Narrative and counter narrative as positions in the literary field of Indian writing

This is a draft version to give an idea of the paper, it lacks references and elaboration in some places. Not to be quoted.

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On August 28, 2011, Anna Hazare end his hunger strike at Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi, as legislation is passed that is aimed at reducing corruption by Indian state officials and bureaucrats. Hazare's action was directed against an earlier bill that left large parts of lower bureaucracy and politics untouched and restricted the mandate of Lokpal officers (ombudsmen) struck a chord in Indian society. Amidst the most intense political turmoil of the last decades, Hazare started his 'indefinite fast' demanding stricter legislation and more power for the ombudsmen regarding corruption by public officers of all ranks.

The movement around Hazare's action mobilized a large number of peoples and brought to light the strong discontent with the gradual decline of moral standards in Indian government and politics. The hard-handed way in which Hazare's action was handled by the government, his arrest and the attempt to prevent him from carrying out the fast reinforced this resentment. In the eyes of many, democracy was abused to cover up the deeply rooted corruption of the political system. Strong language was used, as Hazare called his plea a second fight for Independence and his arrest and subsequent efforts by the government to restrict his 'indefinite fast' were compared with the Emergence of 1975, the darkest days of Indian Independence. Others sympathized with Hazare's objectives but had strong doubts about his claims which bypassed the democratic system and his claim at an absolute right to impose his opinion.

This remarkable period in recent Indian history made headlines all over the world. The reports of Hazare's action, consciously or not, did not fail to notice its ideological nature. This aspect makes Hazare's fast an interesting starting point for an investigation of the rhetorical and literary modes for representing resistance and counter-narrative in Indian writing.

The New York Times reported in the following manner on the ending of Hazare's fast:

By JIM YARDLEY
Published: August 27, 2011

NEW DELHI — India's Parliament capitulated on Saturday to the anticorruption campaigner Anna Hazare and the hundreds of thousands of people who took to the streets to support his cause in a standoff that lasted nearly two weeks.

After a day of wrangling and speechifying, Parliament adopted a resolution endorsing Mr. Hazare's central demands for shaping legislation to create an independent anticorruption agency empowered to scrutinize public officials and bureaucrats in India.
Mr. Hazare, 74, has been waging a hunger strike for 12 days, refusing to call it off unless Parliament adopted his proposed legislation to fight graft rather than a bill put forward by the government. Huge crowds of supporters have participated in peaceful protests and rallies across India in what became an outpouring of public disgust over corruption.

After Parliament accepted some of his demands in a nonbinding "sense of the house" vote, Mr. Hazare ended his fast on Sunday, accepting a glass of juice from a 5-year-old girl, according to The Associated Press.
On Saturday night at the public grounds in New Delhi where Mr. Hazare had been fasting, thousands of his supporters started rejoicing, even as lawmakers were finishing their speeches in Parliament.

"There is a need of a change in the system," said Pranab Mukherjee, the powerful minister who introduced the resolution into the Lok Sabha, the lower house. "And we are doing so."

Consciously or not, Yardley's report of Hazare's fast and its positive outcome conveys the large momentum created by this campaign and contains all the elements that frame it within a well known scenario in the history of Indian politics. The hunger strike, the 'peaceful protest and rallies', and the 'public disgust over corruption' reflect the almost theatrical nature of the events. Even from this outsider's perspective, it is not hard to distinguish how Hazare's action re-enacts a formative moment in India's history: the non-violent protests and hunger strike, the *satyagraha* by Mahatma Gandhi. Hazare appropriated the notion that a demand made in this manner cannot lightly be ignored by formal authorities. The *vrata* is therefore the ultimate of resistance, the offer that cannot be refused without severe loss to the order of the universe, which was recognized distinctively by those who opposed Hazare's action or at least questioned his methods. Behind every enactment in the immanent realm of politics is the shadow of the ultimate *vrata* with which Parvati won the heart

of Shiva. This background lends the *vrata* its exceptional, transcendent authority as an action that represents the absolute truth, which needs no further justification and against which there is no resistance.

