an adolescent daughter and her working mother. It is however necessary to take cognition of the fact that in the rarest of rare of occasions that Munro forays into the subject, there is an unmistakable tone of disregard with which adolescent daughters would perceive their mothers’ career aspirations and the effort put into achieving them. The “most dashing skepticism and unconcern” (Munro 2000, 61) with which the daughters greet the initiatives taken by their writer-mother to set a workplace of her own in ‘The Office’ (1968), highlights how the internalization of traditional gender roles shapes the attitude of these girls towards their mother. One cannot help but notice how such an attitude resonates with the recollections of Sheila Munro about the years of growing up as the daughter of a famous writer in *Lives of Mothers and Daughters: Growing Up With Alice Munro* (2002) where she repeatedly speaks of a feeling the girls had about their mother not being there with them mentally, even when she took care of their every physical and emotional need: “Sure she did the laundry, waited on her kids when they were sick and cooked dinner just like other mom’s did. But it was always clear that what she really wanted to be doing was writing at the little desk at the corner of her bedroom.” (Maynard 2002, 1). Such reaction from her daughter results in a feeling of guilt and frustration, which has often found manifestation, if not explicitly in her stories, in her personal recollections. “Housework never really bothered me”, she says, “what bothered me about it was that it was expected to be your life” (Shapton 2017, 3). The relation between a working mother and her adolescent daughter, however little, as portrayed in her stories does seem to be fraught with complexities that might have had strong autobiographical elements in it. Such relations highlight the how gender intensification might

come out as two-way traffic in a society in transition where girls and women have just started to aspire for a life beyond the domestic arena. While deep rooted internalization of gender intensification might continue to govern the thoughts and actions of a mother, thereby impacting the ways in which she consciously or unconsciously curbs certain ‘out-of-the-box’ aspirations of her adolescent daughter, the daughter on her part might also judge the mother for not fitting into the gender stereotype that looks upon the mother to be the primary caregiver in the family. At a stage of life that sees the body and mind go through multifarious changes and upheavals, she demands the attention of her mother and expects her to take cognition of its psycho-sexual repercussions in a way that she hardly expects her father to. The inability of the mother to do so create a chasm between the two that is difficult to circumvent as is explicit in the equation Toshi shares with her mother in ‘Babli’ (*Sukha aur anya Kahaniya*, 2008), one of the stories penned in the later part of his career by Munro’s Indian counterpart. Though small-town single women and their attempts to negotiate with the social stigma associated with their dreams of pursuing professional goals has been Verma’s one of favourite fortes ever since ‘Parinde’ entered the Hindi literary scenario in the late 1950s, it is only at a later stage of his career that he begins to explore the struggles of women who try to embrace motherhood and professional responsibilities with equal grace and dignity, with dire consequences. The graph – though not very consciously charted out – highlights beautifully how more and more women within the small-town societies of North India are prompted to take up the challenge of continuing to pursue their career in spite of the onslaught of gendered expectations regarding her ‘familial responsibilities’ from both within and outside the family.

As the daughter of working parents growing up under the supervision of the domestic help, Toshi, the protagonist of ‘Babli’, shares a relationship with her mother that is fraught with complexities. The changing contours of her pubertal body and its resultant psychological ramifications go largely unnoticed by the adults. Though not completely aware of the intricacies of man-woman physical relationships, the smell that emanates from her just-awake mother tweaks her curiosity regarding her parents’ conjugal life. This smell is both ‘*gopaniya*’ (secretive) and “*gehri*” (deeply intriguing) is reflective of her newly awakened sexuality and her half-baked knowledge about sexual intercourse. The smell is also emblematic of the mystery and enigma that surrounds her mother. She holds her in awe, not only for being an adult who has access to a ‘secret’ terrain her newly tweaked curiosity longs to peep into, but also for an earning member of the family. Yet she finds her wanting in terms

of the criteria of ideal motherhood in a society that continues to hail the mother as the primary caregiver in the family. Though both her parents are working, she expects her mother to be there for her in a way she never expects her father to be. Thus, gender conditioning plays a vital role in estranging the mother from her daughter, the gulf between them widening over time. Trapped in a not-so-happy marriage with her husband and perpetually hassled to strike a balance between her professional and domestic responsibilities, the mother often vents out her frustration on her child, disciplining her brutally for minor ‘mistakes’. While the daughter craves for and revels at the tender affection her mother showers her with, her sudden bouts of anger and the resultant rebuke instills in her a fear for this woman she holds so dear to her heart:

"सारी रसोई गंदी पड़ी है ..... और तू यहां खाड़ी है" मां ने गुस्से से उसका झोटा खींचा था। गालों के रुचे जारों पर आग सी सुलगनी लगी और आखों से पानी निकल आई..... इच्छा हुई मां की दोनों हाथों पर नाखून बोक दे, लेकिन तभी ये ढीली पर गई, " तू बीच बीच में कहा खो जाता है? तू कुछ बताती क्यों नहीं?" मां ने पूछा. (Verma 2008, 108)

*("Sari rasoi gandi padi hai....aur tu yaha khadi hai" Maa ne gusse se uska jhota kheecha tha. Galo ke ruche jaro par aag si sulagni lagi aur ankhon se paani nikal ayi..... iccha huyi maa ki dono hatho par nakhun bok de, lekin tabhi ye dhili par gayi" tu beech beech mein kahan kho jata hai? Tu kuch batati kyun nahi?" Maa ne pucha. (Verma 2008, 108)*

"The kitchen is so dirty...and you are standing here without doing a thing!" Angry, her mother pulls hard at the ponytail. It felt as if her dry cracking skin had been set on fire. She wanted to piece her hands into her mother's hands, but her grip had already slacked. "Where do you let your mind wander off to? Why don't you answer my question?"

Toshi's inner turmoil is that of a child caught between the urge to retaliate and protest and trying to be more understanding towards her mother. It is interesting to note how a mother who has broken gender stereotypes through her own life choices, appears to enforce traditional gender roles upon her child. It might be looked upon as an attempt on the part of the mother to make her daughter more self-sufficient, but the ruthlessness with which she goes about it makes one dwell upon the mental health of the woman.

Pursuing a career does not accord her the 'luxury' to forgo her domestic responsibilities in a way her husband can. The grievances of her daughter and husband that highlights the mindset of a society whose traditional perception of looking at the upbringing of a child as a 'woman's job', that serves to take the mother on a guilt ride throughout the day. The resultant mental alienation is detrimental to her mental health. Her tendency to

oscillate between two ends of the spectrum of extreme affection and extreme admonishment within a very short span emerges to be the behavioral manifestation of her psychological state that often threatens to push her over the edge.

Such problematic and instantaneously differential behavioral patterns in his protagonists often finds an artistic expression through the perception of a writer who takes major initiatives to bring mental health issues into the purview of Hindi literature. Being a product of a age and a society that sees similar trends in women's emancipation with comes with its own share of social estrangement and judgment and stigmatization, it is not surprising that his Canadian counterpart, too, prompts English-Canadian literature to enter interrogate mental health as an essential aspect of human well-being like never before. Both the author, with their customary affinity towards the subtle and artistic representation of the most mundane, often gruesome realities of life, manages to highlight psychological traumas, anxiety, depression, bipolar disorders, schizophrenia and even suicidal tendencies within estranged alienated individuals in the most poignant and heart wrenching manner in their works. These explorations bring out some of the starkest realities of the urban 'modernity' they strive to look into from within their respective cultural paradigms, through their thematic experimentations with the genre of short story. It is this aspect of thematic exploration that I would look into in the following chapter.

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## Chapter 4

### The Art of the Mind, the Mind of the Art: ‘Anomalies’ and ‘Artists’ in the works of Munro and Verma

One of the most intriguing aspects of the literary genius of Alice Munro lies in the way in which she offers the reader a peek into her own artistic vision through that of the numerous female writer-protagonists who feature prominently in a number of her stories. The most defining feature of this vision as revealed metaphorically through the voice of Del Jordan, the aspiring writer of the collection of linked stories *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) is her insistence on looking into “certain stains, chipped bricks and the long cracks running diagonally” (Munro 1971, 252) across the back wall of a building which as much care and precision as its more well maintained and presentable front side. The significance of this analogy lies in its underlying implication – one that highlights the need to make a consciousness effort to understand and analyze the so-called ‘anomalies’ and the undulating imperfections that lie deliberately, and often coercively hidden underneath the apparently smooth and blemish free surface of the society. For what is branded as an ‘anomaly’ is often nothing but a deviance – physical, mental or aspirational – that does not fit into the socially accepted definition of ‘normalcy’, and it is only by rising above such biases and binaries that one might be able to interrogate the social values, ethics and power dynamics that create, sustain and perpetuate them.

Such a stance that Munro strove to maintain throughout her literary career finds a fascinating resonance in the artistic vision of her Indian contemporary, when throws light on a personal realization in one his interviews:

“वीचार धारा तो ऊपर की चीज है. ज़िन्दगी में जितनी दृष्टियां है , उन्हीं को लेके बिचारधारा बनती हैं। लेखक को किसी एक बिचारधारा की गुलाम नहीं होना चाहिए।”

*Vichar dhara toh upar ki cheez hain. Zindagi main jitni drishtiyan hain, darshan hain, unhiko lekar vichardhara banti hain. Lekhak ko kisi ek vichardhara ka gulam nahi hona chahiye*” (Verma 1999, 93).

[A value system is nothing but an external manifestation of what goes on within. Every perspective and every philosophical standpoint that life has to offer, gives rise to different value systems. A writer should never be a slave to any one particular value system].

Every way of thought and judgment, Nirmal Verma believes, is nothing but an external manifestation of the biases, perceptions and ideologies harboured within those who espouse it. It is imperative, therefore, that an author consciously refrains from succumbing to any one way of thinking (*vichardhara*), particularly the one that is dominant enough to define the contours of the ‘normative’ within a community. Such a way of thought after all is not an irrevocable ‘truth’, but just one of the many possible ways to perceive one’s lived social reality – one that has been successful in moulding the community consciousness in a way so as to project the ‘different’ in a negative light. It is only by overhauling the social dynamics underlying this dominant worldview, that a literary artist might be able to include the ‘non-normative’ in his work not as an ‘anomaly’ to be frowned upon, but as ones who deserve empathy, acceptance and a consciously non-judgmental support and cooperation from the community.

Verma has been true to this artistic ethic in a way few could have. No wonder the prolific scholar Ved Raman Pandey exudes a sense of deepest admiration when he observes “लेखन उनके लिए छापक नहीं, हरदम एक गहरी डूब था।” (*Lekhan unke liye chapak nahi, hardam ek gehri doob hota tha*) (Pandey 2008, i) [For him, writing was never a mere ‘splash’ but a dive into the deepest and darkest depths (of the water) ]. It is not the shiny ripples on the surface of the water, but what lies hidden beneath it, that has captivated his attention as a storyteller. Much like Munro, he has a peculiar flair towards uncovering the ‘abnormal’ and the ‘unfathomable’ concealed within the carefully arranged folds of the socially acceptable, normative everyday existence. It is a part and parcel of their commitment towards the misconceptions, stereotypes and stigmas perpetuated by the small town societies they lived in and wrote about, What appears to be the most fascinating to me as a researcher, is the fact the societies that the lake and the building represent, though geographically set far apart, harbored a very similar attitude towards the ‘non-normative’ – one that made a long term allegiance to their artistic commitment all the more challenging.

As discussed earlier, the mid-twentieth century small town societies of the Hindi speaking belt of North India were fiercely critical of the ‘deviant’. The contemporary

smalltown societies of Ontario, Canada were no better. The close-knit middle-class communities residing therein, were deeply patriarchal, conservative, less accommodative to change and thrived on certain rigid ideas about socially acceptable appearance, behavior and actions. Such ideas forged certain invisible boundaries, transgression of which did not bode well with the community. Voluntary transgressions, in the form of high-flying ambitions and non-traditional life choice (particularly those made by women), was often met with jealousy and suspicion that could even take a turn towards social ostracism. Involuntary transgressions caused as a result of physical deformities, handicaps or long-term illness were judged less, but not accepted any better. While the ‘ugly’, the lame, the hunchback, the harelip-faced, the autistic and the terminal patient of tuberculosis or Parkinson’s disease were not held responsible for their appearance or actions, their presence in the public arena was bound to be met with scorn. They were hardly spared from being ridiculed or laughed at openly, and put at the receiving end of rude jokes and insensitive remarks in a completely matter-of-fact manner. But, few faced suffered social judgment and apathy as brutally as the ones ‘guilty’ of mental ‘deviances’. These deviances were essentially as involuntary and unintentional as that of the physically deformed or disabled, What, therefore, made the social reception of those in the clutches of mental maladies a severe matter of concern is that the way in which the communities in question tended to invest more time and energy in assuming an accusatory stance towards them, than taking cognition of the social, familial and personal circumstances that might have triggered or (in few select cases of hereditary transmission) enhanced it.

Yet, the post-war, postcolonial smalltown milieu of Canada and India had seen these societies located fertile ground for such triggers – factors that might prove to be detrimental to one’s mental health. Health, as World Health Organization (WHO) perceives it, is as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. Mental health defined as “a state of wellbeing in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO 2013, 6), has thus been recognized and acknowledged as an essential component of overall health. This very definition harps upon the importance of the ‘community’ in the basic conceptualization of mental health. While it highlights the role an individual plays within the community vis-à-vis his/her productivity and contribution towards the same as a yardstick for determining the condition of one’s

mental health, it also pinpoints the role that the community has to play in ascertaining a sound mental health of its members.

Stress refers to the physical and psychological response of a human being to a situation that creates certain taxing demands on the individual or calls for some major changes in his or her life. These situations, that may be understood as the ‘stressors’, are by and large the product of the social conditions one is living and breathing in. Positive stressors such as a desired marriage or childbirth, promotion in the work place or an aspired relocation leads to a positive stress response (eustress) that actually motivates a person to rise to the challenge and even increases his general productivity. Negative stressors like fragmentations within interpersonal relationships, breaking up on families, separation from loved ones, social stigmatization, inability to balance between personal and professional life, however, can generate a eustress response only till a certain point. But if the stress continues to persist in spite of all attempts at adjustments and adaptation, it bound to transform into a negative stress response (distress) than can cause anxiety and demotivation and affect one’s productivity in an adverse manner<sup>4</sup>. Every individual has to deal with a fair share of both positive and negative stressors in his/her life. One generally has the ability to cope with them unless (and until) the negative stressors outweigh the positive ones and continue to persist with such intensity that they essentially turn into ‘triggers’ that cause severe emotional distress to the person concerned. Such distress is extremely difficult to cope with and might result in different mental health problems. The smalltown communities highlighted in Verma and Munro’s stories saw themselves posited at such a juncture of history in the post-war decades, that often managed to tip the balance towards the negative stressors with a force enough to render many vulnerable to acute distress and eventual mental disorders.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the social, cultural and economic changes that were coming over the larger urban societies of Canada and India post the tumultuous years of World War II, economic depressions or the struggle for independence from colonial domination, had begun to seep into the small towns too. But they had never been as accommodative of changes as their bigger, ‘better’ and more cosmopolitan counterparts. Therefore, these new ways of living and understanding life would constantly come in conflict

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<sup>4</sup> In his 1975 article on “Confusion and Controversy in the Stress Field” [ *Journal of Human Stress*.1 (2): 37-44] , endocrinologist Dr. Hans Selye coined the term Eustress (‘eu’ is Greek for good) to refer to beneficial stress. He insists that contrary to the negative connotation always associated with stress, stress is not always harmful to one’s mental health. It is only when negative stressors continue to persist for a long time and the stress is not resolved by coping and adjustment, that it can turn into distress.

with the traditional ideas about family, relationships, career and social propriety with the invest the collective psyche of the people for ages. The crisis of values was all-pervasive, and what could be a greater negative stressor than walking the thin line between adhering to traditional social expectations and fulfilling one's own aspirations? The changing dynamics of gender, that aimed to empower women within and outside the domestic paradigm, was not always congruent to the mental conditioning of the community within which it unfolded. Moreover, while the rapid disintegration of the joint family set-up, along with upgraded laws on divorce and family-planning, accorded lesser censorship and greater independence for both men and women, estrangement from the immediate family led to a lack of shoulders to cry on, or a comfort zone to take shelter during a state of emotional vulnerability. A modernist existential crisis that had entered the English-Canadian cultural consciousness during the war years reached heights in the light of such estrangement, and found expression in contemporary literature including Munro's psychological realism. A very congruent understanding of existential crisis permeates Hindi cultural consciousness too, through Verma's *nayi kahani*, as he finds resonance of modernist notions of alienation and fragmentation within his own socio-cultural reality. The phenomenon of 'Indian modernism' as manifested in the Hindi literary context, is all about individuals seeking the meaning of life from within a mayhem of uncertainties, fragmented relationships and intense desolation.

As writers deeply invested in the complex workings of human mind, their explorations invariably led them to an extremely important and relevant question. What effect does such a state of alienation have upon the mental health of an individual? To what extent are they able to cope with the resultant emotional distress? At which point does it start playing havoc with what psychopathologist Maria Jahoda would call one's 'positive mental health' one that "applies when there is evidence that an individual fully utilizes his capabilities or is working in that direction" (Macklin 1972, 74)? It refers to a state of mind where the individual feels encouraged enough to exercise her faculties and capabilities to their maximum potential. A blow upon this 'positivity', would adversely affect not only the individual's pursuit for important life-goals, but also her social interactions. From the earliest days of their literary career, Verma and Munro strove to uncover the causalities behind such external manifestations of such inner mental crisis with a zeal and sensitivity, hitherto hardly found within Hindi and English-Canadian literary traditions.

Their journey into the less traversed path ways of human mental health gained further momentum as time flowed into the later decades of the twentieth century, one



generation suffering from guilt, shame and a deep sense of inadequacy gave way to another apparently more dynamic but no less lonely generation. As a modernist quest for a meaning of life appeared more and more elusive and gradually gave way to a postmodernist realization that life had no one true meaning but held different meanings for different people, building bridges of communication across those subjective ‘truths’ and interpretations of life seemed even more difficult. Such un-bridged chasms further help fuel mental health problems – from milder conditions like General Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and bipolar disorder to more severe ones like Depressive Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and even Schizophrenia – within the members of the respective communities in questions. Each one of these is a disease, that are accompanied by what Ruth Macklin would describe as “unusually persistent pattern of behavior over which an individual has little or no voluntary control, that differentiates her from her fellow human beings and incapacitates her and interferes with her normal participation in life” (Macklin 1972, 37), which require as much clinical attention as any serious physical ailment. Yet, such disorders, which if not met with proper treatment and empathetic caregiving can even lead to suicidal tendencies, hardly received the sensitive and sensitized response it deserved from the communities of smalltown Ontario and North India. On the contrary, the victims were subject to the worst form of ‘othering’ that society can meet out to any of its members – stigmatization. Such a response might largely be attributed to the ‘unusually persistent pattern of behavior’ mentioned above, which however involuntary, did by no means adhere to the socially approved code of conduct of the communities concerned. What they were penalized for was actually their behavioral deviance and not the actual mental disorder that it was the external manifestation of and is this very fact, that forms the foundation of the social stigma that the mentally ill have been subject to, since ages.

Contrary to physical ailments and handicaps, mental disorders do not come with any physically perceivable identifying markers. What one perceives is just a consequential behavioral ‘anomaly’, but what actually prompts it remains shrouded in mystery, for no one really knows what goes on within the mind of another. It is this inability to identify the causality that makes the actions, expressions and body language of the mentally ill appear all the more grotesque in the eyes of the mainstream society. As Rick Moody observes, “We imagine the appearance of mental illness, but it might look like nothing. Suffering looks like something, but mental illness is an illness that leaves no (physical) trace” (Moody 2009, 13). It is, after all, the suffering that translates into a reactionary outburst that one can see. The

actual malady that causes that suffering remains embedded within the depths of the mind, abstract and formless, its complexities understood by none other than the person afflicted by it. This very impalpability of mental disorders along with the grotesqueness of its behavioral manifestation, that accounts for the most significant among the charade of emotions that the mentally ill evoke within their fellow human beings - fear. While disgust and revulsion were feelings that both the physically and mentally 'abnormal' would evoke within the so called 'normal', the former cast a cloud of fear over their hearts in a way the latter would. This fear of the unknown and unfathomable is so intense that it almost borders on terror. The lesser the awareness about mental health in a society, greater is this terror and higher is the tendency to perceive the mentally ill as a threat to public safety and the mid-twentieth century small town societies of Ontario and North India, with little or no public discussions on mental health, were ideal breeding grounds for such terror.

If mental disorder was looked upon as a social taboo, so was speaking about it in public. The secrecy however did nothing but evoke a voyeuristic curiosity about the 'forbidden' within the community that only led to gossips and rumors. Such misinformed conversations over the mentally ill, only helped to reinforce this terror in a way so as to demonize all that could be cured or controlled with proper medical diagnosis and clinical intervention. Such a demonization effectively ensured a de-humanization of the mentally ill – for in reality, what people were worried about were not the effect mental disorders had on the wellbeing of those who suffered from it, but rather the effect it had on the people they shared private and public spaces with. These reactionary outbursts could, after all, hamper the habitual pattern of their day-to-day lives to a great extent. Be it the caregivers, be it the family members, be it the neighbors or the house guests or be it casual bystanders that the mentally ill might bump into on the roads, in a shop or a public event– what was most frightening about the social presence of such people was the unstable and eruptive tendency (Wahl 1995, 51) of their deviant actions. These behavioral manifestations could as the most unpleasant surprise at the most inopportune of times, their causalities mostly unidentified or misinterpreted, and could display an utter disregard for the strict codes or morality, ethics and norms that the society was bound by. As a result, they would often be looked upon as glaring examples, albeit unintentional, of social transgression. No wonder a society essentially intolerant towards transgressions would perceive such expressions, body language, activities et al to be not only 'deviant' but also 'disruptive' and what could a greater threat to a smalltown community, where everybody knew everybody, than one posed to its social order?

It is precisely this perceived threat that rendered a social stigmatization of the mentally ill all the more necessary. Branding them with verbal marks of disgrace such as an ‘idiot’ or a ‘weirdo’ or at worst ‘mad’ and mocking them, hurting them on purpose, shirking away from their presence, refusing to offer them help when in need and most importantly shaming the relatives for having them in the family were a part and parcel of this stigmatization. T. Donnelly feels that “one of the reasons why the stigma of madness is so indelible is that it *needs* to be, stigma is the application of that unborn trace to counteract the fear that the ‘other’ might go unnoticed as such” (Donnelly 2012, 10). Stigmatization was ultimately aimed towards restricting them from participating in the mainstream activities and events of the society. What could be a better way to ensure this exclusion than minimizing their presence in the public eye? And it is only such branding that would help make up for the lack of physically identifiable markers of a malady that the community could achieve this end.

Such an enduring stigma formed the foundations of the carefully engineered process of blaming the mentally ill for their so-called disruptive actions, in spite of being aware of about their involuntary nature – one that would effectively, and unfairly, put them on the same plane as those who voluntarily disrupt the social order by their law-breaking activities. What could after all provide a better validation to the act of involuntary incarceration of the mentally ill – one that had been perceived as the only ‘appropriate’ and ‘practically viable’ way to deal with even within the large and medically equipped urban centers of Canada and India till the first half of the twentieth century. It does not come as a surprise, therefore that their more tradition-bound and less equipped smaller counterparts dealt with their mentally ill in a similar, if not a more restrictive manner.

This politics underlying the social mechanism of positing involuntary incarceration as the most practically viable method of dealing with the mentally ill comes out in ‘all its glory’ through the exploration of Michael Foucault when he puts identifies the asylum as one of the three main forms of social control, along with prisons and hospitals. In a society concerned with maintaining the social order, these three structures “provide the discourses that encode normality, criminality and insanity in order to control (deviant) individuals” (Foucault (1961) 2001, 54). Indeed, in a society more concerned with the immediate removal of any threat posed to the normative than the recuperation and rehabilitation of the ‘abnormal’, what could be a more effective way to maintain the social order than making insanity as liable to persecution as criminality? Making an example of the

deviant, both willing and unwilling, by stripping them off their freedom and locking them away from the public eye was thus a well thought out strategy to make this possible. Though Foucault's observations are primarily predicated on the history of involuntary incarceration of the mentally ill in Europe, they undoubtedly hold true for the two former British colonies – English-Canada and India – that have emulated the European methods of treating the mentally ill, not only in terms of policy making but also their execution, since the early nineteenth century.

It was as early as the 1830s that the first asylums were set up in Canada at Saint John, New Brunswick and Toronto, Ontario. The latter was established in an abandoned prison, which more or less speaks of the erstwhile perception towards the mentally ill – one that found a strong resonance with the derogatory attitude that led to the passing of the first Lunacy Act (1958) and saw the establishment of the first 'native' asylums (meant only for the Indian 'subjects' and not their British 'masters') all over British India, in Patna, Banaras, Agra, Lahore, Calcutta, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Dacca and Poona. These were meant to be more custodial than therapeutic and aimed to 'discipline' the inmates and force them to accept responsibility for their 'guilt'. One of the factors that helped this attitude persist for more than a century across geo-political spaces, is the inability of those suffering from mental disorders to be vocal about their rights as the citizens of a nation. This was corroborated by the fact that there was hardly any discussion, let alone legislative documentations, on what rights, if any, should the mentally ill have as social beings. A longterm removal of the mentally ill from the public eye 'saved' the community from the feeling of discomfort their presence evoked, that could have resulted in this much needed critical engagement with mental health.

It also made sure that people hardly dwelt upon the role that social factors might have played in causing such emotional distress that might led to such mental disorders. Also, it very conveniently absolved the collective conscience of the society – the family, the extended family and the community at large - of its responsibility towards the caregiving of the mentally ill. Once out of sight, it was easy to put them out of mind. It was a relief that they were being 'taken care of' elsewhere. Asylums were not open to the public in the interest of public safety. Thus, few knew about the actual living conditions inside the asylums and few made an effort to do so.

Quite naturally, the taboo associated with mental disorders made sure that any literary explorations of the same in both English-Canadian and Hindi literature was scarce to come by till as late as the early decades of the twentieth century. The few instances one might come by would majorly engage with the dominant social mentality of the times that tended to bring in every mental disorder under the umbrella term of ‘madness’ and portrayed it to a ‘dangerous’ affliction to be feared, controlled and repressed – some endorsing it, some interrogating it, but none completely able to rise above it. Things, however, began to change for the better as the decades rolled towards the middle of the century and new discoveries were made in the field of mental health. The socio-economic crisis of the war-years opened up fresh discussions about the relevance and ethical integrity of the erstwhile policies of mental health in place in both the nations. Conversations continued well into the post-war decades, when a number of social changes as discussed above, saw a sharp increase in the number of people in need of help and care for being afflicted by different mental disorders.

These debates and discussions ultimately culminated in a slow but steady process of de-institutionalization of ‘madness’ – one that called upon the community to take up the responsibility of their mentally ill members, with a clinical support from psychiatric professionals, instead of pushing them towards a longterm confinement in asylums. It professed to bring about a profound change in the perception of mental health within the urban population of Canada and India, and it is at this very crucial juncture in history that Munro and Verma began their literary careers.

The war years of the ‘40s proved to be a watershed in the history in the history of mental health care services in Canada and India. Two societies never interested to trace the causality of mental health disorders to social living conditions of a person, massive overcrowding of the asylums during the war-time years, were forced to sit up and acknowledge the role of the erstwhile devastation, anxiety, prejudices and crisis of values in this gradually escalating number of mental patients in the society. It finally led to an understanding that social and environmental factors *did* lead to mental disorders – the post-war, post-depression years thus brought to the forefront the need to give as much importance to the act of prevention of mental disorders as that of pathologizing them. It induced not only government agents but also sensitized social workers, the medical fraternity and the artist community strove to overhaul the new socio-environmental triggers – already discussed in the beginning of this chapter – that served to pose a threat to the mental health of the citizens in the post-war years.

