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POSTMODERN TRACES AND RECENT HINDI NOVELS

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To Alessandro & Gabriele

*If you can't explain it simply,
you don't understand it well enough*
Albert Einstein

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Notes on Hindi terms and transliteration

As there is no stable agreement on the scientific transliteration of Hindi, to transcribe words originally in *nāgarī*, I have chosen a compromise between phonetic transcription and transliteration. Therefore, I have opted for the scientific system used for Sanskrit, but without writing the short vowel (a) when silent, both within or at the end of a word. When the vowel is pronounced, or may be pronounced, the (a) sound is transcribed. This system facilitates pronunciation and it is the most frequently used. As regards Sanskrit terms, they are transliterated according to the Sanskrit or Hindi system, taking into account the context in which they appear. Words of common use, like Hindi or some place names, are written according to the Anglophone usage.

1

CHAPTER

Introduction: aim, sources and methodology

1.1. Origins and aim of the project

I started to consider the topic of my dissertation about six years ago, during the research for my MA thesis. I was working on the translation into Italian of the novel *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī*¹ (*The Perplexity of Hariya Hercules*, 1994) by Manohar Śyām Jośī, probably one of the most important Hindi voices of the late Twentieth century. The short preface to the novel provided me with a thought-provoking standpoint from which to read the text: the novel, in fact, was defined as “postmodern” in terms of content and structure, and an evolution of Jośī’s previous works (Jośī, 2008, p. 4). In order to endorse (or to re-

¹ *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī* is Manohar Śyām Jośī’s fourth novel and was published for the first time in installments in *India Today*, between March and August 1994. Its main character is Hariyā, an unmarried middle-aged man, who devotes all his energies to the care of sick people and especially to that of his old father Rāy Sāip Girvāṇ Datt Tivārī, afflicted by chronic constipation. His nickname is “Hercules” because he rides a Hercules bicycle, but this epithet creates a comic contrast between his weak figure and the Greek hero. The other members of the *kumāūmnī* community in Delhi consider him an idiot, an unlucky man, who has never known the pleasures of life. His life proceeds quietly, but one day a simple word — Goomalling, read on a map of Australia — determines a drastic turning point. From this moment on Hariyā becomes obsessed with the idea of his alter-ego, a man like him in Goomalling devoting his life to a sick father. Hariyā’s certainties are completely destroyed with the death of Girvāṇ Datt. On that occasion he opens an old trunk to discover an unexpected treasure. He finds jewelry, gold and silver coins, precious stones, but most interestingly some pornographic pictures of Girvāṇ Datt and a letter from a mysterious lama. In the letter, Hariyā’s father is accused of stealing a holy trunk from the deity of Gūmāliṅg, a mythical place somewhere in the Himalayas. If the treasure is not returned Girvāṇ Datt’s family will be cursed. Hariyā decides, therefore, to set out for Gūmāliṅg to atone for his parent’s sin. During his journey he is accompanied by an ambiguous character, Pirūlī Kaiñjā, a woman who is considered to be a holy Buddhist nun by some people, and a prostitute by others. When she returns from their journey she is alone: nobody knows exactly what has happened to Hariyā. In Pirūlī Kaiñjā’s version, they found the lama from Gūmāliṅg and succeeded in their aim. Unfortunately, her story is considered to be completely unreliable. The *kumāūmnī* community tries to investigate and various theories are developed, with the sole result that the story is broken up into a range of potentially true and false accounts.

ject) this assumption it was necessary to understand which postmodern features, if any, were peculiar to the novel. The first macro-element that I observed was the text's inner centrifugal force, that is to say an implicit tendency towards deconstruction. The three basic units of the narrative — story, characters, places — collapse: the story is broken up into multiple variations, the identities of the main characters are ambiguous and extremely multifaceted, even the spatial dimension is questioned. Hariyā's story seemed to me to be a sort of cubist painting where every single element could be seen from several points of view, with no possibility of establishing a final truth. Together with this, I noticed a pronounced tendency towards intertextuality. The novel in fact is strewn with ironical references to the Indian philosophical and devotional traditions, but also to some more recent meta-narratives, such as communism and feminism. The irony which envelopes these *grands récits* is balanced by the centrality attributed to a local narrative, that is the transformation of the *kumāūmnī*² community in Delhi, during the closing decades of the Twentieth century, a community to which both the author and the protagonist belong. The role of the community is emphasized throughout the story at the level of content, perspective (every episode is read through the lenses of the *kumāūmnī* community) and linguistic choices.

These main ingredients — fragmentation and pluralism, the intertextual dimension and the centrality of a *petit récit* — convinced me that a postmodern reading of *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī* was possible. Nonetheless, some new questions started to come to mind, creating the basis of my current dissertation. When postmodernism is a cultural phenomenon born in the “Western world”, deeply connected with its socio-historical background, can it be a suitable term for the Indian context? Are there other Hindi authors whose writing can be assimilated to postmodernism? Obviously, due to the implicit limits of an MA thesis, I could not find an answer to all my doubts and I focused on *Hariyā Harkyūlīz* only. When, some years later, I got the opportunity to start my PhD course, I had no doubt, I wanted to resume my investigation in a wider perspective. Hence the aim of my work is to understand, through the analysis of a significant sample of novels, if and how postmodernism took form in the recent Hindi literary field.

One of the earliest issues that I had to face was that of terminological appropriateness. Postmodernism is often perceived as a Western phenomenon only, and in a post-colonial context such as India it may represent a cultural paradigm superimposed by the Western world or, as a better option, a mere imported fashion. While carrying out my re-

² The origins of this community are in Kumāūm region of Uttarakhand. The name Kumāūm derives from the hill Kūrmāchala, in Almorā district, where it is believed that Viṣṇu resided for three years in the form of Kūrmāvṭār (tortoise) in order to save the earth. Kumāūmnī is also one of the most representative *central pahārī* languages (together with Garhvālī) and it is spoken in Uttarakhand, Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, in some regions of Himachal Pradesh and in the area of Delhi. In spite of this large area of diffusion, it has been included in the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger because its usage is rapidly declining (see <http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php?hl=en&page=atlasmap&lid=1565>).

search, firstly in Kolhapur, in Delhi later, I started to talk about this project and many people asked me: since modernity has probably not yet reached the subcontinent, how can we talk about postmodernism? First of all, it is necessary to distinguish postmodernity from postmodernism, the first being a socio-historical condition, the second a cultural manifestation. If we look at the Indian contemporary scenario, it is undoubtedly complex and multifaceted. India is still characterized by areas of extreme backwardness, but at the same time has become part of the globalized consumer world and mass communications society. When I read Doshi's text *Postmodern Perspectives on Indian Society* I found my thoughts confirmed. He describes the subcontinent as a "kaleidoscopic interplay of tradition, modernity and postmodernity" (Doshi, 2008, p. 79), an image which, in my opinion, perfectly mirrors the composite and polyphonic nature of contemporary India. If we shift our attention from the concept of postmodernity to that of postmodernism and more specifically to its literary form, I think that it is possible to find some common tendencies, belonging to the whole global village. Obviously these features are moulded by the local literary traditions and can be more or less evident and experimental, nonetheless they exist as a common basis, or a common thread. The presence of multiple studies into postmodernism and Latin American (Colás, 1994; Corona, 1998, pp. 17-38; De Toro, 1991, pp. 441-466; Gálvez Acero, 1999, pp. 211-226; Herrero-Olaizola, 2000; Pérez, 1995; Weldt-Basson, 2010) or Japanese literature, and particularly into Murakami Haruki's novels (Iwamoto, 1993, pp. 295-300; Murakami, 2005; Strecher, 1998, pp. 354-378; Yamada, 2006), just to quote a couple of examples, testifies an increasing awareness of the global impact of postmodernism. Even in the field of Indian literatures, a postmodern reading was proposed for the recent Anglo-Indian literary production (Das, 2010; Myles, 2006), with particular reference to Salman Rushdie's novels (Berlatsky, 2011, pp. 109-144; Jenkins, 2002, pp. 62-75; Hassumani, 2002; Shaikh, 2016). Because of all of these reasons, I think that it may be extremely useful to extend this kind of investigation to the Hindi literary field: on one hand it would be theoretically incorrect to exclude *a priori* the presence of possible postmodern traces, on the other a similar analysis may bring contemporary Hindi literature — too often forgot to the advantage of its Anglophone counterpart — to the table of a wider discourse on world literature.

Before proceeding with the description of my project, I want to anticipate some methodological reflections. My work has necessarily to be based on cross-disciplinarity, if not inter-disciplinarity³: to understand the possible meaning of postmodernism in the Indian context, in fact, it would be impossible to avoid intrusions, for instance, in philosophy, history and sociology. In the next chapter, in fact, I will briefly discuss the philosophical basis of postmodernism in the Western world, referring to some of the most im-

³ With the expression cross-disciplinarity, I mean to view a discipline from the perspective of another, while with inter-disciplinarity to use approaches and methods from different disciplines, implying a higher level of knowledge integration.

portant thinkers of the Twentieth century, like Baudrillard, Derrida, and Lyotard. These authors provided some of the most relevant statements on postmodernism and represent a necessary premise for any further investigation. For instance, it would be impossible even to sketch out a reflection on postmodernism without considering Lyotard's argument on the crisis of the modern *grands récits* (Lyotard, 2008), or the Derridian concepts of deconstruction and *différance* (Derrida, 1998 and 2007; Vergani, 2000; Wortham, 2010). Regarding history, it represents a fundamental ingredient both in contextualizing literary changes (see 1.3.) and understanding a conspicuous part of recent literary production based on historiographic metafiction (see 4.1.3.). For a general picture on Indian history, from the ancient times to the end of the Twentieth century, my main sources were *A History of India* by Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund (2016), and *La storia dell'India*, by Michelguglielmo Torri (2007); while for an analysis of the most recent issues *Postcolonial India: History, Politics and Culture* by Vinita Damodaran and Maya Unnithan-Kumar (2000). Lastly, sociology represents an essential resource in understanding the social conditions which led, both in Europe-USA and in India, to the postmodern cultural phenomenon. On Western sociology my main points of reference were Berger and Luckmann (1991) on the definition of reality as a social construct, Cohen and Taylor (1992) on the mental escapes available to face the complexity of the contemporary world and Mirchandani (2005) on empirical postmodernism. In reference to Indian sociology, my starting points were Yogendra Singh (1986) with his analysis of the modernization of Indian traditions, and S. L. Doshi (2008) with his postmodern reading of Indian society. All these elements constitute the foundations of my project and have allowed me to contextualize a double-layered discourse on postmodern literary criticism and postmodern creative works.

1.2. On postmodernism and Hindi critics

The debate on postmodernism, in the Hindi literary field, has been overlooked for some considerable time. According to Avadhesh Kumar Singh (2001), the well-known critic Nāmvar Siṃh — in an article that unfortunately I was unable to find titled *Śatābdī kā avsān aur uttar-ādhunikā* (1984) — discussed the concept of *uttar-ādhunikā* (post-modernity) and rejected it as not suitable for the Indian context. However, mainly from the end of the 1990s and especially after 2000 the first dedicated texts of literary criticism started to be published. The second chapter of my dissertation will be largely devoted to a presentation of the most relevant contributions.

The article *Uttar ādhunik sāhitya-sṛṣṭi aur samīkṣā dṛṣṭi ke bīc “Vāren Heṣṭings kā sāmā”* (“Warren Hastings’ bull” between the postmodern literary creation and critical perspective) by Pāṇḍey Śāśibhūṣaṇ Śītāṃsu represented a first, fundamental source. The author not only described the four elements which he deems peculiar to a postmodern literary work, but proposed a model for textual analysis, through his observations on Uday

Prakāś's short story *Vāren Hestings kā sāmḍ*. Śītāmśu's analysis was resumed by two critics, Sureś Paṭel (2013) and Sañjay Cauhān (2011), who applied their mentor's methodology respectively to Uday Prakāś literary production and to a conspicuous number of recent Hindi novels, like *Mujhe cānd cāhie* and *Do murdoṃ ke lie guldastā* by Surendra Varmā, *Āvām* by Citrā Mudgal, *Tattvamasi* by Jayā Jādvānī and many others. According to Paṭel and Cauhān, the majority of Hindi critics were unable to individuate the real basis and ingredients of a postmodern text, because of this it is necessary to outline a new model for postmodern literary analysis and it should be based on Śītāmśu's contribution. Particularly Cauhān's text *Uttar-ādhunikā aur hindī upanyās (Postmodernism and Hindi novels)* could have represented an extremely interesting precedent for my work, nevertheless despite a noteworthy premise, many of the examples provided do not appear to be either so relevant or accurate.

The analysis will subsequently focus on the contributions of Sudhīs Pacaurī — one of the most important scholars who has written extensively about postmodernism and Hindi literature — particularly on *Uttar-ādhunik sāhityik vimarś (Postmodern literary discourse)*. The critic, starting his discussion from the Western postmodern thinkers, proposes an Indian interpretation of postmodernism and provides some examples of possible postmodern works. This text, together with an interview that I had with the critic, constituted an essential point of reference for my whole thesis. Some further critical works should be mentioned, such as *Uttar ādhunikā kuch vicār (Postmodernity, some considerations)*, a miscellaneous volume edited by Dev Śaṅkar Navīn and Suśānt Kumār Mīśra, *Uttar-ādhunikāvād aur dalit sāhitya (Postmodernism and dalit literature)* by Kṛṣṇadatt Pālīvāl, and *Uttar-ādhunikā: sāhitya aur saṃskṛti kī nayī soc (Postmodernity: literature and new cultural thinking)* by Devendra Issar.

In the following sections I will introduce my further investigations into Hindi creative works and postmodernism, explaining how I selected the period and the *corpus* of texts under analysis.

1.3. Choosing temporal coordinates

Until now there are not many critical works on postmodernism and Hindi literature (according to my findings there are no critical works at all in Western languages) and its coordinates are not even remotely fixed. What is certain is that postmodernism has to be considered as a sort of consequence and reaction to modernism, but what do modernity (*ādhunikā*) and modern literature (*ādhunik sāhitya*) mean in the Indian context?

According to the majority of the critics the modern era began in India in approximately the mid-Nineteenth century, in strict connection to the British *rāj*. Modernity, in this acceptance, is mainly associated with technological and scientific advancement, the introduction of a national legal code and a first change in culture and social structure of Indian society. Nonetheless, this kind of modernity was unable to deeply modify an an-

cient system of values and traditions. As the sociologist Yogendra Singh argued, more than a real change there was a modernization of tradition: basically people maintained their value structures, simply benefiting from the facilities provided by modernity (Singh, 1986). The concept of identity, for instance, continued to be indissolubly bound to caste and religion, leaving in the background individual identity. Probably, in this sense, only Independence and the promulgation of the Constitution determined a first real change, making individual identity powerful (Doshi, 2008, pp. 88-89).

From a literary point of view, Rāmcandra Śukla⁴ in his *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās (History of Hindi literature, 2009)* defined the *ādhunik kāl* as a period characterized by the evolution of Hindi prose, starting in 1843 in connection with the activity of the Fort William College. This definition is still current and covers a vast time frame, variegated groups of authors (it would be equally possible to define Bhārtendu Harīścandra and Mohan Rākeś modern authors), literary forms and genres. As Consolaro points out, modern Hindi writing is determined by the confrontation with two literary worlds: the first derived from the local tradition, the second from the Western model. The resulting literary production was characterized by a new aesthetic, determined by the appropriation and indigenization of Western tendencies. Even so, modernism should not be considered a deliberate choice to emulate a European phenomenon; rather it was a natural consequence of the authors' cosmopolitan backgrounds and socio-historical conditions, which led them to reinvent modernism for their own epoch and geographical context (Consolaro, 2011a, pp. 168-169).

Probably the most relevant tendency of modern Hindi prose, which characterized different movements and schools of the Twentieth century, was social realism (Jain, 2004; Miśra, 2009). As Premchand taught, literature has to deal with social problems, giving voice to those groups which are usually left at the margins of society. From *pragativād* (pro-

⁴ *Ācārya* Rāmcandra Śukla (1884-1941) is a renowned critic and one of the most influential intellectuals in the field of Hindi language and literature, during the first decades of the Twentieth century (on his life and works see Consolaro, 2003, pp. 193-227). In his *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās (History of Hindi literature)*, dated 1929, Śukla divided the history of Hindi literature into four periods (*kāl*): *ādikāl* (early period), *pūrv madhyakāl* (first mediaeval period), *uttar madhyakāl* (late mediaeval period), and *ādhunik kāl* (modern period). The *ādikāl* corresponds to the period of Muslim invasions between 993 and 1318, and was characterized by heroic and chivalrous works (*vīrgāthākāl*). The first mediaeval period (1318-1643) was also designated as *bhaktīkāl* (period of devotion) as it abounded in religious compositions. The *uttar madhyakāl*, from 1643 to 1843, is defined as period of Mannerism or *rītikāl*. The *ādhunik kāl* approximately corresponds to period of the British dominion.

gressivism)⁵ to *āñcaliktā* (regionalism)⁶ — even with differences on the level of aims and perspectives — realism represented a crucial mode of expression, with a focus on the poor and downtrodden. The realist novel has been considered particularly powerful, not only because of its mimetic nature, but because it was considered “*revelatory*, displaying the totality of the social whole that lay beneath the surface” (Gajarawala, 2013, pp. 16).

