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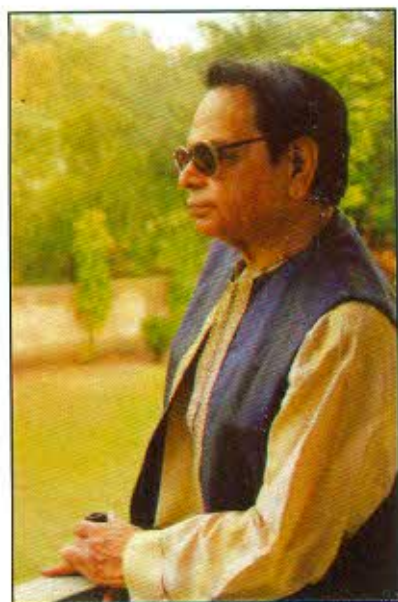
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meet the author

Rajendra Yadav





"Rajendra Yadav's reputation as a major fiction-writer in post-Independence India is indisputable. What is hotly debated in the Hindi public sphere is his deconstructionist role as a social commentator and as the editor of a popular literary monthly. Iconic figure for a new breed of defiant subaltern writer-activists, Rajendra Yadav, now in his seventies, is perhaps the most controversial Indian writer alive today," says Brajranjan Mani.

Born in Agra, of an Aryasamaji mother and an agnostic father who was a medical doctor, Rajendra Yadav had his elementary school education in Agra. Then occurred the event that catapulted him to the vocation of a writer. While he was studying in a school in Mawana, Meerut, staying with his uncle, he broke one leg in a brawl while playing hockey and was confined to bed for a year; the accident that left him impaired permanently, provided him enough time to read and reflect, changing the course of his life; during this period, he read the novel *Chandrakanta* and wrote nearly one thousand pages of a novel under its influence. This proved to be almost like a kind of homework for his future writing career. Another formative experience was the tour he made of

South India along with Amrit Lal Nagar and Dr. Ram Vilas Sharma which instilled in him a sense of unity in diversity found in this great country.

Rajendra Yadav is the principal architect of the 'New Wave' phenomenon in post-Independence Hindi fiction. He is one of the pioneers of the Nai Kahani movement, which comprised in absorbing the spirit of the contemporary and presenting it starkly. His first novel, *Pret Bolte Hain*, which was later renamed *Sara Akash* (which has by now, according to Yadav, sold one million copies, an enviable figure for any Indian book) and has been translated into almost all Indian languages and several foreign languages, was a path-breaker. *Sara Akash* is perhaps the first Hindi novel which attempts to shock Indian culture out of its centuries-old somnolence. Basu Chatterjee made a film out of it, which, along with Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome*, launched parallel cinema in Hindi.

Ukhre Huey Log, his next novel, brilliantly depicts how the changed socio-economic conditions compel the individual to negotiate the sullied path one does not want to tread. It is the poignant story of a couple forced to desert the conventional path, yet find themselves unable to acclimatize to a corrupt and devilish world. It was in this novel that the 'living in' concept was envisaged for the first time.

After writing these two novels, he went to Kolkata, in early 1954, for doing his PhD, on the topic "Yog Darshan and Hindi Poetry." Philosophy proved to be so tough a topic that he ended up reading Chekhov and other great fiction writers in the National Library.

He wrote two more novels, *Kulta* (translated as *The Flirt* but which actually means 'The Wayward Wife') and *Shaah aur Maat* (Check and Mate); wrote several stories and translated Turgenev, Chekhov, Lermontov

(*A Hero of Our Times*) and Albert Camus (*The Outsider*).

Ek Inch Muskaan which Rajendra Yadav and wife Mannu Bhandari wrote together, is a love-tragedy of schizophrenic individuals. Here, Amar and Amala, condemned to reeling under angst, ennui and self-alienation, are entrapped in a love-and-loveless love-intrigue, unable to come out of their wretched existence. There is an interesting background episode to this novel. Prior to their writing it, a novel was serialized in *Gyanodaya* in which eleven authors wrote eleven chapters. Taking their cue from this, Mannu Bhandari and Rajendra Yadav wrote the novel, dividing

authored seven novels, six collections of short stories and one collection of Chekhov's plays (*The Seagull, The Cherry Orchard, The Three Sisters*) in Hindi translation. These plays were performed on countless stages.

