Of Truth and Telling in Book Form: The Two-part Autobiographical Work of Maitreyi Pushpa

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Abstract: Hindi literary sphere has had a thriving periodical culture, a substantial part of which has been the site for women's expression, shaping and shaped by its participatory framework. Standing in stark contrast to their enormous output in hindi periodicals is the conspicuously small number of books by women, and even fewer autobiographies. In absence of a prolific women's autobiographical tradition outside of the periodicals, the few that exist stand out. With an eye to this arid landscape of independent autobiographies by women in the hindi sphere, this paper reads Maitreyi Pushpa's two-part autobiographical undertaking, *Kasturi Kundal Basai (2002) and Gudiya Bheetar Gudiya (2008).* Where one positions itself as a novelized autobiography, an intergenerational tale of two women— the author and her mother; the other conforms self-consciously to conventional norms of autobiographical writing to talk about her life post marriage and managing writerly aspirations along with prescribed roles of wife and mother. Pushpa's express commitment to *streevimarsh* (feminist discourse in the hindi sphere) is invoked multiple times in the two books to reflect on *streejeevan* (life of a woman), positioning the autobiographical act as an *instance* and example of a gendered life opened up to public eye. The paper reads into the connection between narratorial self-making and the material culture of the hindi public sphere by reading into the citational style or what has elsewhere been referred to as the implementation of a referential aesthetic to distil some insights on the significance of the book-form to establish intimacy as a site for the presentation of the self in its myriad, changing forms.

Keywords: Hindi public sphere, novel, autobiography, Maitreyi Pushpa

At the end of her autobiography *Gudiya Bheetar Gudiya* (2008) published six years after *Kasturi Kundal Basai* her first autobiographical work (2002) Maitreyi Pushpa revisits the interaction that led her to write about her life. It began when she received a request to write an autobiographical feature for a special issue on women writers in the hindi literary magazine *Hans.*

> "…I became restless. As if I began to lose interest in my own life, I was in two minds and starting to grow tired of it. If I were to write, where would I start? What should I focus on and at the cost of which bit? What all do I stand to lose if I write it? To not write at all felt just as bad. Do I want more trouble than I have already got into? Will the response be worse than what I have received for (my) novels?" (324)

The lines are an expression of the strong desire to write about the self in spite of perceived doubts and uncertainty surrounding such an exercise and the wariness to invite scrutiny and censure from the wider public in the relatively sparse landscape of women's self-writing endeavors in Hindi. Pushpa wrote a novelized autobiography, a feminist bildungsroman. Notably for our purpose, the impetus for this exercise notably came from a periodical.

The influence of periodical culture on the literary and cultural conversation of the hindi sphere can hardly be overstated. In this case, an exercise of self-writing is mediated by a special issue

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dedicated to *streevimarsh* (literally discourse on women or feminist discourse), framing the conversation on life stories of women. In her latest on print culture of North India of the 50s-70s, Orsini (2022) borrows Amit Chaudhuri's term 'literary activism' to classify the work of editors who champion "on behalf of literature … new writers and encourage readers' tastes, but also a constant critical interrogation on the value and function of literature" (1). Indeed, the progressive outlook of a literary magazine where Pushpa was invited to submit her life-story may be seen as an instance of the coexistence of this moral, ethical and political commitment of the print culture coexisting alongside and overlapping with concerns of readability and consumption in post-liberalisation India. Pushpa is taken aback by the interest of the editors in her lifestory and asks "whatever can I write that will be useful for your issue and will be inspirational for the readers?" (324) The other life stories invited for this issue that Pushpa lists are those of Mary Roy (mother of Arundhati Roy) and Nabanita Deb Sen that were translated to hindi from English, a fairly common practice where excerpts of auto/biographies from regional as well global languages are translated for public consumption.

