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The Decline of Republican Democracy and Rise of the Techno-authoritarian State: Reading Dystopian Novels in Hindi Literature

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ABSTRACT

In the past few decades, the nature of capitalism has changed fast as it has lost its philosophical justification based on the principle of the common good. There have been many avatars of the idea of the “common good”: “white man’s burden to civilize the world,” “welfarism,” and “neoliberal concept of freedom of choice.” Capitalism now seems to have moved in a new direction, however, and it has failed to produce any further philosophical justification for its existence as a mode of production despite generating unprecedented economic inequality. Consequently, there is a rising tension between capitalism and democracy in societies governed by liberal democratic principles. Indications are clear that if the need arises, capitalism would abandon democracy in the name of development and security. Two things are happening simultaneously that not merely confirm this process but also support it vehemently. For one, the nature of the state is changing, becoming more and more authoritarian to smoothen this process of divorce between democracy and capitalism. Moreover, the emerging authoritarian state is supported by the technologies of social control. In the future, one can guess, these societies might witness a painful unfolding of this “techno-authoritarian state.”

Second, the promises of democracy explicitly discussed by the founding fathers of this mode of organizing society, in either capitalist or postcolonial societies, have been heavily compromised. Aside from being abandoned by the state, these principles are undermined by the “we the people” who gave themselves constitutions to govern such societies. Unfortunately, people did not recognize the gradual erasure of republican principles as the regime promised liberal democracy with unlimited freedom of choice. It reduced democracy from the model of organizing society based on liberty, equality, justice, and fraternity with delicate balance among them to a model of majoritarian governance with fractured social relationships. Instead of social sciences, literary writings could probably capture these emerging trends better. In this paper, I explore whether the rise of dystopian literature in

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various languages gives sufficient indications towards this emerging trend of the rise of “techno-authoritarian states” and the decline of republicanism.

KEY WORDS Authoritarianism; Capitalism; Democracy

It is essential to understand our world, as we need an appropriate comprehension of it to explain things happening around us and to try to change them. Understanding the contemporary world is knowing the existing situation and capturing the unfolding dynamics of reality. A good model of such an exercise can be seen in the book *Secondhand Time* (2016) by Svetlana Alexievich, Nobel laureate from Russia. This book is about the transition in the Soviet Union that pulled the mammoth communist state down to present-day Russia. This transition did not take place in a day, yet social scientists from all over the world, including those from the Soviet Union, were not able to foresee the future. To make sense of the changing reality, instead of adopting standard social science methods, Alexievich picked up a project to collect people’s perceptions of what was happening; she collected thousands of testimonials. Interestingly, these micro-stories finally presented a macro picture of what was otherwise not so visible.

This paper suggests that such emerging trends exist at three levels: real, actual, and empirical. The real is the generative mechanism of the actual, and the empirical consists of the episodes and events at the surface level. What we generally observe is empirical and thus draws a picture of the phenomenon observed. This is the first-order explanation, which looks like an explanation but is merely a narration of the events. We attempt to decipher the actual by connecting the observed events empirically. This is the second order of reason, and it gives some understanding of the current moment, but it needs to give us a clue about the long-term trends. Finally, we explore the deeper layer by connecting the empirical and actual with structural logic, which provides us an understanding of the real. The understanding of the real allows us to capture emerging trends. The methodological debates in social sciences revolve around the possibilities of reaching the third level. In short, how do we comprehend the structural logic of the real and connect that with the actual and empirical?

This paper suggests that literature has the potential to capture the real by connecting with and transcending the empirical and actual. This is one of the points, which is methodological, that I am interested in making in this paper. This paper demonstrates that the popularity of dystopian literature reveals something unique emerging at the social and political levels, which the social scientists have missed: viz, the rise of a techno-authoritarian state. I argue that this process started early in India and culminated in the rise of majoritarian democracy and techno-authoritarian states. This has been relatively well indicated by some of the literary texts in India. These texts give us resources to comprehend the micropolitical processes contributing to this macropolitical transformation.

This paper is based on the reading of three Hindi novels: Priyamvad’s *Ve Vahan Kaid Hain* (They Are Imprisoned There, 1994), Mannu Bhandari’s *Mahabhoj* (The Grand Feast, 1979), and Purushottam Agarwal’s *NACOHUS* (National Commission for Hurt Sentiments, 2016). I think these novels have beautifully captured the process of the decline

of democratic institutions and related political processes in society. They indicate clearly that this crisis is a consequence and cause of the gradual emergence of majoritarian democracy and the techno-authoritarian state. I will argue that reading these texts can help social science answer several important questions: Is the nature of the state changing? Are we witnessing the rise of a new form of state? Is democracy in crisis? Will the new state dump democracy and adopt a more authoritarian character? These questions are discussed here in the Indian context, though they are globally relevant.

LITERATURE AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

As I mentioned, to capture the emerging trends in the overall social scenario, we need to transcend the boundary of social sciences and particularly access literary texts. Why do I say this? The production of literature gives enough freedom to the creative writer to speculate and write about things that do not fall within the purview of social sciences. Literature has a better capacity to capture the web of relationships, which allows it to operate simultaneously with several variables, producing the ontological complexity of social reality. It can connect the empirical level of human behavior with the actual level of economic, political, social, and psychological factors. It can also link all of this to the structural level of reality, which works as a generative mechanism for the actual and empirical levels.

Moreover, literature provides space for engagement with esoteric aspects of personal and collective consciousness; it can access the archaeology of collective consciousness and dreams of individual actors, which gives exciting clues for interpreting and explaining the phenomenal world. I am not saying that literature can replace social sciences. Instead, I am arguing for a deeper dialogue between the two, and I would like to suggest that such an engagement would enrich both. This might help us articulate creative literary critique and contribute to the methodological innovation for creative social research. I think it is desirable “to use the tools of social science in combination with those of speculative fiction to explore the space of possibilities in which our future political conflicts might play out” (Frase 2016). Peter Frase rightly suggests that we should think of a new genre of writing titles as “social science fiction” (Frase 2016). He differentiates between social science and science fiction: “The first is about describing the world that is, while the second speculates about the world that might be,” although “both are a mixture of imagination and empirical investigation, put together in different ways” and “attempt to understand empirical facts and lived experience as something that is shaped by abstract—and not directly perceptible—structural forces” (Frase 2016). The point to be noted is that there is an element of imagination in fiction. We cannot deny that such imaginations are not all fictitious, however. Instead, they are based on our lived experience. This element of experiential epistemology helps us capture the aspect of reality which is missed by the theory-oriented epistemology of social sciences. Since it is speculative, one must appreciate that we can talk only about future possibilities. Let me reiterate the point I am making here: Social science will be at great advantage if it engages with literature in terms of its capacity to capture the emerging trends in society.

In this article, I will use three dystopian novels to construct my argument regarding the “rise of techno-authoritarian state” and “decline of republican democracy.” My decision to read dystopian novels for this purpose is not arbitrary. I have conducted a Google search for best-selling novels for a couple of decades. I discovered not only that the production of such novels has gone up but also that their readership has increased manifold. One can claim this about the English-speaking world, as my survey is limited to English, either written in this language or translated into it. I have discovered that the translation of literature from other European, Latin American, and Japanese languages is faster than most Asian and African languages. I am convinced about the rising popularity of dystopian literature in the English-speaking world, and I find a good reason to glance at this genre to explore people’s moods. I am not sure if this is the case with Hindi literature. There is a gap in literature and society, as I am told by many publishers that there is a decline in sales from the counter. Publishers depend on government and library purchases, which does not reflect the popular sentiment towards any particular genre of literature. There is no list of the best sellers released by any literary society available online, as is regularly done in the case of English literature; however, I have selected three novels that I think could be put under the dystopian literature category and are considered necessary by the literary circle. I want to read them for my purpose of capturing the micropolitical process.

ONTOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY, OR “ONTIC MUTATION”

How do we understand our time? In which direction are we moving? There is a need for drawing a mega picture of the future by capturing trends. As I have mentioned above, we need to connect three layers—empirical, actual, and real—to understand and explain the transition we are witnessing today. One must acknowledge the nature of this changing time and address whether this is normal or extraordinary, as the transition is fundamental. We need to ask if we are witnessing an ontic mutation; we will never be able to return to the old system, as it is not merely adjusting or correcting the system but its fundamental mutation into a new system. The symptoms of this newly emerging system are visible but have yet to finally crystalize to the extent of being visible to the naked eye. We must make efforts to capture it. We need to guess it. Still, we can talk only in terms of strong and weak possibilities. This change has four visible symptoms. We must remember that they are merely symptoms, and there is a need to explore the reasons behind these symptoms. The four symptoms are the transformation of capitalism, technology and automation, climate crisis, and authoritarian politics. These symptoms are mutually causally interconnected and, at times, explanatory to each other.

The most remarkable change is visible in capitalism today. Capitalism is moving in an entirely new direction. The history of capitalism suggests that there have been ruptures in its philosophical basis to accommodate the transformations in its nature after every severe economic crisis. The core idea projected as one of the outstanding achievements of this production and distribution system was that it would enhance the “common good”—in other words, the institution of private property and market would allow more production and equitable distribution of resources. This was claimed to be the core idea that guided reform in capitalism several times. The first time it expanded in the non-European world,

it was interpreted as the “white man’s burden” to civilize the world; the second time, it gave the model of welfare economics; and the third time, it formulated neoliberal policies claiming that freedom is the most fundamental common good. All these claims are contested and more ideological than real; however, capitalism has become completely faceless since the last major crisis in 2008; it has not been able to produce any sustainable ideological claim that could be considered a new interpretation of the old claim of being supportive of the common good.

Consequently, several scholars argue that we are moving towards a new postcapitalist era. The debate of postcapitalism has yet to crystalize, but it has abandoned any claim of the common good. Some scholars argue that capitalism has no option but to return to its welfare mode; otherwise, it would not be able to sustain itself. However, the social and labor movements need to be more robust to pressure capital and the state to come to terms and return to welfarism as public policy. There was some initial hope from the Occupy Wall Street movement, but the initial enthusiasm has been lost. It is easy to see that in resolving the contemporary crisis, capital wants to depend on something other than human labor; instead, it hopes the recent technology supported by artificial intelligence and robotics will do the job. Moreover, there is hardly any from below, as neither the labor movement nor student protests seem to care about the “techno-slavery” age awaiting us, where machines will denote and even dictate newer structures and newer societal infrastructure systems under the control of a few ruling brains.

Global capitalism was already facing a severe downtrend, and the COVID-19 crisis has added to that downtrend in a big way. Production and the market were paralyzed for almost six months yet have returned to normal. Consequently, there is a vast GDP fall in all countries. The rise of unemployment was already expected because of the automation of industries, but this crisis has further accelerated the process and provided legitimacy for it. Unemployment was supposed to grow gradually, and according to some estimates in the United States, it might reach remarkably high levels in the next few decades. One of the impacts of COVID-19 was the sudden rise in unemployment, and that without any labor protest. In other countries, one can find comparable statistics. One cannot deny the possibility of replacing labor power with technology. If this happens, these economies will face sustained unemployment. If such a crisis continues, social scientists need to ponder the consequences of this on the nature of the state.

In another paper (Thakur 2020), I argued that this transformation is beyond usual change and instead could be termed an ontic mutation (Thakur 2020). I have called it mutation, as these changes are fundamental and irreversible in the future. This is beautifully captured in *NACOHUS* when one of the characters declares, “In fact, the world in which we were habitual to living has changed forever, and it has not altered suddenly but gradually” (Agarwal 2016:64). The novel suggests that we live in a new historical phase, “NACOHUS Time,” as the organization’s officer tells the protagonist, “Suket sir, you do not understand the point. Well, we are taking you only to explain it. . . . To tell you the truth, sir, you have entered the NACOHUS era. Now TV will always accompany you and we will too . . . rest, you are an intelligent man yourself” (Agarwal 2016:48). This ontic mutation has occurred more than once in every society; it is not new. Till now, we have been thinking of such changes in the progress of human civilization, but this time, we are

witnessing regression, a reverse of whatever human beings have achieved through their struggle in the past few decades. Some examples of literary writings have captured such moments of ontic mutation in other cases. For instance, Michel Houellebecq, a French writer from whom I have taken this concept, has mentioned the fundamental change in the human body that is to come because of genetic engineering, and he thinks this would fundamentally transform the nature of social reactions. In the dystopian novel *Atomised* (also known as *Elementary Particles*, 2001), Houellebecq documented the climax of culture produced by high individualism prevalent in one section of French society. The protagonist is a genome scientist who witnesses the philosophical decline of society, where human beings become so atomized that they start searching for the meaning of existence only in their sexual being without having any link between body and mind. Houellebecq further suggests that with the innovations in genome editing, further mutations would fundamentally differ from any other earlier forms of society. Similarly, Svetlana Alexievich, in her book *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets* (2016)¹, has reported that the change from the Soviet Union to Russia was a kind of ontic mutation, which was hardly recognized by most people.

I want to emphasize that literary writers have mostly recognized such ontic mutations. I think one of the reasons for this is their proximity to the real world and the form of writing that tries to capture a narrative emerging from this real situation. If we agree with this, we need to acknowledge that the transition that dystopian literature suggests cannot be all imaginary. I will further discuss the essential signs of majoritarian democracy and authoritarianism captured by the writers I will discuss in this paper.

DEMOCRACY, CAPITALISM, AND IDENTITY

Let us discuss the political consequences of the economic crisis in the times to come. The neoliberal phase of capitalism had already infused an element of populism in politics. Since the policies under this regime were pro-market, the welfare schemes introduced to support the ordinary people started gradually shrinking. The introduction of the market in the essential aspects of life like health and education reduced the real income of the ordinary people as they began to pay for these crucial services that they used to get free during the welfarist regime. Moreover, exposure to the market and the infusion of an immense desire to consume created a disbalance in people's lives. There was a paradigm shift in the state's approach to inequality, employment, and natural resources. Instead of attempting to give productive assets to the marginalized people, states have started adopting the programs under the larger frame of a "security net" provided by the World Bank. Under the "security net programs," projects were created to dole out some financial support to the people. Abandoning the commitment to education and healthcare made people more vulnerable, and the so-called security net, instead of providing them sustainable security, pushed them into the market network. This temporarily enhanced some people's income; however, it served the interest of the capital, as it expanded the market into newer areas and more people got incorporated. One typical symptom of this is the availability of costly chewable items or eatable things, oil, and shampoos in smaller pouches costing one or two rupees

that penetrated the rural market. This disturbed the food basket of ordinary people and pushed them into further health deprivation.

In the past few years, the new regimes have withdrawn the so-called safety nets, exposing a massive population to a severe precarity. These regimes are using populism as a strategy to assure people of specific support, which comes but only for a smaller number and serves the purpose of the government as it creates a false hope among a vast number of people. This is also true of other promises, like employment, by providing capital, education by training, healthcare by insurance, doubling farmers' incomes, etc. These promises are never to be delivered, as delivery is not on their agenda and they do not have capacity, so, finally, nothing happens, and the situation moves from bad to worse.