With these premises, when do we observe a considerable change in the Indian scenario, which may justify the passage to a supposedly postmodern condition? Initially, I considered the Emergency (1975-1977) as my possible historical divide. During the twenty-one months of authoritarian government, Indira Gandhi’s political opponents were imprisoned and the press censored. Under the flag of urban requalification, slums and poor settlements were demolished with no attention for their inhabitants. The compulsory sterilization program was started. Disillusion, which already characterized the first decades after Indian Independence, reached its peak. While the Second World War, in Europe and the USA, destroyed basic modernist certainties, such as an undisputed belief in the power of rationalism and in human and historical progress, the Emergency did something similar in the Indian context. The Emergency was a break in Indian history, causing generalized distrust towards the authorities and particularly the Congress party. Because of this, I initially considered the mid-1970s the starting point of my research. Notwithstanding, after a first interview with Ajay Nāvāriyā, *dalit* author and Professor at Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi, I started to change my mind and to consider some further variables. According to him, if I wanted to discuss the postmodern issue in the Hindi literary field, I necessarily had to look at the 1990s. Narasimha Rao’s economic reforms played a fundamental role in moving India towards a supposedly postmodern condition. During his term as Prime Minister (1991–1996) India started its path towards liberalization, consumerism and globalization, although aspects of a late capitalistic nation still coexist with others of extreme backwardness. From a literary point of view, the 1990s were characterized by an unprecedented flourishing of marginalized literature, one point being the new relevance gained by women, *dalit* and *ādivāsī* authors in the Hindi landscape. In Nāvāriyā’s opinion, if I wanted to work on new Hindi literary tendencies, independently of the label that I wanted to use, the 1990s had to be my target.

⁵ *Pragativād* assumed a distinct shape during the Thirties, as a reaction to the fading *Chāyāvād* school. The progressivist authors, deeply influenced by Marxist ideology, considered literature as a mirror of social processes and a device through which to shape the course of political events. Yaśpāl, Bhīṣma Sāhnī, Nāgārjun, Rāñgey Rāghav are among the authors who, at least for a part of their life, embraced the movement. On this see Consolaro, 2011a, pp. 122-128; Avasthī, 2012; Miśra, 2016.

⁶ The term *āñcaliktā* was coined with the publication of *Mailā āñcal* by Phaṇīsvarnāth Reṇu in 1954. The author, in the novel’s preface, defined his own text as an *āñcalik upanyās*, a regional novel. The term *āñcal* both referred to the soiled border and to the edge of the *sārī*, which covers women’s breast and waist. Because of this “the border” is a symbol of marginalization, but also of the motherland. *Āñcalik* fiction is associated with the representation of rural areas, of the poor, subaltern people, of the geographically marginal. See Cossio, 1987.

A similar perspective was put to me a little later by Sudhīs Pacaurī. It was February 2016 and I was in Delhi due to my research project. During an interview I had with him, at the Delhi University, he explained his concept of *uttar ādhunik sāhitya* (postmodern literature). According to him it is characterized by two basic phenomena, which represent two sides of the same coin. On one hand there is the new quest of women and *dalit* writers for public recognition, on the other a progressive detachment of the mainstream literature from the social realism inaugurated by Premchand. These tendencies start to become clearly visible from the 1990s, a decade which is marked on a global scale by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and by the creation of a unipolar world, centered on the North-American model; on a local level by the liberalization program and by the upsurge in communal violence. Episodes like the demolition of the Bābrī masjid in 1992 foregrounded again the issue of self and national identity.

In the light of all these observations I decided to consider the Nineties not only the starting point of my project, but my target. The earliest novel that I analyze is *Ḍūb* by Virendra Jain (1991), while the most recent one is *Pīlī chatrīvālī larḱī* by Uday Prakāś (2001), my only intrusion into the new millennium. After reading about twenty novels published in that decade, but not only, I was strengthened in my decision: the novels of the Nineties in fact, as I demonstrate in the following chapters, are largely characterized by some recurrent patterns. Plurality and duplication are crucial at multiple levels, from that of the projected worlds to textual structure. Self-reflexivity, fragmentation, intertextuality are some of the most relevant ingredients. Moreover, the recent literary production seems to distance itself from the tradition inaugurated by Premchand. On one hand a conspicuous part of mainstream literature starts to reject the dogma of social realism and to propose lighter plots, with no didactic intentions or eternal truths. The aura of the work of art is scaled down, erasing the distance between high and popular literature, between art and life. On the other hand, women and *dalit* writers, even though largely through realism, aim to propose an alternative literary canon, free from the influence of the casteist and patriarchal system.

1.4. Criteria in selecting authors and texts

A crucial phase of my project was the individuation of a *corpus* of ten texts, written by ten different authors, which might be representative of the Hindi novel during the Nineties and which contain some possible postmodern features. Obviously, as there are not many available studies on this issue, I had to proceed by successive attempts. The bases of my research were, on one hand *La prosa nella cultura letteraria hindī* by Alessandra Consolaro and *Hindī upanyās kā itihās* by Gopāl Rāy (pp. 341-466), as they both depict the Hindi novel up until the dawn of the new millennium; on the other hand, Sudhīs Pacaurī's texts *Uttar-ādhunik sāhityik vimarś* and *Uttar-yathārthvād*, which provide not only a theoretical analysis on postmodernism, but also some textual examples.

Pacaurī, for instance, analyzes *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī* by Manohar Śyām Jośī, *Ḍūb* by Vīrendra Jain and *Mujhe cānd cāhie* by Surendra Varmā (Pacaurī, 2010, pp. 136-166) in a postmodern, or at least in a post-realist (*uttar yathārthvād*) take.

In order to compile my list of authors, I took into account four criteria. Apart from the basic ones such as gender and age, I considered the authors' cultural and geographical backgrounds and their relationship with the mainstream critics. My final list includes Mañzūr Ehteśām, Mṛdulā Garg, Vīrendra Jain, Manohar Śyām Jośī, Jay Prakāś Kardam, Prabhā Khetān, Uday Prakāś, Alkā Sarāvgī, Gītāñjali Śrī and Vinod Kumār Śukla. The third chapter of my dissertation will be devoted to an introduction to these authors, with biographical information and a general presentation of their novels object of analysis. First of all I wanted to provide, if not and equal, at least a balanced representation of male and female writers. In addition to this, I decided to work with two different generations of authors. Manohar Śyām Jośī, Vinod Kumār Śukla, Mṛdulā Garg and Prabhā Khetān are representative of an elder generation, born before Indian independence. The other authors — with the exception of Mañzūr Ehteśām who, being born in 1948, is exactly on the border — were born during the Fifties or early Sixties. Their origins may be in the core of the Hindi belt, as in the cases of Gītāñjali Śrī and Jay Prakāś Kardam (both from Uttar Pradesh) or from more marginal areas, like Vinod Kumār Śukla from Chhattisgarh. Some of them, such as Vīrendra Jain and Uday Prakāś (both born in small villages of Madhya Pradesh) come from rural areas, others, like Mṛdulā Garg, Prabhā Khetān and Alkā Sarāvgī, from a metropolis like Calcutta. Jay Prakāś Kardam is a *dalit*, while Manohar Śyām Jośī is a brahmin. If Mañzūr Ehteśām's background is the Muslim community in Bhopal, Prabhā Khetān's origins are in an orthodox Hindu family. For me this variety of backgrounds is an essential parameter to obtain a meaningful sample of authors and avoid incorrect conclusions (e.g. to consider a literary feature as a common trend, while it is peculiar of a specific area/community); secondly it resembles the key concepts of postmodernism, which are difference and plurality. The last criterion that I decided to consider was the kind of relations between these authors and the mainstream critics. In most of the cases, in fact, due to their experimentation, to the subjects they chose and sometimes even due to their personal life, they had difficult or at least ambivalent relations with the literary establishment. Mṛdulā Garg, for instance, was even arrested in 1980 on charges of obscenity, due to her novel *Cittakobrā*, which recounts an extramarital affair between an Indian middle-class housewife and a foreign pastor. Garg's explicit references to sexuality caused her a charge of pornography and many years of ostracism from the literary establishment. Uday Prakāś for quite some time was not much appreciated by critics, but was extremely successful in terms of audience. Moreover, he was the first author to return the prestigious Sāhitya Akadēmī award, as a protest against the Akadēmī's indifference over

the murder of the Kannada littérateur Kalburgi⁷. Obviously all these authors were active until, at least, the Nineties.

Following a chronological order, the novels that I chose are:

- *Dūb* (1991) by Vīrendra Jain
- *Chinnamastā* (1993) by Prabhā Khetān
- *Chappar* (1994) by Jay Prakāś Kardam
- *Ṭ-ṭā profesar* (1995) by Manohar Śyām Jośī
- *Dāstān-e-lāptā* (1995) by Mañzūr Ehteśām
- *Kaṭhgulāb* (1996) by Mṛdulā Garg
- *Dīvār meṃ ek khiṛkī rahtī thī* (1997) by Vinod Kumār Śukla
- *Hamārā śahar us baras* (1998) by Gītāñjali Śrī
- *Kali-kathā: vāyā bāipās* (1998) by Alkā Sarāvgī
- *Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī* (2001) by Uday Prakāś

All these novels present some features which can be read as possible postmodern clues. Mañzūr Ehteśām's *Dāstān-e-lāptā*, for instance, is the story of a "missing man", Zamīr Ehmād Khan, built as an unordered collage of moments of life. The first noteworthy element is the fragmentary nature of the text. Fragmentation on the level of textual structure corresponds to the protagonist's deep crisis. There is no stable identity, hence no unifying center for the whole account. The protagonist, in fact, keeps on escaping from his duties, seeking refuge in his lies and in an alternate dimension of a supposed mental disease. The second postmodern trace is the novel's hypertextual dimension. Apart from the reference to the *dāstān*, the Urdu-Persian folk romance, the text is strewn with multiple references to Western literary works, such as to Forster's *A Passage to India*, Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, André Gide's *La Porte Étroite*, Stone's *The Sailor on Horseback* and Walter de la Mare's poem *The Listeners*.

A second example may be Mṛdulā Garg's *Kaṭhgulāb*. On the content level, the novel challenges the *status quo*, proposing new models of femininity and masculinity. The author particularly deconstructs the conventional equivalence, according to which being a woman means being a mother. Mṛdulā Garg in fact proposes some alternative ways for women's self-realization, like writing or social commitment. In addition to this, the text is characterized by self-reflexivity and, in the second chapter, there is an explicit reflection on the possible meaning of writing. Lastly the novel, which is composed of five chapters depicting five different life stories, reveals a more complex structure. Every character, in fact, apart from relating her/his individual experiences and traumas, proposes a different point of view on the other protagonists. Moreover, each life story is characterized by the alternation of a first person and third person narrator, creating an intriguing game of per-

⁷ Prakāś received the award in 2010 for his long-short story *Mohandās* and returned it in September 2015. In less than two months his decision was emulated by more than thirty writers (on this see section 3.10).

spectives. The fourth chapter is devoted to this kind of textual analysis, to the individuation of the recurring patterns and to the explanation of their possible postmodern reading.

In order to conduct my investigation, in addition to the above mentioned Hindi critics, Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* represented an essential source. Considering a variety of theoretical approaches, the author identifies in ontological plurality or instability the dominant of the postmodernist fiction. In other words, according to him the common denominator of postmodernist works is the ability to foreground their ontological status and to raise questions about the world (or worlds) in which we live. Moreover, McHale provides multiple examples from various literary traditions, like North American metafiction, Latin American magic realism, and the French Nouveau Roman. In this sense *Postmodernist Fiction* represented a crucial point of reference. Regarding more specific issues, such as intertextuality my theoretical starting points were Julia Kristeva (1980) and Roland Barthes (1975). Nevertheless, my debt is mainly to Gérard Genette's work (1997), particularly with his reflections on *hypertextuality*, due to a more practical approach, oriented to textual analysis. Regarding other crucial features of contemporary literature, like metafiction and historiographic metafiction, Patricia Waugh (1984) and Linda Hutcheon (1989, 2004) were respectively my basic sources. Waugh's *Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, despite being more than thirty years old, still provides an accurate picture of fiction self-reflexivity, describing various metafictional strategies and providing a considerable exemplifying *corpus*. Hutcheon's contributions are particularly relevant in connection to the new role acquired by parody and history in contemporary literature. Her historiographic metafiction provides a persuasive alternative to Jameson's idea of postmodernism as a sort of dehistoricized spatial pastiche. Historiographic metafiction, in fact, allows the past to be used in a new way, acknowledging the falsity of official historical accounts and foregrounding the critical capacities of postmodernism.

1.5. Dissertation structure

The structure of my work has been largely anticipated through the previous sections, however, for reasons of clarity, I wish to recapitulate here its structure. Furthermore, on this point, I have to acknowledge my debt to Ulrike Stark's PhD dissertation, *Tage der Unzufriedenheit* (1995), on Muslim Hindi writers. Stark, in fact, also worked with ten different novels (actually written by six different authors), bringing to light some common relevant features and reflections.

First of all, in chapter 2 (*Postmodernism and the Indian perspective*), I introduce the concept of postmodernism as generally known in the Western world, shifting gradually towards the Indian context. My basic questions are: what could be the meaning of postmodernity and postmodernism in India? What happened in the Hindi literary field at the dawn of the new millennium? Secondly, I propose an overview of the most relevant

contributions provided by Hindi critics to this issue. Initially (section 2.2.1.), I briefly introduce texts like *Uttar ādhunikā kuch vicār* (*Postmodernity, some reflections*, 2000), edited by Dev Śaṅkar Navīn and Suśānt Kumār Miśra, *Uttar-ādhunikāvād aur dalit sāhitya* (*Postmodernism and dalit literature*, 2008) by Kṛṣṇadatt Pālīvāl, and *Uttar-ādhunikā: sāhitya aur saṃskṛti kī nayī soc* (*Postmodernity: literature and new cultural thinking*, 2012) by Devendra Issar. Subsequently I address in more detail the works of Śītāṃśu and his disciples (see respectively section 2.2.2. and 2.2.3.) and of Sudhīś Pacaurī (2.2.4.), which represented my main points of reference.

Chapter 3 (*Postmodernism and Hindi novels: introducing authors and texts*) is devoted to an introduction of the ten authors and novels that I selected for my investigation. For each of them, I provide basic biographical information (here too with the aim of maintaining a balance between the authors, avoiding giving too many details for the most well-known writers) and, for the novels, the synopsis of the plot.

Chapter 4 (*Postmodern traces within Hindi novels*), which is the actual core of my dissertation, aims to investigate how some features that are generally acknowledged as postmodern are developed by these ten Hindi novels. Particularly in section 4.1. I discuss the idea of ontological plurality or instability at the level of projected worlds, hence elaborating the concepts of otherworldliness, metafiction and historiographic metafiction. In section 4.2., I address the same idea, but at the level of text structure, reflecting on the strategies of duplication, multiplication and fragmentation. Section 4.3. is devoted to some examples of mainstream literature challenging the realist aesthetic, while section 4.4. to literary voices from the margins (women and dalits), struggling against traditional totalizing powers.

After the conclusions (chapter 5), I have added an appendix which contains a basic glossary of postmodernism (both Hindi-English and reverse), as a support for those who may wish to address the issue of postmodernism and Hindi literature for the first time.

2

CHAPTER

Postmodernism and the Indian perspective

2.1. An introduction to postmodernism:

2.1.1. From the Western origins...

Postmodernism has become one of the keywords of intellectuals' debates in Europe and the USA since the 1960s. The prefix *post-* should not be read in a chronological sense, as it refers more to “logical and historical *consequence* rather than sheer temporal *posteriority*” (McHale, 2004, p. 5). Postmodernism is undoubtedly a complex cultural phenomenon, rejecting any unifying or fixed definition. Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that it questions the bases of the modern era and problematizes the major certainties of the “Western world”. As Hutcheon (2004, p. 18) stated, the prefix *post-*, in fact, denotes a “contradictory dependence on and independence from that which temporally preceded it and which literally made it possible”, that is modernism. Postmodernism, she added, “marks neither a simple and radical break from it nor a straightforward continuity with it: it is both and neither”.