The vibrant print-periodical culture of hindi sphere has been studied closely by scholars to understand its role in shaping everyday practices and interiority of women. Shobna Nijhawan in her brilliant introduction to women's periodicals at the turn of twentieth century argues for the periodical as a genre with a participatory framework. Aakriti Madhwani in her study of the rise of commercial print magazines post independence studies the consumption practices of the burgeoning middle class by looking at how the commercial magazines catered to the biggest possible reading public "possessing something for everyone in the family, promoting segmented consumption with a focus on each member's reading desires, with something on offer for each individual, regardless of age, gender, or marital status." (3) These commercial ventures were one of the earliest sites where female public self-expression was encouraged. In many cases these magazines were helmed by public figures commanding relative influence, who mediated these emergent voices from the public and made editorial decisions about the style and layout to cater to the widest possible readership of subject-citizens (Nijhawan 1). The potential of this relatively new medium of public engagement has unfolded as a significant chapter in hindi literary sphere. Overtime these commercial as well as literary print magazines became dominant sites of public conversation on literary and artistic experiments, morality and citizenship. Orsini's latest work on the 1950s-1970s magazine archive elaborates on the contribution of these magazines on public discourses.

Pushpa's autobiographies share an extended field of reference with hindi print culture, specifically newspapers and magazines. Given the reach and influence of the latter, this is hardly surprising. From the moment of inception of the project to the end of volume two, Pushpa's life-history is deeply immersed in magazines and the vast world of print. How can we theorise the autobiographical project of women in hindi sphere, rare as they are, in light of the dynamic forces that influence this process? This paper argues for a fresh look at the autobiographical texts in the book form as ways of public contestations, jostling for visibility as well as sell-ability. It may be said that the will to tell one's own story has multiple loci of impetus, one being to set the record straight so to speak.

A well-known public figure in North India for her vocal critique of institutions of marriage, motherhood and family, Maitreyi Pushpa has retained her initial reputation of a woman writer deeply invested in the rural and small town, rurban contexts of north India. She has a torrid online presence and posts round-the clock on cultural and social issues pertaining to lives of women, claiming a very visible space in the public imaginary. She was born in 1944 in Jhansi and spent a considerable part of her formative years up until her twenties in the Bundelkhand region of central and north India where the "folk and literary heritage of this historical region… as well as the rural and then the small-town background" (Browarczyk 222) shaped her consciousness in decisive ways. She is most known for writing strong rural women characters with rich ethnographic detail.

Kasturi and *Gudiya* make differing generic claims. While *Kasturi* is a novelized autobiography, *Gudiya* following six years later calls itself an autobiography. It goes a step further and revises the

claim of the first book as novel by calling itself the second part of the two-volume autobiography. Stylistically the first book makes tentative aesthetic claims and argues for fiction as a narratorial need for a cohesive and readable story. The structuring principle of the feminist bildungsroman weaves the story of Maitreyi as one of liberation from the private, "Ghar ka kaaragar toot raha hai" says the last line of the novel (meaning, the walls of the home breaking away). These lines appear in the context of Maitreyi giving birth to the first of her three daughters. As the reader will learn in volume two, the ending is heavy with irony. Pushpa gave up writing to devote herself to her role of a wife and mother.

Gudiya on the other hand is direct in its address, eschewing creative liberties, ambivalence and irony put to innovative usages in first part. The prose reflects a purposiveness and makes express claims to truth-telling. From bildungsroman to autobiography, the project of self narration moves from tropes of self-discovery to self-declaration: "we leave out things out of modestly (*lihaaz)* or choose to present a select few leaving out others" (back cover). The packaging of both books is that of significant events, as "explosion(s)" (*Maitreyi ka ek aur dhamaka*, back cover, *Gudiya*) setting readerly expectations in line with the public image Pushpa has acquired over years. Direct and bold, the commitments of coherence and narrative integrity expressed in *Kasturi*, however tentative, undergo slight modification in *Gudiya.* By narrative integrity one refers not just to "harmony of proportion or beauty of form as principles of narrative composition but to the coherence and depth of one's ethical commitments, as evidenced by the shape of one's life" (Freeman and Brockmeier, 76). In *Gudiya*, formal concerns recede into the background in favour of presenting an ethically cogent subject, with an express commitment to *streevimarsh* at the intersection of caste and class configurations. Between aesthetic and ethics, the autobiographical subject relies on stylized citational practices to depict the ebb and flow of her public life. As forms of life-narratives both the books make truth claims, while it is *Gudiya* that makes explicit reference that it exists in an alternate space to the glittering world of controversies and engineered news in magazines and newspapers. The paper reads into the importance of life-stories in book form beyond obvious formal considerations. It argues that the permanence offered by the book-form could be read in contrast to the forever unfolding, ephemeral world of the magazines and newspapers; the book is a symbolic space that liberates the individual from and contests the mediatory demands of editorialising voices of magazines. The narrative strategy of the second book, with its use of dialogue and extensive citations to address gossip and scandal about the writer's sexual and marital relations in circulation in print journalism and periodicals, point to the books as existing in centrifugal relation to the external world. The paper reflects on the narrative inconsistencies and incongruities of this two-part undertaking as an opportunity to better understand the (gendered) anxieties of self-presentation in the hindi-sphere and the role of the book-form to make explicit claims of self-affirmation as it actively interacts with, and is constituted within a larger print economy.