The first phase of the neoliberal regime became highly unpopular because of the economic policies that benefited capital but delivered only promises to the people. Unfortunately, because of the lack of any formidable movements by workers or farmers or by marginalized people, left parties could not take advantage of this situation. There was a general decline in the legitimacy of the left parties due to the collapse of the existing socialist systems, but the larger trap was the rise of identity politics in every country. Capital promoted identity politics to contain any consolidation of masses against the neoliberal ideology. This is not to suggest that identity politics was a conspiracy of capital, but it allowed capital to avert any formidable popular upsurge against the system.

Let us try to unpack the politics of identity to understand the connection between capital and democracy in contemporary times. It is essential to realize that there are stages of identity politics. The stage theory of identity politics will help us explain the universal presence of identity across time and space but the eminence of it only in specific contexts. Identity Identification is the first stage, in which we feel closer to someone as we have some common experience to share based on caste, culture, language, religion, nation, and so on. This affinity is natural, as such shared experiences create common ground for communication, and recalling such experiences gives us immense pleasure. These shared experiences also help us construct communities, primarily with fuzzy boundaries. We therefore love participating in parties or clubs based on these common grounds. This stage of identity politics has hardly any political element and is more based on our primordial experiences. We develop an image, to use in Lacanian terms, towards the things we are missing and cannot return to that in real life, and we therefore create such occasions to recall these experiences. If things remain at this stage, one can hardly call it political in the typical sense of the term.²

The second stage, Identity Consolidation, begins when we try to give a more formal or informal institutional shape to the group identified by specific common markers. So, we give it a name and organize events to attract attention and not only for pleasure. At this stage, the boundaries of such groups remain porous and people without such markers are also welcome to participate. There is a mild effort to adopt specific dress or cultural symbols, and people start identifying the group with them. This stage is also not political in the typical sense, but political actors start approaching them as vote banks. Political leaders start addressing their concerns, occasionally using their symbols while addressing them as a group. The group's cultural programs become the center of attraction for the

political leaders, and, at best, such groups at this stage work more as an interest group or a pressure group.

By the time the group evolves to the third stage, Identity Politics, it becomes overtly political. The group starts formulating its ideology, which glorifies the golden phase of its history and highlights specific differences with others and asserts at the political level. For further consolidation of the community that is created with the help of ideological interpellation, such groups identify their other and start demonizing the other as the enemy. History is read selectively, events are highlighted to celebrate the glorious past, heroes are rediscovered, and, finally, the identity group emerges as an active political actor, promising the return of the golden age.

In the fourth stage, the identity movement enters the Violent Conflict phase. At this stage, a sharp competition begins among the different voices within the group. Two processes begin simultaneously: one silencing the weaker internal voices and the other attacking the imagined enemies. Sometimes, an identity group inflicts violence outside to consolidate its position within the community. A militant core emerges in the group and tries to capture the central stage by demonstrating its power to fight against the enemy externally. Conflict becomes inevitable if the other such groups created are equally assertive. At this stage, identity politics hides internal contradictions and inflicts violence within as the groups develop canons for governing the community, and such canons are mostly quite restrictive.

What is also interesting about identity politics in a country with diverse intersections, such as with multitudes of linguistic, religious, cultural, and social hierarchies, is that to create a Great Identity, the group also silences and marginalizes various Small Identities based on their cultural, historical, intellectual, or social capital. It becomes the group's burden to civilize the marginalized ones into the structure the group believes to be appropriate. Symbols of the Great Identity are enforced on the Small Identities who might have experienced the same but differently. That space for "differently" is erased from the equation when the leadership dictates the heroes that will be acknowledged, the language that will be spoken, and the culture that will be celebrated more. The Great Identity creates pockets of power based on the same approach it claims to be fighting.

What is the link between capitalism, democracy, and identity? Identity politics plays a functional role until the third stage of development as mobilization for democratic participation is enhanced. Though it is antithetical to the politics of citizenship, as the modern state does not treat individuals as community members but promises to empower them with the rights supported by authority, such a functional role of identity politics deepens democracy. Increased participation based on community identity is therefore considered a "democratic upsurge." There is a need to unpack the idea of democratic upsurge, however, as it is not so innocent in terms of the culture it produces, which by no means strengthens the notion of democracy. It renders the concept of modern citizenship irrelevant. In moments of crisis in capitalism, identity-based politics allows the state to fragment the marginalized people so that any consolidation for protest can be defeated. In such situations, the state promotes the politics of identity by providing specific selective support to the competing identities, and mainstream politics is defined by this.

India is an excellent example of this process. With the introduction of neoliberal policies by the Indian state, community rights were emphasized. The introduction of caste-based reservation policies and privileging community assertions started simultaneously with the introduction of neoliberal policies by privileging the market over the state in the realm of economy. Identity politics played a significant role in allowing the Indian state to introduce antipeople economic reforms. As typically happens in the fourth phase of identity politics, the liberal voices within these communities were marginalized, and identity groups formed their own by being demonized, which they started consolidating themselves. This became the suspected enemy, and at times, the otherness became a source of internal and external violence. The irony is that the so-called democratic upsurge created a political culture antithetical to democracy. The universal principles of political arguments were sacrificed to the assertion of the one guided by community interest. The relativist argument is based on cultural logic without asserting any universal principle of justice.

Consequently, instead of asserting that nothing universal is final and that new facts have to be accommodated whenever they come to light, we accept a relativist argument based on the interests of the powerful identity group. Sacrifice of the possibility of any universal principle of justice creates fertile ground for what we have started calling the post-truth era. The rise of new populism based on religious identity is a logical extension of identity politics asserted by the smaller communities. In India, it is popularly known as the Mandal–Kamandal phase of politics.³ There is no doubt that the caste system is antithetical to democracy, as it produces not only hierarchy but also humiliation, and there are issues of recognition and redistribution linked with discrimination based on it. We have to accept that the Indian democracy has to fight against such a system; however, the method of resolving this issue privileged the reassertion of caste as a community, and in this process, the other forms of discrimination were utterly undermined. This served the purpose of the capitalist state, as it reduced class assertion and even recognized increasing class discrimination. There was no formidable opposition from caste-based politics against neoliberal policies. The neoliberal policies were implemented unopposed during the dominance of the regimes supporting social justice based on the Mandal politics in India.

For quite some time, even the left parties were standing in support of caste-based identity politics as they feared the rise of communal politics of the majority community championed by a set of political parties. Unfortunately, as I have argued above, the option between Mandal and Kamandal was hardly an option, as one paved the path for the other. The logic has shifted a little, and now the idea of victimhood has shifted from caste-based discrimination to the narratives of religion-based humiliation. India is a fertile ground for long-term identity politics based on religious ideology, as it has a history of intercommunity distrust and conflict. The history of Hindu–Muslim relations has been full of contradictions and cooperation; however, the politics of identity selectively uses memory to highlight the atrocities done by the Muslim rulers and uses the global rise of Islamophobia to support the fear of the majority community. The shift from Mandal to Kamandal politics was not difficult, as it needed only a similar narrative of victimhood.

Once one form of identity politics is exhausted because of loss of legitimacy and capacity to create a more significant bloc, as the benefit of such politics is limited to the dominant partner, the other form is projected as a central contradiction. There is much

difference between identity politics based on caste discrimination and victimhood on religious grounds. In the former case, the structures of domination still exist and such politics played a liberative role to a great extent. In contrast, in the latter case, the dominant community has gained a lot in the post-independence development process. One cannot deny that there is a logical and organizational similarity between the two, however. Both undermine the logic of democratic culture despite increasing popular participation in politics.