Postmodernism highlights that realities commonly perceived as “natural”, such as capitalism or the patriarchal system, are actually social and cultural constructs. It challenges scientific positivism, Enlightenment rationalism and the inevitability of human progress. According to the postmodern critique, after the Second World War it is no longer possible to believe in a rational and univocal history, which necessarily tends to an

improvement of human conditions. It is no longer obvious that national economies will continue to grow and life conditions to improve. Scientific and technological progress does not always bring benefits to people's lives. It was possible to read history as a process of human kind realization and evolution until it was considered a unitary process. Nonetheless, in the postmodern world we realize that the history we know, is only one of the possible representations of the past, a representation determined by dominant groups. The end of colonialism and imperialism had a crucial role in the dissolution of this unitary and Eurocentric concept of history: the former colonized, in fact, started to problematize such a concept (Vattimo, 2007, p. 11). Western ideals became one of many possible options: they were not the best nor the worst, but undoubtedly they had been imposed with violence. In such a context, history becomes a series of emptied-out stylizations ready to be consumed: as Jameson (2007, pp. 35-36) critically stated, we can no longer reconstruct the actual past, we can only investigate history through its images and simulacra. Nonetheless, this does not mean that postmodernism denies the existence of the past, rather it questions "whether we can ever *know* that past other than through its textualized remains" (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 20). More in general, in such a context, what is questioned is the modernist acceptance of the cause-effect relation: an effect is no more determined by a unique cause, but by multiple ones. Even the truth has to be considered plural and cannot be reduced to a monolithic assumption. In other words postmodernism questions the limits and the possible distortions of modern rationalism. The prototypical modern man believes in the superiority of rationality over faith, emotion and tradition, but the impulse towards rationalization may imply an oversimplification of reality, reducing it to series of clear, logical relations.

In Derrida and Lyotard's terminology, postmodernism *deconstructs* the *grands récits*, the totalizing ideologies related to the Enlightenment and modernity. Marxism, structuralism, economic liberalism are just some examples of the master narratives used by scholars in order to oversimplify the complexity of the world. Postmodernism, to be more accurate, does not definitely reject all meta-narratives, but their pretense of being natural and eternal truths. Postmodernism, in fact, wants to return to plurality and specific peculiarities, which can no longer be universalized (Chiurazzi, 2002 p. 39). It interrogates the urge to sameness, certainty and homogeneity, foregrounding what is different, provisional and heterogeneous (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 42). These are probably the key concepts of postmodernism and allow us to understand its different manifestations in the various fields of knowledge. The term postmodernism in fact has been used in several fields — from art to music, from philosophy to literature, from architecture to sociology — referring to heterogeneous approaches and because of this it may appear even more controversial. Nevertheless, as Boyne and Rattansi (1990, p. 9) argued, conceptual coherence might be found in "a set of cultural projects united by heterogeneity, fragmentation, and difference". What allows an extension of the term postmodernism to all these fields is the fact that

they share a common condition which we would characterise as a crisis of 'representation' or, more accurately, a series of crisis of representation, in which older modes of defining, appropriating and recomposing the object of artistic, philosophical, literary and social scientific languages are no longer credible and in which one common aspect is the dissolution of the very boundary between the language and its object, this in turn being related to the acceptance of the inevitability of a plurality of perspectives and the dissolution of various older polarities (popular/élite forms, subject/object) and boundaries (for instance between disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, history and psychoanalysis). (Boyne and Rattansi, 1990, p. 12)

Another fundamental contribution to postmodern epistemology — hence to postmodern reflection on knowledge — was provided by Baudrillard. According to the French philosopher and sociologist, in our contemporary world, all reality and meaning have been replaced with symbols and signs, and the human experience is simply a simulation of reality. Representations have erased the reality and what we have are *simulacra*, copies without the original, which precedes the original.

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory — *precession of simulacra* — that engenders the territory [...] It is no longer a question of imitation, duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real. (Baudrillard, 1994, pp. 1-2)

Moving from an epistemological to an empirical discourse, some other key concepts of the postmodern reality should to be taken into account, that is to say time-space reorganization, risk society and consumer capitalism (Mirchandani, 2005, pp. 100-106). In light of the object of my analysis these concepts are particularly relevant: in fact, the related phenomena are gradually spreading across the developing countries and cannot be considered as pertaining to the Western world only. The first concept, time-space reorganization, is basically connected to technological innovation, which caused space to collapse and time to speed up, with consequent increasing flows of people, information and money (Mirchandani, 2005, p. 101). Phenomena like globalization (see, for instance, Hardt and Negri, 2000) and new communications technology like the Internet (Castells, 1996) are probably the most relevant examples of time-space reorganization. Second, risk society (see Beck, 1992 and Boyne, 2003) is a new phase of the post-industrial society, where “risk has entered new arenas of our social lives so that social actors think about and organize the world in terms of risk” (Mirchandani, 2005, p. 102). Undoubtedly, events like September 11 and other terrorist attacks have emphasized the risky elements of the postmodern society and their perception by common people. Third, “consumption

has replaced production as the salient principle of postmodern society, and consumption itself has changed from its modern forms” (Mirchandani, 2005, p. 104). Sites and processes of consumption have been gradually extended (note that often modes of distribution are more important than modes of production), while consumption choices are more and more relevant in the construction of individual identities. All these concepts cannot be considered as the sole property of Europe and the USA, as they mould the reality of many metropolises across the world.

2.1.2. ...to the Indian context

As outlined in the previous section, the concept of postmodernism was born in the “Western world”, deeply connected with its historical and socio-cultural background. Lyotard, for instance, in his pivotal text *The Postmodern Condition* clearly defined his field and aim of investigation: in the introduction he clarified that the object of his study is the state of knowledge in highly developed societies (Lyotard, 2008, p. 5). Ziauddin Sardar (1993 and 1998) similarly addressed postmodernism as a challenge and an opportunity of the Western world. To be more accurate he critically stated that “the post-modern ‘we’” is not a “pluralistic, global we: it applies to those in North America and Europe who are, consciously or unconsciously, genuinely confronted by choices about lifestyles, belief systems and ‘realities’” (Sardar, 1993, p. 879), hence it applies only to a particular group within Western society. According to the scholar postmodernism cannot be linked to billions of people living in poverty or in traditional contexts like “India, China and Islam, and numerous smaller civilizations in Asia and Africa, both urban and rural dwellers. These people cannot choose to be what they want to be, what they have always been, simply because the environment that sustained and nourished them, that allowed them to be what they want to be, has been and is systematically being destroyed” (Sardar, 1993, pp. 878-879). Postmodernism is perceived as a new form of cultural imperialism, the perpetration of an alleged civilizing mission of the West “to render the Other in its own image, into new arenas of oppression and subjugation” (Sardar, 1998, p. 15).

Many Indian scholars are likewise quite skeptical about extending the term postmodern to their own reality. Postmodernism is often merely considered as an imported fashion, which is not suitable for a postcolonial reality such as India. There is no modernity in the subcontinent — many of them argue — so how can we talk about postmodernism? In an interview I had with Sudhīś Pacaurī — one of the most important scholars to have written extensively about postmodernism and Hindi literature — he highlighted the importance of looking at India as a complex and multifaceted reality. Simultaneously we can find traces of pre-modernity in *ādivāsī*’s style of life; traces of modernity in democratic institutions and in the development of an extended middle class; traces of post-modernity in the revolution of telecommunications, in the participation in consumerism

and globalization. From a sociological point of view, Doshi too described India as a “kaleidoscopic interplay of tradition, modernity and postmodernity”. He claims:

it could be wrong to take the view that in the processes of change, tradition comes first followed by modernity and finally by postmodernity. Empirical history demonstrates that all the three processes can operate simultaneously. People’s disenchantment is observed for all the three processes from time to time. Traditions have outlived their time; modernity is many a time fake and it works for the benefits of the dominant class/caste and political groups of society; and postmodernity, which is based on pluralism, differentiation, autonomy, self-identity, may bring out disintegrative tendencies in the society (Doshi, 2008, p. 79).

The economic reforms of the 1990s (about the liberalization process see, for instance, Das Gupta, 2000, pp. 173-201; Tendulkar and Bhavani, 2012) played a fundamental role in moving India towards a postmodern condition. During Narasimha Rao’s term as Prime Minister (1991–1996) India started on its path towards liberalization, consumerism and globalization, even though aspects of a late capitalistic nation still coexist with others of extreme backwardness. Hence the reality of the subcontinent — which is by its nature a mosaic of languages, cultures, landscapes — has become even more complex, a sort of hymn to pluralism.

For a better understanding of this complex situation, I want to take a step back and see how modernism is defined by Indian sociologists. According to Yogendra Singh (1986), for instance, modernity started in India through the establishment of the British *rāj*. In this acceptance, modernity is basically connected to scientific and technological advancement, to the introduction of a legal code, and to a first change in the culture and social structure of Indian society. Nonetheless, he admits that this kind of modernity could not deeply modify an ancient system of values and traditions: essentially people maintained their way of thinking, their structure of values, simply benefiting from the facilities provided by modernity. With quite an opposite stance, Dipankar Gupta (2014) argued that modernity has not been related to technology and consumption, rather to changes in social relations (family connections, privileges of caste and status), and to the desire to go beyond any restrictions imposed by traditional institutions. “True modernity”, stated Gupta (2014, p. 8), “is about how people relate to other people [...]. Modernity is an attitude which represents universalistic norms, where the dignity of an individual as a citizen is inviolable and where one’s achievement counts for more than family background and connections. Once modernity is understood in this fashion, it is apparent that India still has a long distance to go”. Many other sociologists have chosen an intermediate position, underlining that Indian modernity came during the British period, but that it became massively observable in the social fabric only after Independence and the promulgation of the Constitution. These historical milestones, in actual fact, determined a first real change in the definition of identity. Previously, it was indissolubly joined to caste and

religion: it is only in independent India that individual identity becomes powerful (Doshi, 2008, pp. 88-89). Among these scholars Doshi has emphasized that the benefits introduced by modernity were shared by a tiny percentage of the population, hence by the dominant groups only. Moving from this perspective Doshi — in his text specifically devoted to postmodernism and Indian society (Doshi 2008) — has highlighted that postmodernism in India cannot be seen as a reaction to modernism as a whole, but to the increasing privileges of the upper castes. Moreover, postmodernism should be related to the rise of “little traditions”, specific to particular cultural areas or regions. According to the sociologist, in fact, with the rise of modernity — despite widespread fears — local ethnicity, traditions and customs did not fade, on the contrary they were even strengthened through the use modern innovations, particularly through information technology. Doshi (2008, p. 82) even states that “differentiated ethnicity, autonomous ethnicity and self-conscious ethnicity constitute the structure of postmodernity” in India.

Referring more specifically to the Hindi literary field, the debate on postmodernism has been long overlooked. An exception is represented by the well-known critic Nāmvar Siṃh who, during the 1980s, discussed the concept of *uttar-ādhunikā* (postmodernity) and rejected it as unsuitable for the Indian context.⁸ From the end of the 1990s and especially after 2000, the first dedicated texts of literary criticism started to be published; however, the interest in postmodernism remained quite tenuous. In the next sections I will introduce some of the most relevant contributions, following a chronological order and focusing particularly on the texts provided by Pāṇḍey Śāśibhūṣaṇ Śītāṃśu and his disciples, Sureś Paṭel and Sañjay Cauhān, and by Sudhīś Pacaurī.

2.2. Postmodernism and Hindi literary critique

2.2.1. The earliest contributions of the new millennium

The aim of this first section is to briefly introduce some of the earliest contributions on postmodernism in Hindi, which were published after 2000. As it will be evident, these contributions largely concentrate on Western theories, nonetheless they are relevant as they testify to an increasing interest in postmodernism. The first text that I would like to mention is *Uttar ādhunikā kuch vicār (Postmodernity, some reflections)*, a miscellaneous book edited by Dev Śaṅkar Navīn and Suśānt Kumār Mīśra, published in 2000. As explicitly declared in the preface to the text, postmodernism is an extremely complex phenomenon which can be investigated from multiple perspectives. Due to this reason, the editors decided to leave the contributors free to choose their own approach to the issue, with the aim of providing a general introduction to the main characteristics of postmodernism

⁸ I have been unable to find Nāmvar Siṃh’s article *Śatābdī kā avsān aur uttar-ādhunikā* (1984), but its themes are reported in Avadhesh Kumar Singh 2001.

and its most representative thinkers. Moreover, it is argued that, because of the choice of publishing the volume in Hindi, various problems arose, first of all that of lexicon. There are in fact many technical words related to postmodernism with no precise equivalent in Hindi. In some cases the solution was to create neologisms, in others to associate new meanings to preexisting terms. In any event, for reasons of clarity, the English equivalents were often left in brackets (Navīn and Mīśra, 2000, p. 9). In this sense this text can be particularly useful for Western researchers who want to approach for the first time the issue of Hindi postmodernism to create their own bilingual glossary⁹.

Among the scholars who took part to this project there is Sudhīś Pacaurī (Navīn and Mīśra, 2000, pp. 17-21) who discussed the concept of *uttar-ādhunikā* in relation to that of modernity, briefly touching some of its most relevant features. Furthermore, he lingered over postmodernism and marxism, focusing more specifically on Marx's *Grundrisse* (*Fundamentals of Political Economy Criticism*, 1857-1858) and its forward-looking vision of global capitalism. Franson D. Mañjlī (pp. 22-27) introduced some concepts of Bakhtin's philosophy of language and of Deleuze and Guattari's work (actually only Deleuze is explicitly mentioned). As regards the latter, he dealt with the concept of heteroglossia¹⁰ (translated in Hindi as *viṣambhāṣāsthiti*) and with the nature of the novel, which is considered the most suitable genre for the post-industrial era (as it is able to embrace diversity without losing its peculiarities). Referring to Deleuze, Mañjlī presented the tetralinguistic functional model¹¹ (*caturbhāṣāvaijñānik vyāvahārik modāl*) and the definition of minor literature¹². Indranāth Caudhurī (pp. 29-38) firstly analyzed the differences between Indian and Western modernism, focusing on the literary field. He believes that there

⁹ To facilitate this task, at the end of my dissertation I have added a glossary with the most useful terms related, on one hand, to postmodernism and in general to the contemporary condition, on the other to their necessary modernist counterpart.

¹⁰ Heteroglossia refers to the multiple variations of languages used by every individual as a social being. In his *Discourse in the Novel* (1934-1935) Bakhtin provides the example (quoted by Mañjlī) of an illiterate farmer who relies on different "languages" when he prays, sings or when he talks with his family.

¹¹ It is a model delineated by four functions, the vernacular, the vehicular, the referential and the mythical. Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (2003, p. 25) applied this model to Kafka's writing, arguing that he used Czech as the vernacular language, German both as the vehicular and referential (or cultural) one and Hebrew as the mythic language.

¹² To Deleuze a "minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003, 16). The main characteristic of a minor literature is that its language is affected with deterritorialization. To exemplify this concept, Deleuze analyzed Kafka's Prague German. On this he wrote "Kafka marks the impasse that bars access to writing for the Jews of Prague and turns their literature into something impossible — the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise. The impossibility of not writing because national consciousness, uncertain or oppressed, necessarily exists by means of literature [...]. The impossibility of writing other than in German is for the Prague Jews the feeling of an irreducible distance from their primitive Czech territoriality. And the impossibility of writing in German is the deterritorialization of the German population itself, an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the masses, like a 'paper language' or an artificial language; this is all the more true for the Jews who are simultaneously a part of this minority and excluded from it, like 'gypsies who have stolen a German child from its crib.' In short, Prague German is a deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses" (pp. 16-17).

is always an element of universality (*sarvvyāpaktā*) and permanence (*sthāyitva*) in Indian modernism, but it is not the same in the Western perspective.¹³ As a consequence there are significant differences even between the concepts of *uttar-ādhunikā* and postmodernity. To Caudhurī, in fact, the two terms cannot be considered synonyms. *Uttar-ādhunikā* is not the opposite of *ādhunikā*, it is the condition which follows modernity and which is complementary to it. Abhijit Pāṭhak (pp. 39-52) sketched out a history of Western sociology from its founding fathers (Comte, Durkheim, Weber, Mannheim are quoted) to its most recent evolution. Particularly he focused on the challenge posed by postmodernism to classical sociology, mentioning some basic concepts of Lyotard, Baudrillard, Foucault, Bauman and Derrida's philosophy. Only in the conclusive section of his paper he briefly discussed the concept of postmodernism in relation to the Indian society. To mention a last example, Rāghvendra Pratāp Siṃh (pp. 74-88) introduced Derrida's critic to logocentrism¹⁴ (*śabd-kendravād*), hence to the primacy of speech over writing, which characterized the history of Western philosophy (from Greek philosophers to Hegel), but also the Bible, the Vedas and the Upaniṣad.

A few years after *Uttar ādhunikā kuch vicār*, more precisely during 2004 and 2005, a noteworthy series of papers appeared in the literary magazine, *Vāgarth*. These articles were all related to contemporary Western thinkers who dealt, more or less specifically, with postmodernism. They were all written by the same author, Vijay Kumār, and introduced, for instance, Jürgen Habermas (Kumār, February 2004, pp. 31-33), Terry Eagleton (Kumār, April 2004, pp. 65-68), Fredric Jameson (Kumār, June 2004, pp. 43-46), Jacques Derrida (Kumār, December 2004, pp. 69-73), Julia Kristeva (Kumār, July 2005, p. 16-19), with the attempt to explain some of their most relevant and famous arguments, quoting some of their texts and contributions. These articles testify to a rising interest in postmodernism and can be useful in understanding how recent Western philosophical concepts are rendered through the Hindi language.

The following text that I want to introduce is *Uttar-ādhunikātvād aur dalit sāhitya* (*Postmodernism and dalit literature*) by Kṛṣṇadatt Pālīvāl¹⁵, which was published in

¹³ Here Caudhurī explicitly refers to Tagore's essay *Modernity in Literature*, where the well-known writer did not accept English modernist literature as modern as it lacks universality, permanence and of the profundity of aesthetic joy (*ānandam*).

