

Childhood, mystery and the idea of a self in Uday Prakash's memoirs

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This article focuses on some very short stories by Uday Prakash published as 'autobiographies.' Three of them are in the short story collection *Tirich* ("The poisonous lizard") first published in 1989; five autobiographical sketches are found in the collection *Aur ant meṃ prārthnā* ("And, finally, a prayer") first published in 1994. The focalization on the child character produces an indeterminacy that engages in a delightful game with the final ratiocinations of the first-person adult narrator, especially when the child faces traumatic experiences. In these micro stories, time, space and emotions scroll like a film, moving from within the memory and shaping the self in very mysterious ways. At a metanarrative level, writing appears as a journey on the path of memory, from the past towards the present and perhaps even leaping into the future.

Keywords: Hindi literature, autobiography, Uday Prakash, childhood.

1. Fragile memories

As Freud already pointed out at the beginning of the 20th century, retrieving moments and—chosen or suffered—experiences in early childhood is far from easy, as it deals with the particular defence mechanism that is repression. Individuals remember very little of their early childhood: pleasant experiences were used for the development of the ego and of the personality, while the unpleasant ones are preferably removed. This leads to the widespread assumption that memory betrays us, because it tends to reconstruct events, to reorder them according to causal connections that did not exist in reality. Subjectivist conceptions replace the events as they unfold, an idealization, perhaps due to the fact that structured content is easier to remember than fragmentary and insubstantial impressions. Even the sharper and more 'realistic' memories, at least in appearance more related to the cognitive act, can transform over time and dilate until they take on a dimension in which emotional play and imagery replace image. Memories are the basis of a person's self-narrative, an internalized, evolving story of their own life, which constitutes their personal identity. This raises the issue of the authenticity of memory and the impact it has on personal identity (Vidal 2022). Another commonplace

is that the fantasy world and the real world coexist in the child. Yet, the notion that the empirical world is more real than the inner one is shaken if we do not adhere to a positivistic worldview. It is worth pointing out that the perceptible surface of reality in India may have, for cultural reasons, a different extent than in Europe. In the Indian Vedanta world view, for example, the world we experience every day is not necessarily considered true, but it can be understood as just the result of a deep misunderstanding (Pellegrini 2011).

These issues are very much present in Uday Prakash’s writing. Perhaps no other writer has as much influence on contemporary Hindi fiction as this independent writer who has never bowed to the conventions of the mainstream Hindi literary field. Born in Shahdol (Madhya Pradesh) in 1952, he is one of the most eminent contemporary writers in the Hindi literary scene, and although he calls himself primarily a poet, many Hindi writers of the younger generation claim that his short stories and the novel *Pīlī chatrī vāli laḍkī* (“The Girl with the Yellow Parasol”) have exercised a deep influence on their writing. Uday Prakash’s works have been translated into numerous Indian and foreign languages and his style shows many influences from South American authors such as Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez, to the point that it has been often considered an Indian version of magical realism (Ghirardi 2021).

In his stories, the intersectionality of private and public is very marked. The false and the true, fantasy and the real, dream and reality, past and future are all intertwined to such an extent that it is not possible to identify and separate them properly. Uday Prakash’s fame is due to his affabulatory ability and irony, that can convey a hint of positivity even in extremely hopeless situations. He tells stories about his time and society trying to peek into their darkness, always emphasizing his opposition to the system. Human fears, insecurities, resentment towards injustice are reflected in the characters he creates with a deep sensibility.

2. Autobiography/ies

Uday Prakash had nurtured a project to collect the autobiographical sketches he had written in the course of time, but changes in the socio-political life of his country made his attention focus on other issues, and so far he has not published his autobiography (personal communication in an interview, May 2021). This article focuses on a group of overtly autobiographical sketches by Uday Prakash, very short stories published as *Ātmakathya* “Autobiographies.” In these texts he makes a creative use of childhood memories. The focalization on the child character produces an indeterminacy that engages in a delightful game with the final ratiocinations of the first-person adult narrator, especially when the child faces traumatic experiences. In these micro stories, time, space and emotions scroll like a film,

moving from within the memory and shaping the self in very mysterious ways. Three of them appeared in the short story collection *Tirich* (“The poisonous lizard”), first published in 1989 (Prakāś 2001, here in alphabetical order):

Aprādh “Crime” (19-22)

Dibiyā “The little box” (15-18; Engl. tr. Prakash, Hueckstedt and Tripuraneni 2003: 88-92).

