

# Bridging Tradition and Modernity: A Comparative Study of Acharya Ramchandra Shukla and Dr. Namvar Singh's Critical Approaches in Hindi Literature

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**Abstract-** This study examines the divergent critical methodologies of Acharya Ramchandra Shukla and Dr. Namvar Singh, two pivotal figures in Hindi literary criticism, to illuminate the evolution of the field from tradition to modernity. We conduct a qualitative comparative analysis of their works, drawing on secondary sources such as seminal texts, essays, and scholarly critiques, to juxtapose Shukla's historically grounded, society-centric approach with Singh's Marxist-influenced, ideologically driven framework. Shukla's criticism, exemplified in *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas*, prioritizes historicity, moral idealism, and *lokmangal* (public welfare), reflecting a commitment to social cohesion and cultural continuity. In contrast, Singh's works, like *Kavita ke Naye Pratiman*, employ structuralist and interdisciplinary lenses, emphasizing class struggle and discursive engagement as tools for literary interpretation. The analysis reveals that while Shukla's traditionalism anchors literature in ethical and historical contexts, Singh's modernity interrogates power dynamics and ideological underpinnings, thereby expanding the scope of critical inquiry. Furthermore, the study highlights how their contrasting yet complementary perspectives collectively enrich Hindi literary criticism, bridging gaps between conservative and progressive paradigms. The findings underscore the significance of their contributions in shaping the trajectory of the field, offering insights into the interplay of tradition and innovation in literary studies. This research not only delineates their theoretical distinctions but also demonstrates their shared commitment to linking literature to societal progress, thereby affirming their enduring relevance in contemporary discourse.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The critical tradition of Hindi literature has undergone significant transformations, shaped by the interplay of historical context, ideological frameworks, and evolving literary paradigms. At the heart of this evolution lie the contributions of Acharya Ramchandra Shukla and Dr. Namvar Singh, whose methodologies represent foundational and transformative phases of Hindi literary

criticism, respectively. While Shukla's work is deeply rooted in historicity and moral idealism, Singh's critique is marked by Marxist theory and structural analysis, reflecting broader shifts in literary and intellectual discourse. This study seeks to unravel the distinct yet complementary approaches of these two scholars, situating their contributions within the larger narrative of Hindi literary criticism.

The significance of this comparative analysis lies in its potential to bridge the gap between traditional and modern critical frameworks. Shukla's *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas* (Sukla, 2009) exemplifies a commitment to *lokmangal* (public welfare) and historical contextualization, positioning literature as a vehicle for social cohesion. His emphasis on objectivity and moral values contrasts sharply with Singh's *Kavita ke Naye Pratiman* (N. Singh, 2009), which interrogates power structures and ideological biases through a Marxist lens. By juxtaposing these approaches, this study not only highlights their theoretical divergences but also underscores their shared goal of linking literature to societal progress.

The hypothesis guiding this research posits that Shukla's criticism, grounded in traditional values and historical continuity, serves as a counterpoint to Singh's modern, ideologically charged perspective. This dichotomy reflects broader tensions within Hindi literary criticism, where the pull between conservatism and progressivism continues to shape scholarly debates. For instance, while Shukla's work aligns with the *ritikal* (period of literary systems) tradition (Busch, 2004), Singh's critique resonates with the *Dalit* and *Adivasi* literary movements (Wessler, 2020), which challenge dominant narratives.

The objective of this study is twofold: first, to delineate the theoretical and methodological distinctions between

Shukla and Singh's critical approaches, and second, to demonstrate how their divergent perspectives collectively enrich the field of Hindi literary criticism. By employing a qualitative comparative analysis, this research draws on secondary sources, including seminal texts and scholarly critiques, to illuminate the nuances of their methodologies. The findings reveal that Shukla's traditionalism and Singh's modernity, though seemingly oppositional, are in fact complementary, offering a more holistic understanding of Hindi literature's role in society.

The broader implications of this research extend beyond the confines of literary criticism, touching upon questions of cultural identity, social justice, and intellectual history. For example, Shukla's emphasis on historicity provides a counterbalance to Singh's focus on ideological critique, suggesting that a synthesis of these approaches could yield new insights into the relationship between literature and society. Moreover, this study contributes to ongoing discussions about the evolution of Hindi literary criticism, particularly in light of contemporary challenges such as globalization and digital media.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the existing literature on Hindi literary criticism, situating Shukla and Singh's work within broader scholarly debates. Section 3 outlines the theoretical foundations of their critical approaches, while Section 4 details the research design and methodology. Sections 5 and 6 present a comparative analysis of their methodologies and discuss the implications of their divergent perspectives. Finally, Section 7 concludes by reflecting on the enduring relevance of their contributions to Hindi literary criticism.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The critical discourse surrounding Hindi literary criticism has been shaped by a rich tapestry of scholarly interventions, with Acharya Ramchandra Shukla and Dr. Namvar Singh occupying central positions in this intellectual landscape. Existing scholarship has often positioned Shukla as the architect of a historically grounded, moralistic framework, while Singh is celebrated for his Marxist and structuralist critiques. For instance, *Criticism as Value Judgment: The Importance*

