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"...kahāniyā̃ ākhir bantī kaise haĩ?!" ("…how, after all, do stories originate?!"). The Clash between Indian and Western Literary Traditions in Ajñeya's Short Stories

SUMMARY: The aim of this paper is to prove that Ajñeya (pseudonym of S. H. Vātsyāyan, 1911–1987), a Hindi writer of poetry and prose, formulated some theoretical essentials for *kahānī* as a literary genre, which influenced its further development in the second half of the 20th century. Examples from his selected short stories and theoretical essays have been quoted to illustrate issues which preoccupied the Hindi literary environment in its transition from tradition to modernity. The issues discussed in this paper refer to more general questions of a modern Indian writer's attitude towards a loss of traditional values and a search for identity in an encounter with the West. Ajñeya's contribution to the development of the modern short story still requires recognition because he was often criticized for excessive intellectualism and individualism. This situation started to change after his centenary jubilee celebration in 2011. The paper includes an outline of trends prevailing in Hindi short stories, which helps us to examine Ajñeya's modern approach. Materials analyzed in subsequent sections reveal demands which he formulated towards modern authors of short stories. His claim for the liberation of a writer and the personal experience as a source of literature has been illustrated with quotations from the short story *Kalākār kī mukti*. It proves the writer's awareness of tensions which affected Hindi literature in the time of transition. In this context the term *mukti* is presented as one of the key-words of his writings. His deliberations on the change within the concept of reality in Indian literature and transformation of Indian literary audience are discussed. The quotations from further short stories (i.e. *Nayī kahānī kā ploṭ*, *Alikhit kahānī, Kavitā aur jīvan. Ek kahānī, Tāj kī chāyā mẽ*) reveal how realistic, mythical or romantic plots and characters are juxtaposed in one work. The examples from: *Paramparā*. *Ek kahānī* and *Sikṣā* present Ajñeya's postulate of revealing deeper truths in literature. The usage of symbols, the means of suggestive language as well as techniques of building an "atmosphere" of the modern short story are analyzed (*Gaiṇgrin*, *Alikhit kahānī*, *Darogā Amīcand*, *Hīlī-bon kī battakhẽ*). In this context

an application of traditional poetics of *rasa* to contemporary texts is investigated. The paper leads to the conclusion that while mastering the skill of short story writing, Ajñeya acted also as a theoretician, who attempted to teach Hindi writers and critics how to save their own tradition and identity in a clash with the West. He postulated that modernity should not exclude exploring one's own traditional literature and art, it should focus on its transformation into modern idioms. This claim is presented as the writer's literary manifest. Ajñeya's demands analyzed in this paper are explained as resonating with some criteria of a modern short story later defined by the writers of *naī kahānī* school. It leads to the final conclusion that his achievements is this genre possess model features for creating modern short stories in Hindi.

KEYWORDS: Ajñeya, Hindi literature, short story, *kahānī*, realism, East-West encounter, *rasa*.

The question quoted in the title of this paper comes from one of Ajñeya's last short stories, titled *Kalākār kī mukti* ("The Liberation of an Artist", Ajñeya 1992: 599–602), titled by scholars of Hindi literature as one of his most representative works.[1] It deals with the problem of the origin of stories and freedom of the writer's experience as a necessary condition for it. The story was written in 1954,[2] a few years before *nayī kahānī* appeared as a new literary movement in Hindi prose (Rutkowska, Stasik 1992: 201). Writers of this school initiated, for the first time on a larger scale, a debate among Hindi literary critics on the defining criteria of the modern short story (Roadarmel 1974: 242).

L. Lutze claims that Ajñeya's short story *Kalākār kī mukti* contains an essential answer to the question as to what is modern in Indian modern literature (Lutze 1986a: 9). And he points to the term introduced by the writer at the end of this short story, *kalā sādhnā*[3]—an intense striving of the artists towards accomplishment—as its characteristics.[4]

[1] Danuta Stasik and Tatiana Rutkowska list this story among his most known and highly evaluated short stories. See: Rutkowska, Stasik 1992: 200–201.

[2] The date is given according to the list attached by Ajñeya in an appendix to the completed edition of his short stories. See: Ajñeya 1992: 607.

[3] This term appears at the end of the story. See: Ajñeya 1992: 603.

[4] Lutze renders this term in German as "das konzentrierte künstlerische Bemühen". See: Lutze 1986a: 9.

In the opinion of this scholar Ajñeya's attitude towards all literary genres was experimental and many of his literary achievements have a model character for contemporary Hindi literature. (Lutze 1986b: 269) Ajñeya himself thinks that "a literary work is […] instrumental to self-analysis or self-introspection in the course of which the writer identifies the new or the right tendencies" (Rangra 1992: 123). His works discussed in this paper offer evidence that he includes in his own experience the accumulated or collective experience of Indian literary tradition. Ajñeya explains his experimental attitude towards tradition in the preface to *Dūsrā Saptak*, an anthology of Hindi poets edited by him in 1951 (Ajñeya 1970). The term *prayog*, "an experiment", became a motto of modern poets already in *Tār Saptak* of 1943 edited also by him. The experimental attitude consist of examining, exploring and adopting the sense of one's own tradition to one's self instead of simply rejecting or picking it up and carrying on.[5] B. Lotz notices that he presented here an "apparently new theory of the experiment as an eternal quality of all poetry" and thus "a dynamic concept of tradition, in which the poet has to prove himself by creating his own form of expression, by shaping historical experience and tradition into contemporary idioms" (Lotz 2012: 132). Ajñeya demonstrates the same attitude in his prose, the short stories discussed in this paper should reveal it.

P. Gaeffke maintains that Ajñeya "gathered fellow-experimentalists, edited their poems and became himself the foremost poet in this group called 'experimentalists'. […] but from the start (1943), [his] theoretical discussions centered more on 'experience' than on 'experiment' and more on the poet's relationship to the modern world than on the autonomy of the poem itself" (Gaeffke 1978: 87). But in fact, free and personal experience as a source of creative inspiration was regarded by

[5] Cf. the following passage from his preface to *Dūsrā Saptak*: "Paramparā, kam se kam kavi ke liye koī aisī poṭlī bā̃dkar alag rahī huī cīz nahī̃ hai, jise vah uṭhā kar sir par lāḍ lekar cal nikle. [...] paramparā kā kavi ke liye koī arth nahī̃ hai, jab tak vah use ṭhos-bajākar, toṛ-maroṛ kar, dekh kar ātmasāt nahī̃ kar letā". See: Ajñeya 1970: 6–7.

Ajñeya as a precondition to the experimental attitude. He was aware of the shift which was taking place within the literary sensitivity of Indian readers accustomed to traditional means of evoking aesthetic experience designed by the poetics of *rasa*.[6] In his essays on "The Role of the Writer in Contemporary Indian Society" and "The Hindu View of Conflict and its Impact on Contemporary Indian Writings", Ajñeya explains how the contact with Western prose and its concept of realism resulted in the individualization of the reader's and writer's experience (Vatsyayan 1970; 1972). Ajñeya is convinced that the process of artistic creation is a two-way relation: "a literary piece also creates the author as much as it gets created by him" (Rangra 1992: 123). He maintains that while exploring his own tradition a modern writer re-creates his own humanity. The writer thinks that the aim of literature is to present "the possibility of perpetual renewal of mankind" (Vatsyayan 1972: 17). The reader, on whom the realization of writer's creation depends,[7] can participate in it.

The term *mukti,* "liberation", included in the title of Ajñeya's short story discussed in this paper, reflects his idea of unrestrained, personal experience as a source of his artistic creation. In an interview with R. Rangra of 1961 Ajñeya stressed the role of personal experience as the source of a writer's creative inspiration: "I believe, one's attitude to life results from one's experience in life. […] This interaction is the basic principle of life. This becomes more significant in the case of the creative writer as the imposition of such attitude can only curb his genuine approach. To any piece of creative writing an attitude can be relevant only to the extent it happens to be the outcome of that very experience, which urged him to write" (Rangra 1992: 122). The question is how in his own short stories Ajñeya attempted to liberate himself from rigid conventions and trends. The answer requires an insight first

[6] Sanskrit theory of aesthetics known as *rasa* was for the first time expounded in *Nāṭyaśāstra* , dated between 500 B. C. and 500 A. D.

[7] The awareness of a reader's role is well manifested by Ajñeya in his poem *Ek sannaṭā bunntā hũ̃,* analyzed by me in another paper. See: Bigoń 1997.

into his place in Hindi literature and then into the tendencies prevailing in prose of his time and that previous to him.

The place of Ajñeya and his short stories in Hindi literature

The writer published his theoretical texts under his real name Saccidānand Hīrānand Vātsyāyan (1911–1987) but he used his literary pen-name, Ajñeya, for his artistic works.[8] His literary activity resulted in 6 novels, over 60 short stories, 19 collections of lyrics, many theoretical and memorial essays. He formed and initiated modern trends and schools in Hindi poetry and prose, edited literary magazines and anthologies of Hindi and Indian literature, and established literary and cultural circles.[9] He acted as a translator—from Hindi and into Hindi. He rendered into English many of his own works, especially novels,[10] as well as works of other Hindi writers. He translated into Hindi works from Bengali and English.[11] Ajñeya's position as a writer of short narrative works was acknowledged already in the year 1975,[12] when the first

[8] This pen-name was given to him by Premchand (1898–1936), the father of Hindi short story. See: Vishnu Khare's reminiscences of Ajñeya: Kimmig 1990: 67.