The fiasco that ensued as a result of confining patients with radically different diagnosis all together with a single space, highlighted the importance of looking beyond the homogenization of ‘madness’ being sensitive to the caregiving needs specific to the different mental disorders that would afflict people. Moreover, the undue pressure such overcrowding put upon the economy of both the nations highlighted the need to come up with an alternate mental health care facility which required a greater participation and intervention of the community in the caregiving of the mentally ill, than ever before. This led the important organizations like Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA] (renamed as such from National Committee for Mental Health Hygiene in 1950) and All India Institute of Mental Health (established in 1956) to open the doors of mental asylum for the public. This, along with journals, radio programs, documentary films and several international conferences on mental health emerged to be crucial attempts at educating the public about mental health and trying to get rid of the age-old fear and stigma associated with it.

All this prepared the grounds for the World Health Organization’s decision to include mental health services within the general health care system – a development that called for a withdrawal of institutional custody and vested much of the responsibility of the mentally ill with the community with support from the psychiatric wards to be built in the general hospitals. Though this systemic process of integrating mental health care within the educational, health and welfare framework of the community started in the cities, it did not take much long to make its presence felt in their smaller counterparts, for it was believed that with their close knit ‘bonding’ these societies would be far better equipped to adapt to such a change. While laws like Ontario Mental Health Act (1954) or Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Services Act (1959) saw mental health grants flowing in for the building of such psychiatric wards in general hospitals and local community help centers in the small towns of Ontario (Gold 1988, 216); by the 70s, India too saw psychiatric wards being built in ninety general hospitals all over the country. Moreover, programs like the WHO initiative of the Organization of Mental Health Services in Developing Countries (1975) or National Mental Health Program [NMHP] of 1982 ensured a greater interaction of community and family members with not only the psychiatrists but also occupational therapists, mental hygiene consultants, psychiatric nurses and speech therapists based in the district and regional community help centers and general hospitals – one that eventually resulted in a greater involvement in the caregiving of the mentally ill, across not only the small towns but also the rural belts of the country.

Though, increasing community involvement in the mental health care network was easier said than done, and traditional negative attitude towards the mentally ill continued to prevail well into the '70s, such a systemic transformation did serve to put mental health in a position of prominence in the public consciousness it had never enjoyed before. Bereft of the 'luxury' to lock them away and effectively 'forget' about them, these smalltown societies were left with little option but to engage with their 'mad', 'freaks' and 'weirdos' with a less critical and more analytical mindset. This contemporary wave of mental health sensitization that swept over their respective societies, many among the new generation of writers felt the need to highlight mental health as one the primary thematic areas of focus in their works. Munro, with her deep sense of commitment towards traversing every nook and cranny of the minds of her characters, was the foremost among her contemporaries like Atwood, Laurence Gallant or Thomas in being able to identify mental health hazards as one the major psycho-social repercussion of a society in transition. Her Indian counterpart in question, too, was not far behind in helping mental health emerge as one of the foremost thematic concerns in contemporary Hindi literature. *Nayi kahani*, under his able craftsmanship, opened up a fresh vista of mapping mental maladies with Hindi short story – one that was further strengthened by the efforts of Rakesh, Kamaleswar or Bhandari who took up the baton from thereon.

These endeavors of Munro and Verma that opened up new pathways of understanding and representing mental health within their respective literary paradigms, received a further impetus in the light of the wave of postmodernism that swept over the English-Canadian and Hindi literatures in the mid and late twentieth century decades respectively. The pre-occupation with the mentally ill as displayed in their works, their already discussed zeal towards highlighting the cracks within the smooth surface of the mainstream reality, were all a part and parcel of a postmodernist re-evaluation of the eccentric that informed their respective cultural consciousness divided by geographical distance, yet united by a commitment towards highlighting the marginalized perspectives of those grossly unrepresented, underrepresented and misrepresented in mainstream cultural productions, till then.

The way in which 'postcolonialism' in Canada coincided with the rise of postmodernism therein, ensured that the postcolonial nation building process went hand in hand in what Julia Braitbach would call an 'anticentrist rhetoric of marginality' (Braitbach 2014, 292) – one that was driven by the need to give voice to the hitherto voiceless, within the erstwhile cultural paradigm of English-Canada. It strove to interrogate the hegemony of

the grand narratives created by the privileged power-centers and acknowledge and validate the contingent ‘truths’ of the odd, the peripheral and the marginal as equally important components of the national culture. Munro, with her artistic vision largely shaped by the decentralizing energy of postmodernism, found herself largely drawn towards the works of her slightly older contemporary, the postmodernist photographer Diane Arbus (1923-71) from the American South. Though she admired the detailed documentation of the nitty-gritties of poverty-stricken lives in the works of the War and Depression era photographers like Walker Evans, none seemed to have produced such thought provoking works as Arbus, who consciously chose to make the ‘freaks or the oddities from her own small-town milieu, a subject of mainstream artistic deliberation through her photographs. The mentally ill took a position of prominence therein along with the sex workers, transgenders and those with developmental disabilities.

With her unassuming and matter of fact representation of the physically and the mentally marginalized, Arbus seemed to display an ‘amused appreciation’ (Lieberson 1984, 10) of these people in the way that would help the ‘grotesque’ appear oddly familiar (York 1988, 29). What a welcome departure it was from the traditional tendency towards defamiliarization of the behaviorally ‘grotesque’ mental patients, which heightened the stigma around them by photographing them in asylums and focusing on the deviances of their actions and facial expressions! What else could it be, but a fall out of the gradually increasing public visibility of such people, in a post-institutionalization time?

Munro, who has been repeatedly photographed sitting or standing in front of photographs clicked by Arbus is known to have been in deepest awe of the way in which she makes sure that her subjects retain their dignity in spite of their oddity. Such representation of the so-called ‘grotesque’, she insists in her interview with Geoff Hancock, is not ‘fashionable’ but rather ‘responsible’ (Hancock 1982, 107), in the way in which they invite the viewers to rise above the traditional stigma and stereotypes while engaging with the mentally deviant both with and beyond the paradigm of art. It is this photographic vision shaped by that of Arbus, which helped Munro conceptualize the basic story-line revolving around the mentally ill in the form of a visually palpable image. In fact, the story featuring one of her earliest and most complex mentally deviant characters, aptly named ‘Images’ (*Dance of the Happy Shades*, 1968), was born out of a mentally conceived photographic still-shot as it were: “It started with the picture in my mind of the man met in the woods, coming obliquely down the river bank, carrying the hatchet, and the child watching him, and the



father unaware, bending over his traps....From this picture the story moved outward, in a dim uncertain way.” (Munro 1972, 182) Joe Phippen, whom protagonist Del Jordan chances upon, while travelling along the trap lines of her fox and mink farmer father Ben Jordan, by the side of the Wanawash river in the fictional town of Julibee, one rainy afternoon, is a schizophrenic. The story like many others has been based on what the author acknowledges to be her ‘personal material’ in her interview with Tim Struthers (Struthers 1983, 36). The above described ‘image’ of Phippen that finally materializes in a full-fledged story, drawn heavily from many a schizophrenic individual encountered by Munro as a part of her smalltown existence – ones who had been lucky enough to forgo institutionalization, only to be forced to live in the fringes of a 50s-60s small town Ontario society.

In keeping with the typical trait of the disease his existence is plagued by certain delusions, the foremost being that of a constant threat being posed by an invisible and imaginary enemy, the Silases. The fear drives him to carry a hatchet with him as a mode of self-defense. Having burst down his own house, with a firm belief that his enemy was responsible for it, he now lived in a ‘hole in the ground’ beyond the bushes and the trap lines, with a cat as company. The feelings that the sudden appearance of his man instills within young Del reflect an internalization of the stigma of an entire town – one that was struggling with a new challenge of having to encounter in their day to day lives some of those who would earlier be removed from the public eye through institutional confinement. What one finds fascinating is the way in which even this mentality is represented in the form of a photographic imagery – the rain drenched regional landscape with all its destructive splendor of light and darkness providing a perfect apocalyptic backdrop to his threatening presence:

I was transfixed, as if struck by lightning .... All my life I had known that there was a man like this and he was behind doors, around the corner at the dark end of the hall. So now I saw him and just waited, like a child in an old negative, electrified against the dark noon sky, with blazing hair and burnt out Orphan Annie eyes. The man slipped down the bushes towards my father and I never thought, or hoped for anything but the worst. (Munro 2000, 38)

What imbues Munro’s story with the deep sense of responsibility towards the unwilling deviant that she holds in such high esteem in the photography of Arbus, is the way in which the negative connotations of being lightning-struck or ‘electrified’, ‘blazing’ or ‘burned out’ are not associated with the mentally ill, but the ones who strive to marginalize him. Joe himself is just a curve in an otherwise straight river – deviant yet perfectly natural to come by along the contour of any flowing water body – one that Ben Jordan wants his daughter to take in her stride, never bothering to warn her to be ‘careful’ about or ‘stay away’ from the edge

of the water in that particular curved bend. His kindness, his neighbourly courtesy, his matter-of-fact visit to Joe's 'hole' and his completely uninhibited

The constant juxtaposition of the standpoint of the town with this attitude of Ben Jordan who identifies Joe as a sick man - rendered scared, violent and self-harming in his delusions, and in dire need of help and sympathy from the community – drives home the postmodernist realization that there are alternative ways of looking at the marginalized than the one established narrative endorsed as the 'Truth' by the mainstream social mandate. It is ultimately the perspective that one chooses to adopt that makes all the difference, not only in the life of the one who is judged, but also the one who judges him/her. Munro, in her turn never endorses any one perspective openly - letting the journey of the child from endorsing the viewpoint of her community to embracing the ideas of her father, from shunning Joe to protecting his 'secrets' from the stigmatizing gaze of the town, do the talking.

She continues to use this technique in every work that has schizophrenia – one of the most and strongly (behaviorally) manifested i.e. 'eruptive' (as Wahl puts it) and thereby, most fear-inducing mental maladies – at its center. Set in the 1960s, 'Dimensions' (*Too Much Happiness*, 2009) offers the reader with multiple 'dimensions' of looking at Lloyd whose pathological suspicion, insecurity, skepticism about medical science and doctors and a tendency to find an 'enemy' in every person who is not on the same page as him, drives him to strangle his beloved children to death. On the one hand are the authorities of the small town of Mildmay, who hold him responsible for his actions, brand him as 'criminally insane' and confine him in an institution which reduced him to a "thin and grey, diffident yet cold, mechanically moving yet uncoordinated man". (Munro 2010, 7) On the other, is his wife Doree, herself seeking professional help in order to deal with her trauma, who finds greater solace in his company and his delusional stories of having communicated with the children 'on the other side' than she would ever find in the practically grounded counseling sessions with her psychiatrist Mrs. Sands.

His pain of confinement – the 'punishment' of being restrained, tied up and drugged – resonates with the sufferings of schizophrenic patients in mental asylums as narrativized in works like *Snake Pit* (1946) by Mary Jane Ward or *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1964) by Joanna Greenberg. The semi-autobiographical characters, who are confined in Juniper Hill Mental Hospital (based on Rockland State Hospital, New York) and Chestnut Lodge in Rockville, Maryland respectively, speak of a complete state of depravation in the

light of being crammed like prisoners into padded cells. But while the former highlights the horrors of the electroshock therapy, it hints at a need for a structured inter-personal communication with a psychiatrist as an ideal method for treatment – one that is reinforced with a greater conviction in the latter. The Civil Rights Movement had brought to the forefront the question of the basic rights of the mentally ill within American society as well. Times were changing, and it spelled hope for people like the author-protagonist Greenberg or the fictional Lloyd of Munro's story. This hope at the clinical end, seeps into his social existence as well, when the dominant stance of a complete social desertion is pitted against his wife's decision to 'be there' with him.

Her continued visits to her husband, in spite of her detesting him for what he had done, is prompted by a realization that a more empathetic approach of dealing with him might have been much more effective in ensuring his rehabilitation than the persecutory deprivation of freedom meted out to him. The reader, like every time, is left with an open-ended narrative – free to make his/her own choice between the more conservative standpoint on schizophrenia, and the more clinically well-informed and humanitarian one. In all, Munro manages to bring out the tussle underlying the coexistence of such vastly different, and mostly conflicting perspectives on mental health within her mid-late twentieth century small town milieu with such alacrity that it hardly comes as a surprise, when people, especially those from small town backgrounds are able to identify with her characters. As a fond reader Martha White, a student of literature in Capilano University, British Columbia, tells the author in an unpublished letter dated March 20, 1984: "The component in your stories that I find so compelling is your characters and their setting. I have lived in a small town. I can recognize your characters and find them wonderfully true to life. You have captured the very essence of what many people fear about smalltown living". (Alice Munro Fonds 1984) The fact that what Munro considers to be her 'personal material' almost emerges to be a part of their own 'personal material' for readers like her, highlights the relatability, relevance and significance of the author's postmodernist interrogation of mental health. No wonder she chooses to end the journey she had once begun in the 60s with one schizophrenic with a hatchet, with another – this time a woman – in the final work of her literary career.

It is with the 'crazy old lady' Mrs. Netterfield of 'Dear Life (*Dear Life*, 2012) , that is one of the very few stories to have been acknowledged as being actually autobiographical, that the author made one of the most profound statements on the sense of responsibility that the society should, not more often than not did not, display towards the mentally ill. It comes

in the context of this woman, ill-famed for carrying a hatchet to attack people who at the slightest ‘provocation’ including acts like forgetting to deliver some butter that put the grocer’s delivery boy at the receiving end of her outburst, paying an uninvited visit to the author’s childhood home at Lower Town (Wingham). Munro’s signature style of storytelling comes out through the way she juxtaposes the terror of her mother, who represents the collective consciousness of a town that apparently had ‘sympathy’ for such people ‘for as long as they were decent’ (Munro 2012, 313) with the real sympathy that Munro feels when she grows up to understand that no intention of causing any harm but a delusional thought based on the past experience of her having lived in that same house in her youth had prompted the visit from the woman. It emerges to be the final and one of the finest examples of her multi-perspective exploration of the social reception of madness. “They took her away” – she is told. and the very apathy of the statement laced with the relief of having gotten rid of her, the very lack concern over ‘who’ might have taken her ‘where’ (a mental institution or somewhere even worse?), the very realization that her mother’s relation must have pushed her towards this fate, makes her contemplate: “We say of some things that they can’t be forgiven, or that we will never forgive ourselves. But we do – we do it all the time” (Munro 2012, 319). The guilt and shame that emanates from these last few lines of the story, and possibly the last few lines Munro would ever pen down as a writer, bears testimony to a befitting conclusion to a life-long perseverance towards making her readers aware of the multiple perspectives/voices/opinions lying unexplored under the overriding carpet of socially manufactured ‘Truth’ about the marginalized.

What is most fascinating is the way in which her use of photographic imagery, play of light and shadow and most importantly metaphors based on local landscape, nature and seasonal cycle to narrativize these dichotomous perspectives find resonance with the postmodernist approach towards the exploration of mental health that Verma engages in. The challenge they take up, after all, is not only about *what* they choose to talk about, but *how* they choose to talk about it. For, while a sense of social responsibility prompts them towards such a thematic exploration to a large extent, they cannot afford to be completely oblivious to the sentiments of a potential readership, particularly within their own small town communities, who had just begun to engage with mental illness in their day-to-day lives somewhat reluctantly and were not yet accustomed to in-depth and interrogatory encounters with the same in literature.

While this does call for a cushioning effect to ‘protect’ them from the severe blow of a direct and detailed portrayal of the brutal social reaction to and reception of the mentally ill, it also comes with a need to stir them enough to delve into their own conscience and work towards an eventual change of heart in the context. Striking a balance between the two thus opens up a scope for formal and stylistic experimentations, which tweaks the curious storyteller within them. The fear of a schizophrenic woman makes the town equate her with the much dreaded regional storm, whose unexpected arrival during a sunny summer afternoon left their homes, without their storm-windows on and their blinds drawn up, and thereby their lives exposed to her anticipated rampage. No wonder an old and mentally ill Mrs. Netterfield from Wingham, Canada, finds a soul-sister in a certain elderly frail Mrs. Joshua from Shimla, India – both their pathological obsession with their homes and residential towns reducing them to a personification of the destructive facets of their respective region-specific seasonal cycles in the eyes of their communities.

Like her Canadian counterpart, Mrs. Joshua of Nirmal Verma’s *Lal Tin ki Chhat* (1974) too is a lonely schizophrenic woman, left at the mercy of her largely disgruntled ‘uncharitable’ neighbors by her family. Her husband, fed up with her attachment to her unkempt apartment and the hill town of Shimla had returned to their original homeland, England, long ago. She was all for mocking, smirking at and coming with her walking stick after the imaginary enemies made out of people, who chose to move to the warmer plains during the cold winter months. Unfortunately for her, the majority of the town’s population belonged to this category - ones whom she believed did not share her love and devotion for the town, ones who hurried past her house avoiding any eye contact, ones who gossiped unkindly behind her back and ones who ultimately let her die alone, helpless and delusional as “a ghostly glow, bleached by the snow, crouched in the (Mrs. Joshua’s) room” (Verma 2013, 231). One of the most complexly charted out mentally ill characters of Verma thus becomes synonymous to the dreary and dangerous winter snow that covers every corner of the town, for these people who relocate temporarily to escape it. Only the eleven year old Kaya, her neighbor, who has grown up watching her from close quarters, harbors a sense of compassion deep enough to understand how the rejection from the residents of a town, she had held more dear than her own homeland, had hurt her.

The way in which she has always seen and judged Mrs. Joshua, comes back to haunt her as a photographic image from the past that re-enacts itself in the present only to imbue Kaya with a realization anew – Mrs. Joshua’s cloistered and neglected existence has always

been more a social imposition than the fall out of her mental condition, that the girl had earlier believed it to be:

She was now sitting alone, and I was watching her. Was the face she wore now real? What brings on the real face? The brumous afternoon, the scuffy snow, Mtrs Joshua on the chair....white hair, her long angular face in profile, the thin body – on which her skirt hung on as a reed. One hand lay absently on a drawer and the other dangled by the chair. I was sure I had seen it all before. Things have a way of re-enacting themselves, it is in the moment of re-enactment that memory realizes itself: it then comes to life, turns into a witness and says yes it's all true, it happened, (Verma 2013, 231)

Evocation of memory in the form of photographic imagery, to mark a person's transition from a narrow-minded standpoint to a more nuanced and sensitized understanding of mental health, is thus a narrative strategy that Verma shares with his Canadian counterpart. Kaya's sense of shame to have once been young and impressionable enough to have actively participated in that act of stigmatization – being irrationally scared of her, transferring that fear onto her little brother or throwing away the cake baked by her in a drain - prompts her to be there for the old woman in her last days. She switches on the lights and opens the window of her room in her attempt to dissipate, both physically and metaphorically, the 'ghostly glow' of the town's apathy that had wrapped itself round the mentally ailing woman for decades, and allow a light breeze to flood in.

The outsider/insider trope thus plays a crucial role in both the stories. In the former, the house that Mrs. Netterfield pines for represents the mainstream society, that deems her an 'outsider' does not allow her entry into its premises, In the latter, the house that Mrs. Joshua held so close to her heart, had turned in a defacto prison that minimized her contact with the town that lay beyond it, in her final days. The 'outsider' is removed from the social fabric, albeit through a reverse mechanism. The windows, in each case remain the only potential avenue to bridge the gap between these non-normative 'outsiders' and the normative 'insiders. What professes to touch a deep chord within the readers is the way in which even in disgrace the two women become one with identifying seasonal markers – the storm and the snow - of the regional landscape encapsulating the two towns. The irony that lies within the acknowledgement, however grudging, of their belongingness to the local community, comes with a sense of poetic justice. It induces one to question the very system, the very power structure that creates this insider/outsider divide and exposes how fragile, egoistic and misinformed its basic foundation is.

The way in which Verma seamlessly weaves the two opposing perspectives into an organic flow of actions unfolding within a single scene in the story, highlights his post-

modernist orientation towards the literary interrogation of the non-normative in a way that aligns very strongly with the ‘Munroian’ approach towards the same. Verma’s friend, author and literary critic Ashok Vajpayee’s uninhibited declaration of ‘*sach*’ (truth) being ‘*bahuvachan*’ (pluralistic) in the contemporary Hindi context (Vajpayee 2004, 9) could not have found a more befitting preamble than Verma’s observation about the need to look into the plethora of different perspectives underlying every coercive attempt to establish any one of them as the objective, absolute Truth: “हर निगाह एक खोज हैं, और हर खोज अपने आप में छोटी सी साहसिकता।” (*Har nigaha ek khoj hain, aur har khoj apne aap me ek chhoti si sahasikata*) (Verma 1988, 85) [Every perception (of a thing/person/event) embodies an new quest (for meaning), and every quest amounts to a small act of courage] And what else would call for a greater courage and determination than embarking upon a quest for the less accepted, less dwelt upon and often socially stifled perceptions of the mentally ill?

Yet, long before *uttaradhunikatavad* officially enters the Hindi literary discourse – finding its first mention, as mentioned in previous chapters, by none other than Verma himself in a 1984 interview with the same Ashok Vajpayee – its seeds had been sown much before, as early as the 1950s when the author had started his career. It was the heyday of modernism in Hindi literature. Most of the characters of his very first collection of *nayi kahani*, *Parinde* (1959), reeling under the modernist existential crisis, believed in the presence of an absolute meaning of life and sought to grasp it with a desperate earnestness. There were, however a handful, who seemed to be poised at a conjecture in which the subjectivity and relativity of ‘truth’ had become apparent. One of the earliest *nayi kahani* to have made Hindi literature delve into the so-called murky waters of mental disorder – ‘Andhere me’ - is one of them.

The ‘darkness’ that imbues the very name of the story refers to the mystery that surrounds the perpetually sick child-protagonist’s mother Pono. The schizophrenic woman, who unable to come out of her college-days’ attraction for her neighbor and her husband’s friend Viren lives in the past, and is often susceptible to violent outbursts remains confined to her room most of the time. Over the years, the child’s uncomplicated love for her mother is percolated by the extremely telling charade of secrecy that the entire hill-town including her father, her best friend Bano and Bano’s mother maintains about the woman she cares so deeply for. Increasingly and unconsciously, *Bachchi* came to embody the town’s opinion about her mother and started believing that she hardly knew this aloof, unsmiling, ever-

anxious woman— she was a stranger with eyes as unfathomable as “ गहरे जंगल का झुरमुट “ “*gehre jangal ka jhurmut*” (Verma 2011, 28) [the dark depths of a dense forest], that surrounded Simla and was visible through the window of her room. The analogy, like the one found in Munro’s ‘Images’, is one of the earliest expressions of Verma’s strategy of using the *vatavaran* (ambience) of the small-town the story is set in, to thematize mental health hazards – a more mature articulation of which is found in his later works like *Lal Tin ki Chat*.

The analogy marked the beginning of a journey through the maze of socially internalized fear and distrust that culminates in a complete demonization of her mother, when Pono in one of outbursts appeared to her as a specter, sinister and menacing in her “ भूखी फटी फटी सी आखें “ “*bhukhi, phati phati si ankhein*” (Verma 2011, 36) [hungry, glaring eyes] It is only much later, when mother moved to her sister’s place and her father decided to move to Delhi without her, that the child dwells upon an appeal Pono had once made to the one person closest to her heart – “अगर कहीं में चली जाऊ, तो क्या तुम मुझे समझोगे?” “*Agar mein kahi chali jau, toh kya tum mujhe samjhoge?*” (Verma 2011, 22) [If I ever go away somewhere, will you understand me?]. Neither she nor the reader comes to know whether Pono left on her own accord or she was sent away against her wish. But her absence lets her question hang in the air. It is uncomfortable, it is disturbing, it is thought-provoking. With it, Verma enters a domain that a gradually de-institutionalizing small town Indian society was being forced to confront in their practical life. As the child sees strands of yellowish white light gleaming through the closed windows of Pono’s room, a darkness more stifling than any that had ever informed her the social image of her mother.

Through her final comprehension of her mother’s pain of being struck in a delusionary past, the hunger in her eyes being induced by a forced separation from her daughter, the author harps upon the belief that the scholar Ved Raman Pandey enunciates as:

बेशक़ इस बात पर जोर नहीं दिया जा सकता की किसी एक ब्यक्ति की सिर्फ़ एक सच्चाई हो सकती हैं और किसी घटना या स्थिति का एक ही सच्चाई वर्णन हो सकती हैं। विविन्न दृष्टिकोण , ब्यक्तिगत मान्यताएं, विविन्न राजनितिक, सांस्कृतिक या अन्य उद्योशों किसी बर्णन और बृत्यानता को अलग अलग रूप देंगे।

*Beshak is baat par zor nahi diya ja sakta ki kisi ek byekti ki sirf ek sachchi chavi ho sakti hainaur kisi ghatna ya sthiti ka ek hi sachchi varnan ho sakti hain. Bibhinnya drishtikon, byektigata manyatae, bhibhinnya rajnaitik, sanskritic ya anya uddeshyo kisi varnan aur brityanta ko alag alag roop denge.* (Pandey 2008, 44)



[It is not possible to stress on an assumption that a person has only one true image, or there only one right way to describe and interpret a particular situation. Differences in viewpoints, personal prejudices and political and cultural motivations can project a situation in different lights]

It is at a time when the Hindi speaking urban belt of India still believes in the singularity and absoluteness of truth about a person – exemplified by Latika in the title story of this very collection, ‘Parinde’ – Verma had already begun to emphasize upon contingent ‘truths’. That was the only way, he realized, to rip through the politics of marginalizing the involuntary deviant. Unlike Munro, who in spite of retaining certain modernist elements could weaving her narratives into newly emerging but already well-accepted fabric of English-Canadian postmodernism as early as the ‘50s and the ‘60s, Verma in his early stories of displayed a vision far ahead than that harbored within his contemporary socio-cultural paradigm. In fact, these early trysts with *uttaradhunikatavad* in its nascent form, has been crucial in establishing its relevance in the Hindi literary context, in the later decades of the twentieth century and legitimizing mental health as a thematic area worthy of literary attention has been crucial to this process.

What draws one’s attention as the most prominent yet intriguing feature of this multi-perspective exploration of mental health, is the tendency of both the authors to present the problematic dichotomy between the mainstream conservative social perception of the mentally ill and the more accommodative, empathic and sensitized one through the gaze of a child or an early adolescent protagonist. In the majority of the stories discussed above, it is this young mind that ultimately champions the cause of the latter. Childhood and early adolescence, being some of the most impressionable phases in an individual’s life, emerges to be a time when he/she tends to be influenced the most by the attitude and behavior of the adults around them. Their beliefs and prejudices too leave a deep mark in their psyche, often inducing them to imbibe or even internalize and eventually replicate them without fully realizing the complex social dynamics that create, sustain and perpetuate them. These marks, however, are not indelible, for it this very impressionability that renders them more receptive to new ideas. They can ‘unlearn’ what was once ‘learnt’ and take to newer ways of looking at life with a passionate zeal, adults hardly find within themselves. It is their spirit of inquiry and a heart still susceptible to be moved by pain and suffering, that the value judgments ingrained within the ‘grown-ups’ might render them immune to, make them ideal candidates to uphold the social stereotyping and stigmatization of the mentally ill, only to break free of it and form their own independent opinions of them – once that spell a hope of their inclusion,

acceptance and a non-coercive accommodation within the society. Moreover, the innocence and lack of worldly 'wisdom' with which these young ones marvel over their new-found perception, has the potential to affect the reader more profoundly than any didactic approach could ever do. This conscious choice thus again reiterates the authors' grasp over human psychology. So does the only story discussed above, Munro's 'Dimensions', that emerges to be an exception to this 'rule' – for it sees the author venture into a territory that demands a more nuanced and intricate understanding of the human mind, than anything else.

Through her projection of Doree as the representative of the more humane and accommodative stance towards Lloyd, Munro actually explores the subversive potential of the connections of empathy between two individuals suffering the pangs of a mental illness, in overhauling the majoritarian social perception that has actively facilitated a marginalization and repression of both. Doree was a bereaved mother who had lost her children because of Lloyd, but she is also a woman who had to take on a new identity – use a new name, transform her appearance, relocate to a new town (London) and take up a new job – to escape not only her traumatic past but also the judgmental attitude of the residents of Mildmay towards the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that had been triggered by it.