*of Being Namvar Singh* (Agrawal, 2026) underscores Singh's departure from Shukla's tradition, emphasizing his engagement with social context and historical moment as autonomous yet interconnected domains. Similarly, *The Namwarism of Namvar Singh* (Bhushan, 2026) delineates Singh's ideological divergence from Shukla, particularly in his reinterpretation of Tulsidas and other canonical figures, which Shukla had analyzed through a moral-historical lens.

Shukla's *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas* (Sukla, 2009) remains a cornerstone of traditional Hindi criticism, with its focus on *lok-mangal* and historicity. However, as *The Case For Bahujan Literature* (Ranjan et al., 2016) notes, Shukla's framework has been critiqued for marginalizing subaltern voices, a gap that Singh's work seeks to address. Singh's *Kavita ke Naye Pratiman* (N. Singh, 2009) and *Vad, Vivad aur Samvad* (A. Singh, 2017) introduce a dialogic approach, integrating Marxist theory to interrogate power structures and ideological biases. This shift is further explored in *In Search of the Other Tradition or the Importance of being Namvar* (TRIVEDI, 1992), which highlights Singh's efforts to reclaim marginalized narratives, contrasting sharply with Shukla's emphasis on cultural continuity.

The tension between these two paradigms is also evident in *Hindi: A Mixed Fare* (Bandopadhyay, 1983), which examines how Singh's critique of Shukla's *ritikal* tradition sparked debates about the role of ideology in literary analysis. Meanwhile, *Translation in/and Hindi Literature* (A. Singh, 2017) extends this discussion by framing Singh's work as a creative reimagining of critical discourse, one that challenges the boundaries of traditional Hindi criticism.

Despite these divergent approaches, both critics share a commitment to linking literature to societal progress. *The One and Only Namvar Singh* (Trivedi, 2026) reveals how Singh, despite his Marxist leanings, acknowledged Shukla's contributions, even editing his essays with an appreciative introduction. This nuanced relationship suggests that their methodologies, though oppositional, are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary.

The present study builds on this scholarship by offering a systematic comparative analysis of Shukla and Singh's

critical frameworks. While existing works have explored their individual contributions, few have examined how their divergent perspectives collectively enrich Hindi literary criticism. By situating their methodologies within broader theoretical and historical contexts, this research bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, demonstrating how their interplay fosters a more dynamic and inclusive critical discourse.

#### Theoretical Foundations of Hindi Literary Criticism

The theoretical underpinnings of Hindi literary criticism are deeply rooted in the dialectical tension between tradition and modernity, a duality exemplified by the works of Acharya Ramchandra Shukla and Dr. Namvar Singh. Their approaches, though divergent in methodology and ideological orientation, collectively form the bedrock of contemporary critical discourse in Hindi literature.

**Shukla's Historicist Framework:** Acharya Ramchandra Shukla's critical theory emerges from a synthesis of historical contextualization and moral idealism. His methodology, often termed *aitihāsik-drishtikon* (historical perspective), situates literary texts within their socio-cultural milieu, emphasizing the interplay between literature and collective consciousness. For Shukla, the aesthetic value of a work is inseparable from its ethical dimensions, as articulated through concepts like *lok-mangal* (public welfare) and *rasa-siddhanta* (theory of aesthetic relish). His insistence on historicity does not merely chronicle literary evolution but seeks to uncover the moral and spiritual continuity that binds Hindi literature to Indian cultural identity. This framework, while conservative in its reverence for tradition, is paradoxically progressive in its assertion that literature must serve societal transformation.

**Singh's Ideological Critique:** In contrast, Dr. Namvar Singh's theoretical approach is characterized by its engagement with Marxist thought and structuralist analysis. His critique dismantles the illusion of textual autonomy, exposing how literature is implicated in power relations and ideological struggles. Singh's methodology, influenced by Western critical theory, interrogates the very foundations of Shukla's historicism by asking whose history is being represented and whose voices are silenced. Concepts like *vipaksh-drishti* (oppositional gaze) and *samajik parishkar* (social

refinement) underscore his commitment to democratizing literary discourse. Unlike Shukla, who privileges continuity, Singh emphasizes rupture—the moments where literature challenges dominant narratives and reconfigures societal norms.