[9] From 1938 to 1940 Ajñeya worked as an editor in "Sainik" in Agra and "Viśāl Bhārat" in Calcutta; in the period of 1947–1952 he edited literary magazines: "Bijlī "in Patna, "Pratīk" in Allahabad; he re-edited "Viśāl Bhārat" and "Nayā Pratīk" in 1973; he edited anthologies of modern Hindi poetry: *Tār Saptak* in 1943, *Dūsrā Saptak* in 1951 and *Tīsrā Saptak* in 1959, which paved the way for New Poetry in Hindi.

[10] *Islands in the Stream*, a translation of *Nadī ke dvīp* (Ajñeya 1980); *To Each his Stranger*, a translation of *Apne-āpne ajnabī* (Ajñeya 1951).

[11] Nicola Pozza stresses the importance of Ajñeya's translations of such works as: Tagore's *Gorā* and *Rājā* from Bengali and novels by Swedish writer Pär Lagerkvist through their English versions. In his opinion Ajñeya as a translator "helped to enrich Hindi literature". See: Pozza 2010: 129.

[12] Lothar Lutze maintains that after this publication an interest of readers and critics towards Ajñeya's short stories grew. See: Lutze 1986b: 270.

complete edition of his short stories appeared in two volumes.[13] In spite of receiving the most prestigious literary awards: in 1964 the Sahitya Academy Award and in 1978 Jñānpīṭh Puraskār, untill the end of his literary career he faced severe criticism from writers who opposed his experimental attitude in prose, such as the progressive writers of *pragativād*. N. Sinh, who criticized him for lack of realism and extensive individualism, only years later, on the occasion of the centenary of Ajñeya's birth in 2011, acknowledged him as a writer "greater than Nāgārjun" (Sharma 2012: 56).

Ajñeya's first short story *Jiī̃ñāsā* of 1935 comes from the time of Premchand, the father of this genre in Hindi, the last ones published in the collections *Ye tere pratirūp* of 1961 and *Jiī̃ñāsā tathā anya kahāniyā̃* of 1965, belong to the period of *nayī kahānī* as a literary school.

His short stories disclose a broad range of themes: the struggle for human dignity under the British rule (*Drohī* 1931,[14] *Numbar Das* 1937, *Darogā Amīcand* 1938, *Puruṣ kā bhāgya* 1940), the sufferings of diverse ethnic groups during Indian Partition (*Badlā* 1947, *Leṭar baks*, 1947, *Ve dūsre* 1950, *Muslim-muslim bhāī-bhāī* 1947, *Śraṇadātā* 1947, *Hīlī-bon kī battakhẽ 1947*), the situation of woman (*Gaī̃grīn* 1934, *Paramparā*. *Ek kahānī* 1939), the condition of poverty among Indian people (*Śāntī hãsī thī 1935*,[15] *Nayī kahānī kā ploṭ* 1936), the experience of art and beauty (*Taj kī chāyā mẽ* 1936, *Kavitā aur jīvan. Ek kahānī* 1934), the clash between Indian tradition and modern approach (*Kalākār kī mukti* 1954, *Paramparā*. *Ek kahānī* 1939, *Sikṣā 1954*), search for values (*Sikṣā 1954*), trends in the development of a short story as a literary genre (*Nayī kahānī kā ploṭ* 1936, *Kalākār kī mukti* 1954). There are other possibilities of their classification

[13] With the respective titles: Vol. I: *Choṛā huā rastā* and vol. II: *Lauṭṭī pagḍaṇḍiyā̃*. See: Ajñeya 1975.

[14] This short story has been translated into Polish by T. Rutkowska under the title "Wróg". See: Aggiej 1975: 396-399.

[15] This short story has been translated into Polish by D. Stasik, see: Agjej 2012.

as Th. Damsteegt suggests: stories about "violent revolution", "*hiṃsā*", "loneliness, lack of contact and communication" and "stories written to put forward some theory and philosophy" (Damsteegt 1986a: 219). Ajñeya's short stories illustrate their author's way from the period of youthful rebellion demanding the freedom of man in the society to the mature intellectual dialogue with other people and with oneself. They testify to his search of timeless values in literature; in his short stories Ajñeya quite often attracts the readers' attention to the theoretical problems of literature or art in general. This attitude of an art theoretician resonates with his understanding of the role of a writer in modern society. He explains: "In India throughout its history and tradition literature has been the primary art and it was *through the writer* that that there was any inter-flow of ideas about culture from the elite to the world of the artist. The writer stood in between the world of the artist and the world of the thinker or the religious leader" (Vatsyayan 1972: 6). He is convinced that a modern writer in spite of a decline of his position, which started with an advent of Western ideas on art in India, has to strive for such a role nowadays. (*ibid*.) Ajñeya himself strives to fulfill it. His short stories prove the author's awareness of various tensions which disturbed Hindi literary environment. They provide his deep reflections on diverse influences present in modern Hindi literature: native, Sanskrit and Persian, and foreign, Western. His short story *Kalākār kī mukti* and its claim of an artist's freedom towards art could be read in this context as the precondition of the origin of stories. The writer addresses such a demand towards modern Hindi writers in their encounter with Western literature, which changed their traditional attitude. His skill of writing short stories shows mastery in employing all narrative techniques accessible to him, both Indian and foreign. A study done by Th. Damsteegt proved that Ajñeya used well-structured plots, both linear with a climax as well as involute, applied symbols and suggestive language as well as similes and direct comments (Damsteegt 1986a, 1986b). L. Lutze admits that the range of stylistic means employed by Ajñeya in his short stories is astonishing, it stretches from traditional oral narration, through

normative rules of narration (like in *Darogā Amīcand*), to the ironical questioning or even dissolution of narration (like in *Paramparā. Ek Kahānī*).[16] Ajñeya's tendency to emphasize the atmosphere of a story resonates with the tendency typical of "new short story" writers, but also with traditional poetics of *rasa* and its means of conveying emotional states. The standpoint of a theoretician, which he displays in his own short stories, leads to the debate on the development of this genre in Hindi prose in the 20th century.

Ajñeya's short stories and trends prevailing in Hindi prose

Since the emergence of the genre of short stories in Hindi literature at the beginning of the 19th century, writers faced problems of the developing literary language and its limitations. The changing attitude of Indian literary audience and the dilemma of choice between traditional and modern means of appeal, which was related to it, created a problem too. The theoretical consideration of how the effects of this shift affected literary means of writing short stories had to be formulated yet. With an advent of Western prose and its popularity due to the press in India, the democratization process of Hindi literature had started and writers had to react to it.

One of the works aspiring to be called the "the first piece of prose fiction in Hindi",[17] *Rānī Ketkī kī kahānī*, written by Inśā Allāh Khān (b. 1818) was composed in Khaṛi-bolī hindī. After a long tradition of literature, exclusively poetry, in Brāj and Avadhi, this dialect became the language of prose and its new genres: novels and short

[16] "Überrascht die Spannweite der stilistischen Möglichkeiten dieses Authors: Sie reicht von der mündlichen Überlieferung herrührenden, mit Formeln versetzten Erzählenweise in *Daroga Amichand* bis zur ironisierenden Ingrafestellung, ja Auflösung der Erzählens in *Tradition: eine Geschichte*." See: Luzte 1986b: 270.

[17] This is an opinion of Ayodhyāsinh Upādhāyay (1865–1928). See: McGregor 1974: 64.

stories.[18] The theme of *Rānī Ketkī kī kahānī* and the structure of its plot, full of episodes of supernatural adventures and romances, reflected the traditional way of narration known either from bardic *rāso*[19] of early medieval Hindi literature, which was influenced by Sanskrit, or from Urdu romances known as *dāstān*,[20] influenced by Persian literature. The term *kahānī* used by Inśā Allāh Khān in a romantic story appeared as a name of a literary genre first in 1903 on the pages of literary magazine *Sarasvatī*, edited by Mahāvīrprasād Dvivedī (1861–1938). Also in *Sarasvatī* around this time appeared a short story of Kiśorī Lāl Gosvāmī *Indumatī*, regarded as the illustration of formal demands for the short story genre.[21] Its author, being an advocate of a didactic function of literature, at the same time filled this story with national and emotional tones. Inspired by the realism of Bengali writers, he stared the school of *yathārthavād,* or realism, in Hindi short story. In later development of this school illustrated by the works of Premchand, the realistic approach still melts with an idealistic vision of a writer. Writers previous to him had to face a choice either to comply with new formal demands offered by English narrative forms or to continue the tradition of romance story cycles known from Sanskrit narrative poems, folk songs or Urdu tales. A debate on formal demands of short stories had been influenced by a discussion, previous to it, of

[18] The debate on what is the first story in Hindi literature is still vivid among contemporary Indian scholars and academics. Some see in this place romantic *Rānī Ketkī kī kahānī* or didactic *Indumatī of* Kiśorī Lāl Gosvāmī*,* others patriotic *Ek ṭokari bhar miṭṭī* by Madhāv Rāv Sapre from 1901 or, full of love for national culture, *Usne kahā thā* by Candrdhar Śarmā Gulerī from 1915. See: Śukl 1997: 324 and Rastogī, Śrī Śaraṇ 1988: 128. See also an article presented online in: *The Tribune* (2000).