Rendered a social recluse in her own way, could fathom to such extent the pain of social segregation that the incarcerated Lloyd was going through. As the patient of an ailment that can generate extreme physical and mental reactions when the memory of the past event is triggered – her multiple suicide attempts made her more resilient towards his self-harming tendencies, which prompt him to be drugged and tied up. The cold aloofness of her psychiatrist helped her relate to Lloyd's frustration with the one who would 'visit' him in his cell. But most importantly, it is the one event that was largely responsible for their current condition, which connected Doree to Lloyd with vehemence beyond the comprehension of the so-called 'normal' people in and around them. The resurrection of children in one's re-visitation of the incident and the other's delusional imagination, that they bond over, are nothing not attempts on the part of two individuals in the clutches of two different mental disorders to cope with their own pain and suffering.

No story, perhaps, demands as much '*sahasikata*' (courage) on the part of the author as Verma puts it, then one like this. Having to encounter questions about readers judging her for not creating 'desirable roommates' out of her characters, is after all, no cake-walk for any creative artist. Her answer comes as a major blow to such reactions when she

says: “I find this a really strong question. I don’t find people either good or bad, they are such a mixture. I had never realized that people had noticed I had written such deplorable – that’s a strong word – rather such characters with such human characteristics not considered desirable”. (Penguin Random House 2014) Indeed, not perceiving people in ‘black’ and ‘white’ has been crucial in helping her blur the boundaries between the ‘normative’ and ‘non-normative’ with such ease and spontaneity.

What is most poignant about her statement is that it comes up as a part of a conversation with a contemporary writer, a friend and compatriot who has believed in this idea with as much passion as her – one that makes her one of the earliest in English-Canadian literature to foray into the complex contours of trauma response and the resultant PTSD through her *Surfacing* (1972). For the anonymous protagonist, repression of the memory of forceful abortion of her baby by her boyfriend Joe and numbing of emotions was a major coping mechanism of dealing with the trauma that she was unable to recover from. Her self-doubts over her subconscious attempts at ‘reconstructing’ it– “I have to be more careful about my memories, I will start inventing them and there will be no way of correcting it” (Atwood 1998, 70) - were destined to end in moments of sudden and eruptive ‘surfacing’ of the same, pushing her towards complete ‘insanity’.

The novel actually takes up the baton from where another contemporary Margaret Laurence leaves it in her short story ‘The Loons’ (*A Bird in the House*, 1970), where Piquette Torrenne, suffering from tuberculosis, repressed by her father, abused in her school for her bi-racial origins and jilted by her partner tries to find solace in her baby, only to lose it and set herself on fire. Her name which literally means ‘thunder which pricks or stings’ anticipated her ultimate destruction and took cognition of a series of traumatic events that had built up to her losing complete control over herself, ‘outrageously’ shrieking her pain aloud in public places. “What went wrong?” as Morag Gunn from Laurence’s later work *The Diviners* (1974) contemplates while dwelling on Piquette, “Or did it go wrong so long ago that there is no single cause or root to be found?” (Laurence 1970, 83) No wonder, these would-be mothers are the rightful precursor of a Doree or even before her, an Elle from ‘Friend of My Youth’ (1990) – each engaged in a long arduous pathological struggle of dealing with the trauma of losing their dear ones, namely their born or unborn offspring(s).

Though Munro had been looking into the intricacies of how a traumatic incident might adversely affect the mental health of an individual in the following days, since the

earliest days of her literary career, it is with 'Progress of Love' (1986) that she began to foray into some of the long-term pathological effects of a traumatic past on a person who has never been able to recover from it. It is only with Elle, however, that the author actually entered into the complicated terrain of the mind of someone finding her way through the maze of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, in the early '90s. Reduced to a mere shell of her old lively self, following a series of tenuous pregnancies ending in miscarriages or stillbirths, the girl often succumbs to self-harming tendencies, eating and sleeping disorders, panic attacks and violent outbursts.

What appears to be most intriguing, however, is the coping mechanism that she resorts to, to deal with her mental disorder. She tries to repress the memory of the traumatic event(s) but while 're-inventing' it, instead of doing it in a more 'acceptable' light, she chooses to bombard her neighbors from the small town in Ottawa Valley including men, unmarried girls and children with overtly exaggerated, bloody and gory details of her 'disappointments'. Unlike Doree, Piquette and Elle find talking about their trauma and shocking and scandalizing their conservative societies into validating, albeit reluctantly their trauma, strangely therapeutic. The story, more than ever, highlights the differential methods of 'rearranging' memory in order to cope with the same mental malady, triggered by a very similar incident. This release of repressed emotions as it comes from unfathomable depths can cause, uncontrolled and unpredictable in its nature, can sometimes unimaginable reactions. It hardly comes as a surprise, therefore, that the mother of Kaya from *Lal Tin ki Chat* - the first well etched character of Verma, and perhaps Hindi literature, striving to survive the pain of PTSD post a stillbirth, finds this 'release' in a most unpredictable manner.

Deeply disillusioned with the socially assigned 'fate' of trapping women in the vicious cycle of childbirth, she delves into an obsessive and deeply problematic preoccupation with her early pubescent daughter's body: "She would survey me from top to toe, look at me severely, drag me to the bathroom, wash my hair in boiling-hot water, scrub every nook and corner of my body, asking again and again, "Does it happen to you?" (Verma 2013, 224) This 'it' she was terrified of was nothing but the menstrual flow of blood, that would push girls into the never-ending circle of pain. It had happened to her; it would happen to her daughter as well.

Her characterization emerges as an organic outcome of the journey that Verma begins as early as the mid '60s, through the publication of 'Antar' in his second collection of

short stories, *Jalti Jhari* (1965). The author, who commences his exploration of human response to trauma in the same decade as his Canadian contemporary in question, identifies it as a major existential concern for the urban population he wrote about, in his *nayi kahani*. In the small town communities of North India, united by their shared moralities judgments and gossips as strongly as their basic lack of empathy, few were there to lend a patient ear to individuals struggling with the trauma, particularly if triggered by socially tabooed ‘accidents’ like forced abortion, sexual abuse or miscarriage. It was not that such incidents never took place before, it was just that the newly imbued sensitivity and sensitization about mental health within the emerging generation of *nayi kahanikars*, made them more aware of the need to look into the psychological repercussions of the same on the mind of an individual, through the lens of literature. The *Nayi Kahani* movement stood tall in its difficult, yet heartfelt attempt at highlighting this new found realization in its interrogation of postcolonial urban modernity in the Hindi literary context. They strongly believed that “आधुनिकता स्वयं मूल्य नहीं। बदलते संधर्मा में मूल्यों का पुनारमुल्यान है। “ (*Adhinikata swayam mulya nahi. Badalte sandharma me mulyo ka punarmulyayan hain*) (Pandey 2008, 23) [Modernity, in itself, is not a value. Rather, it embodies a reevaluation of the exiting values in the light of the changing contours of human consciousness] and Verma’s earliest attempt towards understanding trauma is reflection of this very idea.

Set in an hospital in a small hill station in Czechoslovakia (where, as already mentioned, Verma had lived in his youth for a decade) , ‘Antar’ charted a single day in the life of the unmarried pregnant unnamed protagonist from India, who was forced to abort the fetus growing within her by her partner who refused to take any responsibility (legitimize the birth through marriage) of them. The superficial concern bestowed in the post-operative phase by the very man who had not been there for her when she needed him the most, the derogatory attitude of the nurse over her marital status and a sudden encounter with the bloodied sheets bearing testimony to her ordeal pushes her over the edge as she keeps repeating – “मुझे बड़ा हल्का सा लग रहा है।” (*Mujhe bara halka sa lag raha hain*) (Verma 2011, 65) [I am feeling very light now]. What had been a living, breathing entity for her, was nothing was an unwanted ‘baggage’ that was needed to be shed off at the earliest for the others. Though not set in India, the smalltown setting within which the story unfolded highlighted values and moralities not any more accommodative and accepting to transgressions than those which informed her base-town back ‘home’. She too, in her turn,

could not free herself from the sense of guilt and shame that she had internalized as a part and parcel of her upbringing in India.

The reiteration of her statement, the blank stare, the act of hurling of things down the hospital window all come as an immediate response to the traumatic incident. The readers never come to know whether it would ultimately reach a long-term pathological state, but it is enough to prepare the ground for the same in a later sketched character by the author like Kaya's mother or even ones created by his fellow practitioners of the Hindi New Story. In fact, the reactionary outburst aligns strangely with that of Amma, the in-charge of the brothel from 'Mans ka Dariya' (1975) by Kamaleswar. The story, widely acclaimed as one of the finest examples of *navi kahani*, highlights Amma's (Hindi for mother) obsessive preoccupation with the cleanliness, hygiene and health quotient of the bodies of the girls living under her supervision. While it tended to make her extremely strict and disciplinarian, the protagonist Jugnu was able to identify it as an expression of PTSD that had kicked in with the shock of rape and death of Kamala, a ward whom she had loved dearly. The guilt of not being able to save her, make her more conscious than ever about the objectification of a woman's body both within and beyond the walls of the brothel. What makes her pain even more heartbreaking, yet poignant is the fact that the loss of Kamala affects her mental health as deeply as the loss of her own child affects Kaya's mother.

The girls in the brothel were terrified of their 'mother', so was Kaya of hers after a point. But she chose to bear with it. After all, this was 'safest' way, as she realized, for her mother vent her pain – in private – in a society where a public outburst could lead to dire consequences, and social judgment of Simla was only one of them. As a woman who saw her two surviving children being sent away from her temporarily for having lost her third one, and had already been subject to a coercive process of 'faith healing' by the her *dai* (midwife), she feared that the stigma of being 'mad' would only be enhanced by the culture-specific, religiously ordained and socially motivated tag of 'inauspiciousness' – that would not only tarnish her family's 'reputation' but also result in her losing her husband's already-dwindling affection and the companionship for her children forever.

Thus, even in a state of deepest mental distress, she cannot express her pain in a way Elle or Piquette did. Such differential manifestation of trauma response in the public/private domain emerges to be an ideal example of what Chaudhuri, Mehta and Pillai how "coping strategies specific to a population" (Chaudhuri, Mehta and Pillai, 2016) might

have therapeutic implication in the case of PTSD. Coping strategies may indeed be shaped consciously or unconsciously by the beliefs, moralities and social dynamics of the community within the person resides. It is imperative therefore, that one takes cognition of this factor while engaging in a cross-cultural literary exploration of the same across. No less important is the need to acknowledge the role the role of ‘local psychosocial frameworks’ (Chaudhuri, Mehta and Pillai 2016) in enhancing the mental disorder already triggered by a traumatic past.

The mental condition of Kaya’s mother was further worsened by the ‘siege’ like isolation imposed on her by the sympathetic, yet superstition driven well-wishers, who could not completely shake off the traditional belief that it is ultimately a woman’s ‘unfavorable stars’ that leads to her child’s destruction. The repeated acts of ‘cleansing’ her ‘polluted’ ‘impure’ body both physically and metaphorically, does not help matters either. In the case of Elle, however, additional triggers come out of the judgment doled out by her townspeople – who openly deem it to be a suitable ‘punishment’ doled out to her for the moral and sexual transgression implicit within her ‘hurried marriage’ to her elder sister Flora’s fiancé. It is not that difficult, after all, to trace the nature of their reactionary outbursts back to the particular ‘stressors’ instrumental in triggering them. What brings these culturally differential approaches together, however, is the way in which each of them embody a deeply problematic patriarchal stance by holding the woman accountable for her trauma and the mental disorder caused by it, What could be a greater source of pain for a woman already on the verge of tripping over the edge?

Interestingly, much like the bond that developed between Doree and Lloyd, the only solace that Kaya’s mother found amidst all the judgments and stigmatization is in the company of Mrs. Joshua. She was the only person, who in spite of her pathological detachment from reality and her tendency to dwell in her own world of delusions, realized that what the younger woman really needed was not social isolation or religious cleansing practices but the love and care of her husband and children. Thus, through this work, Verma too enters the extremely sensitive domain that explores the connections of empathy between two mentally ‘divergent’ individuals and its potential to subvert the social ‘order’, in a way his Canadian counterpart does through her ‘Dimensions’. Elle, however, was not as fortunate. Misunderstood and misinterpreted till the very end, her death through cancer comes as a respite not only to her, but to every person associated with her doomed life.

Incidentally it is around the same time the readers first met Elle that Trauma Studies came up as a discipline to reckon with. It strove to explore the impact of trauma on literature and society by uncovering “the complex psychological and social factors that influence the self’s comprehension of a traumatic experience and how such an experience shapes and is shaped by language” (Rothberg 2017). This opened up a much-needed avenue and a gradually developing theoretical framework to study the literary expression of trauma and its short term and long-term effects on human psychology. It was the fallout of the newly emergent preoccupation of literary critics with trauma, and the psychological explorations of the same in the works of sensitive and sensitized creative artists like Munro, Atwood, Laurence and their contemporaries had much to do with the creating a fertile ground for it.

An in-depth exploration of the representation of traumatic experience and its effects upon human psychology through language – that this discipline calls for – reiterates the organic relationship that each author shares with the local landscape and nature of their hometowns. Many of them emerge to be what Thomas Dutoit calls their ‘signature geo-literary stories (Dutoit 2014, 77) that associate the environment, geography and geology of the small-town settings of their stories, with the long-term pathological trauma response of their protagonists. While the repression and resurfacing of the traumatic memories of Atwood’s heroine from *Surfacing* becomes one with her numerous dives into the depths of the lake surrounding her childhood home in the island in Quebec that she returns to after many years and Laurence’s Piquette’s trauma emerges to be synonymous to the ‘alternately mocking and alternatively plaintive loons’ hanging around Lake Wakapata (Lake Diamond in reality) in the fictional town of Manawaka in Manitoba. The resonance the loons automatically find with the ‘loony’ or the lunatic, emerges to be much more than a mere coincidence in the life of the troubled girl. The ‘deranged’ Elle, as well, in her uncontrolled outbursts is embodied by the winter snow that creates fissures in the “well-drained fields with none of the Pre-Cambrian rock shouldering through the soil” (Munro 1990, 4) of the Ottawa Valley. The horned cow, typical of the region, terribly destructive if led astray, too, is used as a metaphor for the way the deviant ‘self’ perceives itself, mirroring a rationale very similar to what makes Atwood’s protagonist identify with a dead blue heron hanging from the tree, or induces Piquette to find her angst reflected in the cries of the birds trapped in the loons.

Representation of trauma response in Hindi literature, too, takes on a similar turn through the creative endeavours of Nirmal Verma or some of his fellow *nayi kahanikars* like Mohan Rakesh, whose literary consciousness is deeply connected to the ‘earth’ as



experienced through the hill-town upbringings. As Verma openly admits to his readers “इसे शायद वही समझ सकते हैं, जिन्होंने अपने अकेले साये-साये करते हुए बचपन के वर्ष बहुत से वर्ष, एकसाथ पहाड़ी स्टेशन पर गुज़ारे हैं। (*Ise sayad wahi samaj sakte hain, jinhone apne akele saye-saye karte hue bachpan ke varsh, bahut se varsh, ek saath pahari station par guzare hain*) (Verma 2011, vii) [Perhaps only those would understand this (connection) would have spent the lonely desolate years of children, and many others hereafter in hill stations]. This connection finds expression in the way in which the ‘*Hilta Pahar*’ (Moving Mountain) which overlooks the window beside Kaya’s mother’s bed. These densely wooded and tiered hills gave the impression of swaying to and fro when the trees undulated as a result of strong winds. The hills emerge to be emblematic of the tumultuous trauma response of the woman suffering from PTSD – both deep dark and mysterious, both imbued with the potential to diverge from the expected and the normative. What is the act of shutting the window overlooking the hills but a metaphor for the communal attempts to silence and stifle the reactionary outburst of the mentally ill? Thus, earth with its geological and seasonal facet and animate life form emerges to be much more a mere backdrop, a stoic presence in the lives of the human characters created by authors experimenting with the literary representation of trauma response across cultures and continents. The ecocritical trajectory that creeps into the exploration of mental health of the literary artists concerned, is the fallout of the earth morphing into a character in itself in their stories – an entity that has its own story to tell, an entity that responds in its own way to pain of those struggling to negotiate with trauma. The earth emerges to be emblematic of “exposure, vulnerability and openness” as opposed the “(human) world as closure, enclosure and protection” (Dutoit 2014) that imbues it with an ability to respond empathically to the voices silenced, repressed and involuntarily enclosed (confined?) within the controlling clutches of the mainstream society.

Each one of these ‘voices’ highlighted above, being that of mentally ill girls and women, introduces an additional quotient of two-fold marginalization - firstly for their gender identity and secondly for their mental deviance – within the purview of discussion. One cannot help but notice that while their respective communities are adept in the act of victim-blaming, few actually come forward to empathize with them or seek clinical help on their behalf. It hardly comes as a surprise therefore that Munro, who delves consciously into ‘the lives of girls and women’ (no wonder, she names one of her seminal collection of stories as such!) that she encounters as a part of her small-town existence, for what she calls the ‘starting dough’ (Munro 1982, 36) of her stories, tends to concentrate more on women

battling PTSD than their male counterparts. Her Indian counterpart in question does explore PTSD in men through a few stories like ‘Dedh Inch Upar’ which sees a man drinking himself to oblivion to repress the traumatic memories of his political activist wife’s sudden arrest and eventual killing in the hands opposition forces, only to revisit it by telling it to a complete stranger; or ‘Zindagi Yaha Aur Waha’ which finds the young Fatty ‘living’ with her parents by holding onto their unmade bed, spectacles and even their unwashed dentures with an obsessive vehemence long after they have passed away. But such stories are few and far between, in comparison to the one’s dealing with female pathological responses to trauma.

Though the author never sites any specific reason for such disparity, it might be logically attributed to the fact that *nayi kahani* is committed to interrogating the traditional values and moralities in the light of the changing dynamics of gender within the post-independence postcolonial smalltown societies of North India. This turned a critical literary engagement with events, some mostly and the others always specific to female experience - like sexual abuse, marital rape, domestic violence, miscarriage, stillbirth and forced abortion – that have had the potential to push girls and women towards into the deep dark depths of trauma since ages, into the need of the hour. “ हर पिड़ी के पास अपनी आंख होती हैं, आंख ही नहीं बल्की अपना पँख भी - ताकि वह कल के भीतर देख सके और कल के परे जा सके।” (*Har pirhi ke pass apni ankh hoti hain, ankh hi nahi balki apna pankh bhi – taki who kal ke bhitari dekh sake aur kal ke pare ja sake*) ( Pandey 2008, 22) [Every generation has its own way of looking at things, they also have their own wings to set flight – these help them interrogate the past from a fresh perspective and fly beyond its confines], observes Ved Raman Pandey and no words could describe the stance of *nayi kahani* writers in better terms. Literary artists of his and Munro’s generation aspired to problematize the stigma, taboo, judgments and gendered blame-games associated with each of these incidents within their respective small-town milieus, only to break free of their restrictive shackles and move towards a less gender-skewed social, familial and individual existence. A literary exploration of short term trauma response and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in women promises to a fertile ground to embark upon this journey – these works, therefore, driven by motivations that includes, but is not restricted to a heartfelt desire to understand the psychological intricacies of a mental disorders that manifests itself in acute behavioral ‘deviances’. Such motivations might be reason enough for the prioritizing female encounters with PTSD in their works

In this context, it is also imperative to take cognition of the fact, as scientific studies reveal, women are twice as likely to develop PTSD than men. It does not come as surprise, given the understanding that women may be subject to many additional social ‘stressors’, mentioned above, over and above the stress exerted through accidents or loss of dear ones, that men might be subject to. But is the impact of those gender specific social determinants the only answer to a greater prevalence of the mental disorder in question, among women? World Health organization attributes much of this situation upon the observed gender difference within what psychopathologists Nicholas Eaton, Katherine Keyes and Robert Krueger call the ‘invariant dimensional internalizing-externalizing liability model’ in mental health disorder prevalence (Eaton, Keyes and Kruger 2011, 282). Unlike men whose socialization privileges often enable them to engage in an immediate externalization of distress through aggression, misconduct or hyperactivity; women, schooled not to vent their negative emotions in a way so as to inconvenience others, display a higher tendency of responding to stressors by an immediate internalization of the same. Their distress, instead of a much needed immediate expression, is thus channelized through in certain overtly-inhibited and internally focused symptoms like sadness, anxiety, fear and social withdrawal. No doubt it makes them more susceptible to a mental disorder like PTSD than men – for all the pent up distress caused by a traumatic event that gradually builds up to monstrous levels over days, months and even years is sure to lead women to that end.

It is this same gender differential affinity towards internalization that makes mental disorders with less ‘eruptive’ manifestations – be it General Anxiety Disorder, Depressive Disorder or even Bipolar Personality Disorder - more predominant in women than men. Less ‘eruptive’ the behavioral manifestation, less disruptive the mental illness to the social order and greater the possibility of it being denied any clinical attention, particularly in small-town communities of Munro and Verma’s stories that had been coerced into taking ‘responsibility’ of their mentally ill by the gradual turn towards de-institutionalization of their respective national mental health care systems. Denying the fact that there *is* a problem, would absolve the family member from any liability of finding a solution to it and they found it much more preferable than facing the brunt of gossip, rumor, latent stigmatization and shaming for having an ‘anomaly’ within their intimate circle. Such an assimilation of the mentally ill is no less problematic than their involuntary confinement within asylums or our homes – for it is only when they are recognized as being ‘different’ can they be provided with the care, clinical or otherwise, that they are in dire need of. Moreover, while such a stance might

protect them from social persecution and stigmatization, the behavioral manifestations of their respective mental disorders are often misinterpreted as social apathy, self-centeredness, egotism, laziness, irresponsibility, lack of compassion and a conscious and intentional turn towards being non-accommodative towards the physical and mental needs of their dear one. Such misinterpretations proved to be particularly detrimental to women, who have traditionally been expected to always put the needs of before that of their own, within the conservative patriarchal societies in question – often costing them their relationships with their parents, siblings, partners, spouses, offspring, friends, neighbors and other social acquaintances. For a generation of women, who had just started to step into the professional arena, it also tended to hamper their productivity – taking their struggle to establish their own identity within the predominantly male workforce a notch higher. Munro and Verma garnered the deepest concern for such women who strove to bear the burden of undiagnosed mental maladies, with as much dignity as the labels of being a ‘bad mother’, an ‘uncaring daughter’, an ‘unloving wife’ or an ‘inefficient worker’ – their effort to put up a brave front often pushing them deeper and deeper into the abyss of the disorder they were already afflicted with.

The most poignant expressions of such a concern finds its way through a play of light and darkness, metaphorical and figurative, to represent the two ends of the spectrum of bipolarity within the undiagnosed female patients of bipolar disorder. By choosing not to spell out anything clearly, the authors give the apparent impression of playing along with the charade of not recognizing the symptoms of a mental disorder within the protagonist put up by the other characters in the story. The suggestiveness inherent within the way these women are represented, however, speak otherwise.

One of the finest examples of such an approach may be found in the portrayal of Biji from ‘Babli’ (*Sukha Aur Anya Kahaniyan*, 1995) who, as mentioned in the previous chapter is a school teacher constantly burdened by the guilt of not restricting herself to the stereotypical gender role traditionally assigned to a woman in her North India small-town society:

ऐसा कम होता था की वहा बिजी को पूरा देख सके, कभी एक हिस्सा दिखाई देता, तो दूसरे आँखों से ओझाल हो जाता था, उनकी देखी छोटी छोटी दृश्यओं से बदलती दिखाई देती थी - बिस्तर से उठे हुए, बेसिन की और जाते हुए दूध ब्रश करते हुए..... शायद माँ एक औरत नहीं थी.... बहोत से टुकरो में बाटी थी। क्या इसलिए वह इतने परेशान दिखाई देते हैं - एक बनने की कोशिश में?

*Aisa kam hota tha ki waha Biji ko pura ka pura dekh sake, kabhi ek hissa dikhai deta , toh dusra akhon se ojhal ho jata tha. Unki deha chhoti chhoti drishyon se badalti dikhai deti thi – bistar se uthte huye, basin ki aur jate huye, tooth brush karte huye...sayad ma ek aurat nahi thi....bahut se tukro me bati thi. Kya isliya wah itne pareshan dikhai dete hai – ek banne kikoshish me? (Verma 2008, 107)*

[It was rarely that she was able to see mother in her entirety. When she got a glimpse of one part, the other would no longer be visible. Be it rising from the bed, be it walking towards the washbasin or be it brushing her teeth, her body seemed to shifting contours from every change of scene. Perhaps Biji was not one woman, perhaps she existed in several fragments. Is it a continuous attempt to attain a singular entity, which renders her so anxious all the time?]

Few could have represented the inner fragmentation within a woman who often succumbs to reactionary outbursts in her attempt to constantly negotiate between her domestic and professional responsibilities, and keeps oscillating between being an extremely caring mother and to an alarmingly harsh and insensitive one in a matter of seconds, in such a subtle metaphorical manner as a sensitive literary artist like Verma. The emotionally vulnerable Biji – the alternatively cruel and loving mother of Toshi – emerges to be one of the most psychologically complex characters created by Verma in his attempt to look into the nooks and crannies of the human minds caught within a quagmire of traditional social expectations and at the same time driven by an overwhelming desire to pursue their individual, often ‘deviant’, aspirations, that inform their mid-twentieth century small town existence.

The symbolic imagery, tinged with the fear and distrust of the daughter, has a sinister ring to it. As the first strands of sunlight filters through the slightly open door of her mother’s almost dark bedroom, Toshi stands at its threshold and observes the woman she loves and yet is terrified of, wake up and go about her wake morning routine in an awestruck silence for a long long time. While it is obvious that such a vantage point and such an interplay of light and darkness would offer her a fragmented view of the room and the person therein, it is the way in which she interprets her vision that makes it symbolic and unsettlingly so.

Its two-fold significance is connected by a string of causalities, On one hand, the ‘fragmented’ image of the mother signify Toshi’s confusion and dissatisfaction over the various roles that Biji plays within and outside the domestic paradigm. Though she is in awe of her mother, it stems not from any genuine admiration for the identity she has successfully created for herself outside the domestic paradigm. Rather, it is the result of a deeply unsettling fear, that is fueled by her socially internalized belief that is yet to come in terms with accepting and appreciating a woman, particularly a wife and a mother, in any role other than that of the primary caregiver of her family. On the other hand, the fragmentation the

imagery hints is a metaphorical representation of the different shades of her mother's rapidly changing moods that can imbue her 'personality' with different shades – one completely different from the other. The irony lies in the fact the perception of the daughter about her mother as exemplified in the former plays a pivotal role in triggering the latter in the first place, and though Toshi does have a vague understanding of this causality, she is yet to come in terms with the deeper gendered implications of the same.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the post-independence decades, sees the rapid disintegration of traditional joint-family setups, which had thrived on strictly compartmentalized gender roles for men and women - that of breadwinners and domestic caregivers respectively. The legal option to walk out of unhappy marriages ensured through clauses incorporated within the likes of Special Marriage Act (1954) and Hindu Marriage Act (1956) coupled with a relative respite from perennial childbearing and childrearing made possible through the launching and implementation of the National Program for Family Planning (1952) accorded women greater freedom to pursue their dreams beyond the confines of home. All these factors coupled with increased educational and professional opportunities for the middle-class women within the urban centers of North India lead to a drive for their economic emancipation. The call for such emancipation does not remain restricted to the major cities but percolates well into the smalltown societies. Women residing in Shimla or Kasauli, Meerut or Jhansi now aspire to travel places particularly to the cities, strive for higher professional achievements and carve an identity for themselves outside the domestic sphere. But that hardly warrants much change in the traditionally assigned responsibility of the woman within these conservative and morally restrictive societies: domestic caregiving still continues to be considered the prerogative of girls and women. While the familial responsibility of men continues to be restricted to the act of breadwinning, women are still expected to be the primary (and often the sole) caregiver of the family particularly the children, the elderly, the ailing and the pets and are 'allowed' to pursue a career, only and only if they manage to find time for it after discharging all these 'responsibilities' in accordance with the social expectations.