¹⁴ Logocentrism or the attitude of considering *logos* (a Greek term which literary means 'word', but also 'reason' or 'logic') as the central principle of language and philosophy. From a logocentric perspective, speech and not writing is central to language. If speech involves presence, as both speaker and listener are simultaneously present, writing does not (if writer and reader were simultaneously present they would communicate by speaking). Logocentrism asserts that writing is a substitute for speech, an attempt to restore the presence of speech. Derrida's critique to logocentrism is particularly elaborated in *Of Grammatology* (1967) and *Positions* (1972).

¹⁵ Kṛṣṇadatt Pālīvāl published some articles as well on postmodernism, like *Nav sāmśkr̥tik sāmṛājyavād kā gahrā saṅkaṭ* (2003, pp.9-19) and *Paścimvād kī tark-dr̥ṣi meṃ madhyayugīntā kī vāpsī kā ghaplā* (2010, pp. 83-86).

2008. A considerable part of the text's content is actually anticipated and condensed in the chapter *Uttar-ādhuniktāvād kā arth-sandarbh* (*Contextual meaning of postmodernism*, pp. 13-34), which is based on a lecture given by the critic in 1998 at Śimlā University (Himachal Pradesh). To the critic postmodernism is “basically the new-capitalistic, new-imperialistic, neocolonialist, new-structuralist, new-cultural-imperialistic ideology of the latter half of the Twentieth century”¹⁶. Postmodernism initially developed in Europe, then in the USA, and finally reached India. As regards “Western postmodernism”, Pālīvāl provides an overview, emphasizing its conflictual relation with modernism, the role of IT, technology and mass media. Like his colleagues he refers to the most famous French philosophers like Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida, but also to some American intellectuals such as Alvin Toffler¹⁷, Hillis Miller¹⁸, and Stephen Greenblatt¹⁹.

Moving to the Indian context, he points out that postmodernism firstly found place in the debates of Baṅglā intellectuals during the 1960s, later in the 1980s in the debates of Hindi scholars and, before the beginning of the new millennium, it spread among all Indian languages (p. 20). According to Pālīvāl India had not fully reached modernity when the “tornado of postmodernism” arrived and nowadays its influence is clearly visible in all the fields of human life, from history to fashion, from religion to movies, from art to advertisements. In the postmodern era the American cultural model has become predominant and today it seems that “the children of intellectuals, officers and powerful merchants, etc do not know Indian calligraphy, nor the stories of *Pañcatantra* or to count in Hindi”²⁰ anymore. This is a form of new cultural colonialism, but India seems to be happy with that. From a literary point of view, Manohar Śyām Jośī, with his novels *Kasap*, *Kuru kuru svāhā*, *Ṭ-ṭā profesar*, *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī*, is the emblem of the Hindi authors who have started to play the game of the consumeristic, global culture (pp. 75-76).

Nonetheless, another essential aspect of postmodernism is its refusal of all kinds of centralism (*kendravād*), the stress it lays on pluralism (*bahultāvād*) and multiculturalism

¹⁶ मूलतः यह बीसवीं शताब्दी के उत्तरार्द्ध की नव्य पूँजिवादी, नव्य साम्राज्यवादी, नव्य उपनिवेशवादी, नव्य संरचनावादी, नव्य सांस्कृतिक साम्राज्यवादी विचारधारा (आइडियोलॉजी) है। (Pālīvāl, 2008, p. 17)

¹⁷ Author of *Future Shock* (1970), *The Third Wave* (1980) and *Power Shift* (1990), Alvin Toffler is known for his work on the digital and communications revolutions and on their effects on worldwide cultures (see Pālīvāl, 2008, p. 14).

¹⁸ Hillis Miller is an American literary critic deeply influenced by deconstruction. Among his works Pālīvāl (2008, p. 42) refers to *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (1982) and *The Linguistic Moment: from Wordsworth to Stevens* (1985).

¹⁹ Writer and professor at Harvard University, Stephen Greenblatt is one of the founders of new historicism, a form of literary theory originated during the 1980s, which aims to understand literary works through their cultural and historical context, and history through literature. Among Greenblatt's works Pālīvāl (2008, pp. 43-46) quotes *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), and the essay *Towards a Poetics of Culture* (1987).

²⁰ बुद्धिजीवियों, अफसरों, बड़े व्यापारियों आदि के बच्चे न भारतीय कालगणना जानते हैं न पंचतंत्र की कहानियाँ, न हिंदी की गिनती। (Pālīvāl, 2008, p. 76)

(*bahu-saṃskṛtivād*). In a similar perspective the phenomenon of *uttar-ādhunikādvād* has to be considered strictly in connection with the emergence of new voices: dalits, women, homosexuals, marginalized groups in general have started to lay claim to their rights and public roles (pp. 21-22). On “women’s discourse” (*strī vimars*) — which Pālīvāl defines as a social and political force, a sort of global renaissance that is radically changing the concepts of femininity and masculinity — it is interesting to notice that the only women-authors that the critic mentions are Subhadrā Kumārī Cauhān²¹ and Mahādevī Varmā²², with no references to the younger generations (pp. 94-95). In general Pālīvāl asserts that postmodernism, in literary terms, manifests itself not only as a reflex or response to the global, consumer society, but also as a desire of being set free from the dominance of high-caste groups, overcoming the traditional sense of reverence towards their cultural products. On this Pālīvāl argues:

until now we have been considering works like *Rāmcāritmānas* or *Kāmāyanī* or *Rām kī Śaktipūjā* or *Godān* excellent on an intellectual, cultural and aesthetic level. We have been in subjection due to their greatness. But if we deconstruct these works it will start to appear clearly, hidden behind the language and the subtexts within the text, their elitist ideology, sympathy, form, creation and sub-scheme.²³

When even those texts usually considered emblems of empathy and attention for the downtrodden are questioned, it is necessary to give shape to a new literature. A literature which directly gives voice to the oppressed and the usually neglected, creating a new aesthetics and poetics.

The last text that I wish to mention here is *Uttar-ādhunikā: sāhitya aur saṃskṛti kī nayī soc* (*Postmodernity: literature and new cultural thinking*, 2012) by Devendra Issar²⁴. Its slant is highly theoretical, with almost no concrete references to Hindi literary texts. The author (pp. 17-27) starts his discourse by posing some general questions: what is the relation between literature and other disciplines, such as philosophy, psychology or socio-

²¹ Subhadrā Kumārī Cauhān (1904-1948) authored the well-known poem *Jhāmsī kī rānī* (1928), whose protagonist, queen Lakṣmībāi, became a national heroine due to her strenuous struggle against the British in defense of Jhāmsī’s population. She was personally involved in the protests against the British and was arrested twice.

²² Mahādevī Varmā (1907-1987) was a major poet of *chāyāvād*, but also the author of various biographical texts, a social activist and educationist. On her work see Orsini, 2004, pp. 54-82.

²³ आज तक हम ‘रामचरितमानस’ या ‘कामायनी’ या ‘राम की शक्तिपूजा’ या ‘गोदान’ जैसी कृतियों को बौद्धिक-सांस्कृतिक-सौंदर्यात्मक तौर पर विशिष्ट मानते रहे हैं। इनकी विचार-महिमा से अभिभूत रहे हैं। लेकिन यदि हम इन कृतियों को ‘डि-कंस्ट्रक्ट’ विखंडन करें तो पाते हैं कि इनके पाठ (टेक्स्ट) के भीतर मौजूद उपपाठों और भाषा के पीछे छिपी आभिज्यात्य विचारधारा, संवेदना, रूप-योजना, लय-विधान, उपमान-योजना स्पष्ट दिखाई देने लगती हैं। (Pālīvāl, 2008, p. 23)

²⁴ Devendra Issar (1928-2012) was not only a critic, but also an exponent of *sacetan kahānī*, “the story of awareness”, a “movement” which developed during the Sixties as a reaction to *nayī kahānī*. See Consolaro, 2011a, pp. 194-195.

logy? Is any autonomy possible for literature? What could be the meaning of classical Indian aesthetics in the modern (or postmodern) era? What is the relation between Western and local literary theories? Is any unified critique possible, merging Western and Eastern theories? Issar explicitly says that he has no thorough and complete answers to these questions and after discussing them briefly he touches various arguments related to postmodernism and the contemporary condition. He reflects, for instance, on the complex and ambiguous relation between *uttar-ādhunikā* and its necessary counterpart, *ādhunikā* (pp. 41-51), on the omnipresent “sense of ending” (end of God, of man, of history, of ideologies, of art... pp. 61-76), and on the relation between culture and technology (pp. 115-154). He retraces the evolution of the concept of “ideology” (pp. 85-88), quoting Western thinkers such as the Enlightenment philosopher Destutt De Tracy²⁵, who coined the term “ideology”, the Hungarian-born sociologist Karl Mannheim and his *Ideology and Utopia*²⁶, and the American sociologist Daniel Bell²⁷ with his *The End of Ideology*. He addresses the origins of the word “post-modern”, as per Arnold Toynbee’s²⁸ acceptance, and discusses its peculiarities again referring to various Western thinkers, from Lyotard to Foucault, from Derrida to Toeffler (pp. 31-40). As the postmodern worldview is basically perceived as a Eurocentric model (or, better said, a model essentially related to the USA and to some European countries), Issar (pp. 53-54 and 158-166) wonders if it is possible and correct to interpret through it different historical and cultural realities. It is undeniable that some specificities of postmodernism are pertinent to developing countries as well — from the fall of master-narratives to the rebirth of folk art, from lack of faith in rationalism to a new attention for small, regional realities and subaltern groups — nonetheless the local cultural bases cannot be neglected. Among the “non-Western” critics dealing with postmodernism and “Eastern realities”, Issar quotes Edward Said and his well-known works *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Akbar Ahmed’s *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (1992) and Ziauddin Sardar’s article *Do Not Adjust Your Mind: Post-modernism, Reality and the Other* (1993). Referring more specifically to Indian literatures he complains about the excessive dependence on the We-

²⁵ Antoine Destutt De Tracy (1754 – 1836) was a French philosopher and aristocrat, founder of the *Société des idéologues*. His chief work is *Eléments d'idéologie*, where he defined ideology as the “science of ideas”.

²⁶ *Ideology and Utopia* (1936) is Karl Mannheim’s (1893 – 1947) most famous text. Here ideology is conceived as the true nature of any given society, as a system of thought, based on values and interpretive parameters which are valid within that specific system.

²⁷ Daniel Bell (1919 – 2011) was an American sociologist, writer, editor, and professor at Harvard University, particularly renowned for his studies on post-industrialism. In the collection of essays *The End of Ideology* (1960) he discussed the exhaustion of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ideologies.

²⁸ Toynbee was the first scholar to use the word “post-modern” in the Anglo-Saxon context (in his *A Study of History*, a twelve-volume universal history, published between 1934 and 1961), adopting it to refer to the last phase of Western civilization, which started (in his opinion) around 1875.

stern canon, from which, in many cases, the literary glossary and evaluation parameters are taken (pp. 53-57 and 165).

As previously mentioned, this has been just an overview of some of the earliest contributions in Hindi on postmodernism. Starting from the next section I will discuss in greater detail some other texts, which, in the light of my research interests, are particularly useful and thought-provoking. The first author that I will introduce is Pāṇḍey Śāśibhūṣaṇ Śītāṃśu, who tried to defined and exemplify four basic ingredients of a postmodern text.

2.2.2. Śītāṃśu and the four ingredients of a postmodern text

I came across Śītāṃśu's article *Uttar ādhunik sāhitya-srṣṭi aur samīkṣā drṣṭi ke bīc "Vāren Hestings kā sāmḍ"* ("Warren Hastings' bull", between the postmodern literary creation and critical perspective) while reading Sureś Paṭel (2013) and Sañjay Cauhān's (2011) books on postmodern Hindi literature. Both the authors have underlined the scarcity of critique focusing on this topic and address Śītāṃśu's contribution as a crucial one. Pāṇḍey Śāśibhūṣaṇ "Śītāṃśu"'s article was published in the literary magazine *Madhumatī* in 2000 and can actually provide multiple causes for reflection. First of all, the critic briefly retraces the origins of postmodernism in the Western world, referring to its earliest manifestations in architecture and to the theoretical enquires made by Lyotard and Baudrillard (Śītāṃśu, 2000, p. 5). At the same time he highlights that nowadays this phenomenon cannot be relegated to Europe and the USA, and that in India feudal and traditionalist trends coexist with modern and postmodern ones.

According to Śītāṃśu postmodernism is basically a reaction to modernism. In fact, if the keywords of the latter were totality (*sampūrṇtā*) and rationality (*vivek*), the basic concepts of postmodernism are plurality (*bahultāvād*) and desire (*icchā*). While modernity is the era of ideologies, of the definition of national borders, postmodernity states their end and the birth of a new global consciousness (*bhaugolik cetnā*). Moreover, postmodernism is focused on the present time, denying any historical consciousness and underlining the importance of phenomena such as eventuality (*ghaṭṇīyā*), untimeliness (*asamayparaktā*) and anachronism (*kāldoṣṭā*). The critic complains about the attitude of the Hindi intelligentsia, which has started to attack the concept of postmodernism without any in-depth knowledge. He believes that this cultural manifestation cannot be neglected, particularly in the field of literary criticism, as it may provide useful devices for textual investigation. As Nirmal Varmā wrote, a work of art does not say anything, does not teach anything, it makes a revelation, and within this revelation there is no despotic, univocal truth, but multiple and contradictory possible truths. To gather this revelation in its various shades is the aim and the peculiarity of the postmodern critique (Śītāṃśu, 2000, p. 8).

After this general introduction to the topic, Śītāṃśu discusses four elements which he deems crucial for approaching postmodern literary critique. These elements are: the effectiveness of seduction versus production²⁹ (*līlābhāv banām utpādan kī sakriyā*), the urgency of overcoming institutional traditions (*sāṃsthānik paramparā kā atikramaṇ*), escaping from cultural dogma (*sāṃskṛtik anuśāsan se palāyan*) and aurality versus visuality (*śravaṇśīltā banām cākṣuṣṭā*). The author explains each of them as follows:

I) *Līlābhāv banām utpādan kī sakriyā*

In the postmodern era literature is no longer considered a reflection of society, it is no longer subordinated to hard facts. On the contrary, it has become a game of seduction, of presence and absence, of veiled and unveiled meanings. Nowadays, it seems that literature is following a trajectory which is opposite to that of scientific realism and rationality. Literature is now essentially an entertainment, an alluring game (Śītāṃśu, 2000, p. 8).

II) *Sāṃsthānik paramparā kā atikramaṇ*

Postmodernism wants to go beyond any restrictions imposed by traditional institutions, such as society, family, marriage. These boundaries were attacked by several movements of the past, but none of them attempted to deconstruct all totalizing concepts and theories in such a radical way. In this context Śītāṃśu refers to the feminist movement as well: as the literary field has been largely dominated by male authors, women are struggling to find their own space and way of writing (Śītāṃśu, 2000, pp. 8-9).

III) *Sāṃskṛtik anuśāsan se palāyan*

In Śītāṃśu's opinion postmodernism may be described as an illusory fascination (*māyik ākarṣaṇ*), which leads to overcome traditional cultural restrictions. "Global-culture" is becoming the new keyword and the local cultural inhibitions are considered outdated (Śītāṃśu, 2000, p. 9).

IV) *Śravaṇśīltā banām cākṣuṣṭā*

At the beginning of the Twentieth century, imagism (*bimbvād kā andolan*) gained a primary significance, but nowadays echoes and resonances are even more important than images. Śītāṃśu quotes the deconstructionist approach to the text, whose aim is to disclose any hidden echo. The philosophy of deconstruction, in fact, shows that there are no pure texts (*śuddh pāṭh*), as there are always traces of previous ones (*antar pāṭhom* or intertext). In this perspective literature becomes a trace (*cihn*), a "trace of meaning" (*arth-cihn*) and if we disregard it we cannot properly understand any work of art (Śītāṃśu, 2000, pp. 9-10). The critic refers also to other concepts of the Derridian philosophy, such

²⁹ The English translation of the key terms *līlābhāv* and *utpādan* is provided by the author.

as *différance*³⁰, iterability³¹ (translated into Hindi with the word *āvṛtti*) and reversal³² (translated as *pratīptā*), defining them essential for any kind of postmodern analysis.

The following step of Śītāṃśu's argument is based on the analysis of Uday Prakāś's short story *Vāren Heṣṭings kā sāmḍ* (*Warren Hastings' bull*)³³, highlighting the relevance of each of the above listed elements. *Vāren Heṣṭings kā sāmḍ* is described as a postmodern text, where the historiographic component plays a fundamental role (Śītāṃśu, 2000, p. 10). Nevertheless, this component is indissolubly intertwined with fantasy and the reader is unable to distinguish the former from the latter (see also section 4.1.3). Moreover, eighteenth-century events and issues are linked to contemporary ones. Śītāṃśu defines Uday Prakāś's short story as an example of literature of pleasure and of detachment from cultural traditions and institutions.