An excellent example of this decline of the culture of democracy is found in *Chhadan*, a Hindi novel by Surendra Snigdh. This is a story of the region north of Bihar that has witnessed displacement and crisis due to massive floods and the changing course of the Kosi River. The novel begins with Gandhi's quick tour of this region in 1925 and covers the period marked by identity politics towards the end of the twentieth century. The writer chooses to narrate a story of this period precisely to show the change in the political culture of this region, which is marked by a movement from the value-based politics of Gandhian time to identity-based politics in which universal principles are lost. One good example to demonstrate this is the character of a famous communist leader who belonged to a lower caste but always based his politics on the universal principles of justice (Snigdh 2007). I have hardly found any social science writing taking cognizance of this point, apart from providing a good analysis of the decline of democratic culture and the poverty partisan sole of the modern liberal state at the grassroots level.

Let me elaborate on this point with the help of the novels I have chosen to discuss in this article. *Mahabhoj*, authored by Mannu Bhandari, gives a picture of the declining democracy in the 1970s. The leaders in this novel still, at least symbolically, claim to follow Gandhian ideals, and then the story exposes their hypocrisy and contribution to the distortion of democratic norms. Da Sahib, the main protagonist, is an ideal leader with deep links with the ideology and norms of the first generation of postindependent Indian leadership. Still, as the story moves, his personality is exposed. He gets involved in subtle forms of conspiracies and manipulations. Mannu Bhandari beautifully shows the difference between the form and content of his leadership:

Only two gigantic pictures of Gandhi and Nehru were hung on the wall in the name of decoration. Da Sahib considers them as his guides and inspirations. The teachings of Gita are supposed to be guiding principles of his life. You will find a copy of Gita in each corner of the house. By the way, he never gifted anything—he did not believe in meaningless pretence. However, someday, if he had to give something, he only used to give a copy of Gita. (Bhandari [1979] 2015:12)

Such a person manipulates the election process without hesitation. He operates through his men loaded with undemocratic values. Zorabar, one of the confidants of Da Sahib, sets the *Dalit* (downtrodden) *basti* on fire, in which several people are burnt along with their houses. Da Sahib goes against the principles of justice and protects him. Zorabar

kills the person who was trying to collect evidence of a heinous crime he has committed. Da Sahib protects him again. For this purpose, a plain and simple act of a crime by a musclem is transformed into a spicy love triangle story. It was proved that the *Dalit* person killed was a lover of his friend's wife, who, in the garb of friendship, killed him. To give this new twist and change this narrative, Da Sahib had to favor the editor and the press owner by providing a permit for the paper, and the police officer in charge of this case got a promotion. Da Sahib announced a development scheme for the *Dalits*, and the new narrative of progress replaced the depressing story of the burning of the *Dalit basti* and the killing of the person struggling for justice. This is a story of managing things at "election time." The entire democratic process has been reduced to manipulation during election time, which has become more a subject of management than a system of representation. Da Sahib reads the newspaper with great satisfaction as it highlights his efforts to bring progress to his region. The anger and anxiety of the *Dalit* community found no space in the news. This was probably when newspapers were blamed for publishing paid news in India. The author satirically shows that Da Sahib finds it so satisfying as he thinks the editor has done an excellent job promoting "democratic values": "After reading each word of this page, Da Sahib's face lit up. The village of Bapu's (Gandhi's) dream had taken shape before his eyes, and his heart drowned in the satisfaction of doing something significant (Bhandari [1979] 2015:154)." This difference in the form and content of the leadership in the '70s is responsible for the decline of the republican democracy.

The novel also gives the other side of the picture seen through the eyes of the victim, Binda, a *Dalit* and a friend of Bisu, the person who was killed. The real story is that Zorawar, Da Sahib's trusted assistant, is the culprit, and Binda knows it well. He had with him the evidence that was collected by Bisu, for which Zorawar killed him. Through Binda, the novel speaks about the nature of the emerging democratic trends. Look at the Thana (local police station) depicted in the novel:

In the name of decoration, two calendars were hung on the wall—One of Shiva-Parvati and the other of Bharat Mata. On one side of Bharat Mata, Gandhiji is spinning his charkha (wheel), and Nehru is carrying the flag of India. The country always remembers Gandhi-Nehru, even for a second. You will see them seated in every corner, even if they are lifeless pictures only. (Bhandari [1979] 2015:112)

Photographs of Gandhi and Nehru, which are more symbolic than productive, are everywhere. They have become sources of state legitimacy and have lost all their meaning. There is hardly any moral impact on the officer in charge. All immoral things are done in their virtual presence, and they have become "lifeless pictures." The novel shows that the Thana is the state apparatus instrumental in transforming democracy into a political conspiracy. This coercive state apparatus implements the will of the dominant class, and it does so in a style that makes things look legitimate. The people at the margin know the reality of these Thanas quite well, however. Consider the following statement,

in which Binda angrily asks the senior police officer who is sent for inquiry as part of Da Sahib's plan:

Crime! Do you still recognise crime? Of major crimes, do you? You do not consider significant crimes as a crime. Burn people alive . . . kill them . . . all these are not crimes in your eyes? . . . Why is it called investigation? Say you are making everyone a fool! . . . Why fool around with the villagers for nothing? In chess, from Da Sahib's to yours, the pawn of Bisu's death has been fitting in today. That is why the investigation is happening so fast. . . . With so much affection, people are being called for their statements. But nothing will happen. . . what has happened to you people . . . none has any faith or dharma [ethics] left in him. . . . All will suffer damnation. (Bhandari [1979] 2015:122).

The man's vision from the margin is evident as he understands the conspiracy, follows the sequence of events, and knows the intricacies. The punch line that comes after this dialogue represents this understanding of Binda. The police officer warns him that he should remember it is Thana (police station) and not *Pagalkhana* (mental asylum). See how perceptively Binda replies: "Have you left any difference between the two? Whatever happens in the police station, do you even understand its head or tail?" (Bhandari [1979] 2015:122). *Pagalkhana* as a metaphor is the climax of the novel and the end of the journey of republican democracy after this so-called liberal neutrality of the state is completely exposed. The entire criminal justice process depends on the First Investigation Report prepared by the Thana. The novel exposes how the political class uses this institution to empty the content of republican democracy.

The process that started in the 1970s in India matured in the 1990s as the norms of democracy finally took the back seat. This decade witnessed the rise of majoritarianism based on religion. One response to the crisis of democracy was in the form of identity politics of the 1980s. The elite of Independent India constituted the upper caste. Once it lost the sense of justice as it compromised on the values of republican democracy, the discontent against it was consolidated in the form of identity politics based on the victimhood of the marginalized castes. It was emancipatory, as such an identity consolidation did give these groups a bargaining capacity in democracy; however, this consolidation and subsequent identity politics created a further crisis of republican values as even lip service to such principles was abandoned entirely. People stopped asking questions as this new normal became so much more acceptable. The earlier tokenism of the ideas of Gandhi and Nehru, which used to ignite some feelings of guilt in the minds of the political leaders, was entirely abandoned. Symbolically, the "Gandhi cap" became a rare thing to find as it lost its glory in this new world. *Khadi* (derived from *khaddar*, a hand-spun and woven natural-fiber cloth promoted by Mahatma Gandhi) was still popular among the politicians, but more as a symbol of a field of activity than any commitment to the republican values. The phase of the politics of social

justice empowered the marginalized to some extent, but beyond a point, it created a new elite devoid of republican values.