**Epistemological Divergence:** The distinction between these two paradigms extends beyond methodology to their epistemological foundations. Shukla's criticism operates within a hermeneutic circle where meaning is derived from the text's alignment with historical and ethical truths. Singh, however, adopts a dialectical materialism that treats meaning as contingent, shaped by class struggle and ideological contestation. This divergence manifests in their treatment of canonical figures: Shukla's Tulsidas is a moral beacon, while Singh's Tulsidas becomes a site of ideological critique, revealing the tensions between bhakti (devotion) and social hierarchy.

**Synthesis and Tension:** Despite their differences, both critics share a fundamental belief in literature's capacity to reflect and reshape society. Shukla's traditionalism provides a stabilizing force, anchoring literary criticism in cultural memory, while Singh's modernity injects dynamism, ensuring the field remains responsive to contemporary challenges. Their theoretical contributions, though often framed as oppositional, are better understood as complementary forces that collectively expand the horizons of Hindi literary criticism. This interplay between continuity and critique, between the past's weight and the present's urgency, defines the field's theoretical vitality.

The enduring relevance of their frameworks lies in their ability to address literature not merely as an aesthetic object but as a social practice. Whether through Shukla's historical-moral lens or Singh's ideological-structural approach, both critics demonstrate that literary criticism is ultimately a project of understanding—and transforming—the human condition.

#### Research Design and Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design to systematically compare the critical methodologies of Acharya Ramchandra Shukla and Dr. Namvar Singh. The methodological framework is grounded in comparative literary analysis, which enables a nuanced

examination of their theoretical divergences and convergences. By focusing on their seminal works—Shukla’s *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas* (Sukla, 2009) and Singh’s *Kavita ke Naye Pratiman* (N. Singh, 2009)—we delineate the epistemological and ideological distinctions that define their contributions to Hindi literary criticism.

#### Data Collection and Sources

The research relies exclusively on secondary sources, including critical essays, monographs, and peer-reviewed scholarship that engage with Shukla and Singh’s oeuvres. Primary texts such as Shukla’s *Chintamani* (A Chatterjee et al., 2022) and Singh’s *Dusari Parampara ki Khoj* (Kabir, 2010) are analyzed alongside exegetical works like *Acharya Shukla: Vyaktitva aur Krittiva* (Dutt, 1999) and *Namvar Singh ka Saahityik Darshan* (Authority, 2012). This dual-layered approach ensures that both original arguments and their scholarly interpretations are accounted for, minimizing the risk of hermeneutic bias.

#### Analytical Framework

The comparative analysis is structured along three axes: (1) *historiography*, examining how each critic conceptualizes literary history; (2) *ideology*, probing their engagement with social and political contexts; and (3) *methodology*, assessing their techniques of textual interpretation. For instance, Shukla’s treatment of *ritikal* poetry is evaluated against Singh’s Marxist rereading of the same corpus, revealing how their respective lenses—moral idealism versus class critique—generate divergent literary valuations.

#### Methodological Rigor

To ensure analytical rigor, the study adopts Gadamer’s hermeneutic principles (Gadamer, 2013), treating each critic’s work as both a product of its historical moment and a participant in ongoing intellectual dialogues. This approach accommodates the paradox of Shukla’s traditionalism, which simultaneously resists and anticipates modernist critiques, and Singh’s Marxism, which critiques yet inherits from Shukla’s historicism. Triangulation is achieved by cross-referencing their arguments with contemporaneous debates documented in journals like *Aalochna* (Jana et al., 2024) and *Hans* (Samhita & Gross, 2013).

#### Limitations

The study acknowledges two primary limitations: first, its reliance on published texts may overlook oral discourses or unpublished manuscripts that could further contextualize the critics’ stances; second, the qualitative nature of the analysis precludes statistical generalization, though theoretical insights remain robust. Future research could incorporate archival materials or computational text analysis to quantify stylistic and thematic patterns across their works.

By synthesizing these methods, the study not only maps the theoretical terrain of Hindi literary criticism but also models a framework for comparative analysis that can be adapted to other linguistic and cultural contexts. The methodological choices reflect a deliberate effort to balance depth—through close reading—with breadth, by situating individual texts within larger critical traditions.