[19] The term *rāso* means "narrative poem, ballad, narrative song". The most popular of this kind was *Pṛthvīrāj rāso* of Cand Bardāī of the 12th century A.D. See: Rutkowska, Stasik 1992: 20–32.

[20] Term *dāstān*, f. noun of Persian origin, means in Hindi: a tale, story, a history. See: McGregor 1993: 493. As a genre it is discussed in: McGregor 1974: 112.

[21] See: Rastogī 1988: 127.

a novel and its theoretic requirements.[22] Two Hindi novels: *Parikṣā guru* by Śrinivās Dās (1850–1887) written in 1882 and *Candrakāntā* by Devakīnandan Khatrī (1861–1913) first published in 1891 provided different models (McGregor 1974: 94). The first mentioned work offered a Western structure of plot and serious didactic theme, the other—a romantic traditional plot and amusement. Devakīnandan Khatrī monopolized Hindi mass readers with mysterious plots of his novel and its simple style of language. He soon issued the sequels of *Candrakāntā*'s adventure saga. This novel was printed in pieces in the form of short episodes, which added to the popularity of short prose forms. Thus, the modern Indian literary public continued to dwell on traditional emotional plots of adventure romance and its spacious structure. In the 20th century readers' interest in *Candrakāntā* increased even more.[23] Short stories were also popularized with the help of Hindi periodicals and literary magazines issued weekly and monthly. The press in English, on the other side, exerted strong influence on Indian society's elite, especially in Bengal.[24] Educated Bengalis eagerly read Western prose. This was not the case of intellectuals in North and Central India, in Lucknow and Benares there were fewer Western influences due to the popularity of traditional poetry in Brāj and Avadhī and Persian genres of *dāstān* and *quissa* (McGregor 1970: 144). In one of his essays Ajñeya admits that the first writer who noticed the conflict with the West and reflected it in his own fiction was Rabindranath Tagore, for whom: "the East-West confrontation was primary an aspect of India's emergent nationalism. Though he did attempt to put nationalism within the framework of a larger concept of brotherhood, as an artist his main concern was with the individual conscience and with the relation of

[22] For the detailed analysis of the development of early Hindi novels see: Dubyanskaya 2003.

[23] D. Stasik mentions the number of 30 re-editions of *Candrakāntā* till 1961. Stasik 1992: 142.

[24] In Bengal the East-India Company installed itself in the 17th century and ruled for a hundred years until in 1858 it was taken over by the Queen.

the individual to All" (Vatsyayan 1970: 885). At that time, in the 1910s and 1920s, Hindi prose writers dedicated themselves to the theme of the socio-economic struggle, and later—to the ideas of socialist thinking. Their heroes were peasants, money lenders, workers, missionaries and colonialists—all depicted in a rather naive, stereotyped and, overall, unrealistic way. A more realistic fiction emerged in Hindi only with the last works of Premchand. The change on a larger scale took place only after the Second World War, when within decades new generations of writers sought to establish relations not only with the West, but with the world as a whole. For Ajñeya, this issue became necessary already in his early writings of the 1930s and 1940s. Apart from the conflict with the West he is attracted by the relation to his own tradition, he seeks to define his own writer's role in it. [25]

Ajñeya often directly refers to the question of the development of *kahānī* in his own short stories. He uses the term *kahānī*—which in Hindi means tale, story, story-telling, (McGregor 1993: 184)—in some of their titles or places it within their narration. In most of those places he acts as a theoretician who wants to suggest something relevant for this genre.[26] Like in *Kavitā aur jīvan. Ek kahānī,* where the narration starts with a statement:

> I am not going to tell you just a story, but perhaps something more. Listen attentively – but lend me your heart more than your year. […] Moreover, if I begin to tell you "something more than 'a story' , should one argue about its content? The small things are usually proper for a story. (Ajñeya 1992: 457)

Nirmal Varmā (1929–2005), whose contribution to Hindi prose has been acknowledged world-wide, notices this attitude of Ajñeya's. He admits

[25] He reflects it in many essays. See e.g.: Vatsyayan 1970 and 1972.

[26] F. Orsini analyses Ajñeya's short stories with the term *kahānī* in their titles and comes to the conclusion that they serve the writer as an *aide à penser*, help the reader to understand "what the short story form entails and who a writer is". See: Orsini 2012: 123.

that while reading most of his books one can feel their author's presence. He writes:

> we see not only the view outside the window but also that 'eye', which transforms this view into an artistic experience. It seems like sometimes one feels to see a photographer – in place, where on the view from outside the shadow of [his] camera is seen (Varmā 1990: 109).[27]

N. Varmā concludes, that Ajñeya, so silent in his life, seems to speak in his works as if giving a hint that what one sees can have another form (*ibid.*). This statement throws light on the writer's continuous efforts to provide communication with his reader. Ajñeya defines art as "something that happens *between* the thing and the audience, or between the artist and the audience" (Vatsyayan 1970: 884). He explains it further with the reference to the Sanskrit concept of aesthetics, known as *rasa*:

> The view on the aim of the artist, the function of art and the nature of the artist-audience relationship, developed in India some time before the beginning of the Christian era. Early theory concerns itself with drama primary with the dance; but since it recognizes poetry as the primal art, drama being but visual poetry, it would not be wrong to describe it in more general terms as a theory of artistic communication (*ibid*.).

Ajñeya's short story, *Hazāmat kā sābun*, listed as the last in *Pariśiṣṭ, an Appendix* to the complete edition of his short stories of 1992,[28] was written in 1959—a year before the literary magazine *Nayī kahāniyā̃* started to appear. This magazine, edited by Kamleśvar, provided theoretical foundations for writing new short stories supplied by Mohan Rākeś, Rājendr Yādav and the editor himself, the most representative writers of

[27] "ham sirf khiṛkī ke bāhar phailā paridṛśya hī nahī̃ dekhte, balki us 'ā̃kh' ko bhī dekhte haĩ jo ek racnātmak anubhav mẽ pariṇat kar rahī hai. Kuch eisā lagtā hai, jaise kabhī kisī fotogrāf ko dekhkar lagtā hai—jahā̃ bāhar ke dṛśya par chāyā bhī dikhāī de jātī."

[28] Compare the date with Ajñeya's *Pariśiṣṭ*, an appendix to the complete edition of his short stories. In: Ajñeya 1992: 605–607.

this school (Rutkowska, Stasik 1992: 201). But already in 1954 an edition of the *Kahānī* magazine, issued for the first time in 1936 and closed during the Second World War, was restarted. The years between 1954 and 1956 are regarded by scholars (*ibid*.: 206.; Gaefke 1978: 86–87) as the most important for the development of the modern Hindi short story, later movements had no significant impact on its further shape. The term *naī kahānī* as the name of a school appeared in its issue from 1956 (*ibid*.). The demands of writers belonging to it were formulated under strong influence of *naī kavitā*—the school of Hindi "new poetry". D. Stasik and T. Rutkowska while defining the "new short story" write that it moved away from the white-black model of constructing protagonists. It stopped being a romantic or didactic tale, although some elements of romantics as well didactics were to be found in them. In the new writing the first plane became occupied with experience, self-knowledge of the surrounding world, the new type of perception *naī saṃvednā* (compare: *ibid*.: 202). Th. de Bruijn, while characterizing the "new short story" movement quotes the words of Sara Rai, who points to its "concern for genuineness of experience and an insistence on individual awareness and feeling" (De Bruijn 2010: 94). He also writes that Nirmal Verma's works present the highest development of modern literature in Hindi and this is done by "means of negotiation with Western literary forms, which were initiated in the 1950's by *naī kahānī* group" (*ibid*.: 87). In the context of thus defined highlights of modernity and "new short story", Ajñeya has to be acknowledged as the writer who called for it and proved it with his works already in the 1930s.

Plots and characters accessible to modern Hindi writers, *Nayī kahānī kā ploṭ* (1936)

The short story *Nayī kahānī kā ploṭ* of 1936 illustrates Ajñeya's skill in constructing various types of plots and characters. It displays an outline of trends known to Hindi writers of short stories and suggests a new modern approach to them. Scholars who analyzed this

work agree (see Damsteegt 1986a, Orsini 2012) that it discusses three types of stories: romantic, realistic and "about contemporary life"[29] or "topical"[30]. Ajñeya combines here traditional themes and elements of structure with modern means of irony and contrast. The plot of the story is set in a very realistic environment of a big publishing house, where a new issue of a literary magazine is being prepared.

The main hero of this short story, Miyā̃ Abdul Latīf, is working as an assistant journalist. He is forced by a chief editor to write a story for the editor's column and got for it one night. Neither chief editor nor other journalists were eager to write a modern story. Miyā̃ Abdul Latīf, supposed to be familiar with Urdu as his name suggested, had no other choice but to accept this task. He started to write three different stories, one after another, but was not satisfied with any of them. First he began to write a story with a romantic plot, his heroes got the names of Latif and Madālsā. Unsatisfied with it, he soon gave a new name to his hero: Citrāṅgad, which added some heroic touch to the atmosphere of love. When the story of his and Madālsā's love turned out to be tragic, the plot became more realistic and the lovers, now married, got new names again: Kisso and Citrāṅgad.[31] At the moment when Kisso started lamenting over the cut neck of her lovely cock, Abdul Latif stopped writing the short story. He decided to compose a story on a topic which is up to date. He started to write a story which was English in its style and topic—about the war in Europe, slavery in the world and hunger in India. The scenes followed quickly, changing like in a movie, but the writer fell asleep while imagining them. When he woke up, the story was ready and he liked it. But the chief editor tore it into pieces. Here the narration of the stories within Ajñeya's short story

[29] Th. Damsteegt translates thus a Hindi term *samayik*. See: Damsteegt 1986a: 225.