Moreover, the fact that the patriarchal social conditioning deems the male members of the family to be 'taken care of' vis-à-vis their day-to-day domestic needs, even after they reach adulthood, complicates the matter further. The male members of the family are free to concentrate exclusively upon their professional aspirations, at the cost of the unpaid and mostly unacknowledged and unappreciated labor which their wives, mothers and

daughters put into the act of domestic caregiving over and above the paid labor that goes into fulfilling their professional aspirations. The 'balance' that these women are supposed to maintain between their familial caregiving 'duties and professional responsibilities often comes as thinly veiled reminder of the expectation that they should always prioritize the former over the latter and unlike their male counterparts, should always be the one to compromise on (and if need be, even give up) their professional commitments in order to take care of the young, the old and/or the sick in the family. The inability or refusal to live up to such expectations often leads to an estrangement within the most intimate familial relationships, with the women (mostly) being having to shoulder the blame for it and being labeled as 'selfish' and 'self-centred' as opposed to being the ever sacrificing and the ever-compromising caregiver that the society has been habituated to see. Toshi's perception of her mother represents a society in transition which is yet to come in terms with these changing dynamics of gender and tends to judge and stigmatize a working woman, if she fails to prioritize her home front over her work front even for a single day. Her mental conditioning reflects the values she has unknowingly internalized from the accusatory stance of the father and the domestic help, one of whom never cares to share domestic responsibilities with his perpetually hassled wife and the other who feels that she is doing her mistress a 'favor' by looking after the household in her absence.

The fact that in spite of her deepest desire to break free of certain stereotypes Biji is unable to free herself completely of such gendered values, distresses her. The feeling that no one would understand the guilt, insecurities and the burden of expectation that not only the society, but also, she herself has bogged herself pushes her further towards a state of desolation that affects her mental well-being. The suddenness and unpredictability with which her affectionate (even indulgent) parenting turns into an abusive parenting and back again several times during a day, is nothing but a behavioral manifestation of a mental health problem for such erratic mood swings, agitation, irritability and restlessness, accompanied by an acute sleeplessness undoubtedly point towards a mood disorder in the woman. In fact, it hints towards a probable presence of bipolar disorder, a severe and ongoing clinical condition that is characterized by depressive lows and maniac highs – a dangerously polarized oscillation from one end of the spectrum to another, which tends to affect the daily activities of an individual in an adverse manner.

The severe anxiety and hopelessness, that the girl identifies in her mother as she lies pale, lonely and sleep starved in her room only to drag herself out of bed with difficulty and

then force herself to go about her morning chores before leaving for school, is a part and parcel of the depressive episode. It is during these episodes that she strives to seek refuge in Toshi - holding her close, caressing her hair and trying to make up for not being able to be there for her for the major part of the day. The girl would want to reciprocate this love, but immediate episodes of excited and maniac anger would prevent her from doing it. This motif of the conflicting and conflicted parenting of a mother treading the delicate lines between the 'traditional' and 'modern', emerges to be of an extreme relevance in Hindi *nayi kahani*, finding a less subtle but no less intricate enunciation in the works of Mannu Bhandari, a younger contemporary and the only female fellow practitioner of the New Story. A working woman, a teacher herself, many of her stories look into the mental health issues of new-age women trying to strike a balance between their domestic and professional life – 'Mein Har Gayi' and 'Nayi Naukri' to name a few. But the most striking among them perhaps is 'Trisanku' (1995).

Biji's actions find resonance with the puzzling and contradictory behavior of the mother-figure in 'Trishanku', that was published in the same year as the story under discussion. Caught between the aspiration for her daughter to have a 'modern' upbringing that is less restrictive than the one she received within the small-town milieu of Brahmpuri *mohalla* in Ajmer, and her inability to give up fully on her conservative values – the story highlights a similar personality disorder in Tanu's mother. What makes it even more significant is that the author acknowledges it to be autobiographical – Tanu being "a stand-in for her daughter Rachana". (Saxena 2021, 1) Establishing a direct connection between the mother in the story and her own mental health crisis, emphasizes than ever before, the integrity which with the *nayi kahanikars* take up the responsibility of bringing contemporary mental health hazards into the purview of literary discussion.

The predictability of this unpredictable behavior shakes Toshi and Tannu to the core. Moments of affection are overshadowed by the fearful anticipation of those of violent rebukes and beatings that might follow suite. It makes her question the genuineness of her mother's love for her, making her interpret even the gestures of love as an insincere and manipulative act of '*behelana*' or cajoling aimed at ensuring her daughter's cooperation in her 'home-management' endeavors. Needless to say, that such distrust and fear in the eyes of the only person she seeks refuge in, only serves to push her over the edge further. What is such a 'fragmentation' within the mother, but the result of a complete breakdown of communication and complete lack of empathy between her and her dear ones? It is the pain



caused thereby, which ultimately drives her to such a mental condition. Such mental health crisis emerges to be a hitherto unexplored area of Hindi literature that Verma forayed into with his *nayi kahani* and it is with a lot of pride that his wife and poet Gagan Gill highlights the subtlety with which Verma represents such crisis in her interview with Akhil P. Veethil. “He touches the moments of pain like a capable writer. हवा पर वो ambivalence बना जाते हैं( *Hawa par woh ambivalence bana jate hain* ) [He lets a hint of ambivalence hang in the air]. He would never give you the details...he would go around the wound, but he would not enter it” she observes, Such an approach, feels Veethil, is much more effective in bringing out the “raw emotions” (Sahapedia 2018, 8:47-8:55) than what a very direct in-your-face approach would have achieved and what better example of this typically ‘Nirmalesque’ (Sree 2010, 1) subtlety than the optic imagery that has been used to highlight the mother’s bipolar condition in this story?

Few stylistic devices, as already discussed in the second chapter, have the potential to throw light upon the darkest corners of human mind, as poignantly as an optic imagery and like her Indian contemporary, Alice Munro leaves no stones unturned to explore the many possibilities it has to offer. It does not come as much of a surprise therefore that a writer who aimed to look into the nook and crannies of a morally restrictive small-town life would often use the shifting contours of light and shadow to interrogate not only the very commonly identified ‘negative’ emotions of guilt, shame, jealousy but also the much more concerning, yet much less identified and clinically addressed symptoms of relatively ‘milder’ mental maladies that would often overshadow the wellbeing of her protagonists. She clearly enunciates her standpoint on this matter through the voice of the young Del of *Lives of Girls and Women*, who wishes revisit her hometown Jubilee in her works, “And no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought , stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion , held still and held together – radiant everlasting” (Munro 1971, 253). It shows how her own vision of being a chronicler of mid-twentieth century small-town Ontario life was imbued with a certain honesty and integrity that prevented her from romanticizing it and pushing its ‘less-likable’ facets under the carpet. After all, her works drew heavily from her own experienced reality of growing up in Wingham or living her student life in London or spending many of her adult years at Lincoln, and this reality was never a bed of roses.

Neither was the reality that her Indian counterpart had lived and observed through his own small town upbringing and the re-visitations to those small urban pockets that continued to take place even after he had shifted base to Delhi. These were realities infested with many a ‘pothole’, many a ‘crack’ or fissure – and the burden of familial and social expectations and judgments pushing individuals towards moderate to severe mental disorders was undoubtedly one of them. It hardly comes as a surprise therefore that that a woman, who had not only had the audacity to pursue her professional aspirations, but also not to been ‘taken’ in marriage by a man – would be propelled into the quagmire of Bipolar Personality Disorder by the overly judgmental society of Tuppertown. Neither does the way in which the pain and insecurities of Mary McQuade from ‘Images’ (1968) find a very similar metaphorical representation as that of Biji from Verma’s literary universe. Having a trained nurse, Mary is expected to use her professional caregiving skills to look after the perennially and often terminally sick members of her extended family without an ounce of gratitude, let alone any professional remuneration. It is almost as if she has to make up for her not having any conjugal or parenting responsibilities that women her age were supposed to have, in this way. Caregiving is after all a woman’s responsibility and she cannot be let off it, nor could she expect to be paid for it even if it was her profession! This thankless taken-for-granted attitude pushes the exploited overburdened woman towards mental bipolarity, which when seen through the eyes of the child protagonist, whose bed-ridden grandfather and later mother she takes care of, is uncannily reminiscent of the optic illusion of Toshi about her mother.

When Mary is in one of her exuberant highs, enjoying the company of her cousin, the protagonist’s father, a shadow of ‘danger’ looms large over her mind - the apprehension of the mood swing that might take to a depressive low at any moment: “There was a lamp on the table. In its light my father and Mary McQuade threw gigantic shadows, whose heads wagged clumsily with their talk and laughing. I watched the shadows instead of the people. They said, “What are you dreaming about?” But I was not dreaming, I was trying to understand the danger.” (Munro 2000, 35) The way in which the ‘shadow’ dissociates itself from the person and takes on an entity of its own, highlighting the dichotomy between the two is emblematic of the two ends of the spectrum Mary oscillates between. In spite of sharing a home-space with her aunt for months and spending hours under her caring supervision, the girl knows her no better than Toshi knows her mother - that is, only in fragments. It is either an extravagantly expressive, gushing, joking and laughing persona or an irritable, harsh, brooding, nagging, complaining, admonishing persona that she encounters

alternately – the transformation too swift for her to fathom which one of them is the real person and which one ‘a shadow’. What she is not mature enough to identify is that neither defines her in totality – it just bears testimony of clinical bipolarity in a woman who is overworked, unappreciated and constantly at the receiving end of the insensitive attitude of the town and is unable to cope with all the pain, pressure and social stigma of being a career woman well past the ‘marriageable age’

Much like the deeply orthodox communities Verma highlights in his stories, people in Munro’s Jubilee or Hanratty or Milmay or Dangleish or Tuppertown, were not very kind to the ones whose desires and actions did not conform to the traditional ideas about relationships, family and gender specific roles of men and women within and outside the domestic paradigm. Like the actual towns of Ontario they were based on, this traditional mindset was bound to come in confrontation with the social changes insistent on permeating the stubbornly resistant surface of these fictional towns. The enhanced opportunities of employment for women in the arena of teaching, nursing and even the industrial sector, that had emerged as a fall out of the wartime crisis for skilled labour had opened the doors of the world outside, for them. Moreover, the passing of the first unified divorce law in Canada (1968) that made added an irrevocable breakdown of marriage along with the pre-existing clause of ‘marital offence’ as a legitimate reason for a divorce or the attempts to increase awareness about public health undertaken by social activists since the 1930s coupled with the concern over the baby boom in the post-World War II decades, that had culminated in the decriminalization of contraception and abortion in the 1960s, further ensured fractures in traditions. Needless to say, that the small town communities in question did not take happily to them. But what strikes as most jarring is the apathy and complete lack of tact that they display in the process.

Sensitivity, as the child protagonist, clearly mentions was considered to be a ‘bad thing’ by the family and the townspeople in general. Her situation is no better than that of the unmarried Maddy of ‘Peace of Utrecht’ (1968), saddled with the caregiving of her terminally ill mother for years, who is constantly teased, ridiculed and made to feel out of place for being an ‘old maid’ for “in Jubilee, feelings are not spared this way” (Munro 2000, 195). While Maddy is pushed to socialize only with her so-called ‘compatriots’, the widowed, single, separated or divorced women, Mary remains at the receiving end of cruel and indecent matchmaking jokes involving the schizophreniac Joe Phippen (discussed earlier). After all, what sensitivity and understanding could one expect for women who have not followed a

traditional path, by choice out of compulsion from communities that shows none towards those suffering from physically mutilating/ disfiguring long term (even fatal) ailments like Mary's ward or Maddy's mother or those suffering from severely manifested mental illnesses like Joe? As Mary's niece admits with some reservations, "All the aunts and cousins and uncles had grown tremendously hardened to any sort of personal cruelty, reckless, even proud, it seemed, of a failure or deformity that could make for general laughter" (Munro 2000, 35). Whatever their deviance – physical or mentally, behavioural or aspirational, voluntary or involuntary – they were all outcasts in their own way, united in their shared fate of suffering the onslaught of social disdain and discrimination.

Compulsory and compulsive caregiving has often been identified as a major deterrent to the positive mental health of women. A extremely physically taxing activity – it constantly keeps them at edge over the well-being of the dependent ward, saddles them with the fear of being blamed and burdens them with the guilt of 'never doing enough', inducing them to discharge their responsibilities even when they are not feeling up to it, physically or mentally. Thus, female caregivers hardly have anyone to shower them with care and as Savita Malhotra and Ruchita Shah observes, 'self-care' takes a back seat in their lives (Malhotra and Shah 2015, 209). Going through such a grueling experience for years, itself has the potential to push them towards different mental maladies including Depressive and Bipolar disorders. The social rejection and harassment adds the final nail to the coffin for a Biji or a Mary and both Verma and Munro display a tremendous acclarity and affinity towards locating mental health hazards at the interface of such gender skewed social and interpersonal causalities.

Such integrity of thought and expression, however, often comes at the cost of their goodwill with the readers from the 'region' they write about. Munro has expressed her amused disgruntlement over local newspapers of Wingham accusing her for making her home-town "the butt of soured and cruel introspections" (Munro 1982, 5) and local journal journalists asking her probing questions asked by the local journalists as a poorly masqueraded act of identifying the 'reality' within the fiction. For a writer whose customary subtlety of expression is jarring enough, one can only imagine the reaction such moments of unapologetically frank observations about mid-late twentieth century small-town Ontario life would trigger within its residents an indignation about a writer who had been one of the few instrumental in establishing their 'region' in a position of prominence in the literary map of Canada, highlighting such negative, however accurate, elements of it in her works. Munro insists that, "Some of the material I may have lying around already, in memories and

observations , and some I invent, and some I have to go diligently looking for (factual details) while some of them is dumped into my lap (anecdotes, bits of speech). I see how this material might go together to make the shape I need and I try it.” (Munro 1982, 36) The repeated assertions on the part of the author about her stories being works of fiction that use the region-specific ‘reality’ as the ‘starting dough’ is hardly good enough for the ‘insiders’ whose fear, shame and guilt make them anxious over the possibility of revelation of some carefully hidden familial scandal or personal histories of pushing the social ‘misfits’ like Mary or Maddy towards an acute mental health condition.

It might surely be one of the reasons to set her stories in fictional towns. No wonder that Project Bookmark Canada that strives to link fiction and Canadian landscapes by placing Bookmarks (monuments) to mark the real location a story or poem has been set in, has been unable to place a Bookmark for Munro yet. As one Miranda Hill, being its foundering member and former Executive Director explains:

Very few stories of Munro takes place in an actual location which is given its real name, and almost none of these actual named locations are in the countryside known as “Munro country” – that area around Lake Huron and Clinton, where Munro made her home. In fact, Munro has purposely given these locations new names, providing a layer of distance between the real places and the real people. And it is not the business of Project Bookmark Canada to lift that authorial veil away. (Miranda Hill, email conversation with the author, May 26, 2019)

This ‘authorial veil’, applied in almost every story other than the last four of *Dear Life* (2012) , is a deliberate design to ruffle less feathers and generate less animosity within the ‘regional’ readership. Identification and relatability when taken to the extreme of uncovering those facets of life one is not particularly proud of, can be detrimental to the acceptability of the work in the ‘literary market’ of the region, and the astute storyteller would not risk it. Honesty comes at a certain cost and the author faces it with a conviction that may be found in her Indian contemporary too.

Though he never goes to the extent of placing his stories in fictional locations, he displayed tremendous courage and tenacity in holding on to his principles of storytelling, without bowing down to people and power-structures that might be adversely exposed through it. It is clear that he and his fellow practitioners of *nayi kahani* are not out to win hearts, for as Ved Raman Pandey highlights, “नई कहानिकार उन अनुभूतियों को लेते थे जो उनके दृष्टि में प्रामाणिक हैं। भले कहानी अच्छी बने या ना बने। इसलिए निर्मल वर्मा नई कहानी ‘बयाषक कहानी’

और 'प्रोड़ा कहानी' मानते हैं। नई कहानी में मनुष्य के दुनिया का अहसाह और उसकी छुयान दर्ज हैं। "(Nayi kahanikar un anubhutiyan ko lete the, jo unke drishti me pramanik hain, bhale kahaani achchi bane ya na bane. Isliye Nirma Verma nayi kahani 'bayashk kahani' aur 'proure kahani' mante hain. Nayi kahani me manusya ke duniya ka ahsas aur uski chhuyan darj hain) (Pandey 2008, 64 ) [The writers of *nayi kahani* would take up only those feeling and emotions for their exploration that they found to be authentic, even if the story did not turn out to be a well-rounded one. That is why Nirmal Verma considers *nayi kahani* to be the 'aged story' and the 'middle-aged story'. *Nayi kahani* chronicles the emotions of the human world, and the way they touch human lives] This act of naming is not only aimed towards the solemnity of mood and the maturity of expression that *nayi kahani* has come to be associated with. It is a bid towards an honest and authentic (*pramanik*) projection of human emotions that renders *nayi kahani* rich in philosophical wisdom - one that drives its pioneering writer towards such nomenclature. The subtlety and self-restraint that Verma is known for, never comes in the way of this honesty. Therein, lay his skill as a storyteller. So does Munro's. While jarring those, who perpetuate the discrimination and marginalization of the aspirationally 'deviant', into discomfort and self-evaluation, their stories manage to reach to such 'deviants' struggles to cope with the mild to severe mental health disorders such a social attitude has pushed them into. What could make a creative artist more relevant in his/her contemporary social milieu than such an achievement?

This special quality of Verma's works comes out beautifully when Priyanka Dubey, an erstwhile staff reporter of *The Caravan*, remembers him posthumously as the writer whose stories helped her "contemplate loneliness". She goes on to admit, "I always keep one of his books in my travel bag, like a mountaineer keeps to treat nausea. His writing does to me what good literature should do. It helps me move an inch towards understanding my own pain and accepting it. It helps me understand my own life and tolerate my own existence". (Dubey 2017, 1) Such responses do come as a befitted response to many critics who have accused Verma of being too sublime and elusive to be 'realistic'. Modern women struggling with the pain, anxiety or more concerning clinical mental conditions born out of the challenge to juggle between 'home' and 'work' can find themselves within the characters. It is about them, or at least it could be about them, they feel. Small-town societies where open non-judgmental discussions on mental health had not been, and is still hardly, a viable option, such an identification could spell substantial solace, and even a healing potential. A peek into the letters sent to Munro by her female readers, as archived at the Alice Munro Fonds provides one with ample instances of how this holds true for Munro as well. An undated letter from Elizabeth Jackson, who was then an aspiring writer, where she talks about the

feelings the stories of *Lives of Girls and Women*, evoked within her highlights this factor more than ever. She lauds Munro for “reach(ing) the inner consciousness of so many people as you have reached mine”, throwing light upon the turmoil of emotions that the protagonist Del, who dreams to be a writer too, creates within her

I say “yes” to Del too, but deep inside where the little flame that is me flickers, not really able to burn through the wads of insulating cotton wool, swathed around and around that cool blue flame by being so conditioned to “womanliness” and “motherliness”. I would bring the book to the attention of my daughters – actually my sons too. Yours is not only a woman’s voice but a person’s voice too. (Alice Munro Fonds n.d.)

‘Woman’ here does not refer to a biological sexual category, but rather what patriarchal gender conditions makes of those born female. The ‘woman’/‘person’ dichotomy created herein, serves to highlight how a female individual is never considered to be a person who could (and should) have individual choices, opinions, likes and dislikes and aspirations outside the domestic paradigm, like their male counterparts. It brings forth the abyss of darkness within her – the stress, the anxiety, the pain of wanting to be in Del’s shoes, yet held back by years of social conditioning. The wads of tightly swathed cotton, however metaphorical, bear testimony to a state of imprisonment – not physically, but no less harrowing than that. But hope surfaces in the form of the promise the stories hold for future. Perhaps her daughters would not be made to feel as trapped and confined as her, perhaps her sons would learn not enable the creation of such confines for the women their lives. After all, even among working women, those associated with creative arts have been at the receiving end of maximum social ‘stressors’ taking their susceptibility to Anxiety Disorder, Depressive Disorder, Bipolar Disorder and suicidal tendencies a notch higher than women working in so-called mainstream professions. Munro and Verma have been especially attentive to this detail – according it a prominent space in their exploration of mental health issues as a thematic area of utmost relevance, in their stories.

The mid-twentieth century decades were not very easy times for a woman and an artist in the small-town societies of Ontario and few could narrativise it with such heart wrenching clarity as Munro. For in spite of all the masquerade of metaphors and camouflage of fictional towns, Munro does draw her ‘materials’ from real lived experiences, and while there is an actual Mrs. Netterfield behind every fictional Joe Phippen or her own her Parkinson – ridden mother Anne Laidlaw behind every terminally ailing mother-figure in her stories, every woman artist created by her has its basic foundations in her own lived reality as an artist.

Munro, as discussed previously, had had to struggle long and hard to realize her dream of becoming a writer. What begun with a struggle to circumvent the mindset of her small-town society that frowned upon women having professional ambitions, particularly those pertaining to any branch of creative arts, later culminated in an attempt to just hold on to her writing practices over and above her domestic responsibilities towards her husband and three daughters. The struggle, and toll that it might have taken on her self-esteem and mental health, becomes palpable in her words of gratitude in an unpublished undated handwritten note on her mentor Robert Weaver, who never lost faith in her even when she almost had:

But it was the letters that came even when I had not sent him any writing, that gave me so much nourishment and hope...The letters didn't promise anything in particular. They did not reprove me for not writing or exhort me to get busy. They reminded me that I was a writer. The most precious encouragement was not in what he said, but in what he took for granted. What he took for granted was that I was a writer. (Alice Munro Fonds n.d.)

The very fact that Weaver kept on writing to her even when she had moved far away from her home-province, was completely cut-off from the Ontario literary community she held so dear and could barely manage to write anything for months, gave her hope amidst all the distress she was going through. No wonder she calls him her “cross-country psychiatrist” (Alice Munro Fonds n.d.), as he mentions in one his letters to her. Her emotional well-being had been in jeopardy and had it not been for Weaver, she might have never come out of the deep dark hole of scathing pain and identity crisis and the pain that came with it.

These struggles of the life and struggles of an artist, finds its earliest fictional enunciation in ‘The Office’ (*Dance of the Happy Shades*, 1968), where female writer strives to rent an office for pursuing her literary endeavours away from the conundrum of family life. Largely reminiscent of and resonating with the need for ‘A Room of One’s Own’ that her literary predecessor Virginia Woolf harps upon in her seminal essay by the same name that was first published almost forty years before (in 1929), it throws light upon the social forces that play havoc with the mental health of any girl or woman who ‘dared’ to take the almost unthreaded path of ‘writing’ as a profession. The indifference of the family and the alternatively skeptical and patronizing attitude of the landlord testify to that. The harassment and self-doubt it causes her is no way cogent from her mental wellbeing, let alone a satisfactory engagement with literary pursuits.



The significance of this story lies in its ability to induce for further literary exploration of the mental contours of women artists amongst her contemporary writer – leading to some of the most emotionally complex characterizations of female creative artists from a similar small-town Ontario, like the novelist Morag Gunn from a similar small-town Ontario from Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974). It also manages to set off a streak of an in-depth interrogation of the mental health crisis of women artists through an ensemble of characters over the years and across the various short story collections of Munro.. Each one of them emerges to be a perpetuator of the legacy established not only by the likes of Virginia Woolf, but also closer at home, by Lucy Maud Montgomery. Drwaly largely from the life of the author herself, Emily growing up in Prince Edward Island [from her series of *Emily of New Moon* (1923), *Emily Climbs* (1925) and *Emily's Quest* (1927) ] was the earliest in among the female protagonists of English-Canadian Literature to have aspired to become a writer in her own right. The major deterrent about her writing came from the idea that “art was frivolous and a young woman ought at any rate to marry and subordinate her ambitions to those of her husband” (Rubio and Waterston 1995, 76) Thus in spite of its ‘frivolity’, art was associated with a certain freedom of expression and was automatically believed to be able to accord a certain amount of agency to the woman, which if not curbed and restricted had the potential to threaten the basic foundations of the patriarchal small-town society that she lives in. Decades later, this overarching belief continued to persist, and the works of Munro proved to be the finest examples of that.

Munro's was a society where being associated with any form of creative arts, was treated with suspicion – their social conduct, their life-choices, their characters and even their basic integrity as human beings. A woman, expected to live by a certain set gendered norms, thus faced an onslaught of two-fold discrimination, if she chose or even wished to walk this unconventional path. Be it Miss Marsalles, the music teacher from ‘Dance of the Happy Shades; (1968) or be it Del Jordan, the aspiring writer from *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971); be it Rose, the aspiring actress from *The Beggar Maid* (1980) or be it Roberta, the children's book illustrator from ‘Labour Day Dinner’ (*Moons of Jupiter*, 1982) - each one is a lonely soul, paying the price of holding on to their desired vocation with passion and determination. A constant recipient of social disapproval, if not complete ostracization, stability eludes their home-front too. Either unmarried, or divorced or battling relationship problems within and outside the family, many of them register manifestations of bipolarity and clinical depression in their behavior. Munro's realizations about the gender skewed

power hierarchy in marriage - garnered through the personal experience of divorce and an observed dysfunctionality of relationships in and around her - induces her to project marriage as an act of endurance on the part of the woman. "A house is a man's medieval castle" (Munro 2004, 36) she makes the narratorial voice declare in one of the stories, and it is extremely difficult and demeaning for a free-spirited woman with well-defined opinions, particularly an artists, to live with it. The fact that her feelings resonated with many of women artists, particularly her literary contemporaries comes out clearly in her unpublished letter from author Marian Engels dated December 19, 1972 where she speaks of comfort that the women writers – mostly lonely and misunderstood feel in each other's presence. "I liked the writers' meeting. I think I talked too much, leaping in where angels talk etc , but that is me. I guess what we wanted was to be loved and we got together and enjoyed each other's company and that helped a lot. Me, anyhow. To be somewhere, where I wasn't a blithering idiot, but a professional person " (Alice Munro Fonds 1972). The feeling of constantly being denied an agency and being deemed a 'blithering idiot' for the phases of absent-mindedness, dwelling in the world creative imaginations, inability of multitasking, and not being able to strike a balance between the domestic and creative paradigm that is often excusable for a male artist. The 'deviances' and self-assertions that when coming from their male artists could still be accommodated, albeit grudgingly, within the folds of the patriarchal society, was not to be 'forgiven' or 'forgotten' in the case of their female counterparts has harrowing ramifications upon the mental health of a female artist and it is only the 'sisterhood' with others in the same boat, that might heal the scars.

Such invisible bonds of empathy connect every character of a woman artist that Munro creates over the span of her literary career, too. But while each of these girls and women so intricately sketched by Munro, suffer in some way or the other, the most detrimental repercussion of the social apathy is perhaps reserved for the ones lively ballet teacher Miss Farris from *Lives of Girls and Women* who ultimately succumbs to suicide. A free-spirit woman, as mentioned earlier, who committed a three-fold 'crime' of remaining single, choosing to follow a vocation and pursuing ballet – one of the most graceful dance forms – as such, is subjected to bitter criticism over her 'bold' (provocative?) deportment, laughter (provocative again?) and her alleged 'affair' with a fellow teacher by the townspeople of Jubilee including her own students pushes her to the edge of Depressive Disorder till she chooses oblivion over the pain of existing. What is most hard-sitting is the way in which these same people look at her in death. Comparing two suicides of both by

drowning in the Wawanash River they describe Marion Sherriff, burdened with pregnancy before marriage to have “walked into the river”, while Miss Farris “threw herself into it”. (Munro 1971, 227) The sheer apathy and complete lack of sensitivity of the community comes out in the very next statement: “Since nobody had seen either of them do it, the difference must have come from the difference in the women themselves, Miss Farris being impulsive and dramatic in all she did, and Marion Sherriff deliberate and take your time” (Munro 1971, 227). This act of downplaying a major incident like suicide, highlights the absence of basic sensitization about the intensity of fear and pain of the former and the severity of clinical depression of the latter that had caused them to take the final step. Those who never accorded her dignity in life, wish to accord her none in death. Her unconventional lack of typical womanly demureness is nothing but ‘dramatic’, her self-assertion is nothing but ‘impulsive’ in their eyes. The moderate success that her once-student Del Jordan had achieved as a writer by the end of the short-story-cycle when juxtaposed with this tragic culmination to her teacher’s hopes, dreams and talent informs the Epilogue with a strange sense of foreboding – was Del too destined to meet the same fate?

