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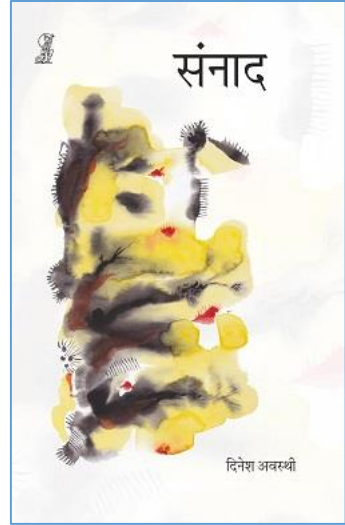
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Book Review on Dinesh Awasthi's Sannad by Subhajit Bhadra

Humanism, Satire, and Experimentation
in Dinesh Awasthi's Sannad: A Critical
Study of Short Stories in Hindi

1. The Expansive Landscape of Hindi Literature

Hindi literature occupies a unique position in India's cultural and intellectual history. Unlike Bengali, Assamese, or Odia literature, which remain closely tied to specific geographical regions, Hindi literature thrives on its expansive reach. This geographical breadth has liberated Hindi writers from provincialism, allowing them to draw inspiration from diverse cultural, social, and philosophical premises. The richness of Hindi literature lies in its ability to absorb influences from multiple traditions while remaining rooted in the lived experiences of ordinary people. This geographical breadth liberates Hindi writers from provincialism, allowing them to explore universal themes while still reflecting local realities.



Writers such as Premchand, Nirmal Verma, and Priyamvad have demonstrated how Hindi fiction can simultaneously reflect local realities and universal human concerns.

Within this rich tradition, Dinesh Awasthi's short story collection *Sannad* stands out as a remarkable contribution. Comprising twenty-four stories, the collection demonstrates Awasthi's mastery of brevity, precision, and humanistic depth.

Awasthi's writing reflects Hemingway's "iceberg theory" in its economy of expression—every word is purposeful, nothing superfluous. His stories resemble meditations on life, death, love, hatred, compassion, sensitivity, grievance, and nature, yet what ultimately triumphs is a profound sense of humanism. Above all, his stories triumph through their deep humanism. Short, crisp, and pithy, they embody the essence of true storytelling. Much like Priyamvad and Nirmal Verma,

Awasthi's narratives often serve as descriptive analyses of human existence.

Importantly, Awasthi does not write for awards or recognition. His stories are warnings to humanity: without compassion and love, society risks self-destruction. His use of *defamiliarization*—a technique that compels readers to see familiar realities in new and unsettling ways—sets his work apart.

2. Character Studies: Portraits of Solitude and Struggle

The story *Purna Dand* opens dramatically, centering on an elderly man who takes daily morning walks. The narrator joins him, measuring distance through the music flowing into his earphones, following his doctor's advice. As their relationship grows, the narrator visits his home and learns that the man is a professor at a local college—unmarried, sophisticated, and deeply introspective. He seems to punish himself by constantly searching for his own deficiencies. Death, viewed as eternal, permeates the narrative, while the protagonist emerges as solitary, disconnected, and a misfit in contemporary society, despite possessing all human qualities. The writer's eye for detail extends even to astronomy. Philosophically, Awasthi suggests that punishment can never be complete, since crime itself is never complete—a strikingly original idea in modern Hindi fiction.

Adhura Syllabus begins abruptly, exploring art, artists, and artistry. One character even promises to create a “syllabus of grief.” Postmodern in its open-endedness, the story recalls the works of Nirmal Verma, Vinod Kumar Shukla, and Priyamvad, while also evoking Elizabeth Bowen and Milan Kundera. It ends unresolved, with Shekharjee seeking Pushpajee—hinting at unspoken love. The narrative also resonates with Monaj Das's *The Misty Hour*.

In *Shobnom Mosi*, the protagonist is the first queer MLA in Madhya Pradesh. Assertive and dominating, she challenges the Brahmin identity of the narrator. The story, full of digressions, reflects on philanthropy, atomic bombs, and human compassion. Mosi's desire to abolish nuclear weapons underscores her humane nature.

One of the hallmarks of *Sannad* is its character-driven narratives. Awasthi crafts protagonists who embody contradictions, vulnerabilities, and resilience.

Ramendrajee

The protagonist of the story *Ramendrajee* is also its title character. Ramendrajee is six feet tall, quite healthy, and possesses a strikingly glamorous face. The narrator recalls having maintained a relationship with him for the past twenty-five years. Honest and strong-willed, Ramendrajee is unselfish and upright. Yet, in recent days, he has grown intolerant of those who flaunt wealth, particularly car owners. He explains that his intolerance stems from the ability to see through façades and uncover the real person beneath. A similar metaphor is applied to bees. Despite finding negativity unbearable, Ramendrajee admits he is helpless. Like many successful individuals, he has endured great struggles.