Nelkaṭar “Nailcutter” (11-14; Eng. tr. Prakash 2003: 205-209).

Five more autobiographical sketches are found in the collection *Aur ant meṃ prārthnā* (“And, in the end, a prayer”), first published in 1994 (Prakāś 2006a, here in alphabetical order):

Ātmakathya “Autobiography” (9-26)

Dopahar “Afternoon” (48-51)

Khaṃḍit striyām, Nehrūjī aur astācal “Broken women, Nehruji and twilight” (39-47; Birkinshaw 2017)

Philm – “The film” (27-31)

Sahāyak – “The helper” (32-38; Eng. tr. Prakash and Hueckstedt 2003: 30-38)

Another autobiographical text by Uday Prakash was published in *Pratilipi* with the title *Kavitā aur deś se darbadar / Exiled from Poetry and Country* (Prakash and Soni 2008). Technically it is not a memoir, as it is published as a comment to the poem *Tibbat* “Tibet,” yet it includes anecdotes from the writer’s childhood narrated in rich details.

For Uday Prakash, an autobiographical element is often the seed for a story. For example, *Dattātrey ke duḥkh* (“Dattatreya’s sorrows,” Prakāś 2006b) is a set of darkly funny scenes reflecting on 21st century Delhi, linked together by a quietly cynical, desultory narrator called Vinayak Dattatreya, whose personality looks very much like Uday Prakash himself. And there is a first-person narrator in both *Mohandās* (Prakāś 2009; Consolaro 2011) and *Maimḡosil* (Prakāś 2006b), the latter even being a freelance Hindi writer. Are these narratorial voices autobiographical? To some degree, absolutely. Uday toiled for years and years as a freelance journalist and filmmaker to support himself as a Hindi writer—no comfortable academic posts for him, a decided outsider from the literary establishment—and it was not an easy life at all. To that extent, Vinayak Dattatreya is based on autobiography. But these ‘authorial intrusions’ are not simply a hint to Uday’s own life: they are part of the urgency, play, and formal innovation in the stories.

3. Thanatological memoirs

It is difficult to label Uday Prakash's autobiographical writings according to a fixed literary genre. In the title I used the term 'memoir.' This is generally understood as a subgenre, insofar biography or autobiography tells the story of a whole life, while a memoir focuses on a particular event, or time, emphasizing touchstone moments and turning points from the author's life. Sometimes memoirs are considered as life narratives where the focus is not on the author's private life, but rather on historical events in which s/he was a witness or an actor. While memoirs usually tend to be predominantly descriptive, they often turn out to be a reading of the soul, of memories, of important moments in a person's life. Here I have used the term in the broad meaning of any nonfiction narrative writing based on the author's personal memories.

A striking element in Uday Prakash's autobiographical sketches is that they often offer the description or the study of death and dying, and the psychological mechanisms of dealing with them: autobiography is a thanatology.

Ātmakathya, for example, starts with the reverberation of the sound of approaching death. The reminiscence of the experience of drowning, an event happened when the narrator was about eight years old, introduces the uncanny notion that death has been a constant companion in his life. The child was saved by a woman who was doing her laundry in the river. The adult narrator comments, with a humorous twist, "Since, I have always loved women very much," but at the same time adds that "not even willingly can I make death something humorous," as "after that event death has always been around me, breathing very close to me" (12).

The episode leads to a constant presence of death in everyday life: "Death is a serious, inevitable presence that overwhelms consciousness, thoughts, and senses. It is the soul of truth" (12).

The consciousness of the fragility of human life leads to an articulated musing about the function of arts, literature and creative activity at large. Art is a search for immortality: "Every creative art - music, dance, science etc.—is at one level the living efforts of human against this final culmination. That is, artists are in a sense the only remedy of death. Deep human efforts to move beyond death, to cross out death" (12).

