

## HINDI NOVELS BEFORE MUNSHI PREMCHAND

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### Abstract

*Traces of the Hindi novel can be found since 1800 to the the present where it is a very dynamic, experimentative and living. Premchand is the first significant novelist who provides Hindi novel an identity and direction. A specific change in characteristics is observed with his advent on the Hindi novel scenario. Thus the age from 1800 with the publication of Inshaallah Khan's Rani Ketki Ki Kahani and to the arrival of Premchand with his Sevasadan (1918) can be categorized as the age of the Hindi novel before Premchand. As the Hindi novel centres around Premchand, the preindependence Hindi novel can be further categorised as the age of Premchand (1918-1936) and Post-Premchand Hindi novel (1936-1947).*

**Keywords:** Hindi novel, fictional prose, Novelist, Pre-independence Nowels.



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**Discussion:** The first fictional prose work in the modern age, Inshaallah Khan's *Rani Ketki Ki Kahani* is a brief work primarily depicting the triumph of the love of Rani Ketki and prince Udebhan against parental opposition. Shyamsunderdas presumes that this work was written by Inshaallah Khan around 1800 A.D. In the introduction he further states that presumably this story was written between samvant 1856 and 1865. The writer is conscious of his setting a new precedent of Hindi prose, or is rather laying the very foundation of Hindi prose. Prince Udebhan and princess Ketki fall in love with each other and wish to be married. The parents of Udebhan agree but the parents of Rani Ketki consider the status of the dynasty of Udebhan inferior and not fit for their daughter. Raja Surajbhan wages a war on the kingdom of Rani Ketki's father that is on the kingdom of Raja Jagatprakash. Raja Jagatprakash sends a message of distress to his guru Gosain Mahender Gir, who resides on the Kailash Parvat along with his devotees. Coming to his rescue the guru wrecks havoc on the army of Raja Surajbhan through a strong dust storm, hailstorm and locusts. He even

curses the family and transforms them into deers. But Rani Ketki could not forget prince Udebhan and one day disappears from the palace by applying the magical ashes given by the guru. The disappearance of Rani Ketki brings a change of heart in her parents who ultimately reconcile to the wishes of their daughter. With the help of Raja Inder, Guru Mahender Gir transforms Udebhan and his parents to their original form and festivities of the marriage take place on a grand scale.

The language of the author is quite simple, lacking suspense in narrative. Thus, it is dry and resembling the essay. The only place where the writer has to some extent been able to raise some curiosity of the readers is when Mahender Gir is not in the position to trace Udebhan and his parents whom he had turned into deers. The failure of tracing Udebhan and his parents could lead to serious consequences to the extent of the marriage of Rani Ketki being stalled.

Prince Udebhan no specific change is found in them nor do we find them to grow from the beginning to the end of the work. The two restrictions that the writer imposed upon himself in his works are the non-usage of foreign words and the syntax similar to what we call Urdu.

Awadhi in the east, Brajbhasa in the central region and khadi boli in the West are the modern languages current in our province. Earlier Awadhi and Brajbhasa were employed for literary works while *khadi boli* was generally employed in the day to day conversations. Gradually *khadi boli* became popular for literary works and the usage of Awadhi and Brajbhasa declined. Shyamsunderdas credits Inshallah Khan for popularizing *khadi boli* by creating *Rani Ketki Ki Kahani* through the same medium. Thus, the credit of providing a literary form to modern Hindi prose, that is the beginning of the use of *khadi boli*, goes to Saiyyad Inshaallah Khan along with

Lallulal's *Premasagar* (1802) and Sadal Mishra's *Nasiketopakhyan* (1803).

Thus, *Rani Ketki ki Kahani* is a work belonging to the category of *Khari Boli* wherein its importance is not from literary point of view but from the aspect of the creation and the development of language. Published in the early years of the nineteenth century this work is undoubtedly an early illustration of Hindi prose. Not only that but because of its being the first narrative work the scholars even consider it to be the first story in Hindi. In fact, it is a prose narrative similar to Lallulal's *Premasagar* (1802) and Sadal Mishra's *Nasiketopakhyan* (1803).