Let us start from the presence of *līlābhāv* within the text (Śītāṃśu, 2000, pp. 10-12). Initially Uday Prakāś depicts the eighteenth-century Hindustān in a traditional manner, through the images of women at work, cutting wood, fishing, selling food in a market, filling pots. Against this traditional background he refers to the amorous games (hence considering *līlābhāv* in quite a literary acceptation) that animates the British Governor's estate and its surroundings. The author recounts Warren Hastings' relation with one of his servants, Cokhī, but also the sexual relations between Mohinī Ṭhākur (the daughter of a rather powerful family, desirous of establishing a strong connection with the British and benefiting from it) and some English gentlemen. Śītāṃśu highlights that *līlābhāv* operates in the story in two different ways. Let us consider first Mohinī's case: initially, with her

³⁰ Derrida coined the neologism *différance* to demonstrate "the limits of speech in attaining full and immediate self- presence or self-identity. Derrida's invented term alludes to the irreducibility of a movement both of spacing and temporalization (in *différance* both difference and deferral are at play) which in fact produces differences themselves, of the kind that Saussure wants to install at the heart of the arbitrary and relational identity of the sign for example" (Wortham, 2010, p. 38). The word *différance* comes from a graphic alteration of the French word *différence*, which can be noticed in a written text, but which cannot be heard.

³¹ Wortham in his Derrida Dictionary writes on iterability: "every mark, each singular text or irreplaceable event is at once a unique, 'once-and-for all' occurrence and yet manifests or inscribes itself on condition of a possible re-marking. Thus, the 'singular' is always repeatable; or, rather, it is iterable, since every repetition (*iter* – 'again') inevitably alters (*itara* – 'other'), just as each signature — as the supposed hallmark of identity — nevertheless attains validity only on condition of its inscription at *another* time or in a *different* place. Iterability isn't just a simple add-on, then, an extrinsic and dispensable 'extra' that comes along after the fact of an original form or presence. Instead, iterability implies a supplementarity that goes all the way down" (Wortham, 2010, p. 78).

³² Reversal is another important strategy of the philosophy of deconstruction which Derrida borrowed from Nietzsche, referring to the reversal of metaphysical oppositions. According to Derrida to execute a reversal of metaphysics as a system of opposition it is not enough to invert it; what is necessary is an opposition which does not recreate a term-for-term opposition, a movement of *oblique reversal* is required (Haar, 2002 pp. 73-74).

³³ A well-known short story from the collection *Paul Gomrā kā skūṭar*, it was made into a theatrical version by Arvind Gaur (2001). The story narrates Warren Hastings' life, from his childhood to the love affair with the Bengalin Cokhī, from his office as Governor of the East India Company to the moral decay of old age. The story is a harsh critique against corruption and malpractice that during the Eighteenth century, as well as today, afflicted India.

lascivious behavior, she aims to gain material benefits for her family. She is moved by reason. However, gradually she starts to feel a real attachment towards one of the Englishmen and her rational and pragmatic game becomes a passionate one. Due to her new feeling she is scolded by her mother: desire and reason (respectively emblems of postmodernism and modernism) inevitably clash. Warren Hastings' trajectory is quite different. When he meets the young, native servant Cokhī, he seems to surrender to passion. He forgets rationality (*vivek*) in the name of desire (*icchā*), leaving behind the norms of his industrial, modernist country. Warren Hastings starts to think about himself as Kṛṣṇa and about Cokhī as Rādhā. Nonetheless, after Cokhī's death and with the presence of his British wife, this postmodern game of seduction vanishes: "he became a common white man, old and bald. After Cokhī's death his world of dreams came to an end. There was no more fantasy in his life. And when a human being has no more dreams, fantasy and all his myths are destroyed, he just remains a pragmatic and calculating man"³⁴.

Moving to the urgency of overcoming institutional traditions, Śītāṃśu invites his readers to linger over the characters' oscillating attitude towards their own traditions. In their ambivalent relations with tradition he sees a typical postmodern feature. Warren Hastings, for instance, initially seems to overcome European traditions: for some time he attempts to learn the local language, he wears traditional Indian clothes and with Cokhī recreates Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's sensual game. Nonetheless, in the end he re-assimilates British customs and adheres to the negative stereotype of the modernist, insensitive settler. On the other hand, women like Mohinī Ṭhākur and her mother Nandinī forget their Indian traditions in order to gain material benefits from the East India Company. Moreover, — Śītāṃśu argues — Uday Prakāś offers multiple descriptions of traditional Indian culture, but at the same time he goes beyond it. There are, for instance, several references to the devotion to Kṛṣṇa, to Jayadeva's hymns³⁵ (sung by Buntū, one of the local friends of the Governor) and to many traditional concepts. Śītāṃśu, for example, quotes the words of the *sādhu* Ānand Murāri to Warren Hastings on the illusory nature of reality: "Son, everything you see is deceit, *māyā*, illusion. The whole earth is nothing but the playground of Krishna Kanhaiyā, the supporter of Govardhan. Everything that is happening, all the things that make you happy or unhappy, everything is just a game! It is im-

³⁴ All English translations from this short story are mine. The original Hindi text is as follows:

समय गुजरने के साथ-साथ वह गंजा, बूढ़ा और मामूली फिरंग बनता चला गया. चोखी के न रहने से उसके स्वप्नों की दुनिया का अंत हो गया. जीवन में कोई फैंटेसी न रही. और जब किसी मनुष्य के पास स्वप्न न रह जाएं, फैंटेसी न रहे और मिथक नष्ट हो जाएं तो वह घनघोर व्यावहारिक यथार्थवादी आदमी के रूप में बचा रह जाता है. (Prakāś 2004, 143)

³⁵ Jayadeva was a Sanskrit poet, lived during the Twelfth century. His best-known composition, *Gītāgovinda*, celebrates Kṛṣṇa's love with the gopis and particularly with Rādhā.

permanent... but eternal”³⁶. And there are other references to local traditions during the last encounter between Cokhī and Warren Hastings. The girl wants to know if the Governor has actually decided to create a map of India, something that she considers terrible. Referring to a sort of *voodoo* practice, she thinks that the aim of creating a map could be no other than to destroy her country. When finally she stabs herself, she does not appear as Rādhā anymore: to Warren Hastings’ eyes she has become Durga, “that woman seated on a tiger, with a horrible human head in her hands, that he kept on seeing in statues and paintings”³⁷. After this episode and due to the presence of his British wife, Warren Hastings goes back to his “modern world”.

At the same time, within a traditional Indian scenario, we can see some local officers who betray their own traditions, in their desire to become wealthy. A British officer describes this situation in one of his letters:

they were slaves, more than slaves in ancient Rome. Generally, they belonged to a high caste. They started to eat beef, to speak English, to wear Western-style clothes and they started to consider their own ancient traditions as nonsense. Apart from their features and from the color of their skin, they were completely English. [...] They are our subjugated shadows. They will rule India for us³⁸.

Śītāmśu highlights how Uday Prakāś plays with present and past: on one hand, the contemporary desire to overcome local tradition that had already existed two hundred and fifty years before; on the other hand, traces of the past — in this specific case, traces of the British dominion — continue to exist in contemporary India. To Śītāmśu this aspect of the short story could be linked to the Derridian concept of *sous rature*, which he mentions with the English word *irezar* (Śītāmśu, 2000, p. 13). *Sous rature* (a concept originally developed by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger) refers to a word which is crossed out in a text, but still remains legible. It implies that a particular signifier is not completely suitable for the concept it represents, but has to be used due to the limitations of our language. To my understanding, Śītāmśu wants to highlight that the past and traditions are *under erasure*, hence present, but in a problematic way in the construction of contempo-

³⁶ बच्चा, जो भी तू देख रहा है सब मिथ्या है, सब माया है। सब भ्रम है। ये सारी धरती तो उस गोवर्द्धनधारी कृष्ण कन्हैया की लीलाभूमी है। जो भी कुछ हो रहा है और तू जिससे भी सुखी-दुखी होता है वह सब लीला है...! यह अनित्य है... परन्तु नित्य है... (Prakāś, 2004, p. 126)

³⁷ चोखी राधा नहीं थी। वह शेर पर बैठी वह दूसरी औरत थी, जिसके हाथ में किसी डरावने पुरुष का कटा हुआ सिर होता था और जिसके चित्र और मूर्तियाँ वह अक्सर देखता रहता था। (Prakāś, 2004, p. 142)

³⁸ वह प्राचीन काल के रोम के गुलामों से भी ज्यादा गुलाम है। इसमें ज्यादातर ऊँची जात के लोग हैं। उन्होंने बीफ खाना शुरू कर दिया है। अंग्रेजी बोलने लगे हैं। यूरोपीय कपड़े पहनते हैं और उन्होंने हिन्दुस्तान की सारी परम्परा को ढकोसला कहना शुरू कर दिया है। वे सिर्फ अपने नस्ल और अपनी त्वचा के रंग के अलावा बाकी सब चीज में अंग्रेजी के हमजाद हैं। [...] वे हमारी ही गुलाम छायाएँ हैं। इंडिया में हमारा सारा प्रशासन वही चलायेंगे। हम जब इंडिया को छोड़कर यूरोप लौट आयेंगे तब भी यहाँ हमारी वही गुलाम छायाएँ राज करेंगी। वह इंडिया में हमारा ही राज होगा (Prakāś, 2004, p. 133).

rary narratives; at the same time the present time is *under erasure* in Prakāś's narrative about colonial India.

The third postmodern element to be considered is strictly related to the previous one, and is defined by Śītāṃśu as *sāṃskṛtik se palāyan*, that is to say the willingness to escape from cultural traditions. To the critic, myth, dream, fantasy and spirituality are the main ingredients of the Indian culture. Nevertheless, nowadays, people from all around the world (Indian people included) are running away from them. This aptitude can be seen both in eighteenth-century and contemporary India: Warren Hastings lost his dreams, his fantasy, his spirituality, but it seems that in contemporary India all the people are following this same trajectory. Those episodes which happened two hundred and fifty years ago are reaching their peak today.

The final element to which Śītāṃśu devotes special attention is the *aural dimension* (*śravaṇśīltā*) of the short story. The reader, browsing through it, immediately notices that Uday Prakāś inserted the pictures of two paintings. It may seem that he is bowing to visuality (*cākṣuṣṭā*), but it is actually the contrary. The author's aim is to analyze these paintings and to deconstruct their superficial meaning, revealing their embedded resonances. In the first painting (*Mr. and Mrs. Warren Hastings*, realized by Johann Zoffany in 1783 and available at the Victoria Memorial Museum of Calcutta) Warren Hastings is depicted together with his wife under a banyan tree. In the background, there is the city of Calcutta. In his left hand, the Governor is holding a cane and a hat, while in his right, his wife's hand. Behind the couple there is one more character, a native girl. It is on her role and on her relationship with Warren Hastings that Prakāś focuses his attention:

“She has big eyes. In her right hand there is Warren Hastings wife's hat, on which a crest of feathers of a rare white bird stands out. [...] But if you look carefully you will discover that between that young servant, standing under a banyan tree, behind Warren Hastings' wife, and Warren Hastings himself there is a deep connection, invisible and indescribable. It will seem that Warren Hastings is holding his wife's hand to reassure her and to conceal the relationship. And you will discover why both Warren Hastings and the Bengali girl have a hat in their hands, while Warren Hastings' wife has nothing. Then, when the picture starts to disclose its meanings and messages, you will discover that the painter Johann Zoffany painted that picture in order to show the relationship between Warren Hastings and the local girl, even though they were trying to conceal it under the hats in their hands. However, Johann Zoffany reached his goal, because he managed to catch the feelings in the eyes of the girl and of Warren Hastings. Yes, look carefully. Those people, that Bengali girl and Warren Hastings, are looking at each other with passion, enraptured, and his lanky wife, overdressed according to the Imperial style, is

standing between them, but she is just appearance. Because she is a British symbol³⁹.

In this way, Uday Prakāś deconstructs the painting, showing a reality which is more complex than the one supposed. The characters' eyes and hands talk silently to a patient and careful observer, revealing a new interpretative key.

The second painting included in the short story was made by an unknown artist and is part of a private collection. It depicts Purley Hall, an estate in Berkshire rented by Warren Hastings while awaiting his trial for corruption. In front of the elegant building, a stable boy is leading a magnificent black horse. In the right-hand corner there are a cow and a calf; in the left there is a chained black bull. Uday Prakāś suggests that a careful observer will be unable to avert his eyes from this bottom, left-hand corner, from the mysterious and furious animal. He/she will start to perceive that there is something more beneath appearance, but what is this? To provide a first hypothesis it will be necessary to recall the story of Warren Hastings' bull, a story which is indeed central, as it gives the title to the short story. The author informs his readers that when the Governor went back to England, he took with him five brahma cows and a bull, which he had received as a gift. Unluckily in Britain the cows were no longer considered symbols of the earth, and creatures with their own personalities: they were just goods, sources of milk, meat and leather. The cows stopped eating and one by one started to be ill. Within a few months four of them died. The last cow mated with the bull and for some time they recreated a sort of family. However, when their calf died, the cow became inconsolable and starved to death. The bull became crazy out of anger and sorrow. One evening, while Warren Hastings (after being acquitted in his trial for corruption) was returning home in his carriage with his wife, the bull attacked and injured them. The crazy animal destroyed the carriage and tore apart the stomach of the black steed: the bull raged against them as they were both symbols of the British empire. But in this way the animal became a risk for England and was shot dead by a platoon of the British army. Śītāṃśu highlights that the multiple echoes of meanings related to this animal cannot be understood within the limits of the more super-

39 उसकी बड़ी-बड़ी आंखें हैं। उसके दाहिने हाथ में वारेन हेस्टिंग्स की पत्नी का हैट है, जिसमें किसी दर्लभ श्वेत पक्षी के पंरों की कलंगी लगी हुई है।[...] लेकिन आप अगर गौर से और देर तक इस चित्र को देखें तो आपको पता चलने लगेगा कि उस बरगद के पेड़ के नीचे, वारेन हेस्टिंग्स की पत्नी के पीछे खड़ी उस जवान बंगाली नौकरानी और वारेन हेस्टिंग्स के बीच कोई गहरा, अदृश्य और अपरिभाषित संबंध है। आपको यह लगेगा कि वारेन हेस्टिंग्स अपनी पत्नी का हाथ पकड़कर उसे भरोसा दिलाते हुए, उसी संबंध को छुपाने का प्रयत्न कर रहा है। धीरे-धीरे आप इस रहस्य को जान जाएंगे कि आखिर वारेन हेस्टिंग्स और बंगाली लड़की के हाथों में ही हैट क्यों है, जबकि वारेन हेस्टिंग्स की पत्नी के दोनों हाथ खाली हैं। और तब यह चित्र आपके सामने अपने सारे अर्थ-संकेतों को खोलने लगेगा और आप जान जाएंगे कि चित्रकार जॉन ज़ोफेनी ने यह चित्र वारेन हेस्टिंग्स और उस सांवली नेटिव लड़की के बीच के संबंधों को व्यक्त करने के लिए ही बनाया था लेकिन वे दोनों अपने-अपने हाथ में रखे हैट से उसे लगातार ढांपने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं। लेकिन जॉन ज़ोफेनी अपनी कोशिश में अंततः इसलिए सफल हो गया है क्योंकि उसने उस लड़की और वारेन हेस्टिंग्स की आंखों की भावनाओं को पकड़ लिया है। जी हाँ, आप गौर से देखें, वे दोनों यानी सांवली बंगाली लड़की और वारेन हेस्टिंग्स गहरे आवेग से एक-दूसरे को सम्मोहित होकर निहार रहे हैं और उनके बीच खड़ी इंपीरियल पोशाक में सजी-धजी उसकी दुबली-लंबी पत्नी, बस यहाँ उपस्थित भर है। क्योंकि वह एक ब्रिटिश प्रतीक है। (Prakāś, 2004, pp. 127-128)

ficial plot: it is necessary to investigate its deeper structure. Uday Prakāś himself raised several questions about the image of the bull. Did he go crazy only because of the death of the cow and of the calf? Did he sacrifice his life in a struggle against the Western industrial society which is inhuman and devoid of any compassion? Or did he fight and die like some fanatics in order to preserve the traditions and myths of his country? Did he die as a devoted servant of his homeland in his struggle against British imperialism? All these images can be included in the bull image. But there is something more, as the words of an old lama reveal at the end of the story: “that bull hasn’t died yet” (Śītāṃśu, 2000, p. 16).