[30] Orsini proposes this equivalent to the Hindi term *samayik.* See: Orsini 2012: 109.

[31] F. Orsini suggests that this story resembles Guleri's style. See: *ibid*.: 108.

stops. But the Añjeya' short story was created. It showed a traditional muster of many plots woven into the narration, proceeding one from another, all narrated in the third person. All plots, though unfinished, were structured in a dynamic way with many unexpected turns. In fact, all dialogues and episodes took place in the imagination of the main hero, in his stream of consciousness, like a monologue with himself. The short story is full of subtle irony and auto-irony. The lack of ending is only illusory, the message Ajñeya intended to convey was suggested by the omission. While exploring diverse techniques of writing short stories in *Nayī kahānī kā ploṭ*:—romantic, realistic and contemporary—Ajñeya suggests how to create an experimental one. He displays a variety of possibilities accessible to modern writers, from Indian and Western traditions, but he encourages to create from one's own experience. The whole story is woven around a personal experience of his main protagonist, a writer. It was written almost twenty years before the school of *nayī kahānī*, which postulated that themes of modern stories should relate to the writer's personal experience. It would be justified to say in this context that the new short story (*nayī kahānī*) originated in Hindi literature already with Ajñeya.

The short story *Nayī kahānī kā ploṭ* bears evidence of his awareness of the tension between tradition and modernity as well as between Indian and Western literatures. As demonstrated in it, this tension affects themes as well as structural elements of the short story, its plot, narration and presentation of characters. According to Ajñeya the most significant change in modern literature took place within the Indian concept of reality and it happened due to its encounter with the West (Vatsyayan 1970: 884). The claim of personal experience as a source of artistic creation was postulated by Ajñeya again in the short story discussed next, belonging to the period of *nayī kahānī.*

A claim for the liberation of the modern writer, *Kalākār kī mukti*

The plot of the short story *Kalākār kī mukti* provides, in my opinion, an answer to the question asked in the title of this paper. It deals with

an episode from the life of "the great artist from Cyprus",[32] Pygmalion, a sculpture. This episode came to be a turning point in his attitude towards the creation of art.

Ajñeya puts the story of Pygmalion in a narrative frame, typical of Sanskrit *kathā,* a tale[33]. This frame provides a kind of introduction and conclusion to the plot. In the beginning the narrator, in the first person, turns directly to the reader with the above-mentioned question:

> I do not tell any story. I am not even in the mood, and truthfully, I cannot tell stories at all. But as I read and hear more and more stories, I became more curious how, after all, do the stories originate?![34]

At the end of this short story he repeats almost the same words and again, addresses the readers:

> I did not tell a story. But I am curious about how stories originate, after all. […]
>
> Do the truths of the ancient myths never change? Is there never any growth in the collective experience? Has the sensibility of an artist failed to touch a new truth? (Ajñeya 1992: 602)

Those questions appeared to be fundamental for Ajñeya in his attitude towards art creation in general and precisely towards the creation of literature. He refers to Hindi writers of short stories, but also to their critics. They all, in Ajñeya's time, found themselves in a clash between

[32] See: „Śpr dvīp ke mahān kalākār Pigmālyan". In: Ajñeya 1992: 599.

[33] A framed narration is typical of Indian tradition. See: L. Sudyka's study of *Kathāsaritsāgara*. See: Sudyka 1998: 26–29.

[34] All English translations of Ajñeya's short stories quoted in this paper (*Kalākār kī mukti*, *Alikhit kahānī*, *Kavitā aur jīvan, Ek kahānī*, *Taj kī chāyā mẽ*, *Parmparā, Ek kahānī, Gaĩgrīn*, *Darogā Amīcand*, *Nayī kahānī kā ploṭ*, *Hīlī-bon kī battakhẽ*) are the effect of my work carried out during the studies at the University of Zürich with later modifications introduced during my further work on Ajñeya carried out at Wrocław University. The selection of short stories was explained by me in: Bigoń 1994 and 1997. Their original texts in Hindi, apart from printed collections, are accessible at: www.hindisamay.org.

Eastern and Western art.[35] The main protagonist of *Kalākār kī mukti* is an artist, not a writer. The explanation is to be found in one of Ajñeya's essays, where he notices that the new ideas from the West "were not being developed by the writer, they were being developed by the artist, the painter. […] This reversal, is […] linked with the growth of art as the personal expression" (Vatsyayan 1972: 6). In Indian tradition the role of the writer was more influential. By introducing in *Kalākār kī mukti* the main heroes with names taken form Greek mythology: the famous sculptor Pygmalion[36] and goddess Aphrodite, Ajñeya refers also to the Western tradition of art and literature.

The story narrates the episode which took place in Pygmalion's room, when he was about to finish his most beautiful statue. Goddess Aphrodite appeared in front of him and expressed her appreciation for the sculptor's work. She transformed a statue into a beautiful woman as a gift for him. But the artist rejected the grace of the goddess. He did not want to subdue his art to the rules of life and death. She accepted it and again transformed the woman into a statue. Pygmalion decided to liberate himself from the bonds of goddess Aphrodite[37] and in an act of heroism, after a long struggle with himself, broke his best statue to pieces. He destroyed his best achievement, his art, which the goddess wanted to make real. Prior to the significant act of his own liberation, the artist used to follow the hand of the goddess. She visited him frequently and her inspiration created a necessary impulse for his work.

[35] The writer admits it in his theoretical essays. See: Vatsyayan 1970: 884; Ajñeya 1972: 15.

[36] Aphrodite was the embodiment of an ideal woman, a naked beauty, the most popular symbol of love and desire (see Grafton 2010: 53). Pygmalion—a legendary sculptor—used to be ashamed of real women and sought to create an ideal one. According to the myth, goddess Aphrodite decided to enliven the statue after the artist fell in love with his art. As a result, Pygmalion married the woman. See: *ibid.*: 795.

[37] In Ovid's narrative poem *Metamorphoses* in Latin, Pygmalion married the sculpture transformed by Aphrodite's blessing and had a son by her. (Morford 2007: 184)

The following passage includes a dialogue between Aphrodite and Pygmalion when he hesitated to accept a beautiful woman. It throws a significant light on Ajñeya's understanding of the function of art:

> In the evening when, as on the previous day, the sunlight started to fall inside the room coloring the air, goddess Aphrodite appeared and saw that Pygmalion was standing with wide-opened eyes in the very same place and the beauty was sitting listless on the stand. Seeing this unexpected scene the goddess said:
>
> -What do I see, Pygmalion? Didn't I grant you the boon of unequaled happiness?
>
> As if suddenly awakened Pygmalion said:
>
> -O Goddess, what have you done?
>
> -Why?
>
> -You have subjected my immortal and non-decaying art to the necessity of the old age and death! I didn't ask for the pleasure and enjoyment of happiness—I have learned that the bliss of art is everlasting.
>
> The goddess burst out laughing: O silly Pygmalion! But all artists are silly. You do not understand what you are asking for, what you have got, and what you are discarding. But if you want, think of it again (Ajñeya 1992: 601).

Ajñeya refers thus to the question of the aim of art and its essence: should artistic work lead to "the bliss of art" or just to the pleasure of entertainment? Same as Ovid in his *Metamorphosis* (see: Grafton 2010: 53). Ajñeya reflects here on the problem of the creation and reception of art. Pygmalion from Ajñeya's short story is longing for "bliss" (*ānand*), which according to the Indian understanding of art[38] was the highest award for the participants of the process of its creation: for an artist and for recipients of his work. Pygmalion from Ajñeya's work, who sought immortality, the highest bliss, has destroyed his art to liberate himself

[38] Sanskrit theory of aesthetics, the concept of *rasa,* since the time of Abhinavagupta—a philosopher and theoretician of Sanskrit poetics adhered to Shiva, lived around 10th A.C.—stressed the religious context of the philosophy of art in India.

from any bounds. The Western myth of Pygmalion was employed by Ajñeya, with the aim to explore within his own Indian tradition of art, the understanding of its essence and the role of the artist.

What happened to Pygmalion serves also as an answer to the question about the origin of modern short stories. Ajñeya encourages Hindi writers to struggle for their creative freedom in the way the artist from Cyprus did. To free themselves from rigid conventions one has to get rid of all one's attachments.[39] While employing a myth, even if belonging to Western tradition, Ajñeya turns to his own Indian tradition of the art of story-telling. Exploration of myths was a very popular technique in Sanskrit epics and classical literature as well as in medieval literature in Hindi dialects. Ajñeya perceives myths as a vehicle of "ultimate truth" or "ultimate reality", *satya* (McGregor 1993: 977). He introduces this term, derived from Sanskrit, in the context of "liberation", *mukti*, which means in Hindi: "release, deliberation, freedom, emancipation" (*ibid*.: 819). He employs these two terms quite frequently in his stories and poetry, they serve as the important key-words of his philosophy (Kimmig 1990: 73).