Differing from the contemporary prose, the novelist in the exposition of the work itself reveals the traits of a novel. The prose works of the Pre- Premchand age, similar to *Udebhan Charita ya Rani Ketki Ki Kahani* and *Bhagyawati* begin with providing a lengthy introduction of the characters and presenting the incidents right from the birth of the protagonist and providing comprehensive details of the family background. But no such information is provided in this work and the mysteries too are revealed at an appropriate time and place. This task is dexterously handled by the novelist and he succeeds in raising the curiosity of the readers. The novelist does not reveal the traits of the principal character Brajkishor upto the one sixty eighth page of the novel. The craft conscious novelist thought it necessary to clarify in the *nivedan* the difference between the novel and the drama. The essential fact is that the novelist is conscious of the artistic style of the novel, which he may have adopted from the English novels. This awareness of artistic novelty too proves *Pariksha Guru* to be the first novel of the English type in Hindi.

Though *Pariksha Guru* is credited with being the first novel in Hindi, it does contain traces of drama and narratives. The maxims, idiomatic phrases and soliloquies of Brajkishor serve as illustration of the influence of the past on the new emerging literary form.

The comprehensive reading of the novelist is revealed through his extensive knowledge of history and literary works in English, Sanskrit, Persian and Urdu. As proof of his scholarship, the author quotes writers such as Lord Chesterfield, Shakespeare, Kabir and William Cowper and from works such as *Hitopdesha*, *Manusmruti*, and *Ramayana* among others. The writer, in the *nivedan* acknowledges his obligation of the epics and other literary writers and forms in achieving this feat of accomplishing the work.

The story is not narrated in a linear manner but the necessary changes have been made. Attempts have been made to make an authentic presentation of the nature of the characters and their mutual relationship. He was conscious from the very beginning regarding the language of conversation and the fictional delineation of characters among others. This is the very reason of its being considered the first novel in Hindi. '*Devrani Jethani Ki Kahani*' and '*Bhagyawati*' do not contain these elements of a novel. With abundance of instructions and directions, the work is idealistic from the renaissance point of view. Yet it creates a realistic impression in matters such as providing an authentic picture of the transitional Indian society, regarding the selection of the characters for the story and in the presentation of the appropriate language.

With all the works published upto *Shyamaswapna*, none achieved popularity that reached a wide section of society. It was only the publication of Devkinandan Khatri's *Chandrakanta* (1991), which created a sensation unprecedented in the realm of Hindi novels.

The novel *Chandrakanta* (1991), depicting a feudal setting with the state of Naugadh, presents the hero, Prince Virendra Singh possessing the medieval qualities of chivalry and being in love with the extremely beautiful and virtuous princess Chandrakanta. With an objective of making the work interesting and engrossing the novelist introduces several obstacles in their union. The father of Chandrakanta, the king of Vijaygadh, influenced by trivial measures of prestige and standing in society, is the first obstacle in their union. The other obstacles are Kroor Singh, the son of the minister in the court of the kingdom of Naugadh and Shivdutt Singh, the king of Chunar. It is only mutual interest that brings the reconciliation between Chandrakanta's father and Virendra Singh. Thus along with the depiction of the incidents of magic and deception (Tilisma and Aiyari), the incidents of the conflicts and the clashes among the neighbouring kingdom too raise curiosity and anxiety among the readers. *Chandrakanta* and *Chandrakanta Santati* present a chain of amazing and astonishing incidents of magic and deception. Regarding the chain of amazing and astonishing incidents of magic and deception.

The novelist without caring for cause and effect of incidents creates incidents and the readers keep flowing along with being astonished with the snares of the illusory world. These works contain an immense potential of astonishing the readers and this is their objective too. These incidents of Tilisma and Aiyari served as a spectacle for the readers. This trend was a change from the earlier reformation works presenting the realistic social issues. Defending the depiction of the Tilisma and Aiyari incidents,

The rationality of the arguments by the novelist regarding the authenticity of the incidents is not important. Important is that an early novelist understands that a novel is not a fairy tale and does not resort to a free-play of his imagination. The novelist violating this fact and depicting divine incidents will be responsible to the readers regarding their justification. Thus the novelist resorts to such devices that create an illusion of authenticity. The lack of relevant sub-plots can be considered a drawback of *Chandrakanta*. But this drawback is not perceived because of the presence of large number of characters and incidents which successfully keep the readers engrossed with their activities and development. The novel *Chandrakanta* is in itself complete but *Chandrakanta Santati* an extension of *Chandrakanta* in twenty-four

volumes, cannot be comprehended without going through Chandrakanta as all its major characters are present upto the last twenty-fourth volume.