This is even more important as illness and death are the constant markers of the narrator's existential condition. In *Ātmakathya* (Prakāś 2006a: 12-13) he states "I have constantly witnessed death since my childhood:" when he was about 12 years old, his 37 years old mother died of cancer, as narrated in the short story *Nelkaṭar* (Prakāś 2001: 11-14). In *Dariyāi ghorā*, a short story collection first published 1982 (Prakāś 2010) he talks about his father's death, happened when he was 17 years old, and his grandfather's illness and death, at 45. They all died of cancer. In the narrator's family nobody

crossed the line of 47 years of age. This is why he feels close to death, and states: “I am almost 40 now and, in my life, there are two words: death and cancer.”

4. Death, pain and violence

In *Ātmakathya* Uday Prakash reflects about death and states that “the truth is that a person’s last death happens when s/he disappears from the memory of others. Therefore, my father, mother, lover’s last death will happen with my death, when their existence that is present in my memory will end” (Prakāś 2006a: 14-15). Living with death, though, is no easy game, on the contrary, it is a cruel condition for a child. When his mother died, Uday Prakash felt like the world had been shaken: he felt like dying himself, as life has no meaning any longer. But the thought of his sister, six years younger than him, kept him alive. He felt the responsibility to take care of her. As an adult narrator, he senses that he remained alive for many years just in order not to leave his sister alone. Later, when father died, elder brother was already married, he had his own family. At that time, the narrator feels that he and his little sister were left alone and orphan. It was the time when he received psychiatric treatment for almost one year, and he started playing “the death game:” “Often I would close my eyes, stop my breath, and I would die. As long as my sister would not panic and break into tears, I was not alive. Perhaps I was looking for confirmation of the fact that I existed in the pain generated that another person felt deep inside through that drama.” (Prakāś 2006a: 16).

Sometimes we need to be violent to others in order to feel that we are alive. In *Kavitā aur deś se darbadar / Exiled from Poetry and Country* Uday Prakash reflects on the presence of violence in children’s life. Children’s games often involve cruel practices towards animals: “For example, catching large butterflies or moths and tying empty matchboxes or other stuff to their tails with bits of string. Tying little cardboard boxes to black beetles and then filling them up with pebbles to test the strength of our living trucks.” Children enjoy the pleasure of putting a pinch of salt on leeches “and then stretching them out and pinning them onto a wooden board and playing them like an ektara.” Cruelty is condemned as an uncivilized behaviour, in some contexts, but it is not recorded as such when it is part of children’s plays and when it is perpetrated by the hegemonic society. Uday Prakash’s musing results in a strong condemnation of the invisibility of violence that comes from the powerful ones: “I often think that there are so many cruelties in tribal societies... cruelties towards other living beings... but when you compare it to the massacres and wars and the destruction of the environment and people perpetrated by these so called advanced and modern civilizations, doesn’t their violence seem like child’s play?” (Prakash and Soni 2008).

5. Dream, life, and creativity

The final part of *Ātmakathya* (Prakāś 2006a) shifts to a discussion about Hindi literary criticism and the reception of Uday Prakash's work in the Hindi literary field. The author argues in defense of his position as a free-lance artist. He is about 40 at the time of writing, but he feels the urge to complete his "autobiographies" as he is worried about the approaching "age line." In fact, as I already mentioned, all his family members in the past generations have died before turning 47 and he feels death approaching. He states that he wants to complete also a film that he has been thinking about for quite a few years. This is the topic of another memoir, titled *Philm* ("The film;" Prakāś 2006a: 27-31).

Uday Prakash's narrative style is often characterized by indeterminacy, that creates a dense atmosphere. The first-person narrator is not an eye-witness of the events: even if he is present there is an obstruction to his seeing/hearing. He must rely on the information given by other people who are/were present in the event. This leads to subjunctive indeterminacy in the speculations and conclusions of the first-person narrator, who might suffer from loss of memory.

In *Philm*, dream and real life, future expectations and memoirs of the past intermingle. Human life loses determination, as the world is turned into a fictional representation of an indetermined script by a set of actors who are not even aware of being actors. The film is "a real proof of some unreality!"