Moving from the concept of *différance*, Śītāṃśu (2000, pp. 17-18) investigates more deeply the image of the bull. First of all, he remarks that the animal physically appears only in the last part of the story, but is it completely absent in the previous part? Is it something tangible or abstract? According to the critic, in the first part of the story, the bull actually exists in Warren Hastings’ mind and is even more dangerous than “the external one”. This is the bull of Western industrial society and culture, devoid of any compassion and inhuman. Warren Hastings’ wife awakes this bull. The madness of this inner bull leads Warren Hastings towards immoral and corrupt behavior. His cruelty seems to reach his peak during the famine in 1769-70, when the Governor, despite the death of millions of people and the desperate conditions of the survivors, continued to collect land taxes and other duties. The bull of Warren Hastings’ mind, with its extreme pragmatism, took devastation everywhere. To summarize, within the short story there are two bulls, facing each other: the bull of Western, industrial mentality and the bull of “Indian-ness”. It seems that the bull of industrialization has killed the Indian one. This is as true today as it was in the Eighteenth century. Nonetheless, the old lama’s statement at the end of the tale may be read as a declaration of hope: Indian-ness has not died. Despite the spread of Western culture, there is room for hope. Uday Prakāś knows the strengths and weaknesses of both Western and Indian culture, of modernity and postmodernity. In actual fact, he cannot be considered a supporter of postmodern values, but he is aware that they are spreading within Indian society and it is not possible to reject them in a simplistic way (Śītāṃśu, 2000, p. 19).

Śītāṃśu concludes his analysis of *Vāren Heṣṭings kā sām̐d* stressing that it can be considered a successful example of postmodern intertextuality, which could not have been written at the times of Warren Hastings. Moreover, he emphasizes the validity of the postmodern process of critique, particularly the deconstruction of the multiple echoes embedded within a text. A similar method of investigation can be applied to several types of texts and should not be set aside as a mere fashion, imported from Western societies.

I consider Śītāṃśu’s article particularly relevant as it is one of the first attempts to outline a possible declension of postmodernism in Hindi literature. The critic not only recalls the basic concepts of Western scholars, but creates a personal interpretation of this cultural phenomenon. He identifies four elements which he considers peculiar to a postmodern text and provides textual examples supporting his reasoning. Moreover, during an

interview in December 2017, I had the opportunity to verify directly with Uday Prakāś how he perceived Śītāṃśu's argument. He acknowledged its validity, highlighting that it represents one of the first attempt to analyze his short story without a political filter⁴⁰. Even if “postmodernism is not a blanket which may cover everything” (using the writer's words), he agreed that, with an accurate contextualization, a postmodern reading of his work is possible.

The next section will be devoted to the contributions provided by Sureś Paṭel (2013) and Sañjay Cauhān's (2011), who explicitly referred to Śītāṃśu's article as the main source of inspiration for their analysis on postmodernism and recent Hindi literature.

2.2.3. Following Śītāṃśu's path: Sureś Paṭel and Sañjay Cauhān

It is extremely hard to define postmodernism as it is an unstable and uncertain condition, however, it is nowadays a worldwide tendency and cannot be ignored: this seems to be the common starting point of Sureś Paṭel and Sañjay Cauhān's texts, respectively *Uttar-ādhunikā aur Uday Prakāś kā sāhitya (Postmodernity and Uday Prakāś's literature, 2013)*, and *Uttar-ādhunikā aur Hindi upanyās (Postmodernity and Hindi novels, 2011)*.

Paṭel starts his analysis with a reflection on the terms *ādhunikā* and *uttar-ādhunikā*. With regard to the former, he explicitly says that *ādhunik* translates the English word “modern”, hence it refers to a change in the social structure, to the birth of a new way of thinking and of a new system of values. *Ādhunikā* can be defined as “the attempt to assert a new identity, overcoming traditional values”⁴¹. Another common meaning of *ādhunik* is that of being “advanced”, being wealthy and rational, free from the interferences of religious powers. This term is generally associated to the idea of “westernization”, that is to say to the influence of the Western values on non-Western traditions. It is generally agreed that modernization has spread across the world through colonialism and industrialization, and in India, as in other former colonized countries, there is a shadow of European modernity. Modernization — argues Paṭel — believes in secularism, wealth and the scientific approach, and has substituted man for god and nature, with an increasing sense of individualism (Paṭel, 2013, pp. 23-24).

As regards the second term, *uttar-ādhunikā* is the name of a tendency that emerged in Europe in the second part of the Twentieth century. Paṭel refers to Lyotard's work *The Postmodern Condition* and defines postmodernity as an evolution of modernity and at the

⁴⁰ This is a clear reference to Marxist approach which dominated the Hindi literary scenario of the late Twentieth century. See note 66.

⁴¹ आधुनिकता यानी पारंपरिक मान्यताओं एवं जीवनमूल्यों से हटकर अपनी एक अलग अस्मिता स्थापित करने का प्रयास। (Paṭel, 2013, p. 23)

same time its conclusive phase. Nonetheless, nowadays postmodernism cannot be considered a condition of the Western countries only, as it has gained a global relevance. In the postmodern world, technology and global capitalism have caused national borders to fade, asserting a new global dimension. Mass media have changed people's relations with reality, influencing their language, their symbols and their way of thinking (Paṭel, 2013, pp. 24-27). In general it can be said that postmodernism refuses all unifying and centralizing theories and questions the modernist idea of history as a linear path or trajectory, with a goal to be fulfilled. Postmodernism stresses the importance of plurality, against any totalizing ideology. It deals with minorities, with subaltern groups and shows their struggle against dominating and oppressive forces. Moreover, postmodernism is immersed in those realities it challenges: for instance, postmodernism lives within capitalism in order to question it from the inside. Postmodernism does not conceal its relations with the consumer society, on the contrary, it uses them to structure its critique. It is an intrinsically contradictory phenomenon, but this is not perceived as negative or problematic. On the contrary, postmodernism accepts the tensions that may exist between politics and aesthetics, between history and narration. Within a similar context the distinction between literary genres starts to fade, as well as the separation between reality and imagination (Paṭel, 2013, pp. 31-35).

Referring more specifically to the Indian context the critic argues that postmodernism took shape during the Seventies as a reaction to a media and market-driven reality, reawakening the sense of being Indians (Paṭel, 2013, p. 28). According to Paṭel (p. 30), in the field of Hindi literature, many scholars consider postmodernism and post-structuralism (*uttar-saṃraçnāvād*) as synonyms, but this is just a misinterpretation, as the former is an epistemological, or a life condition (*jñāndaśā yā jīvandaśā*), while the latter is a strategy of language reading (*bhāṣā ke pāṭh kī raṇniīti*). The two phenomena are linked but cannot be overlapped. Probably there is not yet a clear definition of what postmodernism is, although novels like Manohar Śyām Jośī's *Kuru kuru svāhā* (1980), Vīrendra Jain's *Ḍūb* (1991) and Surendra Varmā's *Mujhe cānd cāhie* (1993) are often linked to it. Other novelists who Paṭel (p. 55) associates with postmodernism are Kṛṣṇa Baldev Vaid, Vipinkumār Agravāl, Mṛdulā Garg, Citrā Mudgal, Alkā Sarāvgī, Jayā Jādvānī. As regards other literary genres, postmodern traces can be found in Uday Prakāś's short stories, Rameś Bakṣī's theatre, and Aśok Bājpeyī, Devīprasād Miśra and Vinod Kumār Śukla's poetry.

Both Paṭel and Cauhān underline the scarcity of critique focusing on postmodernism in Hindi literature. During the last few decades the main critics were probably Sudhīś Pacaurī and Devendra Issar, but none of them identified the essential elements characterizing a postmodern work of art (Cauhān, 2011, p. 16; Paṭel, 2013, pp. 36-37). As regards Sudhīś Pacaurī's *Uttar-ādhunik sāhityik vimarś* (*Postmodern literary discourse*) Paṭel argues that the author provided examples of postmodern novels and poetry, but he did not clearly define what the bases of a postmodern text are. A similar problem is highlighted in Issar's work, *Uttar-ādhunikā: sāhitya aur saṃskṛti kī nayī soc* (*Postmodernity:*

literature and new cultural thinking), which is perceived as a theoretical analysis, with a lack of practical examples. A new way of performing a postmodern literary analysis seems to be necessary. Both Paṭel and Cauhān propose the above analyzed article by Pāṇḍey Śaśibhūṣaṇ Śītāṃśu (*Uttar ādhunik sāhitya-sṛṣṭi aur samīkṣā dṛṣṭi ke bīc “Vāren Heṣṭings kā sāmḍ”*) as a valid model to be followed. They examine the four elements identified as postmodern ones, and seek examples particularly from recent Hindi novels and short stories. Below I will briefly reconstruct their arguments related to each element.

1) *Utpādan banām līlābhāv*

In the postmodern era the notion of consumer society has become crucial and consumption seems to determine people’s lives and identities. Postmodernism assimilates everything into its *līlā*, its *game* of appearance. Echoing Baudrillard’s words both Paṭel and Cauhān argue that if the cornerstone of the modern world was reality, now only its shadow remains. The postmodern *līlā* is a *chāyā kī līlā*, a game of shadows, which deceives and traps people. Today, according to them, its effects on literature are visible at various levels, from the content to the language and style. Both critics (Cauhān, 2011, pp. 19-21 and Paṭel, 2013, pp. 37-42) distinguish various instruments through which the postmodern *līlā* operates within society: advertisements (*viñṅāpan kī līlā*), drugs and alcohol (*naśākhorī kī līlā*), movies, tv and fashion (*Filmī/ ṭī.vī/ fashion kī līlā*), the allure of wealth (*arth/dhan kī līlā*) and power (*pad prabhutv kī līlā*), sex (*yaun kī līlā*) and technological development (*taknīkī līlā*). Concerning wealth, for instance, they state that it has become one of the most important values of the postmodern era: it is seeping into all relations and fields of human life. Education, religion, social relations, everything is threatened by the money god. It seems that everything can be bought, not only comforts, but also a better social status, promotions, sex. Regarding this point, Paṭel quotes Sudhīś Pacaurī’s analysis of Surendra Varmā’s *Mujhe cānd cāhie*. The novel is defined as the story of a “right choice” (the choice of the protagonist, Varṣā Vaśiṣṭh), a story of ambition, of adjustment to the requirements of the market. Varṣā has a successful career as an actress, while her lover Harṣ has not. He is not able to conciliate art, work, affections and dies seeking refuge in drugs. Varṣā mourns his death, but she does not abandon the world of cinema: she has accepted the laws of the market and because of this she is alive and has (at least partially) reached “her moon” (Pacaurī, 2010, p. 165 and Paṭel, 2013, p. 40). Cauhān quotes, among others, a couple of examples from *Kali-kathā: vāyā bāipās* by Alkā Sarāvgī. The first one refers to the protagonist’s daughter-in-law who complains about the amount of money at her disposal per month: what can she do with five hundred Rupees? She spends that amount just in the beauty parlor! The protagonist, Kiśor Bābū, is quite upset by the young woman’s attitude (Cauhān, 2011, p. 39 and Sarāvgī, 2003, p. 202). Nevertheless, not only have the new generations forgotten real values, charmed by appearance and money: even the protagonist’s wife complains about their son’s situation. He should be helped by his father to buy a new car: a Maruti is a car for the middle class,

with an Opel or a Ford his life would be completely different (Cauhān, 2011, p. 39 and Sarāvgī, 2003, p. 111).

On the new role gained by sexuality, both Paṭel and Cauhān have a highly critical attitude: it is considered an effect of the sub-culture produced by globalization and is affecting society negatively. Cinema, television, adverts and beauty contests lure people with glamorous and sensual images. Tv talks with no inhibitions about sexuality, contraceptives, HIV so that nowadays even children could raise questions about sex (Paṭel, 2013, p. 41). Particularly Cauhān (2011, pp. 45-93) devotes many pages to the idea of *yaun līlā*, proposing multiple differentiations, primarily based on its nature, hence if it is real and situated in the present time (*pratyakṣ yaun līlā*), if it is filtered through memory (*smṛti yaun līlā*) or imagination (*kālpānik yaun līlā*). He even differentiates a so called *prākṛtik līlā* (“according to nature”, so between a man and a woman) from *aprākṛtik līlā*, referring to homosexual relations and to masturbation as “unnatural” behaviors⁴².

II) *Sāṃsthānik paramparā kā atikramaṇ*

Postmodernism attempts to break with all social restrictions and inhibitions. Within such a context, Indian society is putting aside its traditional cultural values, proclaiming their groundlessness. It is absorbing the global culture and wishes to go beyond all traditional institutions, such as marriage, family, society, religious and educational institutions. Feminist and *dalit* movements can be considered representative of this tendency (Cauhān, 2011, pp. 22-23 and Paṭel, 2013, pp. 42-50). As regards the willingness to escape from conjugal bonds (*dāmpatyā mūlyom kā atikramaṇ*), for instance, both the authors underline that in the postmodern era men and women are seeking for freedom and independence. In this rush the marital bonds weaken and the number of divorces increases. There is no more faith in marriage and extramarital relations are becoming common. According to them, these changes are especially related to the female situation: women can work outside the domestic walls and have more opportunities to meet different people. Regarding these new tendencies Cauhān (pp. 99-105) quotes some excerpts from Jayā Jādvānī’s *Tattvamasi*, Mṛdulā Garg’s *Cittakobrā* and Surendra Varmā’s *Do murdom ke lie guldastā*, where there are examples of women dissatisfied with their marriages, seeking extramarital relations.

Strictly connected with the crisis of marriage is that of society (*sāmājīk mūlyom kā atikramaṇ*): traditional social bonds are perceived as too constraining, an obstacle to self-realization. On this matter Cauhān (pp. 114-128) again particularly refers to the challenge presented by women to the patriarchal system: contemporary novelists depict women standing up for their rights, having children outside conjugal bonds or who want to decide

⁴² The expression *aprākṛtik līlā* may evoke the controversial Section 377 of the Indian Penal code, titled “Unnatural offenses”, which states that “whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine” (http://devgan.in/indian_penal_code/chapter_16.php#s377).

about their marriages with no concern for family and social expectations (examples from Citrā Mudgal's *Āvām* and Surendra Varmā's *Mujhe cānd cāhie* and Manohar Śyām Jośī's *Kasap*).

In the public sphere, politics is also deteriorating (*rājñītik mūlyom kā atikraman*), both at local and central levels. It has started to follow the laws of the market and of personal interest; ideals are dead, corruption is spreading. Cauhān (pp. 128-129) refers to Manohar Śyām Jośī's satirical work *Netājī kahin* as to an exemplifying text, while Paṭel (p. 47) quotes multiple short stories like Uday Prakāś's *Pol gomrā kā skūṭar*, Amrīksimh's *Dīp*, Maitraiyaī Puṣpā's *Śatrañj ke khilārī*, Girirāj Kiśor's *Vī. āī. pī. tathā lālghar* and Dāmodar Dīkṣit's *Ghoṭālā*.

III) *Sāṃskṛtik mūlyom se palāyan*

Due to globalization Indian culture and civilization are deeply influenced by those of the West. Under the effect of tv, movies, malls and internet, Indian people are distancing themselves from the traditional culture and the protagonists of recent Hindi novels perfectly mirror this situation. As previously mentioned they are escaping from marriage, family, society and religion (Cauhān, 2011, pp. 23-25 and Paṭel, 2013, pp. 50-53). When discussing the idea of *parivār se palāyan*, for instance, Paṭel and Cauhān state that family is no longer a solid institution. Not only conjugal relations, but also the relations between parents and sons, brothers and sisters nowadays appear empty. On this matter Paṭel (p. 51) refers to Mehrunnisā Parvez's *Girvī rakhī dhūp* as a significant story: it deals with changing values in contemporary society and in particular with the indifference of a family towards their old father. Other brief examples are taken from Citrā Mudgal's *Āvām*, where a woman is depicted while thanking god for her father's death, and from Jayā Jādvānī's *Tattvamasi*, where a girl prefers to stay at school than go home, due to the tensions in her family (Cauhān, 2011, pp. 145-149).

On the crisis of the institution of education (*śikṣā se palāyan*) the critics point out that people seem to have lost the value of education and are interested in wealth and comforts only. On this theme multiple short stories can be mentioned: Jayanandan's *Boḍḍīgārd*, Sūryabālā's *Kaṅgāl* and *Dīrgh*, Mṛṅāl Pāṇḍe's *Umeśjī and* Maheś Kaṭāre's *Is subah kā kyā nām dūm* show a deteriorating educational system and environment, with an increasing rate of unemployment among educated people (Paṭel, 2013, p. 52). Among the novels, Cauhān (p. 154) quotes Surendra Varmā's *Do murdom ke lie guldastā*, whose protagonist abandons the academic world and becomes a gigolo.

IV) *Śravaṇśīltā*

If during the modern era visual elements were predominant, in the postmodern context echoes and resonances play a fundamental role, giving new meanings to facts and situations. These resonances are created through three main devices, which are *vivibhinatā*, *āvṛtti* and *pratīytā* (Cauhān, 2011, pp. 26-31 and Paṭel, 2013, pp. 53-54). With *vivi-*

bhinnatā the authors translate the Derridian neologism *différance* (see the previous section, note 30), recalling simultaneously the idea of deferral and differentiation, hence both a temporal and spatial movement. Cauhān (p. 159) says that it is generated through similes (*upmā*), metaphors (*rūpak*), allusions (*saṅket*), suggestions (*vyañjnā*), symbols (*pratīk*), etc. Through the lenses of *différance* there are no more univocal and stable meanings. *Āvṛtti* translates the concept of iterability (see note 31). Through this device a text, or a part of one, is duplicated with an alteration (according to the Derridian philosophy), since iterability implies a modified repetition and not only reiteration. Finally, *pratīytā* or *pratīptā* (reversal, see note 32) is defined as the use of a linguistic unit in opposition to another. If Paṭel does not investigate these concepts in detail (he devotes to them less than two pages), Cauhān attempts a deeper analysis, providing examples from various novels (like Surendra Varmā's *Do murdom ke lie guldastā*, Mṛdulā Garg's *Cittakobrā*, Jayā Jādvānī's *Tattvamasi*, Alkā Sarāvgī's *Kali-kathā: vāyā bāipās*), but particularly from Surendra Varmā's *Mujhe cānd cāhie*. Below I will summarize the critic's main arguments and examples from the latter novel.