The narrative of Hazare 's fast contains more elements that make it suitable for an analysis of the rhetoric of resistance in Indian culture. The evil of corruption is a very real nuisance in the lives of many, who cannot escape having to deal with India's bureaucracy. It destroys a sense of justice and righteousness and thus eats away that Indian civil society from within. The onslaught of corruption on the morals of basically good civil servants is the topic of many narratives in Indian literature, such as Premcand's *Namak ka Daroga* and many other works.

Corruption is a problem with wide implications and dimensions. Hazare's protests mobilized so many as corruption can easily be read as an evil of modernity, the sign of the *Kali-yuga*, which destroys even the most honest souls as they become entangled in the machine of anonymous, disjointed, bureaucratic power in which the traditional checks and balances do no loner operate. It can be constructed in such a manner that it stands for everything that is wrong with modern life, in which the authenticity of the community and the moral purity attached to that have got lost. In Gandhi's rhetoric, which obviously is an important inspiration for a moral appeal and the kind of political action staged by Hazare, this imagined purity is located in the Indian village.

Yardley's report has all the hallmarks of a palimpsest of this great narrative: as it speaks of '...peaceful protests and rallies across India...' and the '...outpouring of public disgust over corruption.', evoking the enthusiasm and activist vigour that fueled the independence movement.

The apotheosis of Hazare's strike as described in the report follows the scenario laid out for such an event: as the fasting is maintained it, the authorities against which the claim is made gradually become aware that they cannot come out victorious in this contest. The hunger striker has the moral high ground and a solution has to be found to prevent an apocalyptic end to the threat to the order of things. Having the death of a hunger striker on your hands is not a situation any government wants to find itself in.

This means that a settlement has to be reached; the establishment acknowledges the claim, even takes over the resolution of the activist, going over to the 'good' side and laying the blame on 'others' who do not posses similar civil and moral stamina. This also heralds a new dawn, putting behind them a past that was wrong, but ignorant of its vices, invoking 'change' and a new era.

Yardley's report of the ending of Hazare's contains all the elements of the scenario of the enactment of the *vrata* as an act of non-violent political action. The outpout of public support, the reluctant attitude of the authorities why try desperately to control the situation and avoid stepping into a scenario in which they can only come out the losers; the gradual emaciation of the protester and the tug of war to reach a solution in which both avoid loss of face, which eventually end in the inevitable settlement. The authorities acknowledge the protester's claim and even take over his resolution and his indignation. Members of parliament switch to the 'good' side and lay the blame on 'others' who do not posses similar civil courage. They defuse the protester's hold on the course of events by proclaiming that this is the dawn of a new era, where the vices of the old will be remedied. They put behind them a past that was wrong, taking over the situation and re-establishing the old order of things, until the next challenge.

> "There is a need of a change in the system," said Pranab Mukherjee, the powerful minister who introduced the resolution into the Lok Sabha, the lower house. "And we are doing so."

The enactment of the *vrata* and the predictable scenario that unfolds in order to deal with this intrusion of a transcendent moral in the immanent, imperfect world, obtains all the characteristics of a ritual act. The example of Gandhi's *satyagrah* and its foundational role in the narrative of the formation of the nation gave non-violent political action its special status and elevated it into an irrefutable claim backed up by a sense of absolute moral right. The elevated status of the scenario that unfolds in every instance of a *vrata* or *satyagrah* makes it powerful and weak at the same time, as the narrative of such political action is very easily transformed in its own counter narrative. Given the fact that there all who participate in the ritual know that it sanctifies act that are not as disinterested as they same, the chain of events that make up this narrative can easily be presented in a satirical manner.

Even Hazare's action, which was by many felt as a beacon of hope in the gradual decline of political moral and the dissolution of the state as intended by its founders, fits a mold that can easily be destabilized and made to loose its gravity. Hindi writing contains a large number of satirical representations in which the act of fasting in order to gain concessions from political superiors is a favorite topic. Examples of this can be found in a series of Premcand stories which feature the luckless pandit Moteram, exposing the double morale of brahminical purity and authority. An adaptation of the story *Moteram ka satyagrah* by Arvind Gaur is a big hit on the Delhi stage.