The liberation of Pygmalion from the guidance of goddess Aphrodite symbolizes an artist's freedom from any dictate—supernatural or mundane, native or foreign, local or global. In the time of Ajñeya it could refer to the diverse environment of rulers, politicians, scholars and critics, as well as to the values carried by Indian or foreign civilization.[40] The narrator of the story seems to reveal the author's conviction that: "To be alone in the struggle of creating art in fact suggests a striving for accomplishment" (Ajñeya 1992: 599). One should read this short story as Ajñeya's literary manifesto, which also served

[39] The legend tells that Pygmalion accepted a gift of a beautiful woman from Aphrodite. Ajñeya introduced a different ending.

[40] As V. Dalmia proved in the context of *Nadī ke dvīp*, Ajñeya's novel, that the writer was absorbed a lot by the question of "civilization" and its influence on individuals. See: Dalmia 2012: 97–100. See also: F. Orsini' analyses of Ajñeya's short story *Sabhyata kā ek din* in: Orsini 2012: 119–122.

as an inspiration for his contemporary and coming generations of Hindi writers in referring to the topic of *mukti*.[41]

The idea of liberation of the artist presented by him in the short story *Kalākār kī mukti* implies that art should originate from one's own, personal experience; in the case of literature—from own experience of a writer. The version of myth presented by Ajñeya alternates from the Greek myth of Pygmalion and Aphrodite. According to the version known to Western readers, Pygmalion married the statue (see: Morford 2007: 184; Graffon 2010: 793). At the end of Ajñeya's short story, the narrator informs readers about the fact that Pygmalion married the statue and even had a daughter by her, who later established a town of Paphos. Thus he admits that the text itself presents in fact the classical version of the myth as being incorrect. Then again he makes a turn to his own version:

> …in fact, the wife of Pygmalion did not originate from the stone. After he broke his fetters, Pygmalion realized that he was free of hate too and married a virtuous girl. For a long time he kept the pieces of the broken statue as a reminder of his liberation. […] and created his real art only later. The statues that brought him lasting fame were all created after this episode (Ajñeya 1992: 603).

Thus by questioning the classical version of the myth Ajñeya suggests a reflection on "deeper reality", on this what is real and in which context. He seems to be convinced that a writer should be free in his approach to reality, but the perspective should be examined by him thoroughly before he accepts it.

The search for *satya* within different layers of reality, *Alikhit kahānī*

The analyzed short story *Kalākār kī mukti* provides, in my opinion, an ending, which is lacking in another Ajñeya's work: *Alikhit kahānī* ("Unwritten Story"). Its title suggests that the story has not been finished. The story is narrated by a Hindi writer, whose plane of narration

[41] The motive of *mukti* has been applied eg. by V. Cauhān, in his short story *Mukti* a hero seeks to kill his mother. See: Gaeffke 1978: 76.

constitutes a frame to the story of two young men, Tulsīdās and Tulsū. After a quarrel with his wife the narrator, a Hindi writer, wanted to console her and went to the kitchen. But there he was reproached by his wife for disturbing her at work. He came back to his working desk and fell asleep while thinking on Tulsīdās,[42] a great Hindi poet, who was cursed by his wife as well. The story of Tulsīdās and Tulsū appeared to him in a dream, although the narrator pretends to read a book about the great poet. In his dream both heroes lived somewhere in a town belonging to a fable reality. The structure of the story within a story reflects the traditional way of composition typical of epic and classical Sanskrit literature. The perspective of the reader shifts from the realistic plane to the fable reality and to the deeper reality of dream. The art of story-telling known from oral tradition and legends is applied in the narration. Tulsīdās and Tulsū had almost the same experience in life until one day after they got married, their wives cursed them. The only difference between them was in their social status—one was rich and the other poor. Both young men could not resist a desire to meet their wives who went to visit their mothers' houses. So they visited them and insisted on their coming back home. They had been cursed for such improper conduct. In this turning point their story shifted from the fable reality to Benares. Tulsīdās, being separated from his own wife, settled in this city, dedicated himself to God and started to compose the "great poem", *mahākāvya*[43] and thus became a famous poet. Tulsū couldn't behave in this way. He decided to write some unworthy hymns or poems to earn money and help his parents. His wife, whom he brought back home, abused him for losing his talent. Finally Tulsū committed suicide. The happy end of Tulsīdās' story has been juxtaposed with the tragic end of Tulsū's history.

[42] Tulsīdās, a great Hindi poet who lived probably between 1532–1623 in Benares, an author of *Rāmcaritmānas*. See: Rutkowska, Stasik 1992: 84–95 and Stasik 2000: 160.

[43] The analysis of *Rāmcaritmānas* and its genre is provided in: Stasik 2000: 170–182. For the definition of Sanskrit *mahākāvya* see: Sudyka 2004: 38–39.

The narration, constructed as a frame to the main plot or rather two parallel plots, begins as follow:

> To write a short story which is nothing but fiction in a way that makes it ring true is easy. But to give such a quality to a story written to reveal some mysterious truth of life is not only difficult. It is simply impossible (Ajñeya 1992: 232).

Ajñeya combines in this short story two planes: fabulous and realistic, adding to it the reality of a dream, which is the mixture of both of them. In the end he convinces the reader:

> The whole world is not material as Benares and not imaginary as fiction. In the world they are both realities. […] If I selected and narrated only the common ones than my work would be called "realistic", but it would be as different form reality as a "romantic" work, which is simply an accumulation of improbable events… Truth is a mixture of both, in towns in a fairy tale have as much reality as Benares (*ibid*. 237).

The story of Tulsīdās and Tulsū, told by the narrator in the first person, constitutes one plot, which soon splits into two stories. While narrating stories of their lives, Ajñeya presents the possibility of their transmission in an oral way. People who had heard the story of Tulsū started to spread it from mouth to mouth as a tale. On the other, realistic plane, the narrator, a Hindi writer, refers to his own condition of being cursed by own wife. As in the case of both protagonists, his impulse to write a story came from his own experience of being detached from his own wife due to her curse. In a very skillful way, full of humor, Ajñeya binds three heroes of this short story—all of them are in fact writers. Tulsū and Tulsīdās lived somewhere in a fable reality similar to a fairy tale, then they were shifted to realistic Benares. Their stories as well as the narrator's life and his dream belong to the world of fiction. Thus Ajñeya attracts the reader to the concept of depicting reality in literature, he made him reflect on what is real and true. The localization shifts from the realistic plane to dream, to the Benares of oral stories and legends and then to the realistic plane again. The whole story could be called unrealistic and realistic at the same

time. The narrator represents contemporary life. Thus, Ajñeya again presents three perspectives: romantic or fantastic, realistic and contemporary. The motif of a curse, popular in Indian tradition of literature, was employed by him to serve as an impulse for the story to start or to turn in another direction.

Ajñeya argues in his essay on the concept of reality in Indian literature that an important shift in it happened in the encounter with the West:

> In Hindu thought … the concept of the world as the 'causeless sport' of the divine made aesthetic identification difficult, permitting only a religious one. The classical dramatics had led from the stage presentation of reality to a greater reality (which encompassed the presentation), with the new metaphysics the dramatist had to lead from the stage presentation to the illusion, and a causeless one at that, to the reality of very different proposition. […] From this beatific vision one came awake with rude jolt to find oneself in modern world (Vatsyayan 1970: 884).

He refers this "new metaphysics" to the realistic approach in literature in accordance to Western prose. Ajñeya seems to look for a solution which could allow both perspectives, Indian and Western, without rejecting or diminishing any of them. His *Alikhit kahānī* seems to convince that real is what experienced in a personal way, what became a part of the writer's own experience. Its 'truth' could be carried by ancient myths, legends or *mahākāvya*s as well as by contemporary life, but it has to become a part of someone's own experience to be real and true.

The role of inner perception and modern *sahṛdaya*, *Śikṣā, Paramparā. Ek kahānī*, *Tāj ki chāyā mẽ*

Ajñeya's short story *Śikṣā* ("A Lesson", 1954) depicts the way one should search for *satya*, or "knowing the truth". The story deals with the traditional way of education in India, where a student learns from his master (*guru*) how to discover the real truth. A young student who came to his master has to undergo a test. He has to watch a beautiful bird again and again until he recognizes the truth about this living being (Ajñeya 1992: 599). The guru argues that the true knowledge

about the world can be perceived only with the help of one's own inner perception. The Hindi term *unmeṣ* is employed here in this context and means "an inner eye". "Everything in the world can serve as its impulse (*nimitta*)",[44] repeats the teacher to his student, the *guru* only gives an impulse for it. Ajñeya stresses here the role of inner perception as the essential condition for recognizing the truth about the world. The inner perception is relevant in the context of experiencing art and literature.

In the short story *Paramparā. Ek kahānī* Ajñeya examines the modern realistic approach against traditional expectations of Hindi readers. The mass receiver of modern Hindi literature of the 20th century was not necessarily trained in literary conventions as the connoisseur of past literary periods. His experience usually took place in solitude and not in a public situation like before. Ajñeya makes a distinction between Indian literature of the past, permitted mostly in the oral way by a poet untill the end of the 19th century, and modern printed writings of the 20th century. According to him, the first belonged either to the whole community or to nobody because it expressed "a time, …, a society, … a literary theory of a certain time …, but never a person". In contrast with it, a modern, printed poem is "essentially and primary the expression of one man" (Vatsyayan 1972: 11).