The further rise of majoritarianism has been documented well by Priyamvad in his small novel *Ve Vahan Kaid Hain*. Its context is the pre-Babri Mosque demolition, hence politics before the rise of Hindutva as the politically dominant force. This text reminds us that it is a mistake to see politics from above; instead, we need to capture the trends in people's everyday lives. Unfortunately, the academic elite debated the idea of secularism as state policy. Still, it could not develop any strategy to counter the political culture, preparing the ground for the rise of majoritarian democracy. One must acknowledge the process through which the idea of secularism was being deleted from the language of politics. The protagonist is a celebrated professor of history, and he is known for his liberal secular approach. His ideological commitment and personal behavior influence his students. The aura of his personality was good enough to communicate his excellent humanitarian values. Things were changing for him, however. He could feel the rise of a new ideology, questioning his relevance. The novel shows the micro process of this emerging ideology. One of the professor's students was influenced by communal ideology. The reasons for this influence were mixed. The new logic of majoritarianism was taking shape, in which religious ideology was combined with economic gains.

The followers of this new ideology were consolidating the identity and using the power of the majority to capture disputed properties. This was using the idea of victimhood to remind people of historical injustice and was producing a new kind of humiliation. Sukkhi Babu, one of the main protagonists of this novel, is the alter ego of the professor of history, another protagonist who represents the Nehruvian secular viewpoint. Sukkhi Babu rose from being a worker in a leather factory to being a prominent government contractor and wanted to seek his fortune in politics. Interestingly, communalism was a new business opportunity for him, as most of the materials used by the communal groups were prepared in his factory. Initially, he was sympathetic to the Muslim community, as he was saved by one of his Muslim coworkers, Shakeel, during the communal riot, and they became good friends. He helped Shakeel by giving him a big plot of land for running the scrap business. After some time, Shakeel left for Pakistan and handed over the business to his brother, who was a poet and interested in something other than running such a low-level activity. His son took the industry forward, and he was pro-Pakistan and deeply influenced by Islamic fundamentalism. Sukkhi's rising status as a politician, in which he was "investing" a lot, empowered him to think big. His business ambition and desire for power were intertwined with his ideological orientation. He could mobilize young people for his purpose, remove Shakeel's nephew from the prime plot suitable for a big marketing complex, and command much more respect than he deserved. The narrative is symbolic of Indian politics, in which the politics of identity benefits some people economically. Consider the following sequence of communal events:

When Masood came out of jail, he was shocked. A flag and a temple were in the yard, and at the gate, Guthli was sitting, . . . violently, staring at Masood's eyes. The people with him were also prepared. There were policemen all

around, for if Masood created a stir, he would again be broken and thrown in jail. The court was closed for two days. Nothing happened in courts except long fights these days, for ten–twenty years or till death. Masood had neither that much money nor time and patience. There was no question of the police speaking against Sukkhi Babu. On the other hand, when Sukkhi Babu calculated that night, he came to know that he had a fief worth two crores, so dreams of the biggest commercial complex of the city started to ooze in his eyes. (Priyamvad [1994] 2002:90)

Sukkhi Babu's communal politics was an investment in the true sense of the term. It gave him double dividends, as it enhanced his economic and political stature. His plan of striking in the city, getting Masood arrested, and setting up the business establishment on the land he rented out to his friend Shakeel, who had saved his life, worked well. Masood later killed Guthli, the young man involved in it, and ran into the house of the professor, who wanted to keep him from a Hindu mob out to lynch him. The mob invaded his house, insulted his daughter, and went on. It is a complex story of a small city, but a narrative with a tremendous possibility of explaining things happening nationally.

The so-called secular state allowed these things to happen in the above case. The next stage of the development is partly imaginary and partly real. Purushottam Agarwal's *NACOHUS* is a dystopian novel in the true sense of the term. It is about contemporary times marked by democracy under the majoritarian regime and the philosophical crisis of capitalism. The National Commission for Hurt Sentiments is a new institution created by the state to take care of the violent phase of identity politics. It suits the majoritarian state, as it provides an opportunity to deflect the real economic issues. The time depicted in this novel is "NACOHUS KAL," an extension of a national emergency when fundamental rights are suspended. Nevertheless, unlike emergency, it is a permanent situation, and apparently, the commission has been constituted on a popular demand.

The main protagonists are three history professors in an institute. They teach Indian culture and civilization. Their only crime is that they dare to be liberal and secular in their approach, and the state has defined it as a new kind of crime. They are accused of hurting the sentiments of the people. It is a bigger crime than anything else now. The novel is full of dream sequences, imageries, and symbolism. It begins with a set of symbolisms depicting the crisis of democracy. There is a temple with a Sufi Mazar that gave the lane its name, symbolizing our society's syncretic culture. But the novel's protagonist, Suket, feels the presence of a crocodile and an elephant in this lane; the former symbolizes the evil of identity politics, violence, and state authoritarianism, and the latter symbolizes democracy. The crocodile has seized the leg of the elephant, and the elephant is crying for help:

Elephants' bellows and shrieks are just going into the void.
Coming back, taking the form of waves of pain, it only
spreads in its body. It was neither heard by Narayan of

Baikunth Lok [Heaven], Gods of *Yamllok* [Hell], nor people of earth. Elephants have been famous in the tradition of strength and wisdom. After being saved by Narayan himself in the tales from Purana, he is believed to be the totem of the blessing of Bhagwat. At this moment, the agonising screams are taking his wisdom and grace of Narayan—the vanity of the three to ether. (Agarwal 2016:10)

This is an ancient symbolism of Indian mythology, and the novel transforms it into a modern context. The entire novel is a narrative of this crisis of dumping democracy by capitalism that we are facing today. In the divorce process between democracy and capitalism, the state uses identity politics to deflect widespread attention, so NACOHUS is a new instrument discovered for the state to control the thought process in society.

The institute is vandalizing the students as the three professors have written something that has at heart the sentiments of different identity groups: the Hindu cultural nationalists, the Islamic fundamentalists, and the social justice group. These three professors are not communists, but they may be put under the broad category of left liberals believing in their responsibility towards democracy, marginalized people, and antipatriarchal culture. Time is changing. People with such ideas were considered progressive elites, and many played a significant role in policymaking in the postcolonial world. But look at the adjectives being used for them by the new political groups:

“Come out, bastard!”

“See, I have arrived. If you want to, beat me, if you want . . . let’s talk! I am ready to debate about what is written.”

“Debate? . . . you pimp . . .”

“*Abey* [Hey], he neither has a wife nor sister or daughter; whose pimp will he be?”

“*Abey*, that chick that comes every day to his house.”

“The traitors of the nation . . . beat them with your shoes! You cannot play with national sentiments; you cannot.” (Agarwal 2016:11)

This is the kind of political culture that is emerging in the process of identity politics. The worst is that the intellectual community gets divided, and some begin thinking these issues are specific to the literature and social science disciplines as their modern science is above them; however, many consider these intellectuals Eurocentric and raise slogans: “The intellectuals should abandon the logic of the sheer European type . . . Eurocentric rationalism—Murdabad [down with; death to: used as part of a slogan in India]” (Agarwal 2016:16). The politics of identity has blurred the argumentative capacity of intellectuals, too; it has done some cognitive damage. They also start talking about hurt sentiments and break the norms of republican democracy by

disturbing the meeting: “What meeting . . . what dialogue . . . enough, fury dance of hurt feelings . . . what right do these bastard seculars have of hurting majoritarian sentiments . . . beat these bastards . . . mother . . . anti-nationals”(Agarwal 2016:20). This is amazing but not difficult to believe by now, as the new political culture is taking shape and it has become a new normal. The novel has captured the emerging trend of intellectuals losing their argumentative advantages. The divisive identity politics has not spared anyone; we have lost judgmental rationality.