An interesting example of the satire on the political culture of post Independence India can

be found in the work of Harishanka Parsai (1924-1995). It is remarkable how his satire on the political ritual of the fast *Das din ka Anshan* closely follows the steps distinguished above in the reports on Hazare's action. Parsai's perspective is that of the common man, who feels he is entitled to get his demands met by undertaking fast. the same. From a ritual of state formation by resistance, the *vrata* has become *gesunkenes Kulturgut*. Parsai's story starts with a dialogue between the narrator and a character named Bannu who has been after Savitri, the wife of Radhika Babu.[1]

A Ten Day Fast

10 January

Today I said to Bannu, "Look here, Bannu, nothing works these days —the parliament, the judges, the bureaucracy, nothing. Today all major demands are gained only through threats of fasts and self-immolation. Our democracy is twenty years old now and is so finely tuned that the threat of just one man starving or killing himself can seal the fate of millions of people. Now's the time you too went on an indefinite fast — for that woman."

Bannu remained silent. For sixteen years he has been after Radhika Babu's wife, Savitri. Once he even got badly roughed up when he tried todrag her away. Bannu can't get her to leave her husband and live with him because Savitri hates even the sight of his face.

Finally, after some thought, Bannu said, "But can one go on a fast over such a matter?"

"You can fast for anything these days," I replied. "Just recently Baba Sankidas went on a fast and got a new law passed which requires people to grow long hair but never shampoo. Now everyone has a stinking head. Compared to it, your demand is a mere trifle. You only want that woman."

"What're you talking about!" Surendra, who had been listening to us, spoke up. "Go on a fast to grab someone else's wife? you should be ashamed of yourself. We'll be the laughing stock of the neighbourhood."

"Look," I tried to explain, "even great sadhus and saints didn't feel ashamed when they went on a fast, so what's the big fuss about us common folks? As for people laughing at us, they've laughed so much at the Cow Protection Movement that they can't laugh any more. Even if they were to try, they'd only cry out in pain. In fact, for the next ten years, none will dare to laugh lest he kills himself.

"But will it work?" Bannu asked. "That depends on how you set up the issue. If the issue is set up well you'll get your woman." I then added, "Let's go to an expert and get his advice. Baba Sankidas is your man. He has quite a thing going these days. Right now he has four men fasting

1 The translation quoted here is by C.M. Naim, who published a volume of translations of satirical short stories by Harishankar Parsai, with an introduction by Vishnu Khare, New Delhi: Katha 2004, pp. 18-24.

under his directions."

This is followed by a day by day account of Bannu's fast. Swami Rasanand explains how Bannu was a sage in a fomer life, who was married to Savitri. They should be reunited again. Swamiji's words make Bannu's fast into a fight for *dharma*. His supporters shout 'Victory to dharma' and pressurize Radhika Babu to give up his wife. Bannu's demand is take to the Prime Minister, who states that it is beyond his jurisdiction. After clever manipulating by Baba Sankidas, who staged the fast and orchestrated the public uprising, the government gives in:

> 21 January
>
> The government has accepted Bannu's demand in principle. A committee has been set up to resolve procedural problems.
>
> Amidst loud singing of bhajans and prayers, Baba Sankidas offered a glass of orange juice to Bannu. Baba declared, "In a democracy public opinion has to be respected. This issue involved the sentiment of millions of people. It's good that it was resolved peacefully, otherwise, a violent revolution could have taken place."
>
> The man from the Brahmin Sabha has made a deal with Bannu. Bannu will campaign on his behalf in the next general elections. He has also given Bannu plenty of money. Bannu's price has gone up.
>
> To the hundreds of men and women who come to touch his feet in adoration, Bannu says, "What happened was god's wish. I was merely his medium."People are shouting — "Victory to Truth!" "Victory to Dharma!"

Parsai's story is full of references to the abuse of religious authority in the political arena and the way all parties involved; brahmins, the state, the lower castes make use of the situation to gain from the claim made by the fasting Bannu. His satire is full of humor but has a serious undertone as it comments on the dysfunction of the state and the decline of its underpinning ideological values.