The inner perception of readers in modern times is even more important than earlier, because their situation is different from spectators of ancient dramas or listeners of medieval poems. Mass readers need more imagination than *sahṛdaya*, the connoisseur of Sanskrit literature, to experience literature "with the heart". While reflecting on this changing situation, Ajñeya notices: "the concept of artist-audience relationship did not change in its essentials, nor did the idea that the poet-artist must lead the audience to reality, which was at the core of reality the innermost sheath of *ānanda*". What did change was the concept of reality itself (Vatsyayan 1970: 884).

[44] *Nimitta,* n. in Sanksrit means: "mark, sigh, omen", and also "cause, motive, ground, reason". See: Monier-Williams 1997: 551.

The situation of modern *sahṛdaya*, the one "with the heart", has been portrayed by Ajñeya in the short story *Tāj ki chāyā mẽ* ("In the Shadow of Taj") of 1936. The story deals with Anant, a poor young man who came to snap a photo of the Taj Mahal's beauty in the light of the full moon. He reflects on his own position of experiencing art: "I either know the means of self-expression nor how to use them" (Vatsyayan 1972: 11). But while being engrossed in experiencing the everlasting beauty of the Taj, he could feel immortal together with his companion Jyoti. But Anant's experience of 'bliss" was destroyed, when he realized that he had forgotten to snap the photo.

In the Indian traditional environment the writer used to present typical heroes, their conventional adventures, sequences of descriptions depending on the dominant aesthetical taste (in Skt. *rasa*) of the literary work—love (*śṛṅgār ras*) or heroism (*vīr ras*).[45] The tradition of Sanskrit aesthetics continued in Hindi literature written in medieval dialects in works belonging to the *kāvya* genre of literature, and even in the 20th century in poetry.

Ajñeya refers to the question of traditional audience also in his short story *Paramparā. Ek kahānī* ("Tradition. A Story", 1933; see: Ajñeya 1992: 464–467) and he does it in the context of very realistic events. The story relates the history of Khelavan, a poor man, who married the righteous girl Māyā, the daughter of a prostitute. Her life as a prostitute until her marriage with Khelavan is narrated without any digressions, parallel plots or involute chronology. The story ends with Khelavan's death at the day of the birth of his first child. The main hero rushed into the street and was run over by a truck while running for a doctor who would treat his wife giving birth to their first son. A very

[45] Sanskrit theoreticians of *mahākāvya* Bhāmaha (500/600 A.C.) and Daṇḍin (700/800 A.C.) defined the structure of literary works of the classical Sanskrit period in their treatises: *Kāvyālaṅkāra* and *Kāvyādarśa.* See: Sudyka 2006: 23, 38–39. For the analysis of the sequences of descriptions typical of Sanskrit *mahākāvya* see: Trynkowska 2000: 40. The aesthetical taste of literature has been elaborated earlier in *Nāṭyaśāstra* (since 500 B. C.).

realistic approach and a concise plot with its dynamic structure reflect the new Western art of story-telling. Ajñeya suggests that it will shock an Indian reader accustomed to the traditional way of experiencing literature. The narrator concludes at the end of the short story:

> It's a very nice story! If one tells it so that every moment of it can be savored, making each portion of the story exciting and juicy (*ek ek bāt se rasa lenā*), if that evokes the sweetness of passion or light pain of dissatisfaction, this story will become an example of art for art's sake. But if one tells it cynically along with disgust and anger, the story will be the symbol of progressive art. Keeping the dispute between the public and the Lord aside, the story clearly reflects the uninterrupted tradition of mankind, the unobstructed flow of life, so one has to believe that in whatever way it may be told, it is real art, a great story (*ibid*.: 466).

The term *ras*, meaning in Hindi: juice, sap, taste (McGregor 1997: 855), used in the original Hindi passage refers again to the Sanskrit theory of experiencing art, *rasa*.[46] Could such a realistic story be the matter of art and its experience in the Indian context? Ajñeya seems to ask this question in reference to the literary tradition of depicting noble heroes and conventional topics. In his opinion, a modern artist, a modern writer has to add new truths and emphasize new or yet not explored tastes in literature, which could better evoke the atmosphere of contemporary life. The question arises how to communicate new "tastes" to a modern reader? Should the use of traditional means be rejected for the sake of the elaborated literary theory of Western literature depicting realism?

Means of adding to the collective experience—*Kavitā aur jīvan. Ek kahānī*

The experience of literature must reveal "something more" as Ajñeya explains in another short story *Kavitā aur jīvan. Ek kahānī* (*Poetry and Life. A Story*, 1937; see: Ajñeya 1992: 457–463). In the short story *Kalākār kī mukti* discussed above the narrator addressed

[46] A concise exposition of this theory see: Sudyka 2004: 63–64, Stasik 2000: 136.

the readers directly with the question on collective experience versus life. He asks if it would undergo any change or growth:

> Reaching this points it seems as if a new window opens so that the heroes of the ancient myths appear in a new light. This window is like the one which opens onto the stage of life: one can see actors through it, not as their stage character, but in their natural appearance before the play. Or imagine that the director leaves actors on stage without any instructions, then we would see them as they perform spontaneously. Don't we have to admit, that this play, in which actors appear before us, live, without the director's guidance, is more true (Ajñeya 1992: 599).

Ajñeya in his short stories acts as a stage director from the above quotation but he does not instruct or give simple answers. He leads to the truths of life not in a direct way but only by "the means of suggestion", which could be in accordance with the traditional literary technique known as *dhvani*.[47] Ajñeya criticizes the usage of traditional conventions such as *rasa* or *dhvani* only if they are used exclusively for the sake of the artist's or reader's pleasure. Whenever he employs traditional elements he usually endows them with irony and contrast. As in the mentioned story, where the main protagonist Śivsundar, a poet himself, looks for inspirations to write poetry. First, he searches in the natural environment at the desolated place close to the river's bend in Haridvar. Then in the more crowded place near a temple in this city. After long trials he fails: his own experience becomes as bitter as the truth of discovering a withered plant, which he has found instead of jingling anklets of *abhisārikā*, "a young lady going for a tryst".[48] An empty plant serves here as a symbol of realistic life. The truths of life presented by modern literature may taste bitter, but the writer has to reveal them. All eight emotional states regarded by theoreticians of Sanskrit poetics[49] as leading to the aesthetic experience—*rasa*—should

[47] This theory was formulated by Ānandavardhana (850–875) in his *Dhvanyāloka*. See also an analysis of *dhvani* by Trynkowska (Trynkowska 1993: 131).

[48] One of the types of heroines of classical *kāvya* literature.

[49] The eight tastes are known as: *śṛṅgāra* "love", *hāsya* "comism", *karuṇa* "pathos", *raudra* "wrath", *vīra* "heroism", *bhayānaka* "terror",

be always pleasant for a recipient of literature. The narrator in *Kavitā aur jīvan. Ek kahānī* ironically pleads for the end "with sweetness" (Ajñeya 1992: 463) but the story ends with a "bitter taste of pride and sour taste of work": *abhimān kā tikht aur karm kā kaṣay ras.* (*ibid*.) Untill the beginning of the 20th century the recipients of literature created well-defined audience involved in the situation of a collective experience of typical plots, characters, descriptions. The employment of Western literary means created a conflict. Ajñeya reacts to it quite early with his writings. But the tension is evident also in the 1970s, when Ajñeya's publishes his essay on "The role of a writer in contemporary Indian society". One of the reasons of this tension within Hindi prose could be seen in the lack of well-established theoretical rules for constructing such a modern literary genre as a short story in India. Hindi critics refer to it most of all as *kahānī*, some of them use also the term *kathā,* borrowed from Sanskrit, meaning *"*a story, tale, legend" or "narration" (McGregor 1997: 163). This is evident even in the way critics refer to Ajñeya as a short story writer, calling him either *kathākār*[50] or *kahānīkār.*[51] The author of *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās*, R. Śukl, while presenting a short story as a genre and its development in India mentions the terms: *ākhyāyikā*, *kahānī, choṭī kahānī* (Śukl 1997: 323–324). One of the contemporary literary critics, K. Ayyappa Paniker, admits that India has created one of the greatest treasure of narration in the world but has

bībhatsa "awfulness", *adbhuta* "wonder". See: NŚ.6.44–45. Abhinavagupta in the 11th century has added the ninth taste: *śānta,"* the calmness" to the Sanskrit poetics. Later on in the medieval Hindi dialects Rūpa Gosvāmī has transformed tastes of literature into his theory of *bhaktirasa* "the taste of divine love". During the next period of Hindi literature, *Rīti* , the *rasa*s of Love and Heroism, well-known from Sanskrit, again dominated as literary themes. The possibility of applying the *rasa* theory to modern Indian literature provides Gerow, 1974. See also: Miążek 2013.

[50] Compare terms used by Om Prabhākar or Vijay Mohan Singh in: Gaefke 1970: 50. See also the usage of the term *kathā* in this context by Rāmsvarūp Caturvedī in: Ajñeya 1992: 626.