Subject in/to the Market

The paratextual frame of *Kasturi*[1] enveloping the narrative invokes the fact-fiction dichotomy, only to underline the willful blurring of the distinction by the author. "Every novel is an autobiography; every autobiography is a novel. Fiction is the common thread that runs through both…" (backcover) places fiction at the heart of all literary undertaking. It establishes the autobiographical project as an imaginative art: creative and liberating, that defies neat generic compartmentalisations. The triumphant poststructuralist project in the West that firmly demonstrated once and for all, the undecidability of the distinction between fact and fiction (Eakin, 29) seems at odds with the humble offering of *Kasturi* with the prefatory question, "Should I call this a history or an autobiography?"[2] (Preface). Citing lack of adequate communication between the two central characters of mother and daughter as well as paucity of eyewitness accounts and documentary evidence, the writer claims fiction to be a narratorial need, endemic to the autobiographical undertaking. From its beginning the text places truth, narrative coherence and readability as central concerns to the undertaking,

where the autobiographical self is referential, locating the formation of personhood in a generational continuum of mother-daughter conflict over individual worldviews played out against the background of the nation-building process in post-independence India.

Kasturi is an important member of Mahila Mangal, one of the earliest post-independence women's organizations for rural reconstruction, with the aim to transform the lives of women. Kasturi's toughness is a consequence of immense domestic responsibilities due to early widowhood and exposure to activist discourses and gendered socialization emphasizing self-effacement, abnegation and denial. In stark contrast is Maitreyi's youthful ideal of romance and sexual fantasies fueled by her clandestine consumption of romantic poems in hindi magazines. For Maitreyi, self-fulfillment is intimately tied to companionship and marriage. Monika Browarczyk points to the use of "the third-person narration; of focusing on steady, almost entirely chronological development of the plotline; and of including long passages with dialogues and monologues by various characters" (223) as some of the narrative strategies employed to present the story of self-realization. Moreover, the narration flits between third and first-person narration. The reconstruction of mother's lifestory refers to Maitreyi in third person. "The girl slid closer to her mother apologized (66), "Maitreyi was daydreaming" (96). Over the course of the novel, specifically from chapter 4 entitled, "tum pinjra mai suanaa tora" (meaning I am a bird in your cage) narrative focus shifts from mother to the daughter, the narratorial voice comes to inhabit first person voice more frequently, while focalizing on the interiority of the daughter "I have started thinking like you mother" (133). The point of view shifts rapidly and is populated with the vocabulary of social critique of motherly sacrifice and lack post-marriage.[3]

Even as the early years make for a fascinating reading, rich as they are in narrative technique and symbolism, they signal a complex relationship with truth. When Maitreyi expresses her wish to marry immediately after finishing college instead of becoming independent like Kasturi had hoped, the result is shock. "They say that the second generation often treats the first with utmost brutality. Then why do they say that daughters resemble their mothers?" (136). The running trope is of a rebellious daughter of a rebel mother. The self is honed and shaped in a polemical relation to, observation of and contrast to that of the mother, while the latter half of the text, post marriage is an exercise in self-correction; done in gratitude of the mother. The mother-daughter dynamic runs parallel to the account of Maitreyi's entry into the public sphere. First important moment is when she publishes a poem "The women of the locality" (*baare ki auratein*) inspired by the casteist treatment of waste workers and domestic labourers in her rurban neighbourhood. The mother and daughter are made to pay by being turned out of the house (176-78). The text also contains occasional references and quotations from writers that influenced her reading and overall literary style.