In 1964, Yadav founded Akshar Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., under whose banner he brought out the works of writers like Agyey, Girija Kumar Mathur, Raghuvir Sahai, Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena, Nemichand Jain, Ram Vilas Sharma, Rahi Mazoor Raza, Mohan Rakesh, Kamleshwar and, of course, his own and Mannu Bhandari's writings. This publishing house took upon itself the task of publishing mostly the first works of authors, be it poetry,



With Sudheesh Pachauri, Padma Sachdev

among themselves the female and male characters respectively and it was serialized in *Gyanodaya* for one year. This novel has been taken note of for its innovative style and technique. Mannu was pregnant with their daughter then and at one juncture, a notice appeared in *Gyanodaya* which announced: "Mannu Bhandari's *rachana* is not being carried in this issue, because she has just given birth to a *Rachana*."

In 1964, Mannu got a job in Miranda House, Delhi University and the family settled down there. Thus came to an end the ten-year Kolkata phase of his life, with a one-and-half-years' sojourn in Delhi. By then he had

short-story collection or novel. The venture was obviously not a commercial one, but even incurring regular losses he ran it for 25 years, till it finally closed down.

31st July, 1986: (Premchand's birthday): Rajendra Yadav, along with Gautam Navlakha, re-launched the magazine *Hans* established originally by Premchand in 1930, in which K.M.Munshi and Mahatma Gandhi had editorial association over different periods. "Many people believe that 'Munshi Premchand' is a combination of 'K.M.Munshi' and 'Premchand,'" quips Yadav. The magazine had stopped publication in 1953. After its re-launch, to this day,



Photo: Dinesh Khanna

under his editorship, it remains a very controversial magazine, because of its radical approach. According to him it is perhaps the only magazine in India run by an individual for two decades without support from any business house or organisation. Only contributions from well-meaning friends are accepted. Arundhati Roy has donated one lakh and fifty thousand rupees this year. And the magazine is brought out regularly, uninterrupted, and completed 18 years on 31st July 2003. All these years, on every 31st July, seminars on literature, culture and social issues are organized. This seminar is very important in the yearly calendar of events in Delhi's social life.

Rajendra Yadav's recent titles such as *Auron Ke Bahane*, *Wey Devata Nahin Hai* and *Mud Mud Ke Dekhta Hun*, are interesting reminiscences of the past and not biographical pieces. He calls them memory fragments, which shows his critical-diagnostic intellect at its peak. Handled with fine sensitivity, supreme craftsmanship, and a bit of detachment, he portrays himself and his friends and other writers in these pieces as if they are fictional characters. Says renowned Hindi poet and fiction writer Uday Prakash:

"Even when he reminisces about actual events and characters of the past, his device is of a fiction writer creating a space

between the real and the virtual, between truth and illusion. His characters are identifiable beyond these texts as real people, who transform themselves into equally fictitious constructs of a narrative. They are both real and imaginary at any moment of their existence."

There is one policy Rajendra Yadav has stuck to diligently. Immediately after his Masters' in 1951, he was offered a lecturer's job in his *alma mater*, Agra College, but he chose not to accept it preferring to keep the total freedom of the writer. He has, to this day, not taken up any occupation that would infringe upon such unsullied freedom which has emboldened him to criticize everything, and to abide by his commitment to radical thinking and action.



With daughter Rachana and wife Mannu Bhandari

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L.-R. Manzur Ehatasham Chitra Mudgal, Krishna Sobti, Rajendra Yadav, Archana Verma,



Francesca Urzini, who did dissertation on Rajendra Yadav's novels, in Italian

Chronology

1929	Born in Agra.	1958	Left Kolkata and stayed in Delhi for one and a half years.
1946	Passed matriculation from Jhansi.	1959	Returned to Kolkata and married Mannu Bhandari.
1949	Graduated from Agra College.	1960-61	Published a novel <i>Ek Inch Muskaan</i> , jointly with his wife.
1951	Passed M.A. Hindi, standing First Class First. Published his first novel, <i>Pret Bolte Hain</i> which was later renamed <i>Sara Akash</i> .	1961	Daughter Rachana born. Settled down in Delhi permanently.
1953	Joined <i>Gyanodaya</i> , a monthly published from Saharanpur where he worked for a brief period. Wrote the second novel, <i>Ukhre Huey Log</i> (Disinherited People).	1964	Founded Akshar Prakashan Pvt. Ltd.
1954	Shifted to Kolkata to do Ph.D	1986	Re-launched the magazine <i>Hans</i> established originally by Premchand in 1930.
1956-59	Again joined <i>Gyanodaya</i> thrice in Kolkata off and on; published two more novels, <i>Kulta</i> and <i>Shaah aur Maat</i> , wrote several stories and did translations of Turgenev, Chekhov, Lermontov and Albert Camus. Freelanced for some time.	1989-90	Stayed in IIT, Kanpur, for about a year as a Writer in Residence.
		1998-2001	Member of the Prasar Bharati Board.
		1998	Shivpujan Sahay Samman.
		2003	Shalaka Samman of the Delhi Hindi Akademi.