According to him, if one nurtures a detective-like mentality, they will be satisfied knowing no one can deceive them. The narrator, however, warns that if Ramendrajee cultivates grievances about everything, he will become overburdened. Ramendrajee responds that at seventy-plus years of age, he no longer cares if people misunderstand him. Yet, in the past, he was short-tempered with opponents who insulted him, mocking their wealth and ridiculing their shallow thinking. The story portrays Ramendrajee as a man who lives life on his own terms. It is a character-driven narrative that also explores boredom and death.

Riteshjee in Dambh

In *Dambh*, Riteshjee speaks with control and confidence about every aspect of life. The central question, however, is whether such conduct has truly benefitted him. The story conveys boredom and frustration. Riteshjee is falsely accused of theft, a blatant lie that reflects the jealousy of others. Suppressed grief and frustration, if not expressed, eventually erupt like a volcano. Here, sorrow becomes contemplation, and happiness and sadness are shown as complementary. Human beings fear death, yet many die daily from that very fear. When Riteshjee visits a doctor and waits two hours for an appointment, he grows frustrated but occasionally accepts reality. His epiphanic realization comes while lying under anesthesia for a dental implant. Despite psychological research, he believes psychology yields little positive result, dismissing it as a useless subject. The story explores the dichotomy between pride and melancholy, suggesting that pride and selfishness distance one from love. Towards the end, Riteshjee discusses divorce, attributing the breakdown of marriages to pride.

Narmadajee in Karwi Muskan

Karwi Muskan introduces Narmadajee, a woman who has undergone surgery and is now adjusting to the importance of oxygen. Though oxygen is abundant, its value is realized only when it becomes scarce. Narmadajee resumes her normal activities without assistance but grows irritable when drenched in water. She reflects on her love for Poritosh, realizing that separation intensifies affection. Love, she muses, is a blessing when it arrives early, but when delayed, something essential is lost.

Respected for her dignity, learning, and strong personality, Narmadajee nevertheless faces hostility for opposing corruption. Even within her college, colleagues conspire

against her, but she remains undeterred. Victimized by patriarchy, she nevertheless maintains extraordinary attachment to her son. Her uncompromising honesty and intolerance of corruption exact a heavy price, occasionally disrupting her domestic life. This story highlights her positive ideology, her refusal to compromise with truth, and carries a subtle undertone of romantic love.

3. Art, Satire, and Postmodernism

Adhura Syllabus explores art, artists, and artistry. One character promises to create a “syllabus of grief,” and the story ends on an open note, embodying postmodern sensibilities. Its discourse recalls Nirmal Verma, Vinod Kumar Shukla, and Priyamvad, while also evoking Elizabeth Bowen and Milan Kundera. The unspoken love between Shekharjee and Pushpajee adds poignancy, reminiscent of Monaj Das's *The Misty Hour*.

Kuch Unse Puchhe, Jinhe Zindagi Ne Mara is satirical, mocking Indian bureaucracy while weaving in mythological references to the *Ramayana* and Angad. Awasthi critiques fraudulent sages who exploit devotees, resisting closure in true postmodern fashion. *Dombh* explores pride and melancholy, while *Karwi Muskan* highlights a woman protagonist's uncompromising pursuit of truth, layered with romantic undertones. In *Underlines*, the recurring metaphor of “underline” threads through themes of disease, fear of death, writer's block, friendship, dissent, and love, making it a multilayered narrative.

Five stories in the collection are character-driven—*Shobnom Mosi*, *Ramendrajee*, *Rajbirjee*, *Balla*, and *Chaturvedjee*. Others, though not discussed here due to space, are equally compelling. With *Sannad*, Dinesh Awasthi leaves a lasting imprint on contemporary Hindi literature, offering a powerful collection that blends brevity, depth, and humanism.

Tatasthata opens with a man aged prematurely by constant coughing and spitting. Initially suffocated, he indulges in self-apology but gradually accepts his condition. His wife understands his feelings. He acknowledges mortality and wonders if she will tire of him as illness consumes him. Though illness confines him, his mental faculties remain sharp. He contemplates writing before death but doubts his wife would provide pen and paper. Four months before retirement, he suffers viral fever. He hopes that taking leave will change his wife's perception of him as a workaholic. Gradually, he becomes inert. His wife, once irritated by his friends' visits, grows more tolerant. The story suggests that sympathy is rarely found when sought, but often arrives unexpectedly. It explores disease, death, and the bond between a dying man and his wife. At night, he feels her caring hands without confession. Both shed tears, soaking their pillows. As death approaches, compassion overwhelms him. The story ends with symbolic gestures hinting at mortality.

Suboho Ka Chay begins with a morning cup of tea, sweetened with sugar to capture its full flavor. The protagonist muses that his taste may change in the future but eventually stops thinking about it. In his quest for understanding, he becomes allergic to over-analysis.