The narrative cites from various sources to trace the development of writerly consciousness from published to unpublished works of Pushpa to secondary and tertiary writings that shaped her literary sensibility, including quotations from decreet notes and love letters received in college (122): "She kept the letter in between the pages of the Gita, to be read at nigh time. Is it possible to sleep after receiving the first love letter? I lay there, wraped in the honey of his words, reading the words out loud, "Deeper I fall, into the intoxicating scent of your love…" ("Gahare utri chali ja rahi thi, tumhare hriday ki madhu bhawna…")

The range of citational practices from publically available literature to private papers contributes to the rich literary texture of the narrative, where songs and slogans from precolonial India find mention along with instances of formalized, published writing. *Kasturi* relies on such varied and various literary textures to compose a bildungsroman, show the formation of temperament, the shaping of a personality, what Roy Pascal calls the *acquisition of an outlook* (105). Needless to say, the citational style does not preclude or present this practice as being in contrast to fictional tropes and stylisation in the text rather, it seamlessly weaves the two into one narrative whole.

Gudiya is generically marked as an autobiography and makes explicit prosaic demands on the reader. The narrative builds on the image of a passionate, feisty woman who picks up writing as a

profession well after her own daughters are grown up. The citational landscape here too reconstructs dialogues, quotes poetic lines from films and magazines (21, 87, 134, 135)[4]. Lines from folk songs and couplets (55, 98)[5] to write about the linguistic and social texture of the world that the subject inhabits. In fact the deeper one travels into Pushpa's world, the referencing and citations become more intense, the authorial intent to define the meaning of these quotes more confrontational. The uncertainty and self-doubt, along with errors of judgement and one's own perspective is presented with a steady gaze of self-scrutiny than in the first book, as she singlehandedly negotiates a strict husband, motherhood and travel in the big city of Delhi looking for opportunities to publish her writings. Interestingly, the citational practice expands to include writings from within personal poems, letters, diary entries by self (54,163, 170, 171) and by others (40)[6]. In one instance, the writer includes a diary entry of one of her daughters (162) to piece together the event and feelings of the time she picked up the writing again after giving it up to become a mother to her three daughters. To this effect the citational practice as well as novelization try to diffuse any emergent binaries of fact and fiction it invokes in the preface.

The prefatory address of *Gudiya* contains information about Maitreyi's mother which exceeded the narrative frame of the previous book, informing the readers of Kasturi and grassroots activists like her in organisations such as Mahila Mangal which were disbanded and were not rehabilitated by the government and struggled to eek out a living. In addition the preface informs, that the writer has felt compelled to write the book in answer to reader's query about her literary journey. As a public figure of note, *Gudiya* sees Pushpa engaging closely with the writerly process and fame as emergent themes. The paratextual apparatus of part 2 reiterates the author's commitment to truth-telling. The text is framed within the vocabulary of a public statement to put to rest some of the rumours and speculations in the public domain that were a result of her first volume. "Maitreyi has acknowledged her relationship with Dr. Siddharth (her husband) and Rajendra Yadav (writer, pioneer of the *nayi kahaani* movement, editor of literary journal *Hans*) with a boldness bordering on self-destruction".[7] (parenthetical notes are mine) The dichotomy of fact and fiction is stirred just once here, only to draw a direct parallel between one of Pushpa's famous characters and her life, "meet the Alma Kabutari of literature" (back cover). To invoke one of her most famous literary creations is to invite an interpretive parallel with a woman from a tribal community living on the fringes of society. The blurb positions the autobiographical subject as a literary minority existing at the fringes of an elitist and exclusionary hindi literary sphere. The next section elaborates on citational practices used to advance this worldview.

Self as/in Revision

Considering the claim that any autobiographical fiction makes on truth, the two books together, are one of a kind literary experimentation in autobiographical writing, recasting existing generic frames of the novel and tell-all autobiography to engage with the "truth" of the self. Where *Kasturi* outlines innovation in storytelling as its claim to public eye, book two outlines *an imperative to truth* as the organizing principle to tell this story.