This is a new world. The novel summarily puts it in a paragraph of the slogans written on the wall and keeps repeating to make us believe the ontic mutation:

That history must perish/that has curdled the brain, “burn the documents, erase them,” “down with memory, long live ignorance,” “screw up the memories/says NACOHUS in affection,” “whoever will remember will be beaten up,” “art is that which entertains,” “literature is that which gives joy,” “thinking is that which makes you conscious immediately,” “writing is that which can be understood immediately,” “wisdom is that which brings you NACOHUS.” (Agrawal 2016:63)

This is the new NACOHUS time, in which things, values, and norms have changed. This is all-pervasive, as the meaning of good literature, knowledge, enlightenment, and almost everything has changed. These slogans indicate declining republican democracy and the rise of majoritarian democracy. This change has happened in a few days. It has taken a long time, and in this process, many people have contributed to its evolution in their ways. What we are witnessing today is only a stage of this decline; we have probably yet to witness the worst form of it. In the next section, I will discuss the changing nature of the state.

STATE, TECHNOLOGY, AND AUTHORITARIANISM

How does the state respond to the ontic mutation indicated by the deepening philosophical crisis of capitalism, emerging majoritarian democracy based on the politics of identity, and declining judgmental rationality in society? We need to differentiate between the regime, or government, and the state. There is no doubt that much of the nature and function of the state depends on the ideological and social basis of the party in power; however, the state is a more continuous institutional and ideological arrangement. Overall, it plays the role of supporting the unfolding mode of production. Under all different regimes in India, the state has facilitated the growth of capitalism. It keeps acquiring different strategies depending on the demands of capital, and regimes are supposed to follow the dictates of the logic of the structure. One of the major concerns of the state is to formulate a long-term ideological support system to make the dominant mode of production spontaneously acceptable to the people.

The elected governments function within these structural limits of the state. In the past few years, it has become clear that the political parties oppose government policies when they are not in power but implement similar policies when they come to power. One can find ample examples of political leaders making contradictory statements on various issues when they are out of power and when they become part of the ruling regime. This only suggests that the state has a structural logic, and governments cannot evade it. The structural reasoning in today's case depends on the demands for governance generated by capital's support requirement to emerge from the recent economic depression. The Indian state will support the capital, making several antipeople policies. The state develops tools for ideological justification and coercive repression to mitigate the popular discount due to capital-centric policies. The more it is difficult to justify the state ideologically, the more the state will need to be coercive. In this process, the state continuously compromises with the principles of republican democracy and transforms it first into liberal democracy and then into majoritarian democracy. Finally, if democracy still hinders the implementation of policies needed to support capital, it will abandon democracy altogether and switch to an authoritarian regime.

I want to argue that the microprocesses of this change from republican democracy to authoritarianism can well be understood through dystopian literary texts. Because these texts capture these microprocesses in people's everyday lives, they have the potential to capture the symptoms quite early, much earlier than the social sciences do. One can find the transition in Indian democracy well documented in the literary texts. The police station of *Mahabhoj* was part of the coercive state apparatus and was working on behalf of the ruling elite. Da Sahib could manipulate the report on the burning of the *Dalit basti* and the killing of the *Dalit* activist only through the patronage of the police officers. The routine promotion and posting of allurements helped these elites use the coercive state apparatus to get desired results. In *Ve Vahan Kaid Hain*, the same police allowed the riot to happen and favored the local business class in fulfilling his selfish goal, and by now, the state patronage has been replaced by financial corruption. By the time we reach the *NACOHUS* level, the authoritarian nature of the state becomes more visible and special provisions are made to legally silence the opposition to the state policies.

In *NACOHUS* time, the state has formulated laws for using coercive means and has created enough confusion in society so that such actions could be justified in the name of hurt sentiments. There are enough reasons to hurt the feelings of all kinds of people. It could be hurt due to a statement on nation, caste, community, gender, and you can go on and on. The students vandalized the library of the institute, and the scholars were attacked by groups claiming to be nationalists or advocates of social justice. Intellectuals have started acknowledging the danger of hurting sentiments. It is widely accepted that one should not even write articles on sensitive issues and definitely should not write the truth, as truth just does not matter; it has become dangerous. Some of the protagonist's colleagues argue in favor of post-truth, as they consider truth culturally dependent. Moreover, this has become the new normal. Symbolically, in the busy corner of the city, which used to be an assurance for syncretic culture, people ignore the heartbreaking crying of the elephant. In a way, the novel warns the people that the authoritarian state is emerging and this expected

behavior is quite abnormal for a democracy. Consider this statement by the character Chauda Singh, who represents the psychology of claiming a 56" broad chest:

Every visionary who takes society on the path of development has had to treat intellectuals like you to put your intellectuality in place . . . see wherever you want to . . . Germany, Italy, Russia, China, Iran . . . it's the same story everywhere . . . [they] become intellectuals. . . . Never use their wisdom . . . intellectuality is to change with time. . . . Match the tune in the chorus of hurt sentiments . . . most people are improving so fast . . . but you are just. (Agarwal 2016:67)

This statement by the officer of the NACOHUS exposes the core of the emerging nature of the state and the purpose of coercion. The idea is not to solve the identity issues but to use them for the needed hegemonic acceptance of the model of development or progress.

One can compare it with the actions of the Delhi police after the communal riot in Delhi. Some noted intellectual activists were given notices and called to the police station for inquiry. None of them reported any misbehavior on the part of the police; however, the purpose of such actions was clear. Please read the following analysis of the event that appeared in the editorial of a noted national newspaper:

It matters little, too, whether the police are eventually able to find the evidence—it won't against individuals with as impeccable and distinguished credentials in public life as Yechury or Yadav. But in the meantime, it can unleash the due process as punishment. And send out a chilling signal, not just to Muslims, but to all those who speak for a more inclusive India, that they can speak freely and criticise the government openly, at their peril. (Editorial, *Indian Express*, September 14, 2016)

So, you have entered the NACOHUS KAL already. The officer has picked up the protagonist on the grounds of hurt sentiments, but the idea is to spread the message that opposition to state policies will not be accepted.

To support NACOHUS, a new kind of organization has been created. It is called BouNeSar (Boudhik Naitik Samaj Rakshak, or Intellectual Moral Social Security Guard), and the purpose is clear:

The thing is that it is not going to happen now that self-proclaimed intellectuals keep hurting the sentiments with their anti-social, anti-national, or, for that matter, anti-ideological activities, and society does nothing about it. . . .

Enough show of respect for intellectuals, now discipline is needed . . . so the Boudhik Naitik Samaj Rakshak . . . BuNeSar takes care of the fact that intellectuals like non-intellectuals know their place. . . . Talking nonsense about these Samaj Rakshaks is also a punishable and cognisable offence . . . by the way, it was you only who made this insulting comment a few days ago, Suket Sir. . . . Nowadays, buildings are getting higher, and humans are becoming tinier. (Agarwal 2016:120)

It is important to note that the technique of running an authoritarian state has improved a lot. Now, the state is quite conscious of building consensus. New ideological elements have been introduced. There is a tendency to convert a section of the population into an ideological tool for the coercive apparatus. It has moved from divide and rule to make the section of people a stakeholder in the process.