Parsai was know for his satires but was also regarded a serious literary author. The style of his satire shows his literary skills, as characters are fully worked out and their transgression of the sacred or of bureaucratic rules becomes more than caricature. It bares the hypocrisy of power and destabilizes the dominant narrative of the state and religion in a touching and insightful manner. His satire is reminiscent of Premcand's *Moteram* stories and other critical writings, but with a different kind of acumen. Unlike Premcand, he does not judge the characters in an ideological sense, but just shows the reversal of the values attached to formal, outward authority.

In the excellent introduction to C.M. Naim's translation of some of Parsai's stories, the author, critic and translator Vishnu Khare (b. 1940) describes how this corpus was part of a flourish of satirical writing in post-Independence Hindi writing. There is a sincere sense of resistance in Parsai's choice of satire. He was a convinced Marxist who choose a career as a schoolteacher to get away from the corruption that plagued the forest department where he first worked. His satire should therefore be read as stemming from the same disillusionment with the promise of freedom from colonial rule after 1947 that characterizes much of post-Independence writing in Hindi. In this manner, satire became an established stylistic device in modernist writing. An interesting example is Kamleshvar's memorable story *George pancham ke nak,* which is an intricate satire on the embarrassment of the government when, just before a state visit by the British queen, the nose on the statue of George V has gone missing. It takes a long and arduous search for a nose that fits the statue as no Indian nose is of the same size.

The example of Parsai's satire on the ritual of *satyagrah* should primarily be seen from a contextual perspective, which means against the background of the ideological frame of the Marxist authors and their protest against the social reality of post-Independence India. Yet, destabilizing the cultural or religious canon through satirizing is not a new phenomenon in Indian writing. Retelling stories that have a considerable cultural status with a slant or a different thematic emphasis which turns the sacred on its head is an ubiquitous practice in both Sanskrit and vernacular literature. The extent of these 'alternative' versions of stories from the epic or other parts of the cultural canon is such that it puts into question the very notion of a fixed core or canon of dominant narratives. Almost for wavery theme or substory of the *Ramayan* there is an alternative version in vernacular traditions.

The sociology behind this *rabelesque* deconstruction of the sacred or of the dominant narrative varies: it can sometimes be traced to the assertion of subaltern identities by subverting the supraregional narrative, or originate in a more horizontally oriented re-appropriation of stories in different ideological or religious contexts. In the light of this, the notion of a dominant narrative has given way to a much more diverse and randomized evolution of narrative traditions in the South Asian context.

The productivity of this form of re-creation through subversion and recontextualization is impressive, as a large part of the record of early modern literature consists of adaptations and innovation on familiar themes. Even relatively newcomers to the cultural field, such as early modern Sufi poets who wrote in the Indian vernaculars, rewrote Indian story-cycles or vernacular

romances in their *premakhyans*.[2]

Post-Independence writing in Hindi developed in a particular time-frame and took much of its thematical content from its specific context. It has been argued successfully that the notion that it copied Western literary modes of realist writing and steered away from the cultural heritage of Indian traditions is a simplification. The hybrid literary idiom of Nayi Kahani authors or contemporaries such Nirmal Verma or Krishna Baldev Vaid[3] is rich with elements that refer to a wider background of Indian narrative traditions and cultural patterns. This is not an argument for a cultural essentialism based on a 'Hindu' heritage, as the most important influence in modern Indian writing comes from the esthetics Urdu writing. The adoption of western literary stylistic writing is a tool in a complex expressive idiom in which there is more than an echo of earlier literary modes and cultural paradigms. The resistance of realism against idealist writing in Hindi is in itself a form of resistance of a new generation which uses the old paradigm of mimicry of counter narrative. It can be safely said that layering western literary modes into an existing composite literary mode represent in some respects a continuation of the notion of counter narrative by retelling the 'old story' with a new thematic emphasis, in a context. It is a matter of further research to deconstruct this literary idiom in order to see what it actually mimics or recontextualizes. It could well be that Nayi Kahani and other modernist authors transformed a literary diction that was established strongly in Urdu writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[4] If we come back to Parsai's satire, it seems safe to say that, although this is primarily to be read from its own context, the slanting of prominent narratives, the parodying and upturning of the sacred is just as productive in his satirical work as in earlier Indian writing.