It is the same fear of being branded as ‘impulsive’ and ‘dramatic’ that hangs like an overarching shadow over the existence of the very first woman artist of Verma’s literary universe. The characterization of Latika ‘Parinde’ (1959) , the music teacher and hostel warden of a boarding school in Simla highlights the pain and insecurities of a woman whose inner battle between her desires and the so-called social values she has been brought up to believe in, drives her to a mental state where she has almost reached a breaking point. Her self-imposed social isolation, which is primarily an attempt to protect herself from the prying eyes of the small-town society that continues to judge a woman in spite of all her professional success and personal achievements, for not tying the knot at the ‘right time’, and deciding to covert her passion for music into her career, condemns her to a state of loneliness that makes life appear bleak and meaningless propelling her fast towards depression. Her harsh rejection of the romantic advances of Mr. Hubert and her coercive need to shame herself for reveling in such attention, is prompted not only by the traditional Indian concept of female fidelity and chastity towards the ‘one true love’ of her life, but also the fear of being ridiculed, laughed at or gossiped about for typical ‘murky character graph’ people would associate with a single female musician like her . Her insistence to live in the past and thrive on the memories of her deceased lover, serves to construct a cocoon she feels the most comfortable in. She longs to belong to the hill-station, the school and hostel she has given the formative years of her life,

but somehow always feels that she does not fit in. Her constant fear of being subject to the stereotypical stigma associated with ‘spinsterhood’ that informs the life of her elderly colleague Miss Wood, and the voyeuristic curiosity about the ‘past’ of an artist, drives her to state of cynicism when she is afraid that even her students might be passing judgments on her. It prevents her from interacting freely and bonding with her hostel wards. The only rare moments she feels completely in charge of her life is when her fingers touch the chords of the piano in the desolate chapel. Music is truly kind to her, but unfortunately she cannot be kind to it.

What comes out as the most thought-provoking aspect of the stories of these two unmarried female teachers battling the storm of life within small-town milieus across cultures is the way in which the social respectability of the teaching profession takes a back seat in their case. Few care about their integrity as a ‘teacher’ and their dedication towards the well-being of their students. What they teach takes precedence over everything else, painting their characters, their personal lives and their professional motivations through a tainted glass of social judgment. Though, unlike the shocking closure provided to Miss Farris’ severe mental health condition, the reader is left in apprehension of the final outcome of Latika’s depression – one cannot deny the fact that her characterization acts the key for Verma to open the Pandora’s Box very few had dared to even approach from afar, prior to his appearance in the Hindi literary scene. He, unlike his Canadian counterpart, hardly has a literary precedence to fall back upon within his own literary tradition. Hindi literature was yet to come up with any well etched out and psychologically intricate exploration of the mind of a female artist, or one aspiring to become one, like a quasi-autobiographical novel *Terhi Lakeer* (1943) by Ismat Chughtai that Urdu literature could boast of since decades before. Thus, like many other ‘firsts’, the credit of threading this hitherto unthreaded path in Hindi literature goes to the skilled storyteller who paints the mental landscape of the musically oriented Latika – her depression, mood swings and erraticism – in such a musically poignant manner.

Latika’s deep-rooted persecution mania goes on to find resonance with many a character of female artist conceptualized in the following decades by her fellow practitioners of the *nayi kahani*, particularly Mannu Bhandari and Mohan Rakesh. An ideal example may be identified in Miss Pall from the story ‘Miss Pall’ penned by Mohan Rakesh in 1973. The obsessive fear of being judged by the society for her single status and engagement with music and painting alike, forces her to quit her job in Delhi and move to a serene hill-station all by

herself in an attempt to escape social interactions. The bitter experiences her artistic ambitions have fetched her in the past are responsible for this mania:

Just imagine, my mother didn't like my having my own home. And my father was opposed to my studying music. They used to say my house should be a home, and not a whorehouse. Only I know the difficult I have had preserving my...uh...uh...purity. You can't imagine how hard it is for a girl alone. I wanted to make a trip to Lahore to paint some pictures there but I didn't go because I realized that confronted with the brute strength of men uh...uh...what could I do alone? Even then you know what terrible things the people in the department kept saying about me. This is why I detest every one of them. (Rakesh 1973,123)

Her words directed towards a former colleague who suddenly chances upon her in that hill-station – the chosen 'hideout' as it were – highlights how the familial and social apathy towards a budding and promising female artist can culminate in a severely pathological persecution mania, where she looks at anybody and everybody with mistrust and suspicion. Everybody is out to 'get her' she believes and even imagines most of the times, because that is what her early experiences have taught her. The obsession with 'purity' also largely reminiscent of Verma's Latika too, reemphasizes upon the stigma of promiscuity and sexual 'availability' associated with a women artist and the psychological effects of the same on her. While it pushes a sensitive Miss Farris right over the edge, a Latika or a Miss Pall are still hanging in there – not yet ready to give up on life completely, but surrounding themselves with 'protective' layers of social isolation and solitude.

The trope of pining for 'a room of one's own' recurs again and again in these stories – where this 'room' (may be an office for some or a house for others; maybe a mere 'work-corner' for some or just a less frequented public space that they have made their own, for others) emerges to emblematic of not only her uninterrupted creative pursuits, but also a her agency to live life in her own terms. It was not to be called a 'whorehouse', not to be subjected to the prying eyes of the family or society, not to be made a subject of ridicule, insecurities or even the disturbingly sexist patronizing attitude that the society often directs towards women with creative aspirations. What appears to be most heart wrenching is the way in which, like many of her fictional (and non-fictional) predecessors, this 'room' is finally attained by Miss Pall at the cost of her mental health. The utter state of inhabitability of the house she had once craved and fought to 'find' herself – its dark peeling walls, its musty unkempt smell, its floor and furniture littered with days old stale food and unwashed cutlery and most importantly, its corners strewn with her old painting lying around rotting and neglected – bears palpable proof of her mental condition. The zeal for painting she was

once fight every one for, has deserted her. She no longer paints- but lives with and within her older artworks, holding on to them with a disturbing and pathologically induced fervour that reminds one the iconic Miss Havisham from the Dickensian universe, whose desperation to hold on to a wedding-that-never-happened had cost her her sanity. Urban middle-class educated woman following creative pursuits, negotiating with such mental health situations , the Latikas and Miss Pall of Hindi *nayi kahani*, thus bear testimony to a literary trail of interconnections that bring them together through shared experiences of pain, trauma, heartbreak, humiliation, judgment and the consequential mental maladies with the Morags, Dels and Miss Farrises living similar realities in small-town milieu of a nation on the other side of the globe.

Needless to say, that the vista of the extremely relevant area of thematic exploration within postcolonial Hindi literature, that Verma opens up through his 'Parinde' continues to persist, maturing with time, through the course of his literary career culminating in Bitti from *Ek Chutra Sukh* (1979). Though the novel looks into the life of a young ailing boy from Allahabad who comes to stay with his theatre-actress cousin Bitti in Delhi and aspires to be a writer someday, it is the young woman who holds the readers heart with the earnestness of endeavours and her sincere attempts to negotiate with the bouts of severe anxiety and the probable turn towards depression that her out-of-box life choices were gradually resulting in. A small-town girl with big dreams, she lives in a *barsati* (terrace room) in Nizammudin, struggling to divide her time between her artistic responsibilities towards the amateur theatre group she had established with like-minded friends and her caregiver responsibilities towards her brother. As person carrying on with her life without the supervision of a guardian figure in a living arrangement hardly considered to be a 'respectable' one for a young not-yet-married woman and pursuing a career looked at with skepticism by the society – she longs to live a life free of every social baggage that threatened to throttle her agency, and the mental disorders that resulted from it. It is through his signature use a philosophical metaphor that Verma addresses her mental condition – where a dwarf dancing in a circus visited by the brother-sister duo emerges to be emblematic of this freedom.

They were having a discussion on rebirth and whether one could be reborn in a single life, changing her identify to leave or quit the older one in this new life, when they see the fan in the circus stripping every item of clothing from the body of the clown except a few rags ( *chithre* ). In a moment of epiphany, Bitti admits that she would like to be like the dwarf if

ever posed with such a choice. Her brother too young to understand her realities or her mental condition is stunned to think that such her cousin would chose to be a person clad in rags, but Bitti explains to him that for her they were not mere rags, but signified happiness for her. This realization, the novel gets its name from, highlights her desire to be reborn in this very life as someone free of the burden of social expectations and judgment, someone free of the gloom, the unbearable pangs of anxiety and panic attacks that had become a part and parcel of her existence. She would readily forgo these ‘clothes’ and hold on to the apparently insignificant shreds of cloth – the artistic endeavours with complete joy and abandon. The ultimate pursuit of positive mental health is after all nothing but happiness and women with unconventional aspirations and frames of mind, deserve it no less than anybody else.

Though not shaped by experiences and realizations as personal as Munro’s has been, such a deeply sensitive understanding of the pain and struggles of female artist largely prominent in Verma’s creative vision, has much to do with his keenly observant nature and an ability to fathom the dark depths of loneliness within people he came across at every juncture of life. His decade long relationship followed with sixteen years of marriage with a poet, who also happened to be closely associated with his own creative process by proofing and designing his books (Dubey 2017), might also have had an important role to play in this respect. Bonding with Gagan Gill over their mutual love for cinema and theatre, accompanying her to the United States of America for a year when she was awarded a fellowship at the Harvard University immediately after their marriage, being supporting of her decision to give up a successful career in journalism to pursue her passion for poetry might have all been exemplary of the sensitivity one finds reflected. What shines through most poignantly, however, is his belief in dealing with loneliness with as much resilience as possible, and resist it from pulling her down, through his words spoken to his wife: “कभी अपने अकेलेपन को मैयला मत होने देना” (*kabhi apne akelepan ko mayela mat hone dena*) (Dubey 2017) [Never let your loneliness be polluted]. This “pollution” harps upon every adversity, every sigma, every discrimination threatens to shake the core of existence of any woman who dares to pursue their passion in any field of creative arts and might drag her into the murky waters of mental maladies. No wonder he is able to bring out the pain permeating the life a girl paying the price of her love for literature and creative writing in his ‘Admi aur Ladki’. The generic names ‘*admi*’ (man ) and ‘*ladki*’ girl by which he refers to his two anonymous male and female protagonist - highlights with a vehemence the fallout of gender

specific social conditioning of both in a way that is strangely reminiscent of Munro's 'Boys and Girls' (1968) (discussed in earlier chapters) in its basic spirit.

The male protagonist is a married writer who is having an affair with a girl working in a bookshop without informing her about the existence of his wife, manipulating her for the sake of his physical as well as creative needs, gaslighting her without caring a bit about her emotions – and getting away with it, just as a man could afford to in a typically patriarchal society. The female protagonist, on the other hand, is a poor twenty-year-old who loves working in the bookstore and being with the man because both help her stay in close contact with literature and satiate her love for creative writing, in the only way possible in her financially unstable life. Moreover, she lets herself be manipulated to believe that the man truly loved her even after coming to know about his wife, and thinks that she owed him her creative contribution to his new book, for the sake of that 'love' – in a way only a girl could be socially conditioned to think, in a patriarchal society. Never having the courage or a socially and financially cogent situation to strive towards curving a creative identity in her own right – she continues to live through her lover's creative self, merging her own creativity with his, while typing the chapters, yet never asking for any official acknowledgement, never even believing that she deserved any. The complex process through which she connects with her own creative self comes out beautifully through the words "When she was lost in the dark forested maze of the story she let either the man or the dictionary take her hand and guide her into the bright glow of meaning, from where she could carry on her own". (Verma 2009, 93) Like many other girls and women, she believes that she should not dare to dream and tries to find consolation in channelizing her passion into supporting the man in her life. She never withdraws her 'support' even after she learns the truth. However, the façade that she had built around herself had begun to wane exposing the reality, for what it was: "She saw a trapped moth beat its wings against the window pane, buzzing up and down along it in desperation. She threw open the window and the moth escaped into the darkness with its tiny little life, brushing the cheek of the girl. She stared after it, trying to penetrate the darkness below" She is the first time that she had come to acknowledge the feeling of stifling entrapment she had been living with over all those years of being in an emotionally manipulative relationship and keeping her creative-self bottled up except to be 'used' by her lover. It is an entrapment which had no physical coordinates – it existed only in her mind, causing severe anxiety over her self-doubts, panic attacks over the long periods of absence and aloofness of her lover and a depression over the curbing of self-expression any passionately creative person was bound



to go through in the long run. Like the moth, she would much prefer the ‘darkness’ i.e. the uncertainties of the world outside than the ‘secure’ captivity she had been living within. The moth means for her, what the dwarf means to Bitti – the closed window pane, and clothes the dwarf cannot wait to fall off his body much analogous to the tightly wound swaths of cotton that Elizabeth Jackson describes to Munro about, in her letter. As inconclusive as ever, the story hardly lets the reader comprehend whether the girl would take the leap of faith like as Del or a Rose but succumb to her mental condition like Miss Farris. However, identifying the feeling of entrapment for what it is, is the first step towards healing and Munro and Verma, in spite of their preoccupation with the pain do insinuate possibilities of recovery and recuperation within their works.

The preoccupation with the mental repercussions of entrapment, however, continues to tread more and more complex pathways across the literary oeuvre of both the writers. As discussed before, the custodial nature of the centres of involuntary incarceration of the mentally ill (the asylums), generally proved to be detrimental for the inmates, hardly ever being truly therapeutic for them. One can only imagine, therefore, the impact institution or non-institutional incarceration might have on the mental health of those not afflicted by a mental disorder, or suffering from some not so severe mental condition.. But what brings up the necessity to bring this apparently bizarre under the purview of discussion is the very real, albeit somewhat unbelievable, phenomenon of ‘madness’ being used to throttle behavioural deviances and voices of dissent, particularly that of women, across patriarchal societies across cultures and its reflection in the works of the two writers in question.

While the history of mental health care in both the nations, as highlighted before, bear testimony to women having lesser access to mental health care facilities including but not restricted to a clinical diagnosis of their specific disorder(s), it is the same gender identity that rendered them more vulnerable to mental health being (mis)used as a mechanism of control to maintain sooth the rough edges, the flatten the undulations and maintain the established order of the society. In her essay ‘Post-Madwoman Writing and the Book of Amibuity’, Teresa Bell highlights how the brand of ‘madwoman’ has often been used by the patriarchal machinery to control the ‘abnormal’ so that the existing ‘normal’ can prevail (Bell 2008, 150-151). This ‘abornormality’ is essentially behavior, at times voluntary and aspirational, but often involuntary and circumstantially ordained. These so-called ‘disruptive’ actions could range from infidelity, homosexuality, alcoholism or simply asserting one’s agency to being sexually molested or raped which has often been perceived as a ‘moral

failing' on the part of the victim. And what could be a more effective way to silence or repress the disruptive that is an essentially coercive process but masquerades as a necessary health care activity?

The earliest text to have opened this issue to further literary engagements, debates and discussions emerged out of the morally restrictive Victorian England. Bertha Mason, the first wife of Jane's husband Mr. Rochester, in *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte opens up a can of worms exposing the darkest crevices of patriarchy that could go to any extent to safeguard its interests. The 'angel/ madwoman dichotomy' (Federico 2009, 217) that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gruber went on to highlight in their seminal essay 'The Madwoman in the Attic' (1979) through the characters of Jane and Bertha had brought to light more than ever before, the politics of curving the social image of a woman based on her wish or ability to conform to the gendered norms of patriarchy. The transformation from beautiful woman from Jamaica, married for her beauty and money to the 'madwoman' insane enough to be up locked in the attic, yet sane enough to burn down Jane's dress as a desperate act of reclaiming her agency in her marriage and her life has been described as an expression of "feminine imagination operating within the prison of gender and sexuality in order to subvert patriarchal oppression" (Gilbert and Gruber 1979, 152) Bronte can indeed be credited to have highlighted an matter of social concern, hardly discussed yet extremely relevant to her spacio-temporal reality. Her standpoint has been instrumental in laying the cornerstones of the Female Gothic that has striven to pit the Janes against the Berthas of the society and look into the social dynamics that has created 'madwomen' out of the latter.

No one knows whether Bertha was locked up because she had lost her sanity, or whether it was because she was locked up that she lost her sanity, or whether she had lost it completely ever at all. This ambiguity had the potential to initiate fresh deliberations over how forceful long term confinement could repress female voices but only by restricting their physical mobility and 'unleash' their deviances upon the society, but also by playing havoc with their mind – actually turning them what they had been falsely branded as and locked up for, in the very first place. With newer notions of 'disruptions' and 'deviances' making their way into the Western social fabric nearing the turn of the century – professional aspirations to be precise – the need to address this issue with greater integrity emerged to be the need of the hour. The earliest, yet one of the most hard-hitting enunciations of this idea within the genre of short story came in the form of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892) by the American writer Charles Perkins Gilman. It throws light on how the physical husband takes advantage of the

protagonist's probable postpartum depression to restrictive her non-normative, non-confirmatory aspirations – “Live as domestic a life as possible. Have but two hours of intellectual life her day. And never touch a pen, brush and pencil for as long as you live” (Golden 2013, 55) – an attempt that finally leads to her confinement in a small room with yellow wallpapers all around it. The narrative takes the reader to a journey to through the psychological terrain of the woman, whose prolonged confinement propels her towards a complete insanity where she begins to hallucinate and communicate with her ‘double’ on the other side of the yellow wallpaper, till she tears up the wallpaper and the imagined entity crawls up to her. The story actively and consciously blurs the edges of the angel / madwoman binary in a way so that both are aspects of personality that exist within a single person. It is the same woman – bringing up an extremely vital question: Could every woman be at the risk of being labeled a ‘madwoman’ if they fail to meet the standards of being an ‘angel’ in accordance with the social expectations? Are both of these nothing but socially constructed categories created just to control the dreams, desires, sexuality and acts of self-assertion of women? Such an exploration of female mental health and its underlying social causalities had thus helped Western short story come of age, that too at a time when custodial confinement of the mentally ill was the norm of the day.

What is most interesting about each on these incidents described in such works as these, or the many others that followed suit, is the fact that even in an age of asylums, theirs’ was always a situation of home confinement, which were facilitated and perpetuated by some of closest family members. Sending to some institution that involved the kind of public exposure and even examination by the staff members, doctors et al involved an amount of risk that they could not afford to take. Turning some less traversed corner of the space they had once known and believed to be their home, into their prison was perhaps the biggest blow to their mental health. The pain of isolation, the lack of anybody to communicate with for months or years at end, decrepit living conditions and the complete heart break at what some of their dear ones were doing to them, pushed the final nail into the coffin.

Needless to say, such phenomena described in the stories were nothing but a fictional representation of the reality many a contemporary woman in the West had been battling with. As more and more women were eager to join workforce and carve their own niche during the years of the World Wars, greater was the need to project them as “childish, merely decorative and incapable of self-actualization” (Rigney 1978, 123) culminating in more such incidents across Europe, American and Canada, and consequentially heightening

the need of their literary representation in literature. While Ethel Wilson and Sheila Watson had begun to venture into the convoluted paradigm of female psychology mental health since the 40s - *Hetty Dorval* (1947) by the former and *The Double Hook* (1959) by the latter, both set in small-town milieus having been two of the most important works in this context – it is only with Alice Munro that the particular motif under discussion enters the paradigm of English-Canadian literature. Her small-town societies, basking in its affinity towards secrecy rumour, misplaced gossip and moral policing were ideal for long time physical confinement to play out. But it is also imperative to keep in mind that de-institutionalization of the mentally was on the way – one that had come with a basic, though not a very comprehensive, understanding of the adverse effects of long-term physical confinement on human psychology. The exploration of this motif by Munro, emerges to be doubly poignant, in this context. How could a society, which no longer confined even their clinically diagnosed mentally ill in asylums unless absolutely necessary hold it upon its conscience to control so called ‘disruptive’ behavior in women by confining them within their own homes? Did it have the tenacity to handle its detrimental after effects on the minds of the individuals concerned, as a collective entity and would they be felt alone to deal with their scars? These are some questions that she keeps dwelling upon.

While her literary career is littered with numerous stories that strives to find answers to these questions, the most thought provoking is perhaps ‘Royal Beatings’, the first story of the short-story-cycle *The Beggar Maid* (1980) . The story of the butcher’s daughter Becky Tyde as told to the young protagonist Rose by her gossip-monger stepmother Flo is terrifying to its core – highlighting the monstrosity of what the said practical of social control can do to its victim. Though being born with a hunchback had put an young mother-less Becky at the receiving end of the ridicule of Hanratty, and apparently turned her into a cause of ‘shame’ for her father, that caused him to lock her up within the house through her precious years of childhood and adolescence – the real reason for her captivity was far more sinister and shocking. The butcher would abuse his son and daughter physically and abuse the latter sexually to the extent of having impregnated her. It was probably to prevent any voice of resistance from surfacing and to preserve the family ‘honour’ – the onus of which lay on the victim and not on the abuser, within the patriarchal machinery – that this confinement was necessary. The role played by the society in this context is perhaps the biggest matter of concern in this entire narrative. In spite of having an inkling of the reality, people rather satiate their curiosity by trying to catch a glimpse of the trapped girl through the windows,

use her pain and trauma as a staple for their gossip, but never make any sincere or constructive effort to relieve the girl off her misery. Their attitude throws light upon how the social tendency of putting the 'sanctity' of the family space above the well-being of an individual and the hesitance of the society to 'interfere' in 'family matters' in such cases, would acts as a major causal factor towards the mental distress and eventual disorder in such trapped souls.

Freedom came to Becky quite accidentally when her father pays the price his temper and misconduct with customers by beaten half dead by three local goons outside his house. Becky's reaction to the situation – that of stepping out of the house after years through the door left ajar standing over her bloodied father and laughing a maniacal laughter without lifting a finger to help him, until her brother carried him into the house – marks the culmination of her gradual descent into insanity. The voice of dissent stifled for all these years, bursting out in a most shocking and ghastly manner. Munro's Southern Ontario Gothic is however, is much evolved in its perception of 'madness; than her predecessors. Hailing from a 'post-asylum age', her fiction often slips into the domain of 'visionary mad narratives; that "celebrates madness as a disruptive mode of insight where the madwoman is no longer a victim but is empowered and the ultimate issue is the control of liminal experience" (Papps 2015, 69) – an aspect that comes out beautiful through the way in which her life shapes up after following the freedom from activity. For unlike her fictional predecessors, Becky does not go into oblivion – but rather heals (except for a few behavioural and temperamental problems) and eventually takes up the reign of her own life even going to the extent of managing the shop of her father. It is her liminal experience finally vent out through her reaction to her father's faith injuries that comes as a first step towards assert her agency – one that empowers her in a strikingly unexpected way. This rationale finds its place in every other story of Munro that touches upon this narrative. Be it the Parkinson's hidden mother of the 'Peace of Ultrect' pushed into the throes of depression for being confined within her home by the daughters by her inability to stick to the norms of social propriety, who 'performs' her liminality by wandering out into the streets in her best dress and makeup at the very first chance she gets or a emotionally abused and gaslighted Clara of 'Runaway' (2004) who 'performs' her liminality through a half-hearted attempt to escape the makeshift farmhouse she is practically confined within by her husband Clark – Munro strives to emphasis upon this (at least temporarily) empowering potential of liminal experiences.

As an author working within a small-town milieu of restrictive moralities and misinformed judgments in a nation that is also undergoes a gradual de-institutionalization of the mentally afflicted, Verma too displays a congruent approach in his treatment of this motif. Though Ajeyna and Jainendra Kumar do venture, albeit obtrusely into the borderline exploration of the social causalities and effects of moderate mental disorders in women – the motif in discussion finds its first detailed and full-fledged enunciation in Hindi literature, through the *nayi kahani* of Nirmal Verma. The finest example of the same is undoubtedly ‘Andhere me’ (1958) which, as discussed earlier, highlights how the schizophrenia of a mother dwelling upon and hallucinating about her past relationship with her husband’s friend, her resultant confinement to her own room and her not being allowed to meet her daughter, impacts the life of the young girl. While Pono admittedly has a severe mental health condition, one is left to wonder whether this confinement imposed upon her by her husband was truly prompted by clinical reasons, but was rather a method of curbing her the streak of infidelity within her. Is it also a technique of hiding this stain in on his family ‘honour’ (and his ‘masculinity’) from the gossipy clutches of the hill-station? The narratorial voice of the daughter never provides a concrete question to these questions, just letting them hang in the air – her naïve observations inducing them to draw their own conclusion.

What is, however, made extremely apparent is that this confinement – without any actual clinical attention – only serves to worsen her mental condition. The final showdown that sees her banging on her daughter’s door, flaring her nostril and laughing a ‘ghostly’ laugh (*bhutaili hasi*) too, remains shrouded in mystery in terms of its real motivations. Is it a mere manifestation of schizophrenia or a deeper and more disturbing attempted to register a voice of dissent against this coercive mechanism of patriarchal control? The husband is ultimately unable to hold on to this control though, for the liminal flashing out in all its terrifying splendour does help Pono reclaim her freedom, though not completely her sanity. The story ends with a possibility of the woman being able to live her life free of captivity, away from the suffocating ‘prison’ her family and townspeople had let her rot away in, for years. She might never be able to see her daughter again, but freedom does come at a cost and one has to accept it.

The free-spirited Lama of *Lal Tin ki Chaat* (1974) or the tuberculosis afflicted Bitto of ‘Dairy ka khel’ (1958), both dispatched to and couped up within her relatives’ homes far away from their home-towns, in an attempt to force them into arranged marriages in keeping with social expectations are also seen navigating the deep dark hole of a gradually

enhancing bout of depression by acting out their liminality in strangely heartbreaking ways. While the former orchestrates the death (an act of ‘freeing her soul’ from the body, for Lama) of Ginny, the pet dog she considers to be her alter-ego; the latter refuses to put her current photograph beside its own younger, happier and healthier counterpart pasted long ago in her cousins scrapbook. Lama is married off, but the streak of self-assertion is passed on to her young cousin Kaya. Bitti is not able to escape her fate either, but her cousin Babu takes away life lesson from her actions, that holds the promise of a brighter future for girls like her. The tendency to turn a mental illness induced or aggravated by forceful confinement used as control mechanism for voices and actions that might pose a threat to the patriarchal social system – thus metamorphoses into seeds of empowerment, turning against the very perpetrators who had originally laid its cornerstones through their oppression and coercion – in the works of both the writers. Pono could easily have been a Clara, Kaya could easily have a Becky been – each one united by the shared experience of involuntary confinement, each one triumphant in their performance of liminality, drawing strength from their little moments of resistance and search for their ‘Self’ in their spontaneous acts of reclamation.

Working within spacio-temporal realities across literatures and cultures, Alice Munro and Nirmal Verma have thus engaged in a deeply sensitive and sensitized exploration of the social, familial, interpersonal causalities, manifestations and ramifications of mental health hazards in any way never attempted before in English-Canadian and Hindi short story. Their customary subtlety of expression and restrained manifestation deeply poignant, yet disconcerting emotions, aim towards provoking the readers to re-evaluate their actions and restructure their ethical framework to accommodate and understand one of the most relevant social concerns of not only mid-late twentieth century India and Canada, but also the world at large.