He was physically handicapped, and this created complexities in his conduct. He often contemplated death in the near future, which made him pensive. He realized that his negative thoughts usually surfaced while drinking tea in the morning, though they did not trouble him during supper or dinner. He thought of his neighbor, a man with an aggressive temperament, who had survived Covid-19 but eventually seemed extinguished. The imagery of a cup of milk wobbling and spilling onto the ground symbolically reinforced this sense of decline.

Adam Theory ka Canvas portrays the plight of a beggar who had been ill for some time. Out of false sympathy, people gave

him rotten food, and no one truly cared. One morning, he suddenly died. The municipal van collected his body, and people hurried to dispose of it to avoid the stench of decomposition. Death freed him from earthly suffering. The story is both a social satire and a commentary on the deplorable condition of beggars. Pandejee, reflecting on this, insists that begging is not respectable but fails to grasp the compulsion behind it. He himself suffers from sadness and pessimism, masking his plight by pretending indifference. When a shop girl mistakenly gave him two thousand rupees, he took fifteen days to return it. Yet when a woman gave him ten rupees extra while selling mangoes, he returned it immediately. Pandejee's actions reveal his clear vision of society's contradictions.

In *Woh Odhura*, the protagonist roams aimlessly around a railway station, a place many consider suitable for passing time. He meets a learned vagabond who seeks honest opinions about himself. Rajib, a retired teacher and friend, is also present. Honest yet iconoclastic, Rajib is a social misfit. When four friends gather, Rajib appears ill and trembling. One person mocks him, while another accuses him of speaking like an autocrat. Despite his politeness, Rajib becomes the target of ridicule. His death leaves his friends saddened, realizing that life feels incomplete when a part of it is lost. Rabi, a poet friend, writes primarily about nature. Rajib, meanwhile, watches pigeons building nests, symbolizing persistence. Rabi falls in love with a college teacher, but the relationship remains incomplete. The story philosophically reflects on human existence, emphasizing that incompleteness breeds dissatisfaction.

Rajbirjee is a character-centric story about Rajbir, who lives in an apartment but avoids social interaction. When the narrator finds him ill, he takes him to a doctor, where Rajbir is diagnosed with typhoid. The narrator brings him medicine, and Rajbir develops affection for him. Every Sunday, the

narrator visits Rajbir's home and is warmly received. Rajbir, a writer of stories and articles, also worked as a proofreader for a local publisher. Learning that the narrator is a professor pleases him. Meanwhile, a violent group fight in the area, resulting in a stabbing, dominates the media. Sharmajee, another local, helps people generously but receives little respect, which irritates the narrator. Television broadcasts a handwashing program that reaches thousands. Rajbirjee, an insightful interpreter of psychology, never flaunts his knowledge. Yet he grows paranoid about his work before sleep. He believes in the transformative power of music. When the publishing house tries to dominate him, he resigns and returns to his village to focus on cultivation. He has lived there for twenty years, occasionally speaking with the narrator by telephone. The narrator reflects on possibilities, leaving the story open-ended.

Awasthi's stories are not only personal meditations but also sharp social critiques. *The story Kuch Unse Puchhe, Jinhe Zindagi Ne Mara* is full of mockery and satire, targeting Indian bureaucracy. It incorporates mythological references to the *Ramayana* and the character of Angad. Awasthi lashes out at fake sages who exploit their devotees. The story resists closure, a hallmark of postmodern narrative.

4. Awasthi's Humanism and Experimentation

Awasthi's stories are not written for awards but as warnings to humanity: if we fail to love one another, we risk destroying ourselves. His philanthropic attitude, sensitivity, and compassion permeate his writing. Crisp and pithy, his stories capture readers' attention from the first line and sustain it until the end. They can be read in a single sitting, yet their impact lingers.

Though some stories appear satirical, they overflow with empathy and understanding. Awasthi experiments with form

and content, employing techniques of defamiliarization to make familiar experiences strange and thought-provoking. Interestingly, while the collection is titled *Sannad*, no story bears that name, underscoring his unconventional approach.

Ultimately, Awasthi writes not with ink but with blood—his words pulsate with emotion, vision, and humanism. His stories remind us that compassion is the true storehouse of peace, and his contribution to contemporary Hindi literature is both profound and enduring.

Title: [Sannad](#)

Author: Dinesh Awasthi

Available: [Amazon](#)

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Subhajit Bhadra is a gold medallist in M.A from Tezpur University. He is a freelance writer, poet, critic and translator. He has published a number of books including *The Masked Protagonist In Jewish American Fiction*, *The Man Who Stole The Crown*, *The Rising Sun*, a book of poems in Bengali and a translated work titled *Selected Stories of Arun Goswami*.

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