In another autobiographical writing Uday Prakash declares that he is not able to read any story which does not have dreams or illusions. He attributes this to the narrative style of traditional epic poems like the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, that he learnt since his childhood, as they are very popular also in their representations in village festivals. In later life, he developed this taste for fantastic and magic in his literary and cinematic frequentations. "If you've noticed, lies and truth, imagination and fact, dream and reality, past and future are all mixed up in all my stories. To the extent that it is impossible to recognize and extricate them from each other. Even for me" (Prakash and Soni 2008).

This immediately calls to mind the Advaitic notion of the world being an illusion, as the unqualified Brahman is the fundamental reality underlying all objects and experiences, while the appearance of empirical individuality is ascribed to *avidyā* "ignorance" and *māyā* "illusion" (Brooks 1969; Fost 1998). For the artist, though, the attempt to unmask the mechanism and the magic of artistic creation are closely connected. As in renown Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello's *Six characters in search of an author* (Pirandello and Davico Bonino 1993), the narrative has a 'meta' dimension, decomposing the dramatic structures. The story shows a transition from person to character, from having form to being form. The communication is based on the transmission of untrue messages, which do not respond to being because they are impossible to classify in the speech convention. Relationships are

compromised from their very beginning and this leads to a loneliness to which there is no solution, that artistically is shown in the creation of traumatic scenes in which all the characters want to live an authentic life but relive anguish and guilt.

We can examine these features in the story *Sahāyak* (“The helper;” Prakāś 2006a: 32-38), about the narrator’s father—a character named Father—who is introduced as a person who “was always eager to help others,” but also as a drunkard: “as soon as it got dark Father would always get out the booze” (all English quotes from Prakash and Hueckstedt 2003: 30-38). The narrator is an adult character, who introduces the incident contextualizing it in the social milieu where Father lived, with an ironic take on Father’s generosity: “Even if people didn’t really need his help, Father was still usually able to find some way to help them out. [...] Many people simply didn’t have many problems, or they knew they were perfectly capable of solving them. People like them made fun of Father.”

As in most of the memoirs by Uday Prakash, soon the focalization shifts on the child character. The narrated event is about a night when Father almost died. He was trying to help some people who were risking their life in the flooding river using his tractor’s headlamps so that the boatmen could see their way back to the village. Suddenly there was a landslide and the tractor slid into the water, remaining half submerged. Father was risking drowning.

The readers are not told exactly what happened: after some time, the child is taken home by a servant and we are only informed about his writhing and wriggling, his crying and panicking. The narration records what the ten years old child hears (screaming, yelling, a lamentation, crying coming from our house), sees (lanterns scurrying here and there, the feeble light of the lantern, darkness and the flooding river) and guesses (perhaps the boat had overturned, perhaps the tractor was on the slope of land above the ghat, either the brake slipped open, or the tractor gear somehow suddenly went into neutral). His knowledge of the facts depends on what somebody said: some say that when it happened, Father was sitting down, drunk and sitting. Somebody else claims that fortunately, the tractor’s wheel got stuck in a sandbar.

Paralyzed with fear, the child looks in the darkness, trying to discern: “What I saw that night has always stayed fresh in my memory like a troubling picture. A night in the dark fortnight, a rain that had fallen steadily for days, the swirling noise of the frothing, foaming river rising between its bank. And far out, in the middle of it all, paralyzed with fear, Father’s head. Absolutely still.” In his anxiety he feels suffocating: “I felt as if a huge empty space had suddenly filled my heart. It was like a balloon that had been blown up, but it was empty, it had no air in it.” But the most painful experience is the sense of helplessness that is not individual, but pervades all the people in the village: all the people could do was nothing more than run back and forth. Mother too, crazed and crying, was just an

observer. "I was undergoing the most horrible experience of my life, I, too, was no more than a spectator."

The story has a happy ending but this event is a lesson for the young narrator, that will mark his whole life experience: "Perhaps that was the day I learned we can all only be the observers of each other's dire emergencies." The reader is not told how Father got saved. The text ends with an anticlimax that emphasizes the impotence of the narrator, whom the servant tries to calm in a paternalistic attitude: "Much later, lanterns and the sound of people talking were heading toward our home. Manohar said, "Stop crying now. Father's coming."