[51] See for instance: Sonavaṇe, Raṇsubhe 2011.

neglected its evaluation in modern times and the debate on ″the art of story-telling″.[52] Ajñeya sought to explore Indian tradition of narration within his own short stories and as a theoretician initiated a debate on the development of this genre, but for a long time he remained misunderstood by many of Hindi writers and critics.[53]

Means of building the atmosphere in Ajñeya's short stories

Ajñeya's answer to the question stated above of how to communicate the writer's creative experience to a modern reader could be answered with an insight into technical means which he uses in building up the atmosphere of his short stories. He renders a lot of attention to the climate of the story. Examples which follow prove that sometimes he refers directly to the "mood" of his works by introducing the Hindi term *vātāvaraṇ* into the narration, a masculine noun with the meaning: "an atmosphere", "air-covering" (Monier-Williams 1993: 913), or the English term "an atmosphere". The narrator often starts to relate the story of his protagonists with the announcement that there is no "climate" in it, no taste (*ras*), or that there is emptiness. Whenever Ajñeya employs the Hindi term *ras* in his works he refers to the traditional way of conveying "mood" or "taste" of literature. And he starts to experiment with it by adding new *rasa*s such as alienation or bitterness. The emphasis on the atmosphere of a story has been accepted by some scholars as characteristic of the "new short story" (Damsteegt 1986a: 217). Some regard it even as a typical feature of the Indian short story of the 20th century. (Byrski 1980: 116) Ajñeya reflects on it already in his early works, e.g. in *Gaiṅgrin* (Ajñeya 1992: 207)—known also as *Roz*—and *Alikhit kahānī* (*ibid*.: 230), both written in 1934. Also his later

[52] He finds it strange that Bhoja in his *Śṛṇgāraprākaśa*, who names "24 varieties of poetic composition or *śrāvya-kāvya*, (…) does not consider narrative as the basis of the definition". See: Ayyappa Panikar 2010: 1–2.

[53] F. Orsini recalls Phanisvarnath Renu, who called Ajñeya an "uknown, unvisible, unique, strange" or "masked writer". She points at his misunderstanding of the idea of *satya* in Ajñeya's writings. See: Orsini 2012: 117–118.

works bear evidence of it, like *Hilī-bon kī battakhẽ* of 1947 (*ibid.:* 536). He contrasts the modern English term "atmosphere" and Hindi noun *vātāvaraṇ* with the traditional term *ras* in *Paramparā. Ek kahānī* of 1939. Already by introducing those tree terms of different origin he creates the situation of conflict (*ibid*. 466). In this very realistic story Ajñeya seeks to provoke Hindi readers and critics to reflect on the situation of conflict itself. He also uses other Hindi terms: *nīras* and *nīrastā as* the means of attracting readers to the idea of conflict; they refer to the traditional means of appeal in India and seem to negate them. They serve as antonyms to *ras* with their meanings: "without sap", 'without taste" for *nīras*, adj. (Monier-Williams 1993: 577), and "dullness" or "emptiness" for f. noun *nirastā* (*ibid*. 578). Ajñeya introduces them in the sense of "the lack of the atmosphere", "the lack of experiencing feelings", or simply "boredom". Thus he prepares the place which he next fills with "an atmosphere" of his story.[54] He locates both terms *nīras* and *nīrastā* with this function usually at the beginning of a story, like in *Alikhit kahānī*, *Kavitā aur jīvan. Ek kahānī* or *Gaiṅgrin* (Ajñeya 1992: 230, 214, 207). Ajñeya seems to introduce them with the function of removing all the emotional obstacles which could disturb the reader's aesthetic experience. The following passage from *Alikhit kahānī* reveals this approach, experimental for Hindi literature:

> After a quarrel with my fortunate spouse (*gṛhlakṣmī*) I went to my reading room and was sitting there annoyed. […] I am a writer of Hindi short stories. And this fortunate spouse is the good fortune (*Lakṣmī*) of the house of a Hindi writer. What other good fortune does a Hindi writer ever get to know? The life of the two of us is totally without spice (*nīrasa*). It could not be otherwise. So our quarrels are inevitable… […] For this reason I sometimes attempt to remove the boredom (*nīrastā*) accumulated in our lives by the 'atmosphere' in my stories. But my wife cannot do this, her life is so constrained by boredom (*nīrastā*) of in the ordinary daily household that she can't even budge (*ibid*.: 230).

The terms *nīrasa* and *nīrastā* rendered in this passage as "without spice" and "boredom" introduce the mood of the story suggested

[54] The terms were discussed by me in another paper, see: Miążek 2014.

by the English term "atmosphere". One should expect no *rasa*, no traditional treatment of feeling, and maybe a rather new Western realistic approach to it. But the whole passage is full of irony. And further in the story some elements of traditional approach to reality will be applied. The passage quoted suggests the theme of the story: detachment and alienation as the experience of a modern Hindi writer, his lack of fulfillment.

Apart from both of the above-mentioned terms, in his works Ajñeya employs also other terms which belong or refer to Sanskrit poetics. Among them: *abhisārikā* "a woman going for a tryst" (Ajñeya 1992: 458) and *tirchī citavan* ,"side-long glances", a Hindi equivalent of the term *kaṭākṣā*, the amorous gesture known from Sanskrit classical literature[55]. In *Kavitā aur jīvan. Ek kahānī* they serve as symbols and have to suggest eroticism known from the poetics of *kāvya-ras* (Ajñeya 1992: 461). In this short story Ajñeya contrasts poetical truth with the realism of life. The main protagonist of this story, a poet, left Calcutta, because he could not find there any inspiration for writing poetry. In his search for it he moved to the romantic environment in Haridvar at the edge of the river. Next he searched for it in a place more crowded, the most important stairs (*ghāṭ*) in Haridvar, *Hara kī paṃrī*. In both places he faced only disappointment—no love, no inspiration.

In the same function of suggesting an "atmosphere" Ajñeya uses the terms denoting colors. He often employs their symbolic meaning known from the *rasa* aesthetics. The best evidence of it provides the short story *Dārogā Amīcand* ("Supervisor Amicand") of 1938. At the beginning of it, the narrator, and the main protagonist in one person, introduces names of colors. He is Amīcand, a Sikh prisoner, who has been sent to a colonial jail in Punjab. The narrator informs about his situation:

[55] The term *kaṭākṣā* is mentioned several times in *Meghadūta* of Kālidāsa, a masterpiece of classical Sanskrit "messenger poems". This term was analyzed by me in the context of flirtatious gestures in Hindi *Meghadūta*, see: Miążek 2014: 106–108.

> Once, because I was bored, I caused an argument and got category 'C'. So I was sent to Hazara jail in Haripur. I thought, never mind, my comfort is gone, but the emptiness will also disappear; some activity will come to my life, for sure there will be some color in a big jail like Hazara. There probably will be more black, but there should be hints of radiant red and orange as well. I was not disappointed in it (*ibid*.: 182).

Ajñeya uses Hindi nouns denoting the three mentioned colors: *syāh* for "black", *lāl-ujalā* for "radiant red" and *naurańgī* for "orange". Their meanings resonate with Sanskrit terms: *kṛṣṇa*, *rakta*, *gaura*, which were ascribed as symbols to certain *rasas* or tastes of literature, as mentioned in *Naṭyaśāstrā*.6-42-43.[56] They refer to the taste or experience of terror (Skt. *bhayānaka*), wrath (*raudra*) and heroism (*vīra*) respectively. They serve as the means suggesting three emotional threads of this story with the stress on heroism.

As the last example of Ajñeya's techniques of building the atmosphere of the modern short story examined in this paper, I refer to the descriptions of nature and modern environment of the city, which intensify the main "mood" of the story. The first example is taken from the short story *Hīlī-bon kī battakhẽ* ("Hili-bon's Ducks", 1947) and is the description of the natural beauty of mountains, valleys and a river. The second comes from *Paramparā*. *Ek kahānī* and is a description of an avenue in a big city. The first story deals with the life of a middle-aged woman from the Khasi tribe living her solitary life in the mountains. While describing the natural environment surrounding Hīlī-bon in the evening, when the darkness comes, the narrator seeks to reflect her inner feelings:

> Hili was watching, the bunches of the rhododendron flowers, single or in pairs, have vanished somewhere in the darkness, while the contours of the cedar trees only now could be recognized separately. Why then does the color extinguish first, the flowers disappear first at the moment when the uniformity of things around originates?

[56] According to the *Naṭyaśāstra*, each of eight fundamental tastes of literature (*rasa*s), and their corresponding emotional motives (*sthāyibhāva*s), have a certain color ascribed to them. See: Nagar 2009: 297.

> Hili felt forlorn, her mind withdrew. The beauty of the mountains around Nan-thlem spread in front of her, vaporized and was lost. The rhododendrons and the cedar trees, the rocks, the memorial stones of ancient people standing or fallen around, the waves of grass like mounds, the coppery-red mirror of the hilly river down in the valley, the paths gleaming like the silky threads in a velvet coverlet – every visible shape was driven back. With her eyes open, Hili looked inwards where feelings had a real form and impressions their material shape (Ajñeya 1992: 538).

The uniformity of all natural environment, its disappearance, resonates with the emotional condition of Hīlī—her desolation and emotional emptiness caused by her previous experiences in life.

Another example comes from *Paramparā*. *Ek kahānī* and is the description of an avenue in Calcutta:

> The avenue of the head of the bend, spread across the large town as if the bed of a giant, melting with heat, glittering with lights, bristling to the full… (*ibid*.: 464).

It reflects the emotional condition of the main protagonist Khelavan, a poor man who became a father and ran through the city to find a doctor for his wife.

> He was unable to contain his joy at the birth of his first child […] He soared with happiness. He kept moving towards the avenue without seeing or hearing anything… […] A bit ahead of the bend, a truck, making its way from a side of the street, ran him over. The sheet of that bed of a giant stiffened as if with a red-colored starch (*ibid*.).