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## Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the works of Alice Munro and Nirmal Verma – two literary contemporaries who had worked extensively on the genre of short story their respective English-Canadian and Hindi literary paradigm. A research that strives to understand how a particular literary genre has evolved at a particular period in history across cultures and literary traditions from two ends of the world has its own set of challenges. It has its fair share of revelatory excitement too. The potential of such a cross-cultural and transnational research, that an initial literary review had unearthed, had its foundation in two major questions: Do the thematic and formal experimentations of Munro and Verma see the short story emerge as the most potent literary vehicle for postcolonial urban 'modernity' across literary paradigms and cultures set far apart? Does that, in turn, bear testimony to the fact that literary consciousness has followed a similar trajectory of thought and expression in a particular period of history, across cultures and nations?

The academic journey that the search for answers to these questions ensued, called for a need to juxtapose the important life events and the social, cultural and political milieu that shaped Munro and Verma as individuals and as literary artists. This would be crucial, I felt, to contextualize the aesthetic vision and personal and professional motivations that prompted them to shift the focus of the English-Canadian and the Hindi short story from the social-realist concerns of the preceding decades of 1930s-40s to a preoccupation of the urban (small-town) middle-class concerns over self-reflexivity, individualism, fragmentation within interpersonal relationships and a deeply disturbing crisis of values that took a centre stage within the mid-twentieth century postcolonial consciousness of their respective literary paradigms. It would also be imperative to understand the coordinates - social, literary and personal – that prompted them to take up a genre lacking canonical status or 'literary market' value for exploring postcolonial 'modernity' with such conviction.

The chosen approach has indeed proved to be fruitful in this respect. Not only has it helped identify the roots of their regional focus in the years spent by the two authors as children, adolescents, young aspiring writers and finally as reputed well established authors in the small towns of Ontario, Canada and Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, India respectively, It has further revealed how their deeply sensitive, temperamentally quiet, introvert, socially awkward nature, their keen observation of the demography, cultural ethos and moral dilemma of their small-town milieu and ruptures within their own familiar and

conjugal relationships make them conscious about the psychological repercussions of the changing social, familial, and gender dynamics within the middle class population of their respective small-town societies in transition. Not only have Munro and Verma successfully situate their regionalism within the postcolonial framework of cultural-nationalism, they have also helped it emerge as an integral part of the postmodernist impetus towards a decentralizing focus upon the geo-political ‘margins’ that was sweeping English-Canadian and Hindi consciousness in the mid and late twentieth century decades. Their early exposure to the modernist works and existential philosophy of European and American writers like James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Anton Chekov, Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Laurence, Marcel Proust and William Faulkner convinced them of the relevance of the same within their own socio-cultural contexts and made them receive and adapt these aesthetics in a way so as to highlight the pain of loneliness and estrangement induced by breakdown of traditional family structures, change in social dynamics of gender, dysfunctionality of relationships and waves of small-town city migration that informed their respective postcolonial urban realities. Several personal disillusionments along with their evolving worldview have however caused postmodernist aesthetics to permeate their artistic vision in the later years of their literary career.

The literary and extra-literary factors that made the short story their preferred literary form to narrativise the existential crisis unfolding within their own social milieu have also come to light. Theirs’ has been a struggle to circumvent the novel/short story hierarchy within their respective literary paradigms – one that was largely propelled by their faith in the suitability of the short story in representing the contemporary concerns of post-colonial modernity, their personal comfort level with the genre, their ability to make the most of the platform provided by literary magazines and journal and their zeal to use the lack of canonical status of the genre, if need be, to their own advantage in terms of innovations and experimentations. It is these endeavours that have ultimately played a pivotal role in helping the genre reach the pinnacle of prominence, thereby rendering it being deemed suitable for anthologization within the publishing ‘market’ of their respective cultures.

As a student of Comparative Literature, I was fascinated to realize that these findings if explored further through relevant methodological tools could build bridges across two completely diverse cultures and literary traditions. It is primarily by using the methodological frameworks of genology and thematology that I have identified and interrogated congruent trends in the evolution of the short story within English-Canadian and Hindi literature, as



exemplified through the works of the writers in question. It has also provided me some phenomenal insight into how the thematic and formal experiments of the two literary contemporaries Verma and Munro with the genre of short story, have helped it emerge as the best suited genre for unpacking postcolonial identities and forging a similar notion of postcolonial ‘modernity’ within Hindi and English-Canadian literature in the latter half of the twentieth century.

A formal analysis has revealed three areas of formal congruence within the genre-specific experimentations of the two authors. Both Verma and Munro have been pivotal to the journey of the English-Canadian and Hindi short story from the ‘event plots’ complete with the causality of action and reaction following a linear chronological progression, that creates a conflict builds up to a climax and ultimately ends in a concrete conflict resolution to a gradual turn towards plots that do not concentrate of external actions or look for any conflict resolution, but rather map the mental terrain of an individual by harping upon a non-linear, fragmented and convoluted chronotope. They focus on a narrative structure that is not informed by a linear progression of incidents and tends to oscillate between different spacial and temporal realities, thereby mapping the complex web of thoughts and emotions of an individual. Munro’s notion of narrativised time is predicted on what E. D. Blodgett would call “a psychological sense of time” (Blodgett 2014, 3) in his paper on ‘Time and Fallibility in the Narration of Alice Munro’ – one that resonates with Henri Bergson’s idea of understanding time as *durée* (duration). Duration, as enunciated in his seminal work *Memory and Matter* (1896), refers to an indivisible continuity between the past, present and the future within human psyche. Munro, follows a modernist aesthetic of storytelling when she invites the reader to conceive the every moment in time as a synthesis of the past and the present and with a view to the future, is ideal for mapping the myriad contours of thoughts and emotions of the postcolonial subjectivities negotiating with the social consequences of estrangement within families, economic emancipation of women, small town-metropolis migration and an emergent awareness about mental health.. For Verma, as he enunciates in his essay ‘Kala, Mythak or Yatharth’, time is “*chirantan vartaman*” (eternally contemporaneous) (Verma 2001, 26) where the past, present and the future are so closely intertwined that the independent existence of one becomes meaningless without the others. This notion of eternal contemporaneity of time that shapes his art of storytelling deeply resonates with Bergsonian notion of duration. It is also fascinating to locate their use of narraivised time at the crossroads of modernist and postmodernist tendencies. By identifying how subjectivity and fallibility of memory highlighted through the use of personal recollections of a past incident

by different people, photographs, letters, dairy, journals and dream sequences – both the authors strive to acknowledge the subjectivity of ‘truth’ and plurality of perceptions, thereby inculcating postmodernist aesthetics as an integral element of their authorial vision.

Delving deeper into the literary craftsmanship of Munro and Verma has uncovered an organic relationship between individual memory and epiphany in the works of the two writers. Munro’s reception of modernist writers like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield has seen epiphany enter the English-Canadian literary paradigm as a crucial narrative device for the short story. The evocation of epiphany, in what she calls “queer bright moments” (Smyth 1992, 32) is often predicated upon the indivisible continuity of the past, present and future that informs the narrative chronotope of Munro’s stories. Her technique of storytelling is such that a direct sensory experience or the evocation of a memory may lead to an illuminating moment of self-discovery. Just as Munro’s epiphany is closely associated with the way she perceives time as duration, Verma’s “*anayas samay*”, too needs to be understood with reference to the author’s approach towards narrativised time. Verma receives Joycean epiphany on the one hand and Proustian *moments privileges* (privileged moments) on the other to come up with his idea of “*anayas samay*” (Verma 1976, 119) in his literary treatise *Sabd aur Smriti*, that spells certain moments of revelation that light up the eternally contemporaneous terrain of thoughts and emotions of an individual, moments which glow at small intervals across the entire landscape of the past” (Verma 1976, 119). Thus ‘epiphanic’ moments in the works of Verma, with their intrinsic suggestivity, resonates with Munro’s aim of bestowing the protagonists, and it turns the readers with a sense of fulfillment, thereby underplaying the absence of an action packed climax and the ‘inconclusivity’ of the story in terms of conflict resolution.

It is this preoccupation with the suggestivity of the narrative that leads to a third area of formal resonance - the use of dark symbolic imagery to represent the thoughts and emotions lurking within dark crevices of the human mind. The use of symbolic imagery based on the bleak, empty, indeterminate landscape of the region emerges to be the reason that prompts critics like Robert Thacker (2004, 150) and Judith Miller (1984, 128) to categorize the author as one of the practitioners of ‘Southern Ontario Gothic’, a special category of English-Canadian prose fiction, that harps upon the elements of the ‘gothic’ to interrogate human fears, insecurities and ‘forbidden’ desires in mid twentieth century small towns of Southern Ontario with its decaying and destructive social order and its residents, whose spirits were being imprisoned and perverted by the very context in which they live. It is through her use

of optic imagery of mirrors, glasses, portraits, eyes and reflections that the narrative chronotope often oscillates between different time frames, weaving the past present and the future into a seamless thread of emotions, recollections and realizations in the minds of the characters. The use of nature based (region specific) imagery and optic imagery also emerges as an important narrative device to highlight the moral dilemma of individuals trying to come in terms with the changes coming over the urban societies of North India in the decades following independence. Not only transgressive desires, but existential crisis that emerges out of being far removed from the real coordinates of one's day to day existence – both physically and emotionally – and engaging in or even witnessing any 'deviant' behaviour that does not abide by the parameters of 'normalcy' of the morally restrictive small town societies portrayed therein, comes out beautifully through Verma's use of symbolic imagery. Thus both the authors use nature, light, sound and even objects of day to day use to shape these imagery – 'defamiliarizing' the 'familiar', evoking a distinct feeling of discomfort within the reader. It is these imageries that account for much of the open-endedness of the narratives-raising certain questions to be speculated upon by the readers, answers of which are consciously and deliberately not offered by the author.

One of the major areas of thematic areas of congruence as revealed through the course of this research - the recurrent motif of the journey of a girl child into adolescence – finds relevance in the light of the changing dynamics of gender that informs the small town milieus of Munro and Verma in early postcolonial decades. In his work *Caring for your Teenager: A Complete and Authoritative Guide* (2003), Philip Bashe, an eminent member of American Academy of Pediatrics, has identified the period from eleven to fourteen years as that of early adolescence (American Academy of Pediatrics 2012 , 1) - a stage of mental and physical development that begins with the onset of puberty. As both the writers trace the mysterious pathways of a girl child's journey into early adolescence, within societies in transition, they look into the intricacies of the gender based socialization process that informs this journey. One of the important aspects of this process of socialization, as observed by the sociologists Hill and Lynch in their Gender Intensification Theory (1983) is the imposition of certain gender specific behavioural norms upon young girls, as soon as they reach puberty, that threaten to throttle their freedom of movement and expression. The traditional frameworks of socialization prevalent in the societies in question faced a threat in the light of greater job and educational opportunities for women, breaking up of traditional family structures and more concrete and gender neutral laws on divorce, birth control and family

planning, that offered urban middle-class girls and women more freedom of thought and action, in the post-war post-independence decades. The small towns in question had never been as accommodative of changes as their bigger, ‘better’ and more cosmopolitan counterparts. Therefore, these new ways of living and understanding life would constantly come in conflict with the traditional ideas about family, relationships, gender-roles and social propriety with the invest the collective psyche of its residents for ages. The changing dynamics of gender, that aimed to empower women within and outside the domestic paradigm, was not always congruent to the mental conditioning of the community within which it unfolded. In the light of these observations, this chapter looks into the physical, social and psycho-sexual determinants that saw female “childhood unfolding into the bewilderment of adolescence” (Kak 2000, 1) - one of the most impressionable and emotionally vulnerable period in one’s life.

How do the years of early adolescence lay the foundations of their future bid to both sexual and psychological agency within conjugal relationships and their claim to a substantial (if not equal) share in the decision-making processes of the family as their male counterparts? How does the tussle between the compulsion to adhere to pre-war notions of gender roles and the desire to embrace the new age sensibilities regarding the female body, sexuality and life-goals within societies geographically and culturally far apart, shape the consciousness of the female adolescents in the works of both the writers? It is the answers to these questions that this thematic exploration has striven towards and consequently inferred upon.

The cross-cultural interrogation of the motif identifies the roots of the psychological turmoil of the young adolescents, in the coercive silence that these mid twentieth century secretive close-knit societies in question maintained on the subjects of female anatomy (especially the sex organs), female sexuality and sexual desire and certain biological phenomena like menstruation, female orgasm, pregnancy and childbirth, that had the potential to turn their journey into adolescence into an alternately thrilling and traumatic one. It leads to an exploration of the intricacies of how the changing body of the girl would emerge to be a site where the politics of gendered socialization would manifest itself more than ever. Be it the restrictions on clothing, body-shaming or restricted physical mobility, and be it the acts of moral policing, limiting interactions with boys or imposing so-called “feminine” codes of behaviour upon the adolescent – gender based social conditioning only served to highlight the inherent dichotomy within the society. It was a dichotomy that steadily conditioned an young adolescent to conceive her self-worth in terms of her

‘desirability’ in the eyes of the members of the opposite sex on the one hand, and abide by the gendered expectations of ‘prudence’ and ‘modesty’ in her deportment, conduct and manners on the other. Arriving upon these inferences, has facilitated a process of mapping the psychological effects of the gender intensification techniques that would teach male adolescents self-reliance and autonomy and encourage their female counterparts to be more accommodative and put the need of others before their own. Delving deep into this mental terrain, reveals similar trends in the way in which dreams, fantasy, playacting, creation of alternative (imagined) realities/personas, reading and storytelling, wanderlust, adopting non-normative dressing techniques and engaging in socially-frowned upon artistic endeavours are used by the authors as tools of subversion, which help the adolescent protagonists to question, challenge and circumvent these forces of socialization.

The pivotal clause of the Gender Intensification Theory put forward by Elizabeth Lerner that asserts that the gender role identification in the formative years of adolescence conditions a child to start identifying, consciously or unconsciously with the same-sex parent (Lerner 1981, 7), has offered some crucial insights into the complex dynamics of the daughters’ relationship with their parents, particularly mothers/mother-figures as portrayed in the works of the two writers. Both the literary stalwarts engage in a conscious and constant juxtaposition of the inner struggle within the mothers who aspire for a ‘better’ life for their daughters than their own and yet tend to perpetuate the traditional framework of gendered socialization they have come to accept and internalize as a part of their own upbringing, with that of daughters who empathize with their but are determined to lead a more socially, economically, psychologically and sexually emancipated life than them, thereby highlighting the inter-generational conflict of values and interests with clarity and conviction.

The impetus on foregrounding the stifled voices of the marginalized within the newly emergent postmodernist philosophy in mid-late twentieth century English-Canadian and Hindi literature has been instrumental in orchestrating such a thematic focus that deals with those battling discrimination and repression on the grounds of gender, in the works of the two authors. A critical engagement with the motif concerned has resulted in re-emphasizing the role of postmodernist philosophy and aesthetics in shaping the literary vision and mission of Munro and Verma. This spirit of giving voice to the marginalized, as espoused by postmodernist aesthetics also turns out to be perfectly cogent to the need to understand the struggles and hardships of the mentally deviant, the ‘anomaly’ – whose voices are stifled by the master-narratives generated by power-centres that both the literary artists

have projected in their stories. It is only by overhauling the forces of systemic and systematic repression, they believe, that one might be able to interrogate the social values, ethics and power dynamics that create, sustain and perpetuate them. The authors in question being two of the earliest literary artists to have identified mental health issues as a socially relevant thematic focus of short story within their respective literary paradigms, it has been imperative to look into the same from a cross-cultural standpoint within the space of this research project.

An attempt to overhaul the politics of stigmatization of ‘madness’ through theories put forward by Michael Foucault (*Madness: The Invention of an Idea*, 1964, 2001), T. Donnelly (“Vogue Diagnoses”, 2012) and O. F. Wahl (*Media Madness: Public Image of Mental Illness*, 1995) has thrown light on areas of congruence in the ways in which the emotions of fear, shame and guilt have perpetuated certain ‘myths’, misconceptions and some dangerously misplaced beliefs about mental health hazards within the secretive and conservative small town societies of Ontario, Canada and erstwhile Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, India. Such explorations have led to a cross-cultural interrogation of the social mechanisms of gossip, rumour, ridicule and ostracization that deprived the mentally ill from clinical diagnoses, social empathy and communal cooperation that was much needed for their complete recovery and recuperation. Both the writers begin their careers at a juncture when their respective nations see a rapid de-institutionalization of the mentally ill, that minimizes their involuntary incarceration and effectively shifts the responsibility of their caregiving from the asylums unto their family and community. It does not help matters that this also happens to be the period where stressors like the small town- city migrations, estrangement within relationships, breakdown of marriages, changing dynamics of gender rendered individuals more vulnerable what Dr Hans Selye (“Confusion and Controversy in the Stress Field”, 1975) calls ‘distress’ and thereby to various mental maladies. Verma and Munro are the product of a times when it was not easy to talk about mental health even in the major cities Canada and India - let alone small-town setups - but it was extremely necessary to do so. Never before had the causalities and the social, psycho-somatic and sexual repercussions of any mental illness in a society, still largely unaware and misinformed about the same, been dealt with, with such sensitivity in Hindi and English-Canadian literature, and it sets a phenomenal precedence for generations of younger writers.

The literary representation of specific disorders like Schizophrenia, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Bipolar Disorder and Depressive Disorder by juxtaposing the problematic

reactions of these societies forced to engage with those suffering from them, with the perception of the patients of their own mental condition concerned in turn with a few sensitized and emphatic voices, that offers alternative perspectives on understanding mental illness than the one offered by the mainstream social mandate, bears testimony to this heartfelt endeavour of the two literary contemporaries. Be it their use of optic imagery of light, shadow and darkness, be it their use of region-specific climatic metaphors or be it the relevant analogies pertaining to the landscape and flora-fauna of the small-town settings of their stories, both the literary artists have displayed a tremendous subtlety of thought and restraint of expression in their literary representation of 'madness' from each of these three standpoints. While it saves the reader the shock of an in, it is jarring enough to force them to encounter their own insecurities, prejudices and insensitivities about this marginalized group of people, for the better and for good.

Gender differential prevalence of mental illness emerges to be an area of critical engagement in the works of the two authors, from a time when proper theoretical musings (based on empirical data) on the same was yet to take shape. Many of their stories emphasize upon the role of gender skewed stressors like the tussle between domestic caregiving responsibilities and professional aspirations, domestic abuse, molestation or tradition or gender specific ones like childbearing and miscarriage in rendering the female characters more vulnerable to distress than their male counterparts. World Health Organization has accepted the viability of what psychopathologists Nicholas Eaton, Katherine Keyes and Robert Krueger call the Invariant Dimensional Internalizing-externalizing Liability Model in mental health disorder prevalence (Eaton et al, 2011, 282), that speaks of a higher tendency in women to internalize pain, trauma, anger, anxiety and fear, in making them more susceptible to maladies like PTSD, Anxiety and Depressive Disorders. This tendency of higher internalization in women, along with the gender skewed stressors bring out a complex interface between mental disorder prevalence and the gender politics as it were, in small-town societies across nations and continents as portrayed within the literary gamut of 'psychological-realist' stories of Munro and *nayi kahani* of Verma.

These gender differential determinants of mental disorders and their effects on women leads to a crucial, and controversial area of discussion – how 'madness' might be used as a control mechanism for women in societies way of its rapidly changing gender equations. It brings to light the highly convoluted and dangerous dynamics that underlies the tendency to coercively masquerade voluntary behavioural and aspirational deviations,

particularly the act of making unconventional life choices and even voices of dissent, that might pose a threat to patriarchal social machinery as mental illness in a bid to control, repress and strife them. The women artists – often branded as social ‘anomalies’ - remain particularly susceptible to such machinations. Their social hurdles and the resultant mental health conditions, throws light upon several areas of resonance in the authors’ understanding of the life and struggles of creative minds within their own socio-cultural contexts.

This research endeavour has, thus, revealed that both the writers have shaped the short story in a way so as to represent the social, cultural, economic and aesthetic transformations that ushered in the postcolonial modernity within their respective socio-cultural contexts. The new-age urban middle-class concerns about changing gender equations, fragmentation within families and interpersonal relationships and a gradual transformation of traditional values and moralities formed an integral part of this modernity, and was deemed a more relevant area for contemporary literary engagement than the ‘progressive’ concerns over the socially, politically and economically oppressed that informed the literary consciousness of the late-colonial modernity. This research thus bears testimony to the fact that two literary communities from two ends of the world and having different cultural-histories were standing at such a conjecture in history in the mid-decades of the twentieth century that they felt the need to shift their focus from the narration of external events to the mapping of the mental terrain of the characters, from the collective to the individual, from larger social criticism to self-reflexivity – and the genre of short story underwent a transformation to give voice to those changes. The short story with its economy of words and episodic nature was deemed ideal for narrativising the slice-of-life peek into the psychological crisis that was gradually becoming the part and parcel of the fast-paced yet lonely and fragmented existence of this section of the society. Moreover, the general lack of canonical status and lack of commercial ‘market’ in terms of the short story within erstwhile English-Canadian and Hindi literary scene, made it a literary form more open to experimentations and thereby more accommodative towards a changing cultural consciousness. Furthermore, the areas of congruence identified in the nature the genre specific experimentations carried out by two contemporary individuals, who never came in contact with each other, nor are known to have acted as an influence or inspiration for one another, highlights how literary consciousness have followed similar trajectories of thought and expression in a particular period of history, across cultures. Tracing the history of the



evolution of a particular genre has thus resulted in establishing connections between so-called disparate realities unfolding across nations and cultures set far apart.

The identified areas of congruence, however significant in terms of their cross-cultural relevance, are not completely unmarked by differences. Munro's literary vision is specifically tuned towards the genre of short story. But though Verma's preferred genre has always been the short story, he has diversified his focus towards other genre like the novel, the travelogue, the essay and has even penned a play, each of which bear testimony to his literary vision as a creative artist, and thereby found their place as important secondary resource material in this thesis. Moreover, not having an equivalent of the short story cycle espoused by Munro in the works of Verma, or for that matter Hindi literature in general, has proved to be limiting for a thorough exploration of this sub-genre within the purview of this thesis.

It is also necessary to take cognition of the fact that though the protagonists created by both the authors essentially inhabit a small-town 'regional' milieu physically, and at least psychologically of not physically, Verma's travels to different parts of the world endows his literary universe with a more panoramic perspective on life than that found in the Munroian world. Furthermore, while both the authors are deeply sensitive in the exploration of gender and gender politics in their works, Munro's tendency to delve into her 'personal material' encapsulating the lived experience of striving to strike a balance between her domestic responsibilities and professional aspirations in a society in transition, lends her engagement with gender issues a more sensitized perspective

The literary and extra literary potential of my cross cultural analysis of one particular genre could open up more cultural and academic exchanges between the two nations, Canada and India. Not only will it help formulate a more holistic understanding of the development of the short story as a genre across cultures but it will also make way for more cross-cultural exchanges between the two nations in diverse fields of academic, cultural and psycho-social engagement. Postcolonial Studies would be foremost among them.

Throughout the tenure of this research, it has been imperative to take cognition of the fact that while 'post-colonialism' in the English-Canadian cultural context has been propelled by descendants of English settlers in Canada striving to sever administrative ties from their mother-country, that in the Hindi literary context had its foundations in the native residents of India achieving freedom from English colonial domination. It is necessary to remember that a

large section of the Canadian populations – its indigenous communities – remained colonized and continue to be so, even today. When the likes of Laura Moss (*Is Canada Postcolonial: Unsettling Canadian Literature*, 1982), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (*The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, 1995) discuss the ‘postcolonial’ in the context of Canada, they highlight the complexities involved in the conceptualization of the same in the case of a European settler-colony like Canada. They are contextually much different from the factors defining the ‘postcolonial’ in a former non-settler colony like India, in terms of the political, administrative and cultural coordinates involved therein. But as revealed this research endeavour, in spite of these differences, certain areas of congruence exist within the mid and late twentieth century postcolonial consciousness within English-Canadian and Hindi literature and that has the potential to open up new pathways of understanding the phenomenon of post-colonialism from a cross-cultural perspective. The cultural productions of literary communities, hailing from nations shaped by very different colonial histories, yet condoning to similar postcolonial sensibilities would prove to a fertile ground for further critical engagement over the idea of the ‘postcolonial’ from a trans-national standpoint, within the arena of Postcolonial Studies.

The attempted literary interrogation of the changing dynamics of gender in mid twentieth century small-town societies across two nations set far apart and its social, cultural and psychological ramifications on the lives of girls and women - particularly in the context of their choices, agency, empowerment, coping mechanisms and tools of subversion and resistance - carries within it a vista of possibilities that might be explored in greater detail by scholars working within the framework of Gender Studies. If pursued meticulously, the exploration of the way in which gender politics, gendered norms and gender specific processes of socialization have shaped up in urban societies across cultures, would lead to a more holistic understanding of the gender as a social category of identity formations within postcolonial Canada and India.

Moreover, the tendency of Munro and Verma to highlight the repression of a female voice in juxtaposition with the exploitation of her animal companion – could break new grounds in research deliberations on Ecofeminism. The basic principle underlying Ecofeminism harps upon what Emily Gaarder “empathy based on common (history of) oppressions” (Gaarder 2011, 54) between women, nature and non-human animals, thereby postulating that the oppression of one marginalized group can never be completely eradicated without putting an end to that on another. From some of their earliest works published in the

50s to the early 70s, that contained strains of such thought even before Ecofeminism emerged as a full-fledged philosophical movement, to published at the conjuncture of the new millennium, when it had established itself on a firm ground of theory and activism – they encapsulate the possibility of tracing decades long Ecofeminist trajectories of interconnectedness across the literary and cultural paradigms from two far ends of the globe.

With the importance of mental health awareness in human well-being having come to prominence in public discussions all over the world in the past decade, representation of mental health problems in literature could open up possibilities of some much needed discussions and critical engagement about the social causalities of mental disorders for students of Literature, Psychology or those working at the interface of the two. The peek that this research project provides into the times when official mental health care facilities in Canada and India were not cogent to the general mind set of the urban communities, would be they were meant to benefit them could prove to pivotal in helping them historically contextualize the psycho-social determinants of mental disorders rampant within their contemporary spacio-temporal reality. A cross-cultural perspective on the history of mental health awareness would, after all, provide a more holistic understanding about one of the most relevant public health issue of modern times.

Last but definitely not the least, this doctoral thesis would facilitate more cross-literary exchanges between Canada and India including comparative academic engagements with contemporary authors, same/similar generic modes of expression and congruent trends in literary movements. Nothing could be more rewarding for a research endeavour under the rubric of Comparative Literature that encouraging more cultural exchanges between two geo-political entities set far apart, thereby contributing in its own little way in expediting the bilateral relations between the two nations. This project has ardently aspired to and worked towards achieving that end.

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## **Annexure 1**

### **Interview: Miranda Hill**

**Date: 26.05.2019**

**(Interview over email)**

**Miranda Hill** is a contemporary Canadian writer. Her first work of fiction, a collection of short stories *Sleeping Funny* (2012) has won the City of Hamilton Book Award. One of the stories in it, 'Petitions to Saint Chronic' won the McClelland and Stewart Journey Prize. She has also published widely in eminent journals like *The New Quarterly*, *The Dalhousie Review* and *The Fiddlehead*. An ardent admirer of Munro's works, she acknowledges her own style of writing to have been influenced by literary craftsmanship of Munro. She is the founder and executive member of Project Bookmark Canada, and one of the main organizers of the Bookmark Reading Circle - projects that have been actively taking initiatives to reaffirm the relevance of Munro's works within the contemporary Canadian readership.

*Among the contemporary practitioners of the English-Canadian short story, Miranda Hill has always fascinated me with her lucid and engaging storytelling. Sleeping Funny has been a prized possession of my personal collection of books ever since it was published in 2012. As a literary artist who has often focused on small-town Ontario life and has spoken about her love for Munro's works – her works emerged to be of further academic relevance to me when I embarked upon my journey of doctoral research, couple of years later. I was thrilled, therefore, when my academic supervisor Dr Debashree Dattaray put me in touch with her over email in May 2019. The interview she graciously agreed to provide me with has been presented below. I will be using the following abbreviations: US for Urmi Sengupta and MH for Miranda Hill.*

US: Dear Ms Hill, you have acknowledged being an ardent admirer of the literary craft of Alice Munro, to the extent of naming your beloved pet after her. Could you share some of your earliest encounters with her works as a reader?