6. The poetics of indeterminacy

The indeterminacy of perceptions, sensations and emotions is a recurrent element in Uday Prakash's memoirs, often creating a poeticism that can be retrieved in his writing in general, where there is an uninterrupted fusion of factuality and imagination and historical figures and events are enclosed in a fantastic and dreamlike atmosphere.

This is particularly evident in *Ḍibiyā* ("The little box;" Prakāś 2001: 15-18; English quotes from Hueckstedt and Tripuraneni 2003), where the first-person narrator, an eight years old child—now an adult—captures a spot of light in a tin little box. He tells about the enigmatic and magical attraction he felt for the designs created on the floor by sunbeams penetrating through holes in the damaged roof of the house. For a long time, he had tried in vain to catch these "sun-circles," but every time the sunbeam "leapt upon" his closed hand. Finally, one day, when he was alone in the kitchen, he caught a beautiful circle of sunbeams. The ray of light was "alive and magical" and the child drew it to the other side of the kitchen with a fan, put it in a tin box, closed the lid, and never opened it again. Since, he has kept this secret treasure as a proof of his experience of having a pet piece of light.

Many years later, the adult narrator reflects on this experience and ponders whether or not to take the risk to open the box and show its content to the world. He is not willing to use it in order to establish his credibility: talking about that or showing his treasure would put to risk his possession of the light spot, and the whole mysterious experience would be lost. At the same time, there is no guarantee that people trust him: some may believe in his experience, but other might not, or at least not fully, as adults never believe it when one recounts such incidents from one's childhood. In the end the narrator cannot solve the dilemma whether it is worth taking the risk to open the box. The narrator states: "I had decided, then, never to tell anyone else about any such incident that happened to me which they would not believe." Yet, paradoxically, he is now writing about it, challenging the impossibility of reaching a successful communication.

In the short story *Dopahar* (“Afternoon;” Prakāś 2001: 48-51) as well there is a focus on the poetic quality of the experience one can have through indeterminacy. The focalization on the child is once again paired with the afterthought of the adult protagonist. The smell of a melon perceived out of season opens the whole range of sensations of summer afternoon, the heat and the sound of the bazaar, in a synesthetic fusion of smell, ear and view. In this story the child narrator is positioned so that he cannot have a full view of the scene, and even this information is given with indeterminacy: “perhaps I was sitting alone on a distance, as was my nature.” He could only see the back of all the people sitting in the courtyard. Actually, it is this very positioning as an outsider that allows him to experience the scene with a difference.

7. The impossibility to forget

Khaṇḍit striyām, Nehrūjī aur astācal (“Broken women, Nehruji and twilight;” Prakāś 2001: 39-47; Engl. quotes from Birkinshaw 2017) is apparently a memoir about lost love. When the narrator, a village boy, was around eleven or twelve, a friendship developed between him and a city girl who had come to the village. While all the adults were taking their siesta in the hot May afternoons, they both cycled into the fields. The girl was learning how to bike, and they developed a secret happy world, where they were alone together in the fields, visiting ancient statues and laughing: “We both laughed a lot. I laughed at her fear and her try for independence. What she laughed at, this even today I don’t know.” Soon the reader finds out that the memoir is also about a historical episode: Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s death, on 27 May 1964. While all other temporal references are left indeterminate, this is the only precise date in the text, even more so because it marks a personal and collective tragedy: the news of Nehru’s death hits the country and at the same time destroys this childish yet very serious world.

A relevant narrative strategy is the contraposition of light and darkness. The story is set in the blinding glare of the heatwave of the month of May. In their peregrinations in the fields the young protagonists find a plethora of ancient statues that lie scattered in the river and in the fields, suggesting the existence of a seducing yet uncanny past, that the child cannot fully understand. In this luscious surrounding there are signs of decadence: most of the beautiful female bodies are mutilated, the river is now a “smallish stream,” but it must have been a very large river in the past. In the title the term that I translated simplifying it as ‘twilight’ is *Astachal*, the name of the mythical western mountain behind which the Sun takes refuge at night. After Nehru’s death the girl—the sun in the boy’s life—disappears: the children are separated and for almost three decades the narrator has had no contact with the girl, even if he maintains the urge to communicate with her. He keeps on nurturing the idea that one day they might meet again, and he is convinced that she too reciprocates his love.