Technological innovations now support the new authoritarian regime. The more we are using technology, the more there is a possibility of being controlled by the state. We happily surrender to information technology, which gives us enough information about ourselves, and control of any activity becomes easy:

The government has decided—every citizen’s food and drink, cry and song, pooping-peeing will be in the eyes of the government . . . people started hoping, “corruption has gone, corruption has gone; just gone . . .” It was announced that CCTV cameras would be installed in every corner of the city, and people started singing words of encouragement, “This is how women should be protected . . .” The government announced fearlessly, “All email phones will remain under surveillance.” Knowledgeable people were overwhelmed and thought of terrorism as being swept away. (Agarwal 2016:37)

The sense of insecurity and then a sense of false security makes people surrender to the techno-authoritarian state. This is how the techno-authoritarian state works and manufactures the consent of the people. This is entirely a new situation. Though this was the same formula that Hitler used to win consent to brutally murder the Jews, what has taken it to the next level is the inclusion of technology. With instruments of “mass insecurity” like fake news and social media platforms, the propaganda spreads faster than a forest fire. The same instruments are also used to provide a sense of false security and to justify actions undertaken to produce that security.

The NACOHUS time is about the use of information technology as human beings are no more supposed to be *homo economicus* or *homo creatives*; instead, they have evolved into *homo informaticus* and are supposed to live in the jungle of concrete buildings, develop a forest of information, and entertain themselves in that beautiful park (Agarwal

2016:115). In this new time, there will be no value for art, culture, literature, philosophy, and history, as technology can replace everything. The intellectuals are supposed to be replaced by the *technectuals*. Consider the ideology of NACOHUS time:

So, Great Intellectuals! I was saying, the context in which you call yourself Intellectual, the era of that context has gone, the answers to all the questions have been found, all the problems have been solved, it's good that history has ended, teach some anecdotes and stories to the children, that's the history. . . . The rest, brother, in this era, writing is that which can be understood immediately; wisdom is that which brings you NACOHUS. That is why you have been called to give wisdom, OK? . . . Understand this, in this post-history, post-narrative, post-Alaa, post-falls era, the only reason to do Homo-informatics is to develop newer technologies . . . theoretical science, and abstract mathematics are also useless things . . . what, like you people, these writers, artists, intellectuals, idiots, will be able to give the world . . . nothing? (Agarwal 2016:131)

This paragraph indicates the ideology of the new techno-authoritarian state, which is based on technological supremacy. The slogan of the techno-authoritarian state is "It is a sin to be intellectual, and *technectual* is your supreme authority" (Agarwal 2016:154), and that is the novel's concluding chapter.

FEAR, SEXUALITY, AND VIOLENCE

Democracy is not merely a system of governance. It is also how we define our relationship with nature, other human beings, and ourselves. The republican values that emerged in India during the freedom struggle had liberty, equality, and fraternity as essential components. The national movement brought people together to participate in the political process. Adopting the universal adult franchise provided confidence to its citizens belonging to different social hierarchies. For the first few decades, the state worked to democratize social relations by implementing the principles of citizenship. The new spaces were created to realize the dream of shared democratic experiences. The schools, hospitals, political institutions, and cultural spaces were sanitized for the participation of citizens without any discrimination. Even if they were not in ideal form in terms of being fully egalitarian, the guiding principle was legal and social equality. The euphoria of the freedom struggle guided the nation's mood. The political leadership was respected, and it was responsive. In an exciting interview with Lothar Lutze, Phanishwar Nath Renu has explained it:

You see, in politics, the people here would look upon the political leader with profound respect and would consider him something like a god. There was a time once, during

British rule, when people seeing someone who wore *khaddar* enter their village would render him every service, thinking to themselves, “The poor fellow will go to jail; what will he get to eat there?”—And they would feed him whatever good things they had in their house. Once, this was the *image* they had of him. Slowly, very, very slowly, when he got into power [this image changed], and the thing is, you cannot make a fool of the people, or anybody, for long. The people do not understand this dual character, triple character—there is one thing they understand: What’s right is right, what is black is black, what is white [is white]. So, they did not know how to add any colour in between to this, and they believed that these politicians—whether they were Congressmen, Communists, or Socialists—were much above them, were their servants, and had sincere sympathy for them. “Therefore,” the people thought, “we may be thieves, we may be scoundrels, but they cannot afford to be so. We may be liars, but they are superior people—like the sadhus and saints—who would teach and serve others. They must be like that.” (Lutze 1985)

This was the image that the political class inherited from the freedom struggle. They were respected for their sacrifice. People used to see them as *Panchparneshwar*—people above the narrow self-interest. *Khadi* and Gandhi Topi (a white cap made of *khadi*) used to be the symbols of the new political class that emerged from the freedom struggle with the legacy of Gandhi and Nehru. Things transformed gradually as the form remained the same but the content changed. The politics declined, and democratic values were compromised. Interestingly, people had the intelligence to understand this. They lost their trust in the political class, which damaged democratic values. Eventually, democracy was reduced to merely a matter of formal representation. This transition took place slowly, but it was deep, and in this process, political parties became more important than the political person. The nature of the party system was transformed from being democratic to authoritarian in terms of their organizational culture. How could an undemocratic political party save democracy? This paved the way for introducing techno-authoritarian characteristics in the state as party leadership started relying more on election-management technology, including money and manipulative voting methods. The leaders began losing their connectivity with the people and their issues.

Consequently, democracy became a capital-intensive industry, following the rule of the market, of course, a different kind of market in which purchasing power was defined not only by money for buying voters but also by populism based on identity. With this emergence of “market” democracy, a techno-authoritarian state emerged and redefined the game’s rules. It has transformed the nature and character of the political class, electoral politics, and the relationship between the party and its followers. Capturing this fundamental transformation is the key to understanding the features of Indian democracy

and the nature of the state today. The novel *Mahabhoj* adequately captures this change: “That is when a deadly wind blew into politics, dragging down key politicians’ spines and turning them into a tail that used to jiggle in front of its seniors. Democracy was there for drumming and cursing, but its reality was that the Praja [public] was dishonest, and the tantra [system] was dependent on the willfulness of a small number of people” (Bhandari [1979] 2015:49). It is important to remember that his observation was made in the decade of the 1970s. Social scientists missed this emerging trend in the Indian polity. Renu indicated something while speaking of the decline in the postindependence dream, which Mannu Bhandari confirmed in the 1970s. The decline continued, and its level went incredibly low.

There are many exciting aspects of this techno-authoritarian state. For instance, it survives by instilling fear in the people’s minds. There is a return to the Hobbesian state of nature; each one fears the other; there is a fear of uncertainty; there is a fear of the invisible hand of the state. Fear is the key to the survival of the techno-authoritarian states. In *Mahabhoj*, there is fear among the marginalized people. It is fear of the local *Bahubali* (muscleman), the political leader, and the police. Police stations represent the state’s coercive power at the grassroots level, and fear is an essential factor in maintaining the aura of this institution. The fear is so prevalent in *Mahabhoj* that nobody dares to tell the truth about the episodes of fire in the Basti or about the murder committed. Everyone knows about who had it done, but the inquiry suggests that it was a fire by chance, and instead of murder, it was a case of suicide. To comprehend this point, look at the discussion between the friends *Ve Vahan Kaid Hain* about fear:

“Then how will you kill that girl, that blind, that sick, that life with a trident if she is not a Hindu?” [Jeevan is the name of a sick child in the house of the professor whom both the friends respect.]

“Whether I will be able to kill or not, it is a thing for later, but I can kill—creating that fear has become necessary now. . . .

“A bit earlier, you were talking about ending compassion. Now, you are talking about creating fear. What a terrible life and future you want to make; all of you, your philosophy, fear soaks everything up, Chinmoy. All the consciousness inside, dignity. The wall of soul, even to its roots.” (Priyamvad [1994] 2002:31)

It is important to note that fear is the core tool of authoritarianism, accumulating anxiety in the human subconscious. It is the accrued anxiety that is the source of depression and nightmares.