Beyond post-independence writing

How can the observations on the drivers of Parasi's satires be take further and applied in later Hindi writing, beyond the fallout of Partition? Nayi Kahani dominated the scene of Hindi writing for long after its period of greatest flourish, the late fifties and sixties. Even today the trenches of literary criticism still echo the issues that were hot in these days: the debate on what Indian literature should be, whose ideology or whose reality it should represent and what constitutes a truly Indian literary

2 See e.g. De Bruijn, *Ruby in the Dust: History and poetry in Padmavat by the South Asian Sufi poet Muhammad Jayasi*. Leiden: Leiden University Press 2012.

3 See, in this respect, the work of Anne Castaing who showed how Vaid's work layers Indian esthetical and philosophical concept with high realist literary modes.

4 This general remark rests on earlier research by the present author into the reversal of cultural symbols in modernist Hindi fiction, some of this is not yet published. See De Bruijn 1999.

esthetic. The resistance and protest of this generation of authors real and genuine but did it really aim to destabilize the dominant cultural canon or the power structure of the young Indian nation. It is safer to infer that this form of writing took its cue from the social reality around it. Its focus was rather to find a literary idiom to describe the experience of the Nehruvian era. Even satire in this context does not break away entirely from the values that it critiqued. Paradoxically, one has to belief in the sacred to turn it on its head.

Where Nayi Kahani turned away from the social reality, it plays with symbols of renunciation, *tyag* or *sannyas,* a valid idiom in Indian culture to mark the domain of the individual outside society, beyond the sacred or the mundane. This is a genuine and valid form of resistance that provides a very strong mode of counter narrative, the radical dismissal of the cultural and social codes. The present panel will deal with this mode in other forms, such as in experimentalist poetry in Hindi at the beginning of the twentieth century. This poetry broke with the classical poetical modes or the romantic conventions of Urdu poetry and found a new idiom to express a personal quest for identity in a modern world.

In earlier sessions of this panel, the question has been raised how more recent forms of protest writing, such as the works of Dalit authors, connect with the modes and stylistics of dominant, mainstream Indian writing. The latter, especially the modernist writing of angry young men in the fifties and sixties represents a critique of and rebellion against a cultural value system to which the Dalit authors claim access. This creates an almost unbridgeable ideological gap between the two. The resistance and critique in this kind of fiction is not of a *rabelesque* nature, it is oriented at documenting violence, humiliation and the eventual emancipation of its protagonists.

Some of this writing adopts a more literary mode which makes it come closer to *savarna* writing. There, the oppression of outcastes is represented by showing how the victims live a life in which the basic decorum and sacredness of Indian society cannot be maintained. This uses the norms of mainstream society as a contrast of the life of the outcastes. This stylistic practice contains an element of building a counter narrative. This aspect is much stronger in stories that feature the Dalit movement's acceptance of Buddhism and the veneration of Ambedkar as an alternative religious canon and a challenge of the dominant Hindu cultural canon.

The orientation of the Dalit movement towards social acceptance makes that it is reluctant to advocate a break away from the system. Its counter narrative paints a picture of a part of society that is denied access to the social system and actively suppressed. In these circumstances, the escape from the social fabric into a renunciatory individualism is no valid option, which keeps the

protagonists locked in a subaltern position. Only when Dalit authors look back from a distance at their earlier predicament and their struggle to make use of the few chances of escape into a position in mainstream society, there is room for a more individualist reflection. In the works of accomplished Dalit authors, such a Surajpal Cauhan or Om Prakash Valmiki, Dalit protagonists are characterized in a more complex manner allowing for some distance between the character's personal emotions and the social position that determines much of his environment and perspective.

As Hindi writing moves away from its formative period after Partition and Independence, its literary idiom has developed along various lines. The idiom of Nayi Kahani and the focus on emotions and realistic modes of narration has remained strong, but it is invested in a depiction that is less locked in by the ideology of resistance or rejection of the harshness of modernity than by a more reflective quest for meaning and identity. Authors such as Geetanjali Shree, Sara Ray, Vinod Kumar Shukla or Kunal Simha allude to earlier stylistic programs but explore the personal rather than the social space. They have moved forward, beyond the anxieties that plagued earlier generations, but keeping the composite idiom in which western high realism and the expressive possibilities of Indian literary esthetics work together.