But just like after sunset there is only darkness, subsequent life does not seem to have been happy for either protagonist. The adult narrator states: "I came to find out for sure that the girl had done an MA in History. She always got things quickly. Then she had fallen in love. After this she got sick. I also found out that she started smoking, and had become very thin. Another thing I found out was that she had many times asked people about me. She had collected all information about me." The reader does not know about the narrator's adult life, but it is clear that his wish to find again the bliss of past happiness is bound to be frustrated, while there is no hope to get a liberating oblivion.

The lack of forgetting, the impossibility of forgetting is one of the central themes of this piece: "This too is a rule that after learning to ride a cycle it is practically impossible to forget. This is the worst part of the theory." The concluding line allows us to generalize the whole country this sense of decline as well as the impossibility to forget the past: "Maybe I was talking of the broken statues, Nehruji and Astaachal..." The ancient civilization is destroyed, but also the recent past shows a downward parable. Internal evidence places the adult narrator in 1990 or 1992, a time when the crisis of the Congress was evident and communal tensions and the radicalization of politicized religious identity was becoming a serious problem for India.

Another memoir about losing and forgetting, focusing on the experience of mother's death, is *Nelkaṭar* ("Nailcutter;" Prakāś 2001: 11-14; Engl. tr. Prakash 2003: 205-209). Here the first-person narrator is a nine years old child, and the reported incident happens the day before Mother's death. Mother cannot speak, due to a tracheostomy, and communicates through gestures. The story is about a particularly intimate moment that mother and son spend together, the boy cutting her nails with a nail cutter. During this delicate exchange the child has a foreboding of death, or more precisely, perceives how life is abandoning Mother: he notices that mother's fingers are "exceedingly thin," the skin is "yellowish," "thin, like kite paper. No, not even yellow—old ivory. And very cold. With a cold that lifeless things have, like chairs, tables, door leaves or bicycle handlebars. And how had her hand become so light? Where had all its weight gone?"

Nevertheless, the meeting is full of laughs and smiles. Only, when Mother touched the child's hair and wants to say something, he stops her. "If she had spoken, she would have asked why I hadn't taken a full bath, why I hadn't washed my hair, why I was covered in dust, and why I hadn't combed my hair." This is how the narrator misses the possibility to hear his mother's voice for the last time.

After finishing the manicure, the child puts the nail cutter under his pillow. But since he has not been able to find it again, even if he has looked for it in the past and keeps on looking for it in the present. Mother dies during the night. The "forgetfulness" that leads to the loss of the nailcutter is symmetric to the child's disregard for Mother's desire to say something. The adult narrator concludes

that “Things never get lost. They stay right where they are. With their complete existence and full weight. We just forget where we put them.”

8. Forgetting, forgiving

Uday Prakash makes time, space and emotions scroll like a film, moving from within the memory and shaping the self in very mysterious ways. At a metanarrative level, writing appears as a journey on the path of memory, from the past towards the present and perhaps even leaping into the future. In *Aprādh* (“The crime;” Prakāś 2001: 19-22), the story introduces a very common event that happens in everybody’s life at some time: telling a lie in a moment of anger. It focalizes on the mindset of the child, who is extremely sensitive, and it introduces the issue of violence, as the protagonist exercises psychological violence on his elder brother. This event does not spoil the relationship, but remains in the mind of the lead character creating a permanent sense of guilt with no hope of redemption, that influences his *Weltanschauung*.

The first passages tell a very poignant story of mutual love between two brothers. At the age of five Elder Brother, Baṛā Bhāī, had polio, which left one of his legs lifeless. Yet, apart from this handicap, he is fit. He is good looking like a god, he is good at sports and he is physically very strong. He is always with the Younger Brother, Choṭā Bhāī, and loves him very much, even if they have different skills. But Choṭā has ambivalent emotions towards the elder brother. He is aware of his brother’s affection but at the same time he feels displaced and inadequate, as he is constantly in a subordinate position.