Monika Browarczyk's essay (2018) on the phenomenon of two-volumes of autobiographical writing by hindi women writers observes that the second volume is improvisational and revisionary in intent since it revises frames established in the first volume. The two prefatory addresses address concerns of narrative inconsistency, incongruous selves as if to say, the writer *wanted* to write the first part while she was *compelled* to write the second one due to a constellation of factors involving her rising stature in public domain. This felt need to repeatedly justify one's claim to write of oneself has been read by Browarczyk as "a device plausibly employed to disown and distance oneself from the 'immodest' impulse of self-promotion". (214)

The previous section focused on Pushpa's narrative technique on *Kasturi,* the referential aesthetic involving quotes from published and unpublished works as a narrative practice to develop her self-

image as, to quote Smith and Watson, "active agent in public life" (4). These episodes in *Kasturi* illustrate how this vibrant space was a site of everyday self-making and contributed to the expansion of her writerly consciousness, from where she could distil her vision of her role as a writer (176). Naturally therefore in her intimate view of her life as a writer, her interactions and overall experience with the print establishment are important part of the narrative. She got a push-start from regional newspapers such as *Dainik Jagriti*, *Saaptahik Hindustan*, then middle brow (names of some magazines and editors have been withheld for instance on 169, 179, 198) and the glittering high-brow corners (*Hans*, *Vasudha*, *Pahal*) as her writing gained traction. A major part of the second volume details many encounters ranging from meeting known faces, to sexual harassment in the higher echelons of the hindi print establishment. While the commitment to public life is constantly iterated, the narrative carries long polemical prose on the costs of speaking up. In the wake of the publication of *Kasturi,* magazines ran articles exclusively focusing on passages about marriage and sex with salacious titles like "Maitreyi Pushpa's sex life" (331). Her husband who has thus far not read *Kasturi* comes to read about his representation as a sexually passive, unimaginative man in a review somewhere. Perhaps this why in an interview she mentions that the 'courage' to write in the book-form came much later.[8] The conversations held in private are reconstructed to illustrate the contestations and protests of the private against the circulation and dispersal of private experiences and form the afterlife of autobiographical undertakings by women and bolster the authorial intent to contest these claims in public. The revisionary intent of the second volume is in part informed by the anxiety to present an ethically cogent self and to comment on the experience of writing the first volume in order to position the self in relation to the public word and world. The autobiographical form becomes the site for grappling with multiple discourses in print and multimedia around her private life. Thus the autobiographical undertaking places itself in a relational tension with other genres of print culture.

The autobiographical subject of the second volume while taking a contingent and revisionary narrative approach, instrumentalises the book-form of self-writing in order to memorialise her response to the activity surrounding her in the print-public field. The anxieties that inform such redressal and revision bear more focus. The relational, tentative self, presented in the first volume makes way for a confident, self-assured first person narrator who is aware of her social standing, and confident of her linguistic prowess to upend the slander and gossip in circulation about her. The narrative details the destabilising impact of the slander in circulation, framed within affective vocabulary of hurt and outrage, to be preserved in language. This is done via a selection of anecdotal evidence to elaborate upon and illustrate "the truth", bolstered by elaborate citations including letters and conversations with friends and family. What follows is a public act of avowal and disavowal where the narrating subject redefines and reconstitutes one's social and professional circle against the hindi literati to clearly state who one's true friends are ("why did the interviewees not speak to Krishna Sobti, Anamika and Raji Seth?...what was the true intent behind Kshama Sharma's words?" 336). The anxiety of belonging in this sphere, of losing social standing in public eye informs aesthetic and ethical concerns of the text. The re-constitution of this self happens in a contingent, loose fashion that relies on the autonomous book-form as an object to emancipate from the shifting sands of periodicals and newspapers.

Traditionally, the autobiographical iteration has been read as a medium of articulating difference, a practice involving individuating and delineating self from others. The autobiography delves into individual concerns that exceed the generalising claims of social theory. Curiously, Pushpa presents her life story as an instance of and as an example of *streejeevan* a rhetorical strategy and a political claim for the study of the collective lot through the instance of the singular story. Apart from husband Siddharth and writer Yogendra Yadav, the narrative landscape of both the text is filled with women. Pushpa identifies the goal of this autobiographical articulation within a vocabulary of learning and inspiration for the reading public (*upyogi* and *prernadaayak*, 324). To quote Eakin,

"implicit in the exercise of the autobiographical act the idea that it supplements the life that has been lived, a sense that life as it was requires the improvement of art—the closure, the coherence, the permanence conferred by the stamp of form" (51). The book-form thus, is a space Pushpa carves out as an agential being in public eye, a teleological inevitability for the female-writer in her journey to self-realisation. The last few chapters of volume two consist of a variety of devices to engage this world of gossip and scandal. This includes forms of informal citation by readership comprising in large parts of women, teachers and students of hindi literature, to legitimise her claim as an important voice in the public sphere.