Does this mean that the sense of resistance is completely dissolved in this new kind of writing? If one monitors the vehement ideological battles that still inspire literary criticism, the answer must be negative. A large number of authors and critics that were prominent in the sixties and seventies are still active and exert their influence through editorships or other prominent positions in the field of Indian writing. The result of this is a largely repetitive discourse in which questions of national identity and current political polarisation leads creates a somewhat artificial acumen and sense of resistance.

The writing that turns inwards in a more literary and less ideological manner is largely disconnected from this critical discourse. It seems to continues a strand of introspection that has existed in different forms in modern Indian writing and is less influenced by the nationalist ideologies that were very strong in the field of Hindi writing. It has been there in the more experimentalist writing of the later Premcand, in the works of Upendranath Ashk, and also in Urdu writing, in the generation that came in the wake of the *Angarem* group by authors such as Ismat Chugtai or Rajinder Singh Bedi. This kind of writing is less anxious to mix Indian stylistic elements with influences from western narrational traditions such as Russian literature.

Manto's counter narrative

The context of Urdu seems important here as it also includes the works of Sa'adat Hassan Manto, which feature a remarkable sense of resistance and counter narrative in which various other modes, such as parody, the retelling with a slant that we have seen in earlier Indian writing, satire and a deep existentialist individualism come together. Brilliant examples of this composite mode are to be found in Naya Qanun and Toba Tek Singh, in which the individual who struggles with or rebels against suppression is still embedded within a recognizable social environment but is not fully defined by it as in ideologically oriented fiction in which the documentation of social reality supersedes full characterization. The resistance of Manto's protagonists in the stories mentioned is also not of the escapist, almost renunciatory kind as is fully developed in the more introspective authors of the Nayi Kahani era. Manto's protagonists are caught in the alienating changes and uncertainties modernity brings to ordinary people. They are portrayed as they try to get to terms with this predicament and are not spared by the author. His fiction is ideologically much more nihilist than the later Nayi Kahani stories; his protagonists have to make do with their limitations as they face the challenges of a world where the existing cultural and social fabric is disintegrating. This disintegration shows especially as the protagonists get more and more out of touch with the reality around them. Their alienation makes that their acts start to form a counter narrative to the 'real' world, although paradoxically, this further emphasizes the latter's getting out of jointy.

Parody or satire are too strong to describe the subtle dislocation Manto describes in his stores. A very accomplished example are his Partition stories such as *Toba Tek Singh*. But also in earlier stories this form of counter narrative is present, such as in *Naya Qanun*. In this respect it is interesting to look at the characterisation of Mangu, the protagonist of *Naya Qanun*. He is introduced in the first lines of the story as follows:

> The coach-driver Mangu was considered an intelligent man in his station. While his educational record was almost non-existent, and he had never seen even the front of a school, he had knowledge of things all over the world. All drivers who had a desire to know what went on in the world were well aware of Ustad Mangu's universal knowledge.

Mangu is a pretty regular character, whose only peculiarity is that he constructs 'knowledge' on current affairs based on shards of conversation overheard from his customers. He then spreads these constructs around in his station as news to which only he is initiated. One day, he overhears two Marwari businessmen discuss the Government of India Act, from which Mangu deducts that the end of British rule is nearing. The new Act will come into force on the 1st of April . When he goes out into the streets on that day, anxious for signs of the new rule, in which the British are no longer in charge, he comes across a British former

customer, who used to be harass Mangu when he was drunk. Believing he can now settle the score, he picks a fight with the Englishman. When he is arrested by police officers, he is still convinced the law is on his side now:

> The police officers brought Ustad Mangu into the station. On the way to it and inside the station he kept on shouting 'There is a new law; there is a new law!' but no one understood himl. 'A new law, a new law, what are you blabbing about – it is still the same old law.' Then they threw him in prison.