Baṛā’s behaviour has nothing that justifies such a feeling. It is the social interaction with the other village children that hurts Choṭā’s deep sensitiveness. He is the only little child in the group, as all boys in the village are six years elder. Therefore, nobody wants to play with him as a partner or to include him in the team, because they do not want to risk a defeat. He is left aside, alone. It is at his point that his brother generally intervenes, protecting him and including him in the game.

But one day the children’s group was playing a sort of tip-cat game, where each boy holds a small wooden stick and hits a small object called *khaḍabbal* straight on the ground with full force, accelerating forward. It is an individual game: no alliances are made and everybody plays for himself.

That day, Baṛā Bhāī’s full attention was in the game. Choṭā Bhāī felt ignored and wondered if the brother might have forgotten him: “For the first time I felt as if I were not there.” He felt “jealousy, inferiority, and neglect.” It is this sense of alienation, bitterness and rage that triggers violence: the younger child vented his negative feelings on the *khaḍabbal*, pushing it vigorously. By chance, it collided with a rock, bounced and hit Choṭā’s head. Baṛā Bhāī’s rushed to help the bleeding child, but circumstances made communication difficult. Unable to tolerate what he perceived as his brother’s

neglect, the little child was unable to react verbally and could only focus on the wish to have him punished. He shoved away his elder brother and dashed home, knowing that the lame boy could not run. He lied to Mother, claiming that Baṛā Bhāī had hurt him. As a result, when the elder brother arrived hobbling, he got trashed by Father.

This is the passage when the reader observes double violence: Baṛā Bhāī has to endure physical violence—father's beating—and psychological violence—he is innocent but he has to pay the fee. His only possible way out is that his younger brother tells the truth. That's why he stares at him with eyes full of fear, plead, request, impotence, panic. At first Choṭā Bhāī does not think of the effect that his lie will cause, but when he realizes he is committing a crime, he gets scared: should he tell father the truth, he will be punished! Therefore, he remains aloof, no sense of justice makes him save the situation.

The story concludes with a focalization on the adult narrator, that turns a personal question into an issue of social justice. The grown-up protagonist confesses that his brother's eyes full of impetration haunt him and make him feel guilty even so many years later. He has tried to apologize for the crime he committed, but Baṛā Bhāī has no memory of the event, and his parents—the only witnesses—are no more. So, there is no way to get free from this crime. The narrator observes that this is not just a personal situation. Social life too is like this. Some historical decisions appear wrong with the passing of time, but there is no way to change the situation once the choice is made. One cannot get back to the past and change what has happened. Moreover, memory of the crime is erased for all, but for the guilt-ridden perpetrator of the evil, who is now regretting his misdemeanor. This condemns him to remain in impotence and helplessness, with the awareness that it is impossible to apologize, and consequently to obtain forgiveness.

9. Conclusion

Displacement is a terrible reality that is constantly present in the Uday Prakash's stories.

The disturbing aspect of the human condition is that not only does truth have no witness, but there is no one even willing to credit it, like in the story *Ḍibiyā*. Even more painfully, there is no knowledge or science in the world by which one can prove it. We also get displaced in relationships, because for many reasons we have to build new liaisons, and old affiliations change over time. But family relationships persist till the last moment and their displacement continues to plague us. That is why the conclusion of the story *Aprādh* tells us that freedom from relationships is impossible. What Uday Prakash stated about things at the end of *Nelkaṭar* is equally true of relationships in his stories: they never get lost, they remain forever. We just have momentary lapses of memory, but then we regret forever.

In this article I have introduced some micro stories that the author labels as autobiography. They refer to childhood experiences that, as it is recognized in psychology, are impactful and determine the kind of life one will live in their adult years. Family relationships and memories play a vital role in shaping the lives of each individual. In Uday Prakash's stories the process of retrieving past experiences from within the memory is characterised by indeterminacy: time, space and emotions move and ramble, and in the end all we have is approximative information, an indistinct picture of a mysterious reality in which the self is shaped through painful experiences. Uday Prakash's stories create such an effect by combining subtle sensation and imagination in gross reality. Starting from simple events or characters, these lively stories go beyond the bounds of immediate reality and become timeless.

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