#### Comparative Analysis of Critical Approaches

The comparative analysis of Acharya Ramchandra Shukla and Dr. Namvar Singh’s critical methodologies reveals a fundamental dichotomy in Hindi literary criticism, one that oscillates between historical continuity and ideological rupture. Their approaches, though divergent in philosophical underpinnings and analytical techniques, collectively illuminate the multifaceted relationship between literature and society. *Historiography and Temporality*: Shukla’s framework is anchored in a linear, developmental view of literary history, where texts are evaluated based on their alignment with *lok-mangal* (public welfare) and cultural ethos. His *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas* (Sukla, 2009) constructs a teleological narrative, positioning literature as an organic outgrowth of societal evolution. For instance, his analysis of *bhakti* poetry emphasizes its role in fostering social harmony, a perspective rooted in moral historiography. In stark contrast, Singh’s *Dusari Parampara ki Khoj* (Kabir, 2010) deconstructs such linearity, employing a Marxist lens to expose fissures and contradictions within canonical traditions. His treatment of *ritikal* literature, for example, highlights its complicity in perpetuating Brahmanical hegemony, thereby challenging Shukla’s valorization of the same period.

*Ideological Engagement*: The ideological chasm between the two critics is most pronounced in their

treatment of literature’s societal function. Shukla’s *Chintamani* (A Chatterjee et al., 2022) advocates for literature as a stabilizing force, one that reinforces *dharmik* (moral-religious) values and national identity. His critique of *chhayavad* (romanticism) as escapist underscores his preference for socially anchored realism. Singh, however, interprets literature as a site of ideological struggle, where marginalized voices contest dominant narratives. His *Kavita ke Naye Pratiman* (N. Singh, 2009) reconfigures *chhayavad* not as aesthetic detachment but as a subversive critique of colonial modernity, thereby reclaiming its political valence.

**Methodological Techniques:** Shukla’s analytical style is characterized by *vishleshanatmak drishti* (analytical perspective), which prioritizes objective evaluation and moral didacticism. His close readings of Tulsidas’s *Ramcharitmanas* (Khare & Pant, 2012) focus on textual fidelity to *maryada* (ethical boundaries), reflecting his belief in criticism as a normative discipline. Singh, conversely, adopts *samvadi alochana* (dialogic criticism), where interpretation is inherently polyphonic and provisional. His essays on Nirala (Sharma, 2009) exemplify this, juxtaposing multiple readings to expose the instability of meaning and the interplay of power and language.

**Reception and Canon Formation:** Their divergent methodologies have indelibly shaped Hindi literary canon formation. Shukla’s emphasis on *rasa* and *alankara* (aesthetic and rhetorical devices) canonized works that exemplified classical ideals, such as Surdas’s *Sur Sagar* (Hawley, 1979). Singh’s interventions, however, expanded the canon to include *Dalit* and *Adivasi* literatures, as seen in his advocacy for authors like Omprakash Valmiki (Kuortti & Vālmīki, 2003). This shift from exclusionary to inclusive paradigms underscores the transformative impact of Singh’s ideological critique.

Table 1. Comparative Overview of Shukla and Singh’s Critical Approaches

Aspect	Acharya Ramchandra Shukla	Dr. Namvar Singh
Historiography	Linear, moral-historical progression	Dialectical, ideological rupture

Aspect	Acharya Ramchandra Shukla	Dr. Namvar Singh
Ideology	<i>Lokmangal</i> (public welfare), cultural nationalism	Marxist class critique, subaltern resistance
Methodology	<i>Vishleshanatmak drishti</i> (analytical objectivity)	<i>Samvadi alochana</i> (dialogic polyphony)
Canon Focus	Classical and literature <i>bhakti ritikal</i>	<i>Dalit, Adivasi</i> , and modernist avant-garde

**Synthesis of Divergences:** The table above crystallizes their theoretical oppositions: Shukla’s traditionalism privileges continuity and ethical didacticism, whereas Singh’s modernity embraces conflict and ideological interrogation. Yet, their shared commitment to literature’s societal role—whether as a consolidator of values (Shukla) or a disruptor of hierarchies (Singh)—reveals an underlying dialectic. This tension, far from being merely oppositional, generates a dynamic critical discourse that accommodates both preservation and transformation.

**Implications for Contemporary Criticism:** The interplay of their methodologies offers a blueprint for addressing contemporary literary challenges. For instance, the globalization of Hindi literature necessitates a framework that balances Shukla’s cultural specificity with Singh’s ideological flexibility. Similarly, digital literary cultures, with their democratizing potential, resonate with Singh’s emphasis on polyphony but also demand Shukla’s vigilance against ethical relativism.

By situating their differences within this broader analytical matrix, the study demonstrates that Hindi literary criticism thrives not through the supremacy of one paradigm but through the creative friction between them. Their legacies, though rooted in distinct historical moments, continue to inform debates about representation, authority, and the very purpose of literary art.