The postcolonial counter narrative

Naya Qanun more or less paves the way for the more sinister *Toba Tek Singh* and its protagonist's madness in the refugee camps after Partition. This story uses the same form of counter narrative in which the protagonist constructs a world that should have been, but is 'fooled' by the folly of the world around him. Although predating the explosion of post-Independence modernist writing in Hindi, the concept of counter narrative in Manto's work almost seems to point ahead to a moment in Indian writing that postdates Nayi Kahani and other currents in Post-Independence Hindi writing. The thematic and esthetic framework for Manto's counter narrative connect with elements that are currently found in Anglo-Indian postcolonial writing. His use of a disjointed protagonist, who represents through the narrative of his own predicament a counter narrative of a broken and absurd modernity, is not completely alien to the kind of resistance against western cultural oppression described in the paradigm of the 'Empire writing back' or the hermeneutics developed by Homi Bhabha and other postmodern thinkers who emphasize the use of mimicry and parody as drivers of the destabilization of a dominant colonist's narrative.

It is odd that writing in the Indian vernaculars is largely excluded from the canon on which the postmodern postcolonial discourse is based, and that it is presumed that the South Asian colonial experience was expressed exclusively in the colonist's language. Perhaps the only exception to this is the recent interest in the events of the Partition and its representation in writing in English and other Indian languages. It is perhaps understandable that post-Independence writing in Hindi remained under the radar of the postcolonial discourse. Although it is inspired by the trauma of Partition, its perspective is totally different from the Anglo-Indian authors as it documents experiences and emotional responses within Indian society, where the colonial oppression was not felt as the most important traumatic event. The focus on nationalist ideologies made that it rejected western influence vehemently, but from the perspective of the search of an Indian purity, not as a sign of cultural oppression. It was also much less caught in between cultures as the westernized

milieus were from which the first generation of Anglo-Indian authors came.

There is one momumental figure in Anglo-Indian fiction for whom this is only partially a valid explanation: Salman Rushdie. His literary roots are both in English literature (with an emphasis on satire!) as well as in Urdu writing and the cultural register of Indian Islam. Both his Satanic Verses as his latest works testify to his proximity to this part of South Asian literature. Salman Rushdie is also most likely to provide the link between the kind of counter narrative that is present in Manto, but has a longer pedigree in Indian writing and the paradigm of postcolonial and postmodern literary analysis. Manto's stories seem to provide much more ground for comparison with the humor and the literary techniques used in Rushdie's prose than mainstream post-Independence Hindi writing. This is not so remarkable after all, as the author of Midnight's Children grew up in a milieu where modern Urdu poets and prose writer were household names and family friends. It is not far fetched to see in Rushdie's satirical and allusive style many elements that have been mentioned earlier in this essay: the tendency to retell and reconstruct narrative elements, the exaggeration of magic realism that upturns the cultural canon and has become a hallmark of postmodern fiction, all of these elements are present and prominent in South Asia's modern and premodern literary traditions.

The emphasis on the resistance against colonial oppression and the dominance of a western cultural paradigm emphasised so strongly and singularly in postmodern literary hermeneutics has failed to a large extent to see how Anglo-Indian fiction forms part of a larger cultural field and literary framework. Some of it has to do with the fact that many of the literary sensibilities that connect Salman Rushdie to the Indian literary tradition are strongly connected with Urdu and its modern writing, which is a repertoire that has been all but effaced in the nationalist agenda of Hindi literary criticism. It may well be that this is also why it has been so underrated as a basis of modern Indian fiction, including its modes of counter narrative.

It goes too far to explore this connection much further in this space, but the above remarks should also caution the projection of the idiom of postcolonial counter narrative from the theories of Bhabha and other, with their focus on subalternity and resistance through destabilizing a dominant narrative, on a wide range of contemporary genres of counter narrative in South Asian writing. The presumption in this discourse that counter narrative is always a protest against a dominant cultural canon disregards the ambivalent position of much of South Asian fiction against any form of cultural canon and its inherent propensity for destablization by retelling and rephrasing. It is a simplification to see counter narrative and narrative as a binary, mutually exclusive opposition, as these positions are not fixed entities in the field of South Asian writing and, in continuous exchange

and alternation, defined the literary modes for 'writing back'.

Leiden, July 2012.