MH: Alice Munro is a writer whom I admire for her craft and style, but she is also someone who helped me understand the kind of upbringing I had and the puzzling ways of the communities I lived in, in rural Ontario. I come from very private people who are quite insular in their circles, keeping themselves separate in many ways from their neighbours – even though those neighbours are not shoved in close as they usually are in a city, but are spread out in towns that dot the farming communities of the area. When my husband – who is from a large extended family of African American relatives, well-versed in their history and enthusiastic in their kinship – is baffled by something that happens in my family of origin, I tell him to remember the stories of Alice Munro. It's kind of a family joke between us.

I can't remember my first encounter with her as a reader, but I know that her books dotted the shelves of my family home, and I remember them making sense to me in terms of atmosphere and ambience. I felt that there were truths there that I understood, and that I could also speak from that quiet place.

When I began to read as a writer does, I found new ways to appreciate Munro.

US: What are the formal/stylistic aspects of her storytelling that have fascinated you the most, and influenced your own art of storytelling?

MH: The remember reading Munro and having an epiphany that she is a master of distraction. She has the ability to direct your attention to something, while all the while the real story is sneaking up on you. And isn't that like life? We're looking elsewhere while time moves on, relationships are forged, and only when we look away from the distraction do we realize that a significant change has been happening within us.

And of course there is the obvious: her stories are so long! And so are mine. In my collection *SLEEPING FUNNY* I have stories that run between 30 and 60 pages, which is quite unusual to see. I believe that the length of those Alice Munro stories – having that tradition established in CanLit -- gave me a leeway with literary journals and publishers that I would not otherwise have had.

US: Project Bookmark Canada looks to be a fascinating endeavour to link local communities with nationwide conversations on literature. Could you please throw light on the initiatives taken by PBC to situate Munro's Huron County (Ontario) within the literary trail of Canada?

MH: For an initiative that seeks to link fiction and Canadian landscapes and cityscapes, it seems strange to many people that there is currently no Bookmark for Alice Munro. But the fact is that Bookmark insists on only placing Bookmarks (monuments that bear a passage of text from a story or poem in the exact location where the story or poem takes place) in real locations, which the author has identified in the work itself. Very few stories of Munro's take place in an actual location which is given its real name, and almost none of these actual named locations are in the countryside known as "Munro country" – that area around Lake Huron and Clinton, where Munro makes her home. In fact, Munro has purposely given these locations new names, providing a layer of distance between the real places and the real people. And it is not the business of Project Bookmark Canada to lift that authorial veil away. So, to date, there is no Bookmark for Munro. But readers are constantly rereading her works and seeing if there is something that meets the Bookmark criteria in that area. Conversely, Project Bookmark Canada may eventually decide to place a Bookmark in one of those intentionally named locations OUTSIDE Munro Country. As I have passed the leadership reins for Project Bookmark Canada onto a new Executive Director, I watch eagerly to see what she will choose.

US: Regionalism has been an integral aspect of Canadian Literature since the nineteenth century. Do you believe that the regional focus in the works of Munro and her contemporaries like Margaret Atwood, Mavis Gallant or Audrey Thomas has been a deterrent to the conceptualisation of Can.Lit. as a singular consolidated entity?

MH: In my opinion Canada is a very regional place. People associate themselves with their homes, their landscapes, their cityscapes and I think that the stories of these and other writers reflect that, rather than creating or reinforcing that. I mean, if you woke up one morning on Vancouver Island, another in Dawson City, another in Saskatchewan, then Toronto, another in rural Newfoundland (and on and on), you would not immediately think that you were in the same country – and that's from the visuals and the weather alone! So any fiction that sets itself down in a real (or nearly real) locale is going to reflect that place.

However, I think that there has been a sense of CanLit as a consolidated entity – and far too much so. We have heard voices that received a kind of sanction because they came from people who reflected a much more homogenous society than the country actually has. And I am happy to see CanLit becoming LESS of a singular entity – and not nearly fast enough.



US: Many of your stories included in *Sleeping Funny* have had a small town Ontario setting. Has Munro's approach towards the 'regional', shaped your approach in any way?

MH: Munro showed me that story was there, in the small places I recognized, as well as in the places that seemed – from that rural perch – much more story-worthy. And that definitely has been part of my experience of writing and of what I write about.

US: Several of your stories dwell upon the 'gothic' and the 'uncanny' to explore the dark crevices of the human mind. Have you ever drawn upon the legacy of the 'Southern Ontario Gothic' exemplified in the works of writers like Alice Munro, Barbara Gowdy, Margaret Atwood or Jane Urquhart for inspiration?

MH: If I have, it wasn't consciously. But in Munro's work, there is an acknowledgement that you don't really leave a place behind. So many of her characters are left behind in the places where they grew up, even though they once entertained ideas of leaving. And those characters that have left carry their former home and its experiences with them. That's definitely something that seems to show up in my work. It's a haunting, of sorts.

US: Could you throw some light upon the ways in which the above mentioned approach towards the 'dark' and the 'uncanny' might have influenced your literary contemporaries?

MH: I don't like to speculate on others' influences, so I prefer not to speak for them here.

US: Could you comment on how Munro's experimentations with the short story cycle might have influenced the art of storytelling of the current practitioners of the Canadian Short Story?

MH: One of the ways that Canadian publishers and Canadian readers seem to find the short story palatable is through collections of "linked" short stories – which is how we more commonly refer to what literature scholars would call a "story cycle". I think it is much more a publishing interest than an interest of most writers. Linked stories make publishers feel less nervous about publishing a collection if it can be billed more as a novel, with recurring characters. As a reader, sometimes I find linked collections interesting, but I admit that I prefer collections that are really varied, tied together instead by the author's concerns.

US: Munro's attempt at subverting traditional gender stereotypes within a post-war small town Ontario society has produced female protagonists who strive to hold their own in the face of patriarchal repressions. Could you comment on the significance of such an approach

in shaping female identity and agency in the works of the contemporary women writers of Canada?

MH: Munro was a trailblazer in this regard, but she was also speaking out of the time she was writing in – a time of great change and real action in the feminist movement in the western world. I'm not sure we can credit Munro with igniting this in her fellow writers, though I am sure she spoke the truth of many of her female readers, then and now.

US: You have been associated with Alice Munro Writers and Readers Festival and the Alice Munro Festival of Short Story for the past few years. To what extent have such initiatives been able to build upon the legacy of Alice Munro in terms of short story writing in Canada?

MH: It's been great to see people in the vicinity of Alice Munro's chosen home (and the model for her fiction) capitalize on and promote her legacy. Not only because Munro deserves such recognition, but because I think it is time to see more recognition of short stories in general. The festival has an opportunity to shine a light on this form, which often receives critical recognition, but not as much attention from readers, book buyers or prize juries. When I spoke at the Alice Munro Festival a few years ago, they were really in the early stages of planning and execution. I look forward to seeing where they take it.

US: Bookmark Reading Circles organised in different parts of the country have often engaged with the works of Alice Munro. Would you like to share your observations on how such discussions and exchanges have highlighted the author's relevance in the contemporary Canadian context?

MH: I think that no reader of Canadian literature doubts Munro's influence on the CanLit cannon, not only because she has been recognized within Canada, but because she has been recognized as a storytelling master on an international scale. So I don't think that discussions within reading circles have really built on that reputation, as that reputation is so strong already. It's considered a given.

## Annexure 2

### Interview: Lorraine York

Date: 08.07.2019

(Interview over email)

**Lorraine York** is Professor of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University, Toronto, Canada. She is currently the Senator William McMaster Chair in Canadian Literature and Culture therein. She has been named Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2017. Her seminal works on *The Other Side of Dailiness: Photography in the works of Alice Munro, Timothy Findley, Michael Ondaatje and Margaret Laurence* (1988) and *Ethics and Affects in the Fiction of Alice Munro* (2018, co-edited with Amelia DeFalco) have explored the role of photography and affectiveness in the stories of Munro, respectively. She also looks into the literary celebrity within and beyond Canada.

*My very first academic encounter with the scholarship of Professor Lorraine York took place when I came across her book on The Other Side of Dailiness: Photography in the works of Alice Munro, Timothy Findley, Michael Ondaatje and Margaret Laurence at the Centre for Canadian Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata in the early years of my doctoral research. Her analysis of how Alice Munro uses photographs/ photographic memory/ photographic imagery as important narrative devices has helped me consolidate my understanding of the artistic vision of Munro. Further, it encouraged me to look into her book on Ethics and Affects in the Fiction of Alice Munro in an attempt to interrogate the exploration of the mental terrain of thoughts and emotions in Munro's works. It was, therefore, an absolute pleasure to be introduced to her over email by the author Miranda Hill in the summer of 2019. The series of warm exchanges that followed saw her help me access scholarly articles on Alice Munro and provide me with an extremely enriching interview on her personal and academic engagement with Munro. The interview has been presented below. I will be using the following abbreviations: US from Urmi Sengupta and LY for Lorraine York.*

US: Dear Professor York, you have acknowledged being an ardent admirer of the literary craft of Alice Munro. Could you share some of your earliest encounters with her works as a reader?

LY: My first encounters with Alice Munro were with her position as a local storyteller, since I grew up in the area of Ontario in which Munro settled in the 1970s: near Clinton, Ontario, near the shores of Lake Huron. I went to high school in that small town, and heard my English teacher speaking about how she would run into Munro on the street and Munro would always notice the most tiny details about her: “You’ve changed your hair!” My teacher said that this was the eye of a writer. I got curious, picked up *Lives of Girls and Women*, and was flabbergasted. How did this (older) woman know so much about growing up in this geographical space? So it started with the personal. I decided to specialize as a scholar in Canadian literature because it happened to be the area that came along with Alice Munro.

US: What are the formal/stylistic aspects of her storytelling that have fascinated you the most and encouraged you to engage critically with her works?

LY: I truly love the stylistic brilliance: that famous Munroian oxymoron in particular. I love the indeterminate endings. Just the sheer bravura loveliness of the words placed side by side.

US: Regionalism has been an integral aspect of Canadian Literature since the nineteenth century. Do you believe that the regional focus in the works of Munro and her contemporaries like Margaret Atwood, Mavis Gallant, Margaret Lawrence or Audrey Thomas has been a deterrent to the conceptualisation of Can.Lit. as a singular consolidated entity?

LY: That’s a genuinely interesting question. I’m going to think about the very idea that CanLit needs to be a singular consolidated entity. I think that this idea has been a force in our literary past, but I’d also suggest that we needn’t think of a national literature in this way. If we do, then we tend to exclude authors and works that don’t easily “fit” into pre-existing categories. In that sense, regionalism has been a corrective to that pressure to make CanLit into one “consolidated entity,” and to that degree it has been a welcome force. Regionalism, however, can also be used to sideline authors and works. In the days after she won the Nobel Prize, for instance, the media coverage of Munro stressed her work on the small town, but that obscures the fact that she has also been quite a talented author of the urban.

US: Do you think that the photographic realism that invests Munro’s works has much to do with this regional focus of her stories?

LY: I think the two are interrelated but there isn’t necessarily a causal relationship. If the priority is on the immediate, tangible world, as it is in the photographic realist painters whom

Munro admires (eg. Mary Pratt), then there's going to be a value placed upon looking closely at one's local environment. At the same time, Munro would doubtless train that close reading upon whatever she's looking at. And in the short stories written across this long career, it's clear that this kind of looking attaches itself to whatever kind of environment she's describing. And I think it also has to do with valuing domestic labour. Again, to call to mind Mary Pratt's painting, you've got everyday kitchen scenes—fish, etc.—conveyed with the kind of loving painterly realism that the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch painters bestowed upon earthenware, fruit, flowers, and the like.

US: Munro has always been weary of affiliating herself to any particular movement/school of literary writing – be it postmodernism, be it photographic realism or be the Southern Ontario Gothic school of writing, to name a few. Would you like to share your observations on this?

LY: I think this is true of many writers: few wish to be pinned down, restricted to a particular aesthetic. Part of this has to do with a desire for openness and experimentation, and even in the case of Munro, who seems to have such a well-defined aesthetic, there have been significant shifts in her methods and styles (see the wonderful Munro critic Robert Thacker on her work)

US: Could you comment on how Munro's experimentations with the short story cycle might have influenced the art of storytelling of the current practitioners of the Canadian Short Story?

LY: Oh my, yes. Many newer writers have been unstinting in their praise of Munro's work, even writers who are patently doing very different things with the form. I think here particularly of a newer writer like Sheila Heti, who does quite experimental things with memoir and essay-influenced fiction. For her, reading Munro was critical. So I think this is a sign of a particularly major talent; if you can influence not only those who write in your tradition but those who are exploring other aesthetic venues, then you are a paradigm-shifting figure in the literary field.

US: Munro's attempt at subverting traditional gender stereotypes within a post-war small town Ontario society has produced female protagonists who strive to hold their own in the face of patriarchal repressions. Could you comment on the significance of such an approach in shaping female identity and agency in the works of the contemporary women writers of Canada?

LY: I've mentioned Sheila Heti, who, while she does not write about small-town Ontario society, writes about the challenges that face women, particularly women artists (I think here of her recent book *Motherhood*). But there are many women writers who have studied at the feet of Munro. This would be my partial list: Jane Urquhart (who has been a close associate of Munro's), Lisa Moore (who does write with regional—in her case, East Coast—awareness), Anne Michaels (who writes very different kind of fiction). But as I write this list, confining myself to Canadian writers, it seems artificial, in that there are many international writers who count Munro among their influences.

US: Would you like to share your observations on how the opportunity to read her stories in the Canadian Broadcasting Services' programmes might have helped shape Munro's literary celebrity during the early decades of her career?

LY: The importance of Robert Weaver's "Anthology" to the launching of Munro's career cannot be overstated. He gave early visibility (or, I suppose, "audibility" would be the better term!) to her stories, but he also encouraged her. We have letters exchanged between the two of them that show just how crucial he was to her in those early days when she was struggling to write and to juggle her domestic labour as a mother of small children at a time when women were expected to put that domestic labour first. Check out Robert Thacker's definitive biography of Alice Munro for the details.

US: The short story has long been treated as an 'apprentice genre' to the novel in Canada and has therefore suffered several publication hazards. Even attempts of anthologising short stories have been few and far between. Has the Nobel Prize win of Munro helped Canadian short story acquire a greater acceptability in the 'literary marketplace' of the country?

LY: Yes, it has, to a degree. It's still difficult to market a volume of short stories, but I think it will potentially clear the way for particularly gifted short story writers to resist calls that they necessarily write a novel. In recent years, stories have done well, particularly those by emerging writers of colour and Indigenous writers (I'm thinking here of Leanne Betasamosake's work). I think that we collectively now see the short story as able to sustain a career, and that's thanks to the career of Alice Munro.

US: English/French Canadian literatures have long suffered the onslaught of Euro-American cultural hegemony both within and beyond the boundaries of the nation. Has the prestigious

award won by Munro helped enhance the visibility of Canadian Literature in the international literary scene?

LY: Yes. Prizes do that. I think that other factors have helped, such as Munro doing extensive publication in *The New Yorker*. There's a vibrant international community of scholars interested in Canadian literature. And while that community has suffered setbacks, such as the cancellation of the Canadian government's Understanding Canada programme, it continues to thrive. One thing I'd also mention is that the sense of the Canadian literary field as constructed through that English/French binary is also undergoing radical, welcome change, as Indigenous writers in particular publish exciting new works (examples: Joshua Whitehead, *Jonny Appleseed*; Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*; Waubgeshig Rice, *Moon of the Crusted Snow*; Tanya Tagaq, *Split Tooth*, and I could name so many more!

US: Could you comment on the role of literary translation in shaping the nature of Munro's literary celebrity outside the boundaries of Canada?

LY: I have to admit that this subject is not one in which I am expert. I know that she is widely translated, but to find out more about Canadian literature and translation, I'd send you to the work of an emerging scholar Cristina Ivanovici.

US: Alice Munro Symposiums and Bookmark Reading Circles organised in different parts of the country have often engaged with the works of Alice Munro both from a thematic and a formal standpoint. Would you like to share your observations on how such discussions and exchanges have highlighted the author's relevance in the contemporary Canadian literary circles?

LY: There's no doubt that these activities have supported the already considerable literary celebrity that Munro and her work enjoy. As Munro comes to the end of her career (I doubt that anything after *Dear Life* will be published; I gather she's in very frail health), these activities keep Munro's work in the public realm, engaged with by readers.

US: Initiatives like Alice Munro Writers and Readers Festival and the Alice Munro Festival of Short Story have been undertaken in the recent years to encourage the literary endeavours of budding writers. To what extent have such initiatives been able to build upon the legacy of Alice Munro in terms of short story writing in Canada?

LY: This is a most fascinating question: I think that any initiative that leverages the literary celebrity of an established writer (and who, at this point, beyond Margaret Atwood, could be more widely celebrated than Munro?) in order to encourage emerging writers is particularly worthy. As your previous question suggested to me, some activities reinforce that existing celebrity; these initiatives, on the other hand, turn it to an ongoing good, ensuring that emerging writers receive the support they need—the kinds of support that someone like Robert Weaver extended to a young Munro. One nagging question that remains for me is whether these activities can draw forth and support a range of emerging writers from historically underrepresented communities (queer, black, Indigenous, people of colour). I think that with the proper stewardship they can, and what a meaningful legacy that would be.

US: Could you share your observations on how such festivals harp on and in turn, serve to enhance the literary celebrity of Munro?

LY: I think I may have covered that in the previous response, #13.



### Annexure 3

#### Interview: Ved Raman Pandey

Date: 27.12.2021

(Interview over Google Meet)

**Ved Raman Pandey** is Associate Professor in the Department of Hindi, Presidency University, Kolkata, India. He is currently the ICCR chair at the Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture, Mauritius. He has worked extensively on Nirmal Verma for his doctoral research titled 'Adhunikatavad, Uttarakunikatavad aur Nirmal Verma' (Modernism, Postmodernism and Nirmal Verma). His areas of interest include History of Hindi literature, Medieval and Modern Hindi poetry, Hindi Fiction and criticism.

*One of the foremost among the Indian scholars who have worked on Nirmal Verma, Dr. Pandey has delved deep into the politics and poetics underlying the literary craftsmanship of the author in his doctoral research. His thesis has served as a major tour de force behind my own research project - guiding me and helping me find my way through many a maze of doubts and deliberation. I was elated, therefore, when a personal correspondence with him was made possible through the kind mediation of Professor Tanuja Majumdar, Presidency University in early 2021. The opportunity to meet and interact with him albeit through a virtual platform, has been an extremely rewarding experience. The interview has been presented below. I have used the following abbreviations: US for Urmi Sengupta and VRP for Ved Raman Pandey.*

US: Dear Professor Pandey, you have acknowledged being an ardent admirer of the literary craft of Nirmal Verma. Could you share some of your earliest personal encounters with his works as a reader? What role have such encounters played in inspiring you to engage critically with Verma as a literary scholar, in the later years?

VRP: The first story of Verma that I remember reading is 'Parinde'. I was a student of M.A in Calcutta University at that time. The story had an unique kind of sensibility and a musical kind of language. I felt that I was not reading something in prose or poetry, but a language coated with some raagas and songs. I was mesmerized! The way in narrated the things, slowly tenderly....I feel it is much more than what we generally understand by literary craft.

Literary craft can leave you awestruck. It is usually looked upon as what poet Mandakranta Sen means when she says "*Je kotha jemon bhabe bola hoeche, aj take onnobhabe bolo*" [What has been told in one way, tell it differently today]. This refers to an attempt to tell something already told, in a different manner and approach it from a different perspective. But Verma's literary craft is not limited to this mere 'language art' or what we might call '*bhasa ka khel*'. He has the ability to create an ambience or '*parivesh*' through his storytelling. He has his own style of expression - very few words are spoken, but what is said goes straight to the heart! You can feel it deep within.

US: The *vatavaran* (ambience) of the hill stations he sets his stories in, plays an important role in his stories too....

VRP: Verma's conceptualization of *vatavaran* is very different from what we generally understand as *vatavaran*. It is almost as if you, as a reader, can feel that ambience - and you feel the emotions of those who are dwelling within that ambience. A character may be lonely, or in pain; a character may be happy in the company of a friend or busking in a celebratory mood - he would never state it explicitly but you would be able to feel it anyway. Sometimes this is achieved through his dialogues and sometimes just through the space that exists between two dialogues. He might not explain everything in length, but throw in one or two words here and there....

US: And a lot would be implied through them.

VRP: Exactly. The words would make you feel the emotions of the characters. This was what I felt about 'Parinde' when I first read it. Sometime later I came across the critical review of the collection of stories *Parinde* (named after the title story 'Parinde') as done by Namvar Singh in *Kahani: Nayi Kahani* - it has indeed set a benchmark for how critical reviews should be done. As I went through it, I was thrilled to find my exact feelings about 'Parinde' - about its sensibility and *sangeetdharmita* - being echoed by Namvar Singh!

If we look at the content of the story, we would find many renowned critics would place it among the top five greatest love stories of Hindi literature along with stories like 'Usne kaha tha' by Guleri and 'Teeshri Kasam' by Phaniswarnath Renu. Now if I come to your second question....

US: Your work on 'Adhunikata, Uttaradhunikata aur Nirmal Verma' has been a huge source of inspiration for my own research endeavours. Could you please throw light on the academic

vision and motivations that prompted your decision to work on Nirmal Verma in your doctoral thesis?

VRP: There are a number of factors that led to this decision. Within a year of having had my first encounter with Verma's stories, I got the opportunity to have one-is-to-one interaction with him. After I was done with my M.A. and had been granted the UGC Junior Research Fellowship to pursue my doctoral research, I travelled to Delhi to interview two individuals. The first one was Dr. Ramvilas Sharma, who according to me is the greatest critic of Hindi literature. The second was Nirmal Verma.

When I started reading his upanyasa and collection of nibandh ( critical essays), I realized that what makes him special among Hindi writers is that very few of them have actually displayed the kind of global perspective that informs his works. He is a Hindi writer no doubt, but his background is not that of Hindi literature. He had been a student of Indian History in St. Stephen's College. He also harboured interest in architecture, anthropology, poetry and painting. It is a typical postmodernist feature of an individual not limiting himself to any one particular discipline or field of work. This is true for many renowned postmodernist thinkers like Michael Foucault or Jacques Derrida. For example, you cannot describe Derrida only as a linguist or a philosopher. He adorns many hats together. Same holds true for Verma.

When I was reading his works as a student, I had considered him to be a modernist writer. I had thought that as a writer of the post-independence era, he was largely preoccupied with certain modernist concerns. But later, when I began to look into his collections of essays like *Sabd Aur Smriti*, *Kala Ka Jhokim* and *Dalan Se Urtar Hue*, I came to realize that he had also addressed postmodernist concerns with a keen sense of enquiry. This was a time when postmodernism was gradually emerging to be a matter of critical engagement in English literature and different branches of the Social Sciences (but not yet in Hindi literature) - but few had a clearly structured idea about its intricacies. Was it a literary term of something more? Was it in opposition to modernism or did it build upon the latter? There were many questions but no definite answers as yet.

More I read Verma's works I realized that his preoccupation with modernism had been much to do with questioning its philosophical standpoints. It is during this time that I picked up one of his interviews with the renowned Hindi writer Ashok Vajpayee. I have mentioned this in my thesis.....

US: I have read it sir. It is there that he talks about *uttaradhunikatavad* (postmodernism) in the Indian context, for the first time.

VRP: Yes. Please note that this is even before Francois Lyotard has published his famous book on *The Postmodern Condition*. We should definitely respect Western knowledge. But the way in which native research are conditioned to think that every novel idea must have been imported in its entirety from Europe, from the West is very problematic. I have very strong reservations about this generalized conception.

Not many in Indian, particularly Hindi academia, I believe, have perceived modernism and postmodernism as anything but Western phenomena. As my readings threw light on how Verma had questioned various facets of erstwhile Indian modernity, it came as a flash of realization to me - could I look at Verma's works in the context of postmodernity and postmodernism?

It is then that I began to read 'Parinde' from a postmodern context. Most people look at it as a love story. But I was amazed to realize that the story is more about war - a critique of the loss and desolation brought about it - than love! It was war that had separated Latika from her lover. And else had been this war but a vice of modernity? The story provided a peek into how modernity had adversely affected human existence.

US: Very few critics have actually tried to look at 'Parinde' from this perspective....

VRP: Yes. I could identify this as postmodern stance on the part of Verma and this leads me to your question on the representation of his personal political standpoints in his works.

US: Be it his Marxist inclinations, be it his faith on Gandhian philosophy or be it his anti-emergency stance, Verma has taken certain very strong political and ideological stands in the course of his writing career – ones which he has highlighted in his interviews, essays, travel narratives and to some extent even his novels. Yet, very few of his short stories, barring rare exceptions like 'Dedh Inch upar', seem to have dwelt consciously on political themes. Would you like to share your thoughts on this?

VRP: Firstly, you also need to take cognition of his explicit verbal and written statements in favour of Tibet's liberation from Chinese domination.

As you must know, Verma deals with political themes in his upanyasa *Ve Din* and *Raat ka Reporter*. Though he does not explore political themes very explicitly in his stories, a few

words exchanged by characters, a few passing political references made here there do bear testimony to his own political and ideological standpoint. For example, *muktibodh* plays an important role in one of his most well-known stories 'Andhere mein'. The story ends with a reference to *Flaubert's Letters to George Sand*. What is it but a reflection of his personal ideologies in his stories. There are many such examples - you have to be able to identify them for what they are.

US: So what you mean is that his personal politics finds a place in his stories too, but in a subtle and not in an in-your-face manner?

VRP: Exactly so. When critics look at stories like 'Dusri Duniya' or 'Setember ki ek sham' they assert that these stories look into the existential crisis and loneliness of human beings. Verma poses many a question - who is responsible for this loneliness? What is the purpose of our life? Why were we born into this world, in the first place? This existential crisis was not imported blindly and mechanically from the West but was rather born out of the contemporary Indian reality. There were several reasons for this. One of the foremost among them stemmed from the fact that pre-independence India saw the British create policies to strike a blow upon the deep attachment that their culture and religion had traditionally shared with the day-to-day existence of the Indians. After independence, people had hoped that these ties would be reinstated, but that did not happen. The consequent disillusionment would lead to a kind of existential crisis.

Verma never adheres blindly to Western worldviews and ways of life. Rather, he is deeply rooted to the Indian culture, philosophy and way of life and has a keen understanding of the same. This disillusionment, therefore, hits him hard too.

US: Many critics tend to accuse him of being an 'outsider' and not talking about Indian realities....

VRP: His regional focus might have led to certain misconceptions. Critics born and brought up in some other part of the country might not have a very well fleshed out idea about life, as it was Simla. Can Verma be held responsible for that?

Let me share with you an anecdote on what inspired him to write 'Parinde'. He had been to Ranikhet once. He had strolled out for a walk when he chanced upon a group of girls. A radio was playing and they were laughing to their heart's content. They had no idea he was there. But he stood mesmerized by the scene - and that was what sowed the seeds of 'Parinde'. We

find a similar scene unfolding in the story when a group of girls are discovered laughing together in a hostel room by Latika.

The upanyasa *Ve Din* too has been inspired by a true incident from his own life. During his stay in Czechoslovakia, he went to watch a play one evening. During the interval period, he got acquainted with a Czech woman who invited him for a coffee thereafter. Verma obliged and the woman paid for both their coffees. They agreed to again meet over coffee the following week. But Verma was a student surviving on limited means. Courtesy demanded that this he paid for their coffees and he did not have that much money to spare. He decided, therefore, that it was best not to meet her this time. There he was, sitting at home and wondering had the woman had come to the Cafe? What she had thought of him when he never turned up? How long had she waited before she had given up and finally left the place? Seven years had passed after this incident and Verma was not residing in Delhi, when one day the memory of that day suddenly came back to haunt him and eventually went on to the foundations of *Ve Din*.