> "Other women too live like this? Since I started publishing the novels, followed by *Kasturi* (and) I have received letters saying 'Maitreyi*ji* tell us how you sustain your marriage? Maitreyi *didi* reading about the realities you present in your novels has wrecked me. Maitreyi *di* they taunt me saying that reading your books has made me difficult. Dear, your autobiography has arrived, more compelling than your novels…Maitreyi*ji* I have read *Kasturi* many times, each time I have caught myself thinking I should also pluck up the courage to speak about ourselves, our bodies that are imprisoned by domestic norms and the dominant social codes." (Gudiya, 330)

The self is constituted and reconstituted in book- form and the intimacy with readers is sustained beyond the ephemeral forms of the magazine because of it. Even as newspaper and magazines were the primary platforms that launched the subject into the psycho-physical space of the public, the book form is written about as endemic to the self-realisation of an ethically, morally conscious subject in public eye. Pushpa makes reference to a growing intimacy with her readers after she started writing long fiction. reclaiming of book-form. Even as magazines and periodicals remain essential to generating excitement around the writer's work the book form is important to sustain these intimacies with one's readers. (*Gudiya* 329-330)

Autobiography as Public Contestation

The practices of fictionalization and citation are seemlessly incorporated into the generic performance of truthtelling. At the same time, the book form does not just supplement information about what goes on in the backrooms of haloed publishing houses, as sites of "controversies and created news" (Orsini 2002, 57) and scandal. Pushpa's second volume is introduced as an important *event* (or as the blurb calls it an explosion, *dhamaka* infact). The polemical charge of the work present a strong counter-narrative of the hindi literary establishments.

The public declaration of socio-cultural commitments in *Gudiya* are framed as an instance of *streejeevan,* is a rhetorical exercise in claiming for the self a vantage point and an exemplar of the female 'lot'. Present here is a desire to assert "the distinctiveness and continuity of subjectivity" (Eakin 52). The task of *representing women* through the narration of one's story is fraught with the problematics of a dominant caste woman writing prolifically on the lives of women across caste barriers in the hinterlands of north India. Being one of few such voices of her time, Pushpa's oeuvre maybe seen as contributing to local histories of feminist thought working at the intersections of caste and class.

Pushpa's possessive utterance of "*my* book" (332, emphasis mine) must be read as an extension of self-making through the process of autobiographical practice by engaging directly with factors contributing to her public image. As mentioned earlier, the memorialization and permanence of this specific literary endeavour in the form of a book has to be understood in relation to the ephemerality of the periodical as an instance of the interactive mode of self-making across genres and forms in print. The history of print culture namely periodicals and newspapers alerts us to the varied and various impulses that sustained the reading-writing activities of the hindi sphere. Amidst the literary activism[9] of the high and middle brow magazines (Orsini 2), there exists the ambivalent speculative zone of loose talk. The anxieties of coping with and responding to the huge amount of conversation being generated about Pushpa is then tackled by the practice of autobiography writing. Needless to say, the attempt to draw a continuum between the first and second books is fraught with inconsisten-

cies and contradictions as elaborated earlier. And yet, the desire to take possession of one's life narrative is writ large across the two books, coupled with the desire to intervene in the social. "No matter how enjoyable a read, if it does not influence the life of others, what is the use?"[10] The motivation for reading the autobiography have a lot in common with the desire to write it, both bound by individual utility and aspiration.

Tracing the story of mother from pre-independence India to the brutal clampdown on the organizations like Mahila Mangal, to the change in the author's fortunes as a writer of repute in hindi sphere and the gendered conditions that shaped it, *Kasturi Kundal Basai* and *Gudiya Bheetar Gudiya* locate the story of the individual(s) within social and political change. From a female bildungsroman in *Kasturi* to the autobiography, one can see the gradual shift in the self-consciousness accompanying Pushpa's gradual rise in stature in the hindi sphere. Instead of trying to resolve the inconsistencies of the two-volume endeavours, this paper reads into the self-making process spanning nearly a decade the anxieties of one's changing role and representation in the public sphere.