With regard to *vivibhinnatā* Cauhān focuses on the symbolic value of the title of the novel: in a general sense “reaching the moon” stands for reaching happiness, and Varṣā, the protagonist, does whatever is possible to attain it. Moreover, the moon is connected to the sky, to the dimension of imagination, in opposition to the earth which is the basis of reality. Varṣā decides to abandon her house and her conservative reality to seek a satisfying career and the world of her dreams. At the same time the moon stays also for Harṣ's love. Varṣā starts her relationship with this young actor and the moon seems to become full. Unfortunately, on the moon's surface there are several dark spots as well, and they spill onto Varṣā's life: in fact, she becomes an unmarried mother and her companion dies. A veiled anticipation of Varṣā's troubles can be found in her name: actually her birth name was Silbil, but she decided to change it into Varṣā. The moon is clearly visible when the sky is clear, but when it *rains* the moon is darkened by clouds: Varṣā means rain and therefore it is impossible for her to reach her desired moon completely.

As regards the concept of iterability in connection with intertextuality (*antar-pāṭhīya āvṛttiparak śravaṅśīltā*) Cauhān (pp. 188-199) shows the multiple references made by Surendra Varmā to the work of the Sanskrit poet Kālidāsa. First of all, when Silbil decides to change her name to Varṣā, she explains her reasons to her father. She has read Kālidāsa's *Ṛtusamhāra* (the long poem for the six Indian seasons) and she especially liked the rainy season, Varṣā. Moreover, Cauhān suggests a possible parallel between the effect of the rainy season and of Varṣā's work on her family: as the monsoon has a fundamental role in assuring the earth fertility and prosperity, in the same way Varṣā, gaining success, assures her family wealth. The second reference to Kālidāsa is to *Meghadūta* (*The Cloud Messenger*): in this case Varṣā is missing her lover Harṣ, who has moved from Delhi to Mumbai. She remembers the condition of separation described by the Sanskrit poem, hence she recalls a literary *topos*, intertwining it with her personal experience

(iterability as repetition with alteration). There are two more references to Kālidāsa, the first one to *Śakuntalā* (to describe a woman's beauty) and the second one to *Raghuvamśa*. When Varṣā becomes a famous actress she is served and attended in all her personal needs. Once she remembers some verses from *Raghuvamśa*, where Rāma and Lakṣmaṇ, without even asking, are served by nature and gods.

Finally, concerning reversal (*pratīptā*) and intertextuality, the critic points out the contrast between the present time (Varṣā's time) and a mythical/traditional past. Varṣā's father, for instance, is compared to the mythical mountain king Himālaya: in the girl's eyes, her father, differently from Himālaya, does not care about her happiness and only wants to impose his decisions (Cauhān, 2011, pp. 183-184). Towards the end of the novel, after her lover's death, Varṣā remembers some verses from the *Gītā*. In this case, supposedly, there is a contraposition between Harṣ and Arjuna's behavior. As in Kṛṣṇa's words Arjuna will fulfill his *dharma* by fighting: in this way he will find happiness both in killing or being killed. But Harṣ has chosen a different path: he has attempted to escape from his life finding an illusory refuge in drugs and committed suicide. Finally, Cauhān identifies a further contraposition between how Varṣā reacts to Harṣ's death and how she is supposed to react. Again the girl remembers some verses from the *Gītā*, related to the imperishable and eternal nature of the soul. After the body's death, the soul is still alive, so there should be no reason for mourning. Nonetheless, in actual fact, Varṣā is overcome by her lover's death (Cauhān, 2011, pp. 185-186).

In conclusion, both Paṭel and Cauhān refer to Śītāṃsu's article as an essential source, but the structure and aim of their texts is completely different. Paṭel's contribution starts from the analysis of Śītāṃsu's postmodern elements, but they do not occupy a central place. Basically they are functional to the introduction of the author's main interest, that is to say Uday Prakāś's work and its relation with postmodern tendencies. In addition to this, Paṭel provides an overview of the concepts of *ādhunikā* and *uttar-ādhunikā*. On the contrary, Cauhān's goal is to develop Śītāṃsu's argument and provide examples from recent Hindi novels. Some of them, referring particularly to the concept of *śravaṇśīlā* and intertextuality, can be quite interesting although I am not sure that they fit perfectly with the Derridian concepts of *différance*, iterability and reversal. Nevertheless, they can be good examples of echoes revealing themselves to a careful reader, and of intertextual games. Unfortunately, in some other cases, the author's quotations do not seem to be so relevant nor pertinent. This is the case, for instance, of the excerpts quoted from *Mujhe cānd cāhie on naśākhori kī līlā*, hence on the possible role of drugs and alcohol in the postmodern *līlā*. In the first episode one of the protagonists (Harṣ) is drinking some Johnny Walker with another man, while in the second one Varṣā is having a beer with a friend. There is reference to alcohol, to the fact that nowadays even females drink, but nothing more. Alcohol, in these excerpts, does not become a "mental escape" (on this see, for instance, Cohen and Taylor, 1992, pp. 145-147) from the complexity of the contemporary

world, nor alters the characters' mental conditions, twisting the perception of reality. Another doubtful example can be found in relation to the idea of *sāmājīk mūlyom se palāyan*, hence referring to characters who are supposedly escaping from social values. Cauhān (p. 153) quotes an episode from Manohar Śyām Jośī's *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī*, where the protagonist meets a relative, Hemulī Bojyū, and is asked to take a rest from his "social tour" and to have a cup of tea with her. Hariyā tries to refuse the invitation saying that that was not the right day to stop at the old lady's place. Cauhān simply cites these few lines from the novel and states that from the lady's words "it is clear that there is an escape from social values. At the same time Hariyā is also fleeing social customs and traditions"⁴³. Maybe the old lady is using a flirtatious tone (which is considered not suitable for a rather old widow) and in this sense she is passing some social conventions, but the author does not say anything like that nor does he justify his statement. Moreover, as regards Hariyā's behavior, it is even harder to understand why it should be an example of *sāmājīk mūlyom se palāyan*: he is simply a rather odd man, who has developed a sort of "grammar" to handle his social visits, firmly establishing where and when to stop for a tea and a longer talk. Hence, I would probably read his refusal more as an example of his obsessions rather than a denial of social norms.

2.2.4. Sudhīs Pacaurī

I would like to start this section by referring to the interview I had with the critic Sudhīs Pacaurī in February 2016 at the University of Delhi. Arranging a meeting with him was initially quite complicated, but it represented an extremely good chance to clarify some concepts that I had previously read in some of his texts. First of all, I asked the scholar the same question that many people have put to me since the beginning of my research project: how can we talk about postmodernism in India, when there is probably not yet any proper modernity? Pacaurī started to describe India as a kaleidoscopic and complex reality, a country dominated by strong contradictions, where traces of different eras coexist undisturbed. We can find traces of pre-modernity in *ādivāsī*'s lifestyle; traces of modernity in democratic institutions in the development of an extended middle class; traces of postmodernity in the revolution of telecommunications, in participation in the phenomena of consumerism and globalization. According to the critic, the most relevant changes towards a postmodern condition started during the Nineties, during Narasimha Rao's term as Prime Minister. From an international point of view it was a decade dominated by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and by the creation of a unipolar world, centered on the North-American model. From a local perspective it was characterized by a considerable leap forward in the direction of liberalization, global market, consumerism

⁴³ स्पष्ट होता है कि वह सामाजिक-मूल्य से पलायन करती है। साथ ही हरिया भी सामाजिक रीति-रिवाज से पलायन करता है। (Cauhān, 2011, p. 153).

and advanced capitalism. Despite this, areas of serious backwardness were clearly visible. One major issue of this period was, moreover, an upsurge in communal violence: episodes like the demolition of the Bābrī Masjid in 1992⁴⁴ again foregrounded the issue of self and national identity.

As regards the Hindi literary field, Pacaurī started his discourse with Premchand and his socially engaged prose. The writer brought to light the issues of the subaltern and the marginalized in a realist style, setting a model for many authors of the Twentieth century. Even a more recent tendency like *nayī kahānī*⁴⁵ is indebted to him, particularly in terms of realism. Nonetheless, neither Premchand nor the majority of the authors who followed directly experienced oppression or discrimination. Until the dawn of the new millennium the downtrodden groups had no real chance to give voice to their sorrows, concerns and aspirations. With the process of liberalization social changes considerably accelerated (even if they mainly involved the middle class), and women and dalits started to lay claim to their rights and to public recognition. These groups wanted to talk about their lives in the first person. The emergence of these new voices is considered one of the essential ingredients of the contemporary literary scenario and may be linked to the postmodern condition.

After this general introduction, I asked the scholar to indicate some novels for me that he considered close to postmodernism. The first example he mentioned was *Mujhe cānd cāhie* (1993) by Surendra Varmā⁴⁶. Its protagonist Varṣā is quite different from the usual heroines of the previous decades. Until *nayī kahānī*, women were usually depicted as sensitive and emotional, and extremely devoted to their partners. Varṣā is different. She is much more self-centered. Her personal realization is primarily connected to the public sphere, to her job and artistic experiences (she is an actress). Even when her partner dies, she does not step back. To Pacaurī, such a character shocked the Indian middle class, even though (or possibly because) she mirrors actual social changes. In this sense, within the novel, the reader can find some possible postmodern traces. Nonetheless, the critic clearly underlined that he was not talking about postmodernism as a full-bloom phenomenon, rather about possible postmodern clues or traces.

⁴⁴ On 6 December 1992, a large crowd of Hindu activists demolished the sixteenth-century Bābrī Mosque in the city of Ayodhyā (see, for instance, Bacchetta, 2000, pp. 255-284; Gregg, 2104, pp. 52-72; McGuire, Reeves and Brasted, 1996). The mosque was “charged” with being built on a Hindu sacred site, that is to say on Rām’s birthplace. During the 1980s the Vishva Hindu Parishad, together with BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), started a campaign to build a new temple there, dedicated to god Rām. On 6 December 1992 a rally was organized in Ayodhyā, involving about 150.000 volunteers, with devastating consequences.

⁴⁵ *Nayī kahānī* is a Hindi literary movement born during the Fifties, mainly associated with the names of Kamleśvar, Mohan Rakeś and Rājendra Yādav. New Story writers dealt with people’s conditions in a changed social context (dominated by rapid urbanization and industrialization), facing alienation, the crisis of values, and difficulties in finding a new, modern identity. For the manifesto of *nayī kahānī* see Kamleśvar 1969; while for a general introduction see Consolaro, 2011a, pp. 178-187 and Roadarmel, 1974.

⁴⁶ Later in this section I will refer again to *Mujhe cānd cāhie* and to a more extended analysis provided by Pacaurī in *Uttar-yathārthvād* (2012) and *Uttar-ādhunik sāhityik vimarś* (2010).

His further examples were two novels by Manohar Śyām Jośī *Kuru kuru svāhā* (1980) and *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī* (1994). Regarding the former he simply invited me to think about the main character (whose name is exactly the author’s name, Manohar Śyām Jośī). At a first glance, he may appear a common, realist character, well integrated within a specific historical and socio-cultural background. But he is actually a “magical character”, whose identity is constructed on different layers. As for Hariyā’s story⁴⁷, Pacaurī pointed out the intrinsic critique to the realist tradition that it carries. Initially the novel deals with Hariyā’s miserable life, completely devoted to the care of his sick father. This first part of the account may seem close to the realist tradition, but this semblance vanishes at the death of Hariyā’s father. From this moment on the story breaks into multiple fragments with no chance of establishing an ultimate version. Another essential aspect of the novel is its close tie with the local community from which it emerges, that is the *kumāūmnī*⁴⁸ community in Delhi. Until the end of Twentieth century a work of art was considered representative of society in a broad sense. Now literature is linked to little, local traditions and, within the novel, a sort of identity is suggested between the story and the *kumāūmnī* community.

Pacaurī’s last examples referred to Vinod Kumār Śukla’s prose and particularly to his last novels *Khilegā to dekhemge* (1996) and *Dīvār meṃ ek khiṛkī rahtī thī* (1997). Both can be defined as celebrations of “small things”, and are characterized by extremely reduced plots, by the absence of great events or tragedies, didactic intent or eternal truths. In particular, the scholar briefly lingered over a central image of the second novel (for an introduction to the novel see section 3.7), that is the elephant which appears on the protagonist’s way to school. The pachyderm may appear just as an alternative vehicle which connects Raghuvar Prasād’s (the protagonist) home and workplace, but is actually something more. First of all the elephant walks ponderously and provides a different perspective from which to observe everyday reality. The huge animal reminds us of another type of life, belonging to ancient times, which proceeds un-rushed and in accordance with nature. According to Pacaurī, this lifestyle is comparable to that of the *ādivāsī* and represents a possible alternative to the frenzy of the contemporary world. Another noteworthy aspect of the novel is that the main characters, Raghuvar Prasād and his wife, despite their humble conditions, never complain about anything. This is undoubtedly a new way of looking at the lower-middle-class, avoiding the hard tones of social realism.

To conclude the interview Pacaurī shortly recapitulated two of the most relevant aspects of postmodernism. Firstly, he recalled the progressive detachment from modernist master narratives, which are perceived as exhausted. Secondly, he highlighted the new role acquired in literature by pleasure (see also section 4.3). In the consumer society, peo-

⁴⁷ For this novel too, I will broaden the analysis later, as per Pacaurī’s texts mentioned in note 1. For a general introduction see section 1.1.

⁴⁸ See section 1.1 note 2.

ple do not want to buy sorrow and suffering (which is a fundamental part of the realistic tradition), but well-being and happiness. Therefore we start to encounter texts whose plot is extremely reduced, with no great ideals or teaching. We find mosaics of daily-life images (no longer charged with the idea of social commitment), apparently “light plots” with plenty of sexual allusions and fascinating puns. Literature becomes a pleasurable game and a product of the consumer society, erasing the distance between its high and popular forms.

Let us move now to Sudhīś Pacaurī’s text specifically devoted to postmodern issues, that is *Uttar-ādhunik sāhityik vimarś* (*Postmodern literary discourse*, 2010). Like the critics introduced in the previous sections — Śītāṃśu, Paṭel and Cauhān — Pacaurī highlights the skepticism towards postmodernism which dominates the world of Hindi literary critique. Postmodernism is often considered as a concept borrowed from Western societies, a mere imported fashion. To him, however, postmodernism is nowadays an all-pervading economic and cultural condition which cannot be neglected. In his contribution Pacaurī provides a theoretical overview of postmodernism, based on Western thinkers, but also the analysis of some Hindi texts which can be assimilated to this cultural phenomenon. The critics that he mentions include, for instance, McGown⁴⁹, who identified in the deconstruction of the totalizing nature of capitalism the main goal of postmodernism (Pacaurī, 2010, pp. 14-15); Baudrillard⁵⁰ and his concepts of signs and simulacra (pp. 16-17, 97-98); Rorty, who defined postmodernism as an “ironist theory” (*viḍambanātmak siddhāntikī*), which rejects eternal truths and univocal conclusions (pp. 21-22). From Jameson Pacaurī recalls the well-known definition of postmodernism as the “cultural logic” (*sāṃskṛitik tark*) of late capitalism (p. 15), the ideas of “death of the subject”⁵¹ (*kartā*

⁴⁹ Author of the text *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (1991), John McGown provides a comprehensive overview of the philosophical bases of postmodernism and opens a new perspective on its political implications. As stated in the text’s preface, the author attempts to understand what postmodernism is “by examining a specific form of cultural critique that has become increasingly conspicuous in the academy since about 1975” (McGown, 1991, p. ix). Basically he discusses phenomena such as poststructuralism (referring to Derrida and Foucault), contemporary Marxism (with references to Jameson, Eagleton and Said), and neo-pragmatism (referring to Lyotard and Rorty) as variants of postmodernism.

⁵⁰ Pacaurī explicitly refers to Baudrillard’s texts *In the Shadow of Silent Majorities* (1978) and *Simulations* (1983). The former discusses the relation between masses and meaning in the media society. In the contemporary world, argues the French philosopher and sociologist, communication merely communicates itself. Masses, in a sort of “collective retaliation”, are indifferent to history, political events, art and culture. All they do is “enjoy the spectacle”. *Simulations* comprises the English translation of Baudrillard’s previous texts, *Simulacre et Simulations* (1981) and *L’Echange Symbolique et la Mort* (1977). Baudrillard claims that, in our contemporary world, all reality and meaning have been replaced with symbols and signs, which do not refer to anything except themselves. The illusion of reality becomes more and more impossible, and, simultaneously, the line between true and false, the real and its artificial form becomes evanescent.