US: So, simple mundane apparently trivial incident have sowed the seeds of many of his stories....

VRP: That is true. We also need to look at the expression of simple emotions in his stories. An ideal example would be the story named 'Sukha'. The famous professor gets to interact with many an erudite scholar in the conference. But it is the company of a young aspirant largely unaware of and therefore unperturbed by his popularity, that he enjoys the most!

US: Verma been in Europe for many years and is known to have engaged in length with European literature. Do think Verma has received modernism and postmodernism consciously in a way so as to suit the Indian context?

VRP: Verma understood the nature and salient features of both European modernity and his contemporary Indian modernity very well and was aware of the differences that existed between them. He did receive some basic ideas from the West, but his engagement with them was firmly grounded in his in-depth knowledge about the Indian *parampara* (traditions) and *jeevan-paddhati* (way of life).

Moreover, he has never really declared his sensibilities to be postmodern, or called himself a postmodernist writer. But he has questioned the various facets of contemporary Indian

modernity and critiqued the modernist philosophy as espoused in early post-independence Hindi literature. Would that not be enough to qualify him as a postmodernist writer ?

US: Verma has always been weary of affiliating himself to any particular movement/ school of literary writing. In fact, he appears to be surprised and even somewhat uncomfortable at being hailed as the pioneer of the *Nayi Kahani* (New Story) movement in Hindi literature by a renowned scholar and critic like Namvar Singh. Could you share your observations on this non-conformist stance of the author?

VRP: Verma himself never calls the stories of *Parinde*, *nayi kahani*. When Namvar Singh writes his review, *nayi kavita* is already a well-known concept. The sensibility and language of Verma's stories was unique. Singh felt that these marked a major shift from the kind of stories that Hindi literature had seen till then - not only in terms of form and content, but also sensibility. Nobody before Verma had been able to create such a *parivesh* ( ambience ) through his storytelling! All these factors induced Singh to declare *Parinde* as '*nayi kahani ki pehli kriti*' (the very first instance of *nayi kahani* ). Unlike Kamaleswar, Mohan Rakesh and Rajendra Yadav, Verma had never proclaimed himself to be a *nayi kahanikar* (writer of *nayi kahani* ) , nor did he affiliate himself to the *Nayi Kahani* movement. Yet, it was he whom Namvar Singh declared to be the pioneer of Hindi *nayi kahani* and his mandate is accepted to be the final word till date.

US: Sir, thank you so much for the enriching session, specially the anecdotes that you have shared. It has been a great learning experience for me.

## **Annexure 4**

**Interview: Katerina Ruhrova**

**Date: 02.02.2022**

**(Interview over email)**

**Katerina Ruhrova** is a scholar of Indology at the Institute of Asian Studies, Czech Republic. She has worked extensively on Nirmal Verma in her diploma dissertation entitled ‘Nirmal Verma and Czechoslovakia’ (2021). Through her research endeavour she has looked in Nirmal Verma relationship with Czechoslovakia, where he has lived from the late 1950s to 1968 and worked as a fellow at the Oriental Institute, translating modern Czech writers like Karel Kapek, Bohumil Hrabal and Milan Kundera into Hindi. She has delved deep into the works of Verma set in Czechoslovakia or influenced by his experiences acquired in Czechoslovakia and has tried to situate Verma’s stay in Czechoslovakia in a broader cultural and historical context.

*I found the rationale behind the research endeavour of Ruhrova extremely fascinating the very first time I accessed the abstract of the same from an online source. Unfortunately, the dissertation being written in Czech appeared to be a major deterrent. I was extremely happy and grateful to Professor Martin Hribek and my academic supervisor Dr Debashree Dattaraj when they put me in touch with her on January, 2022. Interacting with her has provided me crucial insights into the ways in which Verma’s Czechoslovakian experience might have shaped his authorial vision. It has also helped me understand his role in facilitating cross-cultural transactions between erstwhile Czechslovakis and India. The interview has been presented below. I will be using the following abbreviations: US from Urmi Sengupta and KR for Katerina Ruhrova.*

US: Dear Katerina, you have acknowledged being an ardent admirer of the works of Nirmal Verma. Could you share some of your earliest encounter(s) with his works as a reader?

KR: Nirmal Verma’s writing was rightly so a part of our curriculum of Indian studies at Charles University. His short story Dahleez stood out for me, and I still remember it vividly



for its marvelous depiction of a young girl's mind and emotions. Empathy and deep insight into different characters and situations are the qualities that I appreciate and value about Nirmal Verma the most. His unique understanding of the depths of people's heart without being condemnatory or condescending draws me to his writing all over again.

Much later, I had realized that my very first encounter with Nirmal Verma and his work had been through translation by a truly remarkably gifted translator Dr Dagmar Marková published in *Nový Orient* (a journal of Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic).

US: What academic vision or motivations prompted you, as a student of Indology, to take up the works of Verma for your thesis?

KR: More than academic vision I was intrigued by the fact that even though Nirmal Verma spent many years in the former Czechoslovakia his stay there was very strangely enigmatic and mysterious. My academic advisor Dr Jaroslav Strand encouraged this direction of research. No-one even knew such trivialities like how many years did Verma spend living in Prague or how did a young Indian man get scholarship to study in a small European country at the end of 1950s.

US: Would you like to share your thoughts on how Verma's stay in Czechoslovakia might have influenced his reception of European modernism and existentialism in Hindi literature?

KR: Naturally Verma must have been influenced by the books he read and people he met during his stays and travels in the former Czechoslovakia and in Europe in general. Even though he was indisputably associated with Czech academics, literature critics and writers, I do not feel entitled and knowledgeable enough to elaborate more on this topic.

US: Are there any culture-specific storytelling techniques of Czech literature that have influenced Verma's writings?

KR: This question is particularly inspirational and deserves further research. For any native Czech speaker with knowledge of Hindi it is astonishing how culturally well appropriated Verma's stories and novels are. Not only does he use Czech words and sentences to create the proper atmosphere or to gain authenticity, but his descriptions of reality and surroundings are

so accurate that one is immersed in the story completely although it is written in a different language. Prime example is Verma's novel *Ve din*.

US: Many of Verma's literary works that are situated in the then Czechoslovakia dwell upon political themes. How integral, do you feel, was his stay in Prague to the shaping of his personal political ideologies?

KR: Very much. He himself pointed out this fact on numerous occasions in various interviews. Verma experienced day to day life in a country ruled by Communists. Furthermore, he saw the hope that many people shared during the Prague Spring, the period of political liberalization, and he saw disillusion that followed the invasion by friendly countries from Eastern bloc. This incident surely played a role in his political views and strong political statements.

US: How effective, do you think, were Verma's translations of Czech writers in introducing erstwhile Czech literature to the mid-twentieth century Hindi readership?

KR: Firstly, Verma's translations deserve more attention. Even today his portfolio of authors whose texts he translated appears genuinely astonishing. Verma offered Indian readers the opportunity to experienced writings of fine authors like Bohumil Hrabal, Milan Kundera, or Karel Čapek without transmission of English. Maybe at that time it was a daring initiative, but the number of translations proves that there was a demand. Verma did not stop there, he went further. His translations are often accompanied by informative forewords or essays explaining Czech literature background.

US: To what extent have Verma's translation of Czech writers been able to facilitate further cross-cultural exchanges between India and Czech Republic?

KR: In my humble opinion we Czechs own Verma a lot. His life was connected with Prague, and he must have had a good command of Czech language. Strangely enough we almost neglected it in the past. Maybe this oblivion was caused by Verma's criticism of political situation in the formal Czechoslovakia which was for obvious reason not welcome by the government. I do believe in a brighter future. Verma's novel *Ve din* will be published in

Czech. This book has the potential to boost interest in cross-cultural exchange between our countries at least a little bit.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that Verma remains such a popular and important figure of Indian literary scene that his name itself pulls readers to his own works as well as translations.

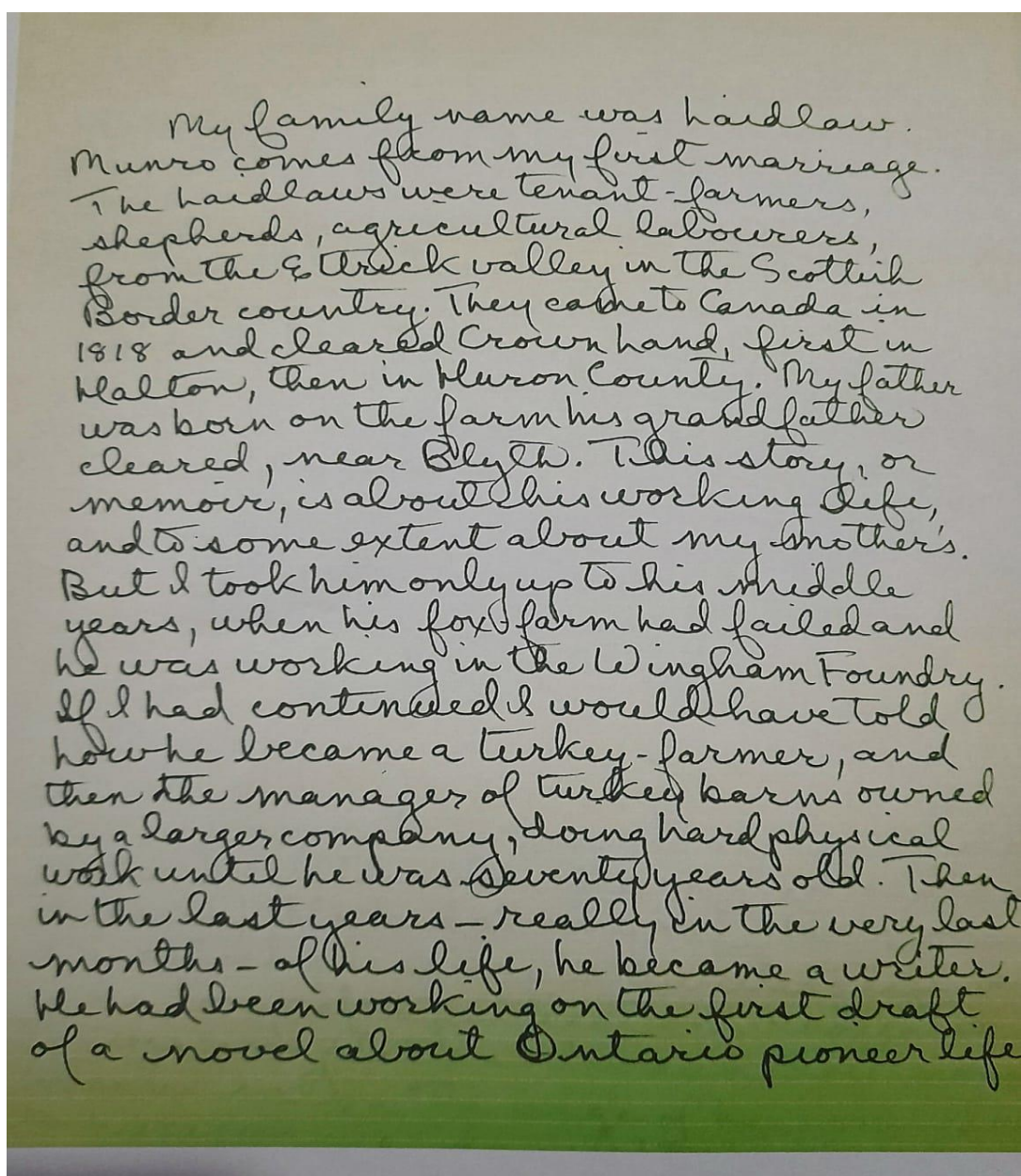
## Annexure 5

### Select Archival Papers from Alice Munro Fonds, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada

#### Item 1

Munro, Alice. n.d. Alice Munro on the Laidlaws. MS C-37, Alice Munro Fonds,  
University of Calgary Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta.

Handwritten note. Page 1

A photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper. The text is written in cursive and describes the family history of Alice Munro, specifically her father's background as a tenant-farmer and his later career as a writer.

My family name was Laidlaw.  
Munro comes from my first marriage.  
The Laidlaws were tenant-farmers,  
shepherds, agricultural labourers,  
from the Ettrick valley in the Scottish  
Border country. They came to Canada in  
1818 and cleared Crown land, first in  
Halton, then in Huron County. My father  
was born on the farm his grandfather  
cleared, near Blyth. This story, or  
memoir, is about his working life,  
and to some extent about my mother's.  
But I took him only up to his middle  
years, when his fox farm had failed and  
he was working in the Wingham Foundry.  
If I had continued I would have told  
how he became a turkey-farmer, and  
then the manager of turkey barns owned  
by a larger company, doing hard physical  
work until he was seventy years old. Then  
in the last years - really in the very last  
months - of his life, he became a writer.  
He had been working on the first draft  
of a novel about Ontario pioneer life



Handwritten note. Page 2

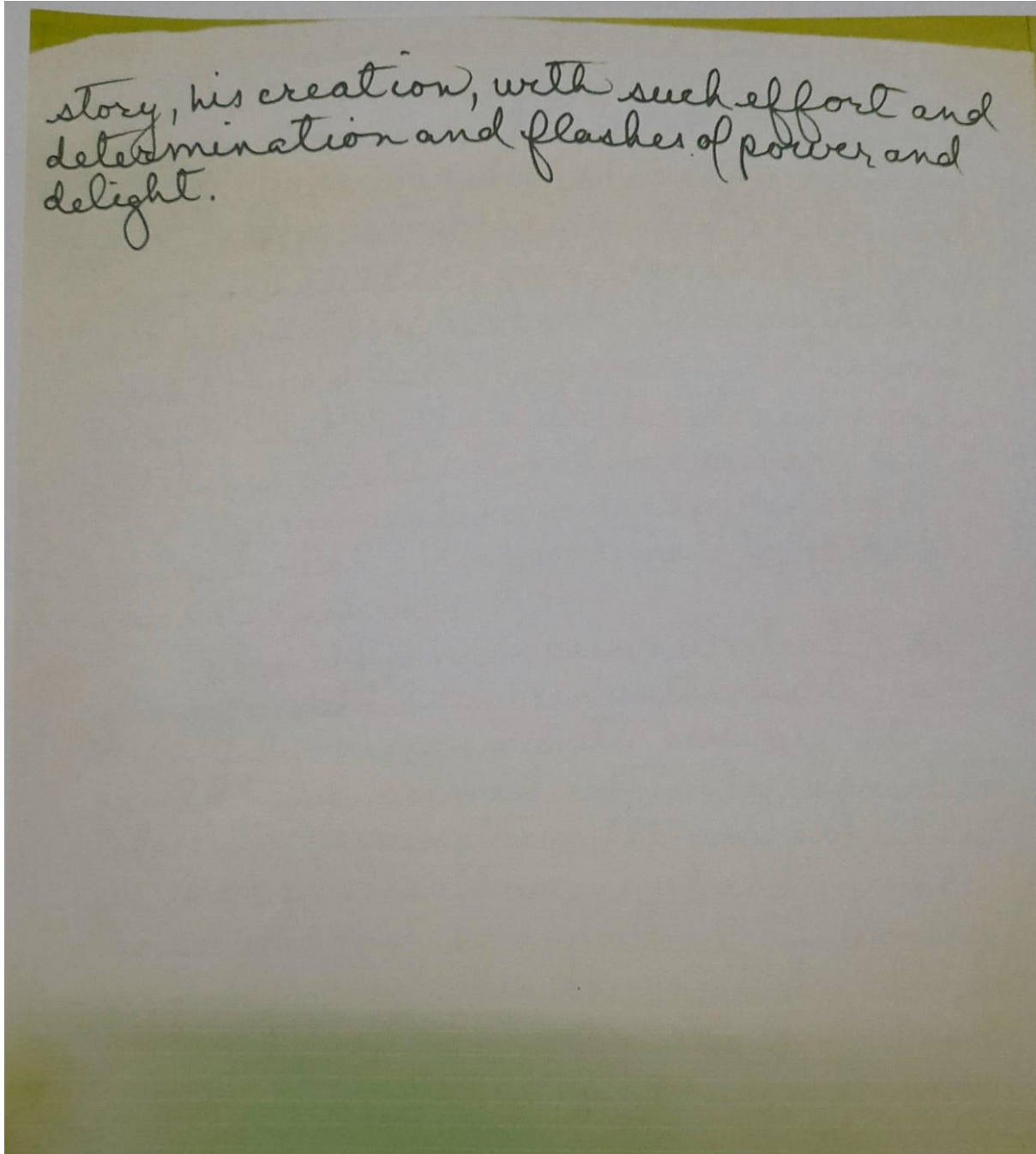
2

when he went into the hospital for a check on his worsening heart condition. He decided to have an operation, and went home for three weeks to await the surgeon's return from vacation. When I visited him in the hospital all he wanted to talk about was his characters, and ways he had thought of to strengthen his book. During the three weeks he had left he produced a second draft that I read with astonishment after his death. He had made a wonderful leap, in organization, in grasp, in love of his material. His book The MacGregors, was published in 1979.

Should he have been a writer? The choice would have been unthinkable, in his family, his community, his time. It would have seemed unmanly, impractical, indecently presumptuous. (It was possible for me because I was a girl and a girl's choice was not so important, it would all be forgotten when she married and had children) He had at any rate the moments of greatest pleasure in a writer's life, which come long before publication, vindication, or even completion. I mean those moments when he sat on the edge of his hospital bed in his pyjamas and caught hold of his

Munro, Alice. n.d. Alice Munro on the Laidlaws. MS C-37, Alice Munro Fonds, University of Calgary Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta.

Handwritten note. Page 3



story, his creation, with such effort and determination and flashes of power and delight.

## Item 2

Munro, Alice.1977. Elizabeth II, Queen of the United Kingdom. Box 2, File 13, Alice Munro Fonds, University of Calgary Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. (Reference Code: CA ACU SPC F0012-S0001-FL0043)

Certificate for the Silver Jubilee Medal awarded by the Queen, duly signed by Jules Leger, Governor General of Canada

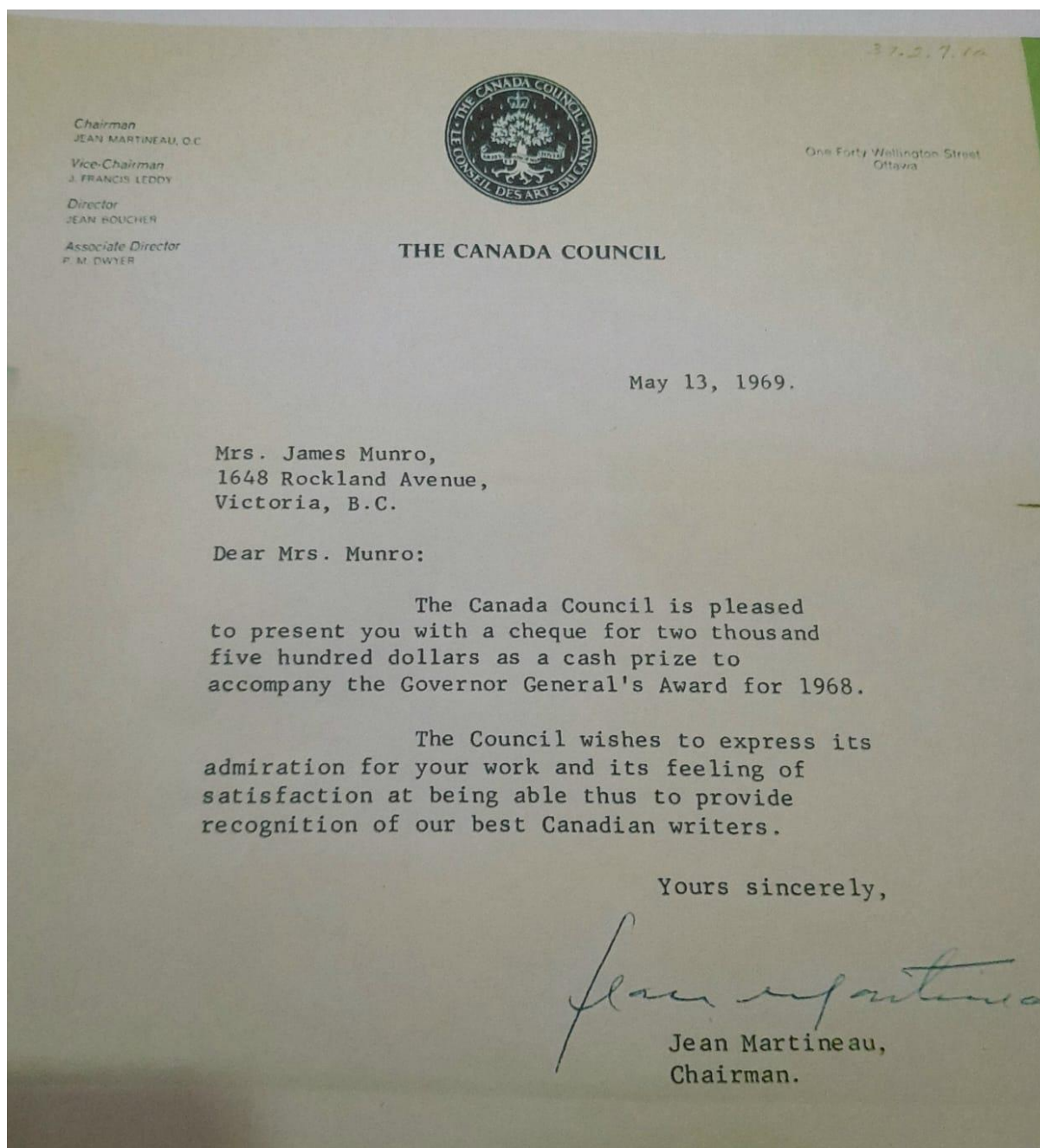




### Item 3

Munro, Alice. 13 May, 1969. Canada Council. Box 2, File 7, Alice Munro Fonds, University of Calgary Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. (Reference Code: CA ACU SPC F0012-S0001-FL0037)

Letter on being awarded the Governor General Literary Award (1968)

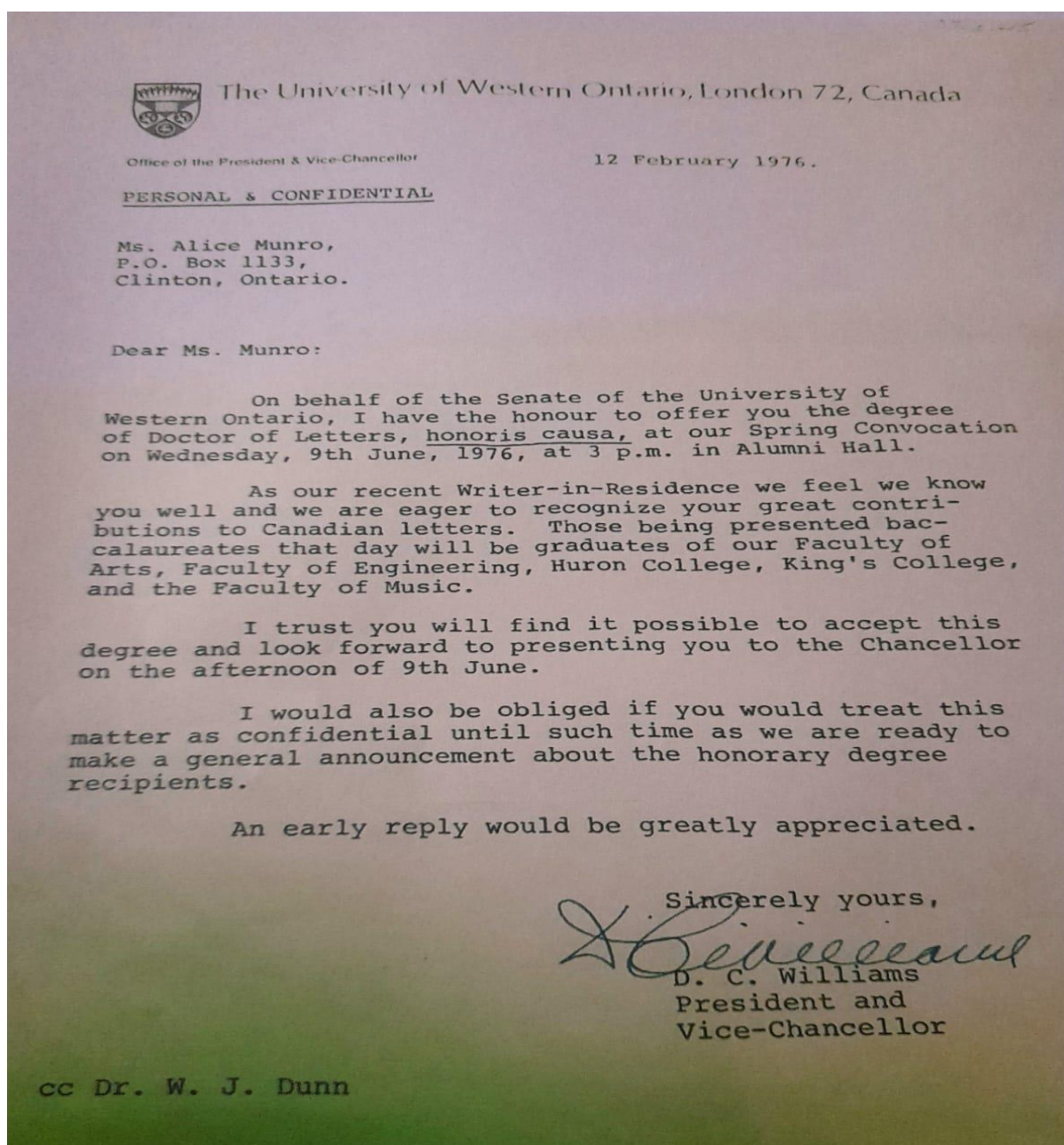




Item 4

Munro, Alice. February 12, 1976. University of Western Ontario. Box 2, File 45,  
Alice Munro Fonds, University of Calgary Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta.  
(Reference Code: CA ACU SPC F0012-S0001-FL0075)

Letter conferring the degree of Doctor of Letters, signed by D. C. Williams, President and Vice-  
Chancellor of University of Western Ontario



Item 5

Munro, Alice. n.d. Weaver, Robert. Box 1, File 29, Alice Munro Fonds, University of Calgary Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. (Reference Code: CA ACU SPC F—12-S0001-FL0029)

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

351 Jarvis Street,  
Toronto,  
November 27th

Dear Alice:

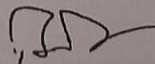
Our letters crossed, and this time I do seem to have been nagging. I'm sorry I bothered you about the Canada Council when you were in a state.

I wasn't entirely surprised by your letter because I've sensed for a long time some kind of strain. I don't know whether I ever told you, but I grew up with a widowed mother, sister, step-sister; widowed grandmother and spinster aunt across the street; and four spinster aunts in Toronto. It made me sensitive to the way women feel, though it doesn't seem to have taught me how to work out my problems with women very successfully.

Anyway, I wasn't too surprised. I think it's probably a good idea not to try me as a cross-country psychiatrist, but if you ever have to, I'll do my best to give you some kind of adequate response. I wish I could get to Vancouver, and I'm going to try to manage a visit in the spring. Right now, however, my mother, who has been a senility patient in hospital for ten years, is dying of cancer. But because she is so old and frail, it moves slowly, and no one knows how long it is really going to take for her to die. It seems foolish to get a trip from the CBC to the West Coast if I might have to turn right around and come back. My sister is getting over a breakdown (at least I hope she is) but not working very regularly. And in the midst of all this, my own problems sit static and unresolved.

I don't tell you all this to depress you; it's sometimes rather grimly cheering to know that other people are in a mess. You mentioned the difficulty of talking about it when things were bad. If you're like me, you may have a reaction a few months later when you're through the worst - just a warning from my weight of years and having some pretty lurid reactions two or three times when the dust was settled somewhat!

I guess you know that I'm fond of you for yourself as well as because of your writing. Let me know if there's anything I can ever do (we'll try the Council again), and I hope things improve. Work is a great help, I find. Do I sound fatherly now? As ever,



Robert Weaver

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