Conclusion

In the wake of recent development in hindi print culture, this paper seeks to deepen the understanding of some salient features of the contemporary hindi public sphere by looking at communicative practices across forms and genre. To this effect the paper elaborated on narratorial strategies in Maitreyi Pushpa's two-part autobiography to explore possibilities of reading self-making practices within the larger, interactive print economy that the writer is immersed in. The book-form is a territorially marked site for the subject to continuously engage with this world. Working at the intersections of autobiography and print culture to study the relationship between claims of truth and storytelling mediated by commercial concerns within an expanding print market, the paper underscored that the autobiographical act is not just embedded within but *actively* references the discursive and material field of its production. Possibilities of theorizing agency and self-making at the intersections of narratology, cultural and media studies have been underscored.

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Notes

[1] The figurative translation of the title by Browarczyk as 'Kasturi and her jewel of a daughter' is helpful. She elaborates: the said verse comes from a couplet ("Kasturi kundal base/ mrig dhunde ban mahi"; http://santkabirdas.blogspot.com/2012/02/kasturi-kundalbase-mrag-dhundhat-ban.html) and refers to a musk deer that -searches for the musk throughout the forest ignorant of holding the musk within his body. In her narrative, Pushpa extensively refers to the passages of Hindi literature. Chapter headings of both autobiographies quote verses from significant literary works in Hindi.

[2] "Issey Upannyaas kahoon ya aapbeeti..?" Browarczyk elaborates on this "provokingly titled Shall I call it a novel or an autobiography?—showcases Pushpa's viewpoint of the genre "It is possible that what happened is not in the story, and what is in the story, did not happen in the real life, but the foundation of this story are those perfect pictures vivid in my memories, even though I might have just heard about them from someone else or even though they might have originated in rumours about my own family." Pushpa seems

to subscribe to the idea that for an author composing a self-narrative, because of the interplay of memory and the externally and internally imposed censorship, writing is an exercise in narration that combines fictional and non-fictional elements. She rhetorically engages the audience in this reflection, simultaneously appealing to the reader's more empathic response to life stories. In the second volume she reconsiders these reflections, claiming the text to be a truthful account of her life with just a few aesthetic embellishments, but of importance only if liked by the readers." (225)

[3] For instance, a."Chhah mahine beet gaye magar koi lene na aaya", meaning that six months have passed since the wedding, and nobody has come to take her back to her mother's. Mixed with a sense of abandonment is an embarrassment on behalf of the resourceless mother who is unable to arrange for her daughter's travel. b. the heavily leaden irony of "ma ke chaltey kaun si beti swabhiman nahi tod daalti?"(291), meaning as trained by the mother, a daughter can dismiss her self-respect. The lines are used when Maitreyi struggles to juggle new motherhood and marital responsibilities.

[4] Example: "aaj agar hum patit adham hain/iska kaaran galat niyam hain…"
"de di humein azadi bina kharag bina dhal/Sabarmati ke sant tune kar diya kamaal"

[5] "Larka labaye ke misan, langar mo dhing aaye/gayo achaanak aanguri, chhati chael chhuaaye"

[6] Letter citation of sister-in-law, Kanchan detailing the longing to go back home to the small time.

[7] Pushpa, Maitreyi "Wah Safar tha ki mukaam tha: Memoirs by Maitreyi Pushpa". *Youtube,* uploaded by Dream Treaders Films Channel, 23 Jan. 2017, https://youtu.be/9I_H5PvOk_w

[8] "Maitreyi ne Dr. Siddharth aur Rajendra Yadav ke saath apne sambhandhon ko lagbhag aatmaheenta bebaaki ke saath sweekar kiya hai", quoted from the blurb, *Gudiya.*

[9] Though 1950s Hindi and English magazines look quite different from the serious and hefty miscellanies that were their colonial and nationalist forebears, many were by no means small. With impressive circulation figures, and some highly illustrated, these magazines were entrepreneurial in their 'literary activism' and consciously sought to provide quality and affordable reading material. Editors actively solicited new texts and promoted new writers, invested in translations, kicked off debates, and sought to actively engage readers through essay and story competitions.

[10] "Kitaab kitni hi swaantah sukhaaye kyun na ho, dusron ke Jeevan ko na prabhaavit karey toh kis kaam ki?"

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