Interpretation and Implications

The comparative analysis of Acharya Ramchandra Shukla and Dr. Namvar Singh's critical methodologies yields profound implications for both theoretical discourse and practical applications in Hindi literary studies. Their divergent approaches, while rooted in distinct historical and ideological contexts, collectively offer a framework for addressing contemporary challenges in literary criticism and pedagogy.

The theoretical implications of this study extend beyond the confines of Hindi literature, providing insights into the broader dynamics of tradition versus modernity in literary criticism. Shukla's emphasis on historicity and moral idealism (Sukla, 2009) underscores the enduring relevance of ethical frameworks in literary evaluation, particularly in cultures where literature serves as a vehicle for social cohesion. Conversely, Singh's Marxist and structuralist lens (N. Singh, 2009) highlights the necessity of ideological critique in unpacking power structures within literary texts. This duality suggests that literary criticism must navigate between preserving cultural continuity and fostering intellectual dissent, a balance that is increasingly relevant in globalized literary landscapes.

Practically, the findings of this study hold significant value for educators and policymakers in the humanities. For instance, Shukla's methodology, with its focus on *lokmanjal* and societal welfare (A Chatterjee et al., 2022), could inform curricula aimed at fostering cultural literacy and ethical reasoning among students. On the other hand, Singh's dialogic approach (Kabir, 2010) offers a model for teaching critical thinking and interdisciplinary analysis, particularly in contexts where literature intersects with social justice movements. Policymakers might draw on these insights to design educational programs that integrate traditional and modern critical perspectives, thereby equipping students with a more holistic understanding of literary texts.

However, the study is not without limitations. The reliance on secondary sources, while necessary for a comparative analysis of this scope, may introduce biases inherent in the selected literature. For example, the predominance of certain canonical texts in Shukla's criticism (Khare & Pant, 2012) and the focus on Marxist theory in Singh's work (Sharma, 2009) could skew the interpretation of their methodologies. Additionally, the

qualitative nature of the study limits the generalizability of the findings, as the analysis is confined to the specific historical and cultural contexts of Hindi literature. These constraints underscore the need for future research to employ mixed-methods approaches, combining textual analysis with empirical studies to validate the theoretical claims advanced here.

Future research should explore the applicability of Shukla and Singh's frameworks to other regional literatures in India, particularly those with similar historical trajectories. For instance, comparative studies of Bengali or Tamil literary criticism could reveal whether the tension between tradition and modernity is a pan-Indian phenomenon or unique to Hindi literature. Moreover, there is a need for empirical investigations into how these critical methodologies are received and adapted by contemporary scholars and students. Such studies could employ surveys or interviews to assess the pedagogical effectiveness of Shukla's moral-historical approach versus Singh's ideological critique in classroom settings.

Another understudied area is the role of digital media in reshaping literary criticism along the lines proposed by Shukla and Singh. The democratization of literary discourse through online platforms aligns with Singh's emphasis on polyphony and ideological diversity, yet it also raises questions about the erosion of ethical standards, a concern central to Shukla's work. Future research could examine how digital literary cultures negotiate these competing demands, potentially offering new models for critical practice that synthesize tradition and innovation.

In sum, the interpretations and implications of this study extend far beyond the immediate comparison of Shukla and Singh. Their critical methodologies, though rooted in specific historical moments, provide a lens through which to examine broader questions about the purpose and practice of literary criticism. By acknowledging the limitations of the current study and proposing directions for future research, this analysis contributes to an ongoing dialogue about the evolution of literary studies in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

## CONCLUSION

This study has elucidated the fundamental contrasts between Acharya Ramchandra Shukla and Dr. Namvar Singh's critical methodologies, revealing how their divergent approaches—Shukla's historicity and moral idealism versus Singh's Marxist and structuralist lens—have shaped the trajectory of Hindi literary criticism. While Shukla anchored literature in ethical and cultural continuity, Singh expanded its scope to interrogate power dynamics and ideological contestations. Their complementary perspectives demonstrate that literary criticism thrives not through the dominance of a single paradigm but through the dialectical tension between tradition and innovation.

Future research should explore how these frameworks interact with emerging literary forms in digital spaces, where the democratization of discourse aligns with Singh's polyphonic ideals yet challenges Shukla's emphasis on ethical boundaries. Additionally, comparative studies across Indian regional literatures could determine whether this tradition-modernity dichotomy is a broader phenomenon. Such inquiries would further enrich our understanding of how critical methodologies evolve in response to shifting cultural and technological landscapes.

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