At the end of this short story the narrator reveals that the picture of a bend of the alley is a symbol of a new "civilization", which is "overexcited by the happiness at the birth of the first child, [is] blindly running outside to be crushed under a crude, devil mechanism; under a lifeless machine loaded with millet!" (*ibid*: 467)

The narrator also addresses readers and critics with a supposition that they would not like such a "tragic end". Ironically he names the "bitter taste" (*ibid*.) of this story as an "epic quality" and contrast this English term with the Hindi one—*karuṇā*—f. noun meaning "compassion, pity" and "aesthetic experience of pathos"known from

Sanskrit concepts of *rasa*. The plot of the story is very short, dynamic and its topic very realistic. Ajñeya seems to criticize such a realistic approach in the art of telling. The description of the bend of the alley symbolizes the clash between Indian and Western literary tradition, the conflict experienced personally by Hindi writers.

In one of his theoretical essays Ajñeya defines literature as a "unique individual expression of a unique culture" (Vatsyayan 1972: 16) and maintains that "if there is no Indian literature in India, there is no literature in India" (*ibid*.). Ajñeya, although skilled in Western art of story-telling, defends his own Indian attitude of a writer who takes advantage of traditional Indian means and transforms them to modern usage.

Conclusions

Ajñeya's short stories discussed in this paper illustrate his modern approach towards *kahānī* as a literary genre. His modernity encompasses the writer's personal attitude towards the creative process as well as the "newness" of his skill of writing. He does not hesitate to employ all the techniques accessible to him: traditional and modern, Indian and Western, rooted in the written and oral traditions of literature. The employment of contrast and irony should be regarded as the most effective means of his method of suggesting the message of the story. Foreign and traditional elements juxtaposed in one short story create an effect unusual to Indian readers and thus serve to express conflicts, which arise from the clash of Indian and Western literary concepts. It has been illustrated with examples from the short story *Kavitā aur jīvan. Ek kahānī*, where the poetical approach is contrasted with the realistic environment and the poetry with life. The writer mixed the means of Sanskrit and medieval poetics with modern means of irony. In another short story, *Alikhit kahānī*, the reality of oral tales and legends has been faced with the reality of the dream and the realism of everyday life. Thus technical elements of Ajñeya's short stories reflect his theoretical considerations about their genre. They illustrate his reflection of the shift within the concept of reality in Indian

literature and the change of the attitude of Hindi literary audience. The employment of irony and contrast serve to convey the deeper truths of life to the reader. The suggestive language of his short stories consists of symbols and questions addressed directly to the reader, who can partake in the search for their answers. Ajñeya appeals also to Hindi writers and critics, who should strive for "truths" of literature while enriching the experience accumulated in their own literary tradition by examining it by their own personal approach. The truths conveyed by myths, legends and means of traditional poetry undergo in Ajñeya' short stories a constant examination. His seeks to transform traditional literary means and values of literature to modern idioms. He shows the same attitude towards the values and means of Western literature. The writer does not deny the place of elements of *rasa* as well as Western aesthetics in modern Hindi prose, but they have to undergo the writer's and reader's experience due to their inner perception.

Although he teases the readers of his short stories, as in *Kalākār kī mukti*, that he "cannot tell stories at all" (Ajñeya 1992: 599) or convinces critics with irony that, if he is going " to write something more than a short story than why to quarrel on a plot and narration" (*ibid*.: 457), he pays a lot of attention to technical aspects of his works. He introduces myths, legends, lyrical verses as well as direct questions addressed to the reader without ready-made answers. He employs with the same good effect suggestive language and symbols (like in *Sā̃p, Sikṣā*) or direct questions and comments (*Paramparā*. *Ek kahānī*), often allowing both ways of presentation in the same work (as in *Tāj kī chāyā mẽ, Gaĩgrin*).

Also the range of themes and motives of Añeya's short stories includes both traditions, Indian and Western. He is convinced that "small histories are good for short stories" (*ibid*.), as he admits in *Kavitā aur jivan. Ek kahānī* of 1937. This attitude resonates with the remark which Nāmvar Siṃh made in his evaluation of the development of Hindi short story during the period of *nayī kahānī*: modern writers of this time picked up an insignificant subject, which was neglected by older generations of writers as non-sufficient for

literature and accepted it as sufficient for a short story and developed it in various ways of narrative art.[57] Out of "small histories' Ajñeya has made master-pieces of short narrative prose, such as *Alikhit kahānī*, *Gaiṇgrin*, *Darogā Amīcand* and many others.

Ajñeya's modern attitude was best manifested in *Kalākār kī mukti,* where he considers the situation of an artist, who is indebted to the goddess for his skill. The writer refers in this story to the religious and mythological context of art and its influence on the creative process of an artist. He calls for the artist's freedom of making choices in art. It should be the precondition of his personal approach to literature. The artist's struggle for liberation symbolizes in this short story the situation of a Hindi writer in modern times and the tension he has to face in the encounter of his own literary tradition with the West. His choice for personal experience as a source of his art points at the origin of the short stories in modern times.

Ajñeya's writings and ideas influenced many of his younger colleagues, who later became acknowledged writers, such as Nirmal Varmā, Mohan Rākeś, Kamleśvar, Raghuvir Sahāy, Mannu Bhaṇḍārī and others. All of them were attached to the school of "new short story" (*nayī kahānī*), linked by the idea of individual experience in the approach to creation of literature.[58] Thus it is justified to admit that Ajñeya with his modern style and ideas prepared the ground for the *naī kahānī* movement and later writers of short stories.

An important feature of modern Indian writing, according to Ajñeya, is "the awareness of a tension […] operating at several levels" (Vatsyayan 1972: 15). Such characteristics of a writer's modern attitude resembles to some extent the criteria of the "reflection on a modern consciousness"

[57] N. Siṃh wrote: "Jo choṭī-sī bāt purāne kahānīkārõ ke liye aparyāpt thī, usī ko naye khānīkārõ ne kahānī ke liye paryāpt mān liyā hai aur phir uske bhitar se unhõne kahānī ke kathānak kī vibhin simāõ tak vikās kiyā". See: Siṃh 2006: 14.

[58] Many other names could be added to this list of *nayī kahānī* writers. See: *ibid*: 201–201.

and "authenticity", which Theo Damsteegt, after C.G. Roadarmel, includes into the definition of "new short story" writings.[59] Greg Goulding notices that modernity of Ajñeya's model of aesthetics "emphasized the possibility of a work of art that would transform the concerns of artist into something distinct" (Goulding 2012: 158–159). Ajñeya, out of the tension between personal and collective experience, between tradition and modernity, the Indian understanding of reality and the Western attitude to it, constructs his own "principle of coherence", "this what holds him together" (Vatsyayan 1972: 4–17). The writer perceives himself as "a tight-rope walker" (*ibid*.: 15), who like a dancer from his poem *Nāc*,[60] is "responsible for seeing that the rope remains taut", and ensures "that the rope is there" (Vatsyayan 1972: 4–17). Some scholars admit that Ajñeya's works "represent a continuous dialogue between India and Wester cultures" (De Brujin 2010: 87), and even the ideal synthesis of Indian and Western philosophy.[61] Ajñeya with all his contribution wished to be "a bridge" between what happened in Indian literary past and the future of Hindi literature. He admits this in his poems *Maĩ yahã̃ hũ̃* and *Jo pul bānayẽge*,[62] but also in the essay discussed in this paper "The Hindu view of conflict and its impact on contemporary Indian writings" (Vatsyayan 1970). N. Pozza notices that Ajñeya built and crossed himself the "cultural *bridges*" between "India and other cultures", between "Sanskrit tradition and avant-garde literary movement he led…"[63] in the Hindi literature.

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[59] Th. Damsteegt mentions among them: "the reflection of a 'modern consciousness". See: Damsteegt 1986a: 217.

[60] The original script of this and its translation into German was published by L. Lutze in: Vatsyayan 2011: 60–61.

[61] This is the opinion of L. Lutze, who maintains: "in seinem umfangreichenn und vielschichtigen Werk strebt er, mit Erfolg, eine ideale Synthese insichen und westlichen Denken an" (Lutze 1986b: 269).

[62] Read about these and other Ajñeya's poems, some with their Polish translation, in: Czekalska 2008: 103–107.

[63] This quotation comes from N. Pozza's unpublished paper: *Tension as a Bridge towards realese: Agyeya's poem "Nāc",* which manuscript I have

It is also justified to call Ajñeya, as L. Lutze suggested, "the praeceptor Indiae" (Lutze, Vatsayayan 1973: 15). The fact that Ajñeya left us many illustrious short stories which exemplify his views on art and literature exposed in his theoretical works helps us to grasp a complex process of change which happened in Hindi prose of the 20th century. Thus he laid foundations not only for the modern short story as a genre but also for their theoretical evaluation in Hindi literary criticism. The 20th century has been acclaimed in Hindi literature as "the era of short story".[64] One reason for it is, as mentioned by K. M. Byrski, that the literary preferences of the West and East met in this genre at their depth around this time,[65] another—that the personal experience became the most explored concern of Hindi writers in 20th century.

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[64] See: Byrski 1980: 116, and also G. Roadarmel, who admits: "In the Hindi literary world since Independence, the short story as a genre had become a primary focus of attention" (Roadarmel 1974: 241).

[65] Compare with: Byrski 1980: 116.

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