Basically *Chandrakanta* and *Chandrakanta Santati* are incident dominated works. The novelist doesn't pay much attention to characterization. It presents persons and not characters that can be given any name. Thus it is difficult to differentiate one character from another. All their action is removed from reality and is imaginary. The characters here are created to suit the requirements of the incidents and not vice versa. In fact this is character narration or ready made construction of characters but not characterization. The characters are static and go through no change or transformation from the beginning of the work to its end. They lack individuality or any trait that can term them as round characters. According to the will of their creator they exhibit their evil and virtuous qualities and are either entirely evil or entirely virtuous. The nature of the conduct of the characters is even not with an objective of providing entertainment to the readers. This objective is fulfilled by the strange incident of *Tilisma* and *Aiyari* (magic and deception). In spite of the characterization of the novel being its drawback the novel succeeds in achieving popularity among the readers. Analyzing the reason of the popularity of these flat characters among the readers.

Though the hero and the heroine belong to the royal class, their character portrayal is based on the incidents that depict unrestrained love and chivalry. Thus attracting the masses towards them.

Almost at the end of the age of the Hindi novel before Premchand arrives Mehta Lajjaram Sharma's *Aadarsha Hindu* (1915). Like Shradhdharam Fillori's *Bhagyawati* and Lala Srinivasdas' *Pariksha Guru*, Mehta Lajjaram Sharma's *Aadarsha Hindu* (1915) is another didactic work of the Pre-Premchand Hindi age. Just as Shradhdharam Fillori's *Bhagyawati* is influenced by the social reformation taking place in the nineteenth century, *Aadarsha Hindu* is influenced by the contemporary *Sanantan dharma*. This work depicts the influence of the Sanatan dharma on this age. The work is also a fine specimen of the resistance to the social reformation taking place in the Indian society during the Pre-Premchand age.

The novelist proposes to emphasize the significance of Hindu religion, eradicate the evils in Hindu society and to create a healthy and virtuous society based on the beliefs of *Sanantan dharma*. To fulfill this objective the writer presents the work in a manner of a travelogue. The male and the female protagonist are on a pilgrimage and visiting places of religious

significance such as Kashi, Gaya, and Prayag among others. The experiences of this couple during the pilgrimage form the novel *Aadarsha Hindu*.

The writer touches upon a wide range of issues concerning Hinduism from evil practices at places of pilgrimage, significance of religious traditions and customs, superiority of Hindu religion and customs, Hindi language, untouchability and economic condition of rural artisans among others. Rather it has been the writers attempt to touch upon almost all the contemporary issues relating to Hinduism. This has made the work artificial and highly didactic. But one cannot deny the sincere efforts of the writer in attempting to present the incidents in a natural manner as if naturally cropping up from the incidents occurring in the work.

The novelist attempts to expose the ritual performing pundits in Prayag cheating innocent public. The novelist also emphasizes the significance of being vegetarian. If a pandit cites shastras permitting the Hindus to intake fish, Pandit Priyanath, the mouthpiece of the novelist quotes *Manusmruti* that strictly prohibits consuming food by taking life of a living creature.

The merit achieved by performing hundred Ashwamedha yajna is not above the merit achieved by abstaining from consuming flesh...It is the order of the sages that the creature whose flesh is consumed in this world will intake the flesh of his eater in the other world. The novelist being a staunch follower of *Sanatan dharm* supports the orthodox beliefs and practices. He emphasizes on the importance of traditions and customs. He is a supporter of purdah-system, religious ceremonies, caste system and idol worship. Thus he praises Priyamvada, the female protagonist for maintaining purdah even from a pure Brahmin and a member of their group, Pandit Godbole. His views regarding the status of the women in Indian society too have a strong Sanantani influence.

**Conclusion:** Though the last forty three years of the nineteenth century form a natural period in Hindi literature, the literary instinct was not in abeyance during the five decades preceeding this period. Till the age of Bhartendu Harishchandra (1857-1900) the Riti school (1643-1843), though perceptibly decaying, was still a living force. The stimulus towards decisive change came from the writers' initiation into humanism and the determination of a few elect spirits to adopt the new language, Khari Boli, which was gradually replacing Brajbhasa, the language of the Hindi poetry for centuries. The emergence of Khari Boli, the language of the cultivated circles in and around Delhi, was one of the major contributions of

the Mughal Empire to the progress and the efflorescence of the modern Hindi and the force behind the evolution of the Hindi literature.

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