The novel has several dream sequences in which the protagonist experiences the fear installed in the subconscious. The protagonist of the NACOHUS suffers in the dream. The fear of the authoritarian state was installed in his subconscious, expressed in the following words: “What is the colour of fear? Sometimes brown, little red, sometimes

green, sometimes saffron, sometimes like rainbow? Maybe even white . . . like shrouds” (Agarwal 2016:31). The series of dream sequences in this novel suggests the deep relation between fear in real life and the unusual symbols of it appearing in the dream of the protagonist⁴; however, his friends correctly diagnose the problem:

Subconscious and all are fine . . . but the factory of nightmares isn't in the subconscious; it's somewhere else, and to that point, neither you bastard intellectuals' Freud Baba and his water-hen disciple Jung's reach is, nor of our native *Yogis* [practitioner of Yoga], *Babas* [a term used as a mark of respect to refer to Hindu ascetics], *Ammas* [mother; leaders of New Religious Movements]. . . . You are a member of a community of nightmares. . . . Learn to live with nightmares . . . otherwise, what is the point of the membership? (Agarwal 2016:28)

One can analyze paragraph after paragraph related to the artificially generated fear factor strengthened by the technological simulation. Fear is becoming part of the ideological state apparatus for the first time. One feels the invisible eyes of the state all around—eyes empowered by technology to penetrate the deepest layers of our being. There is no doubt that fear is antithetical to democracy, and the simple consequence of anxiety as a political concept is the decline and rise of the techno-authoritarian state.⁵

Another unexplored dimension of the widespread fear and anxiety in society is sexual violence. There is a paradigm shift in this realm. Sexual violence now is not a product of the usual desire for physical, sexual satisfaction. Still, it expresses deep frustration aimed at humiliating the person or the community. Consider such an episode in *Ve Vahan Kaid Hain*:

“That day, you asked if I have the flag of humanity?” . . . Look, he opened the zip of the pants, put his hand inside, and kept the penis on his palm, “Look at this, grab this flag.” He dragged Dadu by holding his hand. Dadu closed his fist with all the force he had. . . .

“Do you know where we will pitch this flag? In between your daughter's thighs . . . look at the flag.” (Priyamvad [1994] 2002:108)

This kind of sexual aggression is a product of long-accumulated anxiety in the personal and collective subconscious. The point becomes more visible in *NACOHUS*:

Yes, Mr. Reuben, what were you saying?” Why don't the people with hurt sentiments argue. . . . Why do they get down to beating . . . isn't it? This matter is beyond your understanding. What do you know about feeling proud

about one's existence that we feel when you are treating the pain of your feelings by beating them up or getting it done . . . you aren't able to believe right . . . ok, someday experience it yourself . . . joke not . . . just, once, someday . . . aah . . . ooh . . . experience the happiness. It's almost ironic . . . you see. . . . Whether a man is a chameleon or a human . . . he always seeks out the evacuation of his anger, frustrations and depression through sex. (Agarwal 2016:148)

This is something unique, as one always wonders why the nature of sexual violence is changing in India. These texts suggest that there is a deeper connection between the crisis of capitalism, state authoritarianism, fundamentalism, and sexual violence. When considering any project reclaiming republican democracy, it is essential to understand this complexity. The so-called theories of populism being advanced to comprehend the contemporary crisis may not be enough to give us the depth of our problems in India.

CONCLUSION

This article analyzes three novels from Hindi literature written at separate times. The first novel, *Mahabhoj*, written in 1979, captures the initial years of the decline of Indian democracy. This was also the decline of the system of one-party dominance in Indian politics. The leaders of the dominant political party carrying the legacy of the Indian National Movement and that of Gandhi and Nehru started showing the symptoms of compromising democratic values. The protagonist representing the party got involved in the worst electoral manipulation involving state institutions and creating social conflict. The second novel, *Ve Vahan Kaid Hain*, was written in 1994, in the background of majoritarian politics marked by the rise of Hindutva and the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. It explains the micropolitics of the Hindutva movement and shows the further decline of values in society and politics. Remarkably, it shows the political economy dimension of this new phase of Indian politics in which the neoliberal value system got intertwined with majoritarian politics. This was a new phase that was so clearly visible in society. Symbolically, it was represented by the attack on a famous professor of history and the installation of the worst kind of fear in the minds of intellectuals. The third novel, *NACOHUS*, shows the continued process and gives possible future directions, as it is a dystopian novel. It is full of violence, nightmares, abuses against intellectuals, and state authoritarianism. Social scientists in India have yet to be able to capture this process and the complexity of it. The process continues, and I guess it has yet to climax.

This article suggests that the decline of republican democracy and the rise of techno-authoritarian states must be comprehended in their multiple dimensions. One always wonders why the crime related to women has increased so much. What is further surprising is the nature of rape cases, which does not indicate by any means the product of human desire to have sexual pleasure. It is the consequence of the aggression that people have imbibed in themselves. The techno-authoritarian state has profound implications for

our conscious and subconscious behavior. The deepening philosophical crisis of capitalism might result in the strengthening of the techno-authoritarian state. One can read it between the lines of the following decision of the UP government: According to the Uttar Pradesh Special Security Force (UPSSF) Act 2020, the force will not require a magistrate's order or warrants to make an arrest or conduct searches. A set of rules by the state government will govern its powers (*Indian Express*, September 14, 2020). This only indicates the beginning of something coming. This time, reclaiming republican democracy will not be easy, as the transition is a kind of ontic mutation.

NOTES

1. It is important to note that it was reported on September 9, 2020, that some men in black masks were trying to enter Alexievich's apartment. This is the kind of new phase of techno-authoritarian states almost everywhere globally. She wrote, "They have stolen our country, and now they are trying to abduct the best of us. But hundreds of others will come to replace those who have been taken away from our ranks. It was not the Coordination Council that rebelled, it was the entire country that raised" (Karmanau 2020).
2. Lacan uses two interrelated concepts: imago and mirror stage. *Imago* refers to the mental image of oneself formed at the early stage of human life. This image is not just a visual representation but encompasses the child's perception of themselves, influenced by interactions with the external world, primarily through primary caregivers. This image also influences the identity choices that the person makes in their life. This theory of imago is closely related with Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, which he thinks occurs when a child recognizes their reflection in a mirror, usually between six and eighteen months of age. Lacan proposed that this recognition leads to the formation of the ego, as the child identifies with the image in the mirror. The formation of the imago is a critical moment in a child's development, as it marks the beginning of the ego's lifelong tension between the internal sense of self and the external image. It introduces the child to the symbolic order, a key Lacanian concept referring to the realm of language, culture, and societal norms. These two concepts could be crucial for making sense of this phase of identity formation. This explains human beings' emotional attachment to culture. (For details, see Lacan 2003.)
3. *Mandal-Kamandal* indicates two kinds of politics of identity in India that have deeply influenced the political scenario since the 1980s. Mandal symbolically represents the caste politics, whereas Kamandal represents the communal politics of the Hindutva forces.
4. A social scientist should document and explore the clinical diaries of the psychoanalysts of contemporary times. I remember talking to a psychiatrist in Kashmir while doing a project on conflict; he had similar stories to share.
5. "Azadi had become a defining rallying call of the anti-CAA protests. This was the Azadi, or freedom, promised in the constitution—liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship. Those young people who organised the protests, bearing portraits of Gandhi in one hand and Ambedkar in the other, are today being

summoned and interrogated by the police and jailed without bail as rioters, conspirators, and secessionists. While rejecting her bail plea, a judge of the Delhi High Court reprimanded one young activist. ‘When you choose to play with embers’, he admonished her, ‘you cannot blame the wind.’ ” (Mander 2020:8)

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