⁵¹ If the great modernist authors were associated with the idea of uniqueness and distinctiveness, such a perception of the artist is no longer possible in the contemporary society. Total innovation appears impossible as everything has already been invented or said. The unique chance seems to be recycling the past through the technique of pastiche (which differs from parody as it supposedly lacks any ironic connotation). See the original argument in Jameson 2007, pp. 31-34.

kī mr̥tyu), “effacement of history” (*itihās ke vilop*) “and schizophrenic writing”⁵² (pp. 36-38). Moreover, the scholar refers to Lyotard and the end of the modernist master-narratives (pp. 26-28); Foucault⁵³ and his genealogy (translated into Hindi with the term *ānu-vaṃsikī*; pp. 44-57); Derrida and his philosophy of deconstruction (pp. 78-95). These are just some examples, but many others can easily be found. Among the Indian intellectuals Pacaurī mentions Aijaz Ahmad, a Marxist theorist and political commentator, detractor of post-structuralism and postmodernism. Particularly Pacaurī (pp. 58-77) deals with the text *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literature* (1992), where Ahmad discusses the role of theory and intellectuals in the movement against colonialism and imperialism. The text is known also because of its polemical considerations on Fredric Jameson’s *Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism*, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*, and in general about the group of subaltern studies. According to Pacaurī, Ahmad aims to construct a new, valid literary theory but he does not accept the challenges of postmodernism, or better said, is unable to provide satisfying answers to the questions posed by postmodernism.

Later, in a chapter titled *Parody aur Pastiche (peroḍī aur peśīc*, pp. 96-117), Pacaurī discusses some of the most relevant features of postmodern literature. Intertextuality is undoubtedly the first one. In the contemporary world, in fact, intertextuality seems to have become the very condition of textuality: it is no longer possible to create something completely new, there will necessarily be references to the past and to previous works. Through pastiche — a term that he glosses as *kataran sāhitya*, hence “clipping literature” — the boundaries between what is literary and what is not are broken. “Here history, autobiography, biography, everything is mixed. Here literary genres are broken, their fixed forms are broken. They can no longer be eternal, perfect and pure. Here the reflections of women, minorities, dalits and subaltern groups find a place”⁵⁴. Parody is defined as an ironic form of intertextuality (*antarpāṭhīyā kā vyaṅgyātmak rūp*) and as

⁵² Postmodern art recycles symbols, styles and themes of the past, but without charging them with essential meanings. In the media society the past is just an accumulation of images, and in such a context the subject becomes “schizophrenic”. If usually the meaning of a sentence is provided by the inter-relation among its signifiers, in case of schizophrenic disorders the signifying chain is interrupted. The subject perceives a series of isolated signifiers, discontinuous and disjointed, which cannot be reconnected to a linear sequence. A schizophrenic subject lives in a perpetual present time, disconnected from past and future: this is exactly the subject’s living condition in the present time. The cultural product of such a condition will inevitably be fragmentation. See the original argument in Jameson, 2007, pp. 42-44.

⁵³ Pacaurī specifically quotes *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), *The History of Sexuality* (1976-1984). Through these texts a new way of interpreting relations between knowledge, power and body emerges. Knowledge and power are inseparable: exercising power always generates new forms of knowledge and simultaneously knowledge influences power. Moreover, Foucault (particularly in *Discipline and Punish*) highlights the new centrality of the body (which is a fundamental aspect of post-modernity) and proposes a connection between the human desire for knowledge and for physical pleasure.

⁵⁴ यहाँ इतिहास, आत्मकथा, जीवनी सब मिश्रित हो उठता है। यहाँ साहित्य की विधाएँ टूट जाती हैं, उनके पक्के रूप टूट जाते हैं। वे शाश्वत, मुकम्मल और शुद्ध नहीं रह पाते। यहाँ ‘महिला विमर्श’ और ‘अल्पसंख्यक’ और दलित या पिछड़े विमर्श भी जगह पाते हैं (Pacaurī, 2010, p. 99).

another essential postmodern device for looking at reality. It is particularly useful to look at the past: through parody history can be recovered, but in a new manner, abandoning its traditional aura of grandiosity (p. 100). Parody unmasks the misconception that it is possible to reach an ultimate truth about the past (p. 106). On this, it is important to notice that for Pacaurī postmodernism does not mean “the end of history”, it simply brings to light the incompleteness of traditional forms of knowledge. For postmodernism an event does not have a fixed meaning, but multiple possible meanings. The critic, then, lists some authors and novels which can be considered postmodern, where both parody and pastiche are visible. Among the Western ones he quotes Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Günter Grass’s *Tin Drum*, Doctorow’s *Loon Lake*, Reed’s *The Terrible Twos*, Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum*, Findley’s *Famous Last Words* and Rushdie’s *Shame*. From the Hindi literary field he cites Manohar Śyām Jośī’s *Kuru-kuru svāhā*, *Kasap* and *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī*, Surendra Varmā’s *Mujhe cānd cāhie*, Bhagvānsimh’s *Apne apne Rām*, and Virendra Jain’s *Ḍūb* (p. 109).

Another essential characteristic of postmodernism that Pacaurī points out is its contradictory nature. Postmodernism accepts it and does not try to conceal the tensions between aesthetic, historical and textual dimensions, between history (*itihās*) and text (*pāṭh*). Postmodernism challenges the idea of “aura of the work of art”⁵⁵, which traditionally placed art on a separate level from life. Literature becomes a product of the consumer society and the distance between high and popular literature is erased (pp. 102-103).

I would like to move now to two chapters that are particularly thought-provoking in light of my research interests. The first one, *Hariyā kī hairānī* (*Hariyā’s perplexity*, pp. 136-148) is devoted to the almost homonymous novel by Manohar Śyām Jośī (*Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī*, 1994); the second one *Yahī hai rāiṭ cois bebī! (ā hā!)* (*This is the right choice baby, a-ha*, pp. 157-166) devoted to *Mujhe cānd cāhie* by Surendra Varmā.

Pacaurī commences his discourse on Hariyā’s story by comparing its author to Umberto Eco: “our Umberto Eco wrote Hariyā in Hindi. Hariyā the illegitimate is surpassing Eco’s ‘Pendulum’ and ‘Rose’”⁵⁶. The story is highly provocative and, for quite some time, it disconcerted the writers’ community exactly as, within the novel, Hariyā’s behavior troubled many members of the *kumāūmnī* community in Delhi. Hariyā is depicted as a simple man, devoted to the care of sick people, unconcerned about the pleasures of life.

⁵⁵ Here we can find a reference to *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) by Walter Benjamin. The German philosopher and writer argued that technical innovations determined a radical change in the perception of the work of art. Cinema, photography, the phonograph, for instance, rendered meaningless the traditional concept of “authenticity” of the work of art. When we look to a renaissance painting there is a considerable difference if it is the original one or a copy, but when we watch a movie this distinction is irrelevant. Many people will be watching the same film through several copies in different movie theaters, and nobody will enjoy it in a privileged way. To Benjamin, mechanical reproduction diminishes the *aura* of a work of art, hence its unique aesthetic authority.

⁵⁶ अपने उम्बर्टो इको ने हिन्दी में हरिया लिख दिया है। हरिया हरामी इको के ‘पेंडुलम’ और ‘रोज’ दोनों को छका रहा है (Pacaurī, 2010, p. 136).

Despite the pain and sorrows of his life he has never felt perplexed. Nonetheless, something changes during a visit to some relatives. A young boy Atul shows him a town with the intriguing name of Goomalling on a map of Australia. This name prompts Hariyā to muse about the affinity with the word *gū*, which means “feces”. How is it possible that people can live in such a place? Atul explains that human beings can live almost everywhere, challenging the most inhospitable conditions. There will probably be someone in Goomalling who is experiencing Hariyā’s own difficulties. From this moment on Hariyā becomes obsessed with the idea of his alter-ego, a man like him devoting his life to a sick father. The perplexity of our protagonist increases when he hears the name of Goomalling (or maybe *Gūmāliṅ* would be more correct in this case) from one of his father’s friends, Banno. She is actually quite an old lady suffering from amnesia, who is even no longer able to recognize her relatives. Hariyā is chatting with Banno’s son when she enters the scene asking “You wretch! You’re leaving without cleaning out Abbajaan’s latrine? You think we’re Goomalling worshippers, is that it?” (Joshi, 2009, p. 34). Hariyā is completely disconcerted: how is it possible that Banno knows about Goomalling? And is that Goomalling the same of the map of Australia? Banno and his father shared many of their memories, so if Goomalling was in her mind, it had to be in his father’s mind too. So why hadn’t his father ever mentioned that place? In Jośī’s words:

Was Goomalling some dangerous place that people were afraid even to mention? Or was Goomalling just some lie born of senility? And if that was the case, was the Goomalling on the map, too, just a falsehood? And the picture kept repeating itself in Hariya’s head: that of a father and a son irretrievably connected by stuck shit, what was the false Goomalling that formed the background of the picture? And was that the one that popped up in Banno’s senile mind or the one on the map? (Joshi, 2009, pp. 35-36)

But the reader is made to ask some further questions: did Banno really say Goomalling or something like *gū kā liṅ* (that means “a *liṅ* made of feces”)? Is everything happening in Hariyā’s mind, due to the power of suggestion? In any event, Hariyā’s behavior becomes increasingly strange and he starts to represent an intricate argument for his community: according to the doctor an unknown illness affects his brain, while another notable believes him to be possessed by spirits. And the situation becomes worse when Hariyā’s father dies and an unexpected treasure is found. In an old trunk, in fact, Hariyā discovers jewelry, gold and silver coins, precious stones, but most interestingly some pornographic pictures of his father and a letter from a mysterious lama. In the letter, the deceased is accused of stealing a holy trunk from the deity of *Gūmāliṅ*, a mythical place somewhere in the Himalayas. If the treasure is not returned, his whole family will be cursed. Hariyā decides therefore to set out for *Gūmāliṅ* to atone for his parent’s sin. The protagonist’s choice is interpreted in various ways by the members of the community: according to a first group he has probably gone mad due to all the sorrows he has experienced; to a second group, he is just pretending to return the trunk, as he wants to keep the

treasure for himself; to the last one he is the ideal son, wishing to save his father's spirit and memory. Hariyā leaves for the mysterious site of Gūmāliṅg, but never comes back: the community will never know what actually happened. People attempt to investigate and various theories are formulated, with the sole result that the story is broken up into a range of potentially true and false accounts. To Pacaurī (p. 142) this is a crucial aspect of the story, which can be linked to post-structuralism: everyone can provide a different reading of the story, as nothing is universal and eternal. There is no chance to establish a final truth, but just personal and subjective interpretations.

Another interesting aspect of the novel is the change within the community determined by the spread of television. At the time of Hariyā's story, television had yet not entered every house and the people of the community had extremely simple forms of entertainment, especially recounting tales and stories to each other. Immediately after Hariyā's disappearance, one of the most popular entertainment activities was gossiping and wondering about him, forging new narratives of what must have happened. However, after the arrival of TV, only the elder generations continued to talk about Hariyā's story and to keep it alive. It seems that the community is no longer interested in his tale. Nonetheless, to Atul — who in the meanwhile has become an eminent subject of the community, and has started to work in an American University as an IT engineer — the bond between the story and the community is a sort of necessity: “whether you write or not, live or die, the story of the perplexity of Hariya Hercules would live as long as our community did, because a story could not exist without perplexity, and our community could not exist without stories” (Joshi, 2009, p. 154).

But let us return for a moment to the role of television within the narrative, since Pacaurī establishes an interesting parallel between TV and the mirror. First of all, how is the mirror (physically or as a metaphor) present in the story? Hariyā, after hearing about Goomalling, starts to have some strange epileptic-like fits, where he sees his own Australian double (Harry) struggling with his father's chronic constipation (the old man's name will be Gary, and he will be his father's double). As previously mentioned, Hariyā progressively becomes obsessed by the idea of the double, somebody exactly like him, *like the one who looks back at him from the mirror* (Joshi, 2009, p. 28). The story hence becomes a game of reflected images, a game of *mirrors*. Moreover, towards the end of the story Hariyā is said to have crossed the mysterious mirror of Gūmāliṅg and to have joined the First Female Other. In actual fact Hariyā has disappeared, but neither the community nor the reader knows what has happened. On this Pacaurī wonders: after the arrival of television (which has substituted the mirror in providing the image of “the other”), is it possible for us to lose ourselves while watching television in search of the other, exactly as Hariyā lost himself in the mirror of Gūmāliṅg (Pacaurī, 2010, p. 144)?

Two further points are raised by the critic, respectively related to literature and realism and to the community of writers. On the former, Pacaurī argues that Hariyā's story,

through its games of reflections, deeply questions realism and represents a breakthrough in Hindi literature. He believes that

those who consider literature as a mirror of society, according to this meaning of Gūmāliṅg, who keep on searching for their own reflection in literature, they find their own end as the realist school. Hariyā Harkulīz turns out to be such a dangerous post-realistic narrator. Hariyā's story goes further, destroying quite a few realistic suppliers of literature and positivistic doctrines⁵⁷.

On the latter, he warns the community of writers of the risks implicit in the world of global media: it seems that writers have forgotten what being perplexed means. In this sense, providing a little perplexity again is the real goal that Jośī's novel wants to achieve (p. 148).

The second example of textual analysis that I wish to mention is that based on Surendra Varmā's *Mujhe cānd cāhie*. Basically the novel is a story of female emancipation, whose protagonist, Silbil, starts her conflictual journey during the high-school period by changing her name. Her name will not be Silbil anymore "nor Yaśodā, the name will be Varṣā Vaśiṣṭh. The reason, because there is no beauty in Yaśodā. There is no 'moon' in the name Yaśodā. Right here starts her search for the moon. And until the last page Silbil thinks about her aesthetic search, that is to say, to her search for the moon and for Varṣā"⁵⁸. Silbil comes from a traditionalist family: her father is a Sanskrit teacher, none of her relatives has ever tried an acting career, nor left the small town of Shahjahanpur. The arrival at her College of a new English teacher, Miss Divyā Katyāl, radically changes Silbil's life. Miss Katyāl comes from Lucknow and represents a sort of agent of "modernization" and of the urban world. Thanks to her, Silbil starts to read many important authors of world literature and starts to wonder about the meaning of life: will she live as her relatives did? Silbil reacts to the limitations of her social and family background and starts training as an actress. She moves to Lucknow and, while her parents would like to see her married, she decides to enter the National School of Drama. During this period she meets a young actor Harṣ, who will become her lover. Time passes and Silbil, now with name Varṣā, approaches the world of cinema. She becomes a successful actress, but life is not so simple as it might appear: it is not so easy in fact to conciliate

⁵⁷ साहित्य जिन्होंने समाज का दर्पण मान रखा है, गूमालिंग के इस अर्थ के अनुसार, जो साहित्य में अपनी छाया खोजते रहते हैं, यथार्थवादी स्कूल की तरह मृत्यु को प्राप्त होते हैं। हरिया हरकुलीज इतना भयावह उत्तर-यथार्थवादी कथाकार ठहरा। हरिया की यह कथा साहित्य की कई यथार्थवादी दुकानों को, पोजिटिविस्ट सम्प्रदायों को ध्वस्त करती हुई आगे निकल जाती है। (Pacaurī, 2010, p. 146).

⁵⁸ यशोदा नहीं, नाम होगा वर्षा वशिष्ठ। कारण, यशोदा नाम में कोई सुन्दरता नहीं है। यशोदा के नाम में 'चाँद' नहीं है। चाँद की तलाश यहीं से शुरू होती है। और अन्तिम पृष्ठ तक सिलबिल सौन्दर्य-संधान यानी चाँद-संधान यानी वर्षा-संधान के बारे में सोचती है। (Pacaurī, 2010, p. 157)

art, work, relationships. Harṣ, for instance, is unable to find his own balance and seeks refuge in drugs. Varṣā gets pregnant, but Harṣ's addiction leads to his death.

At a first glance, the novel may appear quite realistic: during the closing decades of the Twentieth century many women could have identified themselves in Varṣā, a brave young lady ready to challenge her world. Moreover, according to the critic (p. 161), the novel can be read as a brief history of the National School of Drama and Indian cinema, as many celebrities can be found in Varṣā's story and characterization (he quotes, for instance Śobhnā Bhūṭānī⁵⁹ and Nīnā Guptā⁶⁰). Nonetheless, to Pacaurī (p. 160) it would be too simplistic to read the novel through the lenses of realism only. For instance, a psychological reading would be possible. From this point of view Silbil becomes a symbol of sexual repression and her life experience a journey of liberation of the body, of desire through art and beauty. Apart from this, two further currents can be identified, existentialism (*astitvavād*) and consumerism (*upabhoktāvād*). In the first part of the story the protagonist perceives her world as incomprehensible and restrictive. She knows that she wants something more. She wants the moon. Here we can find the existentialist shades of the novel, with intertextual references to Albert Camus' *Caligula* and Anton Čechov's *The Seagull*⁶¹. It is noteworthy that, before the novel begins, Varmā quotes some lines from *Caligula*, where the Roman Emperor says that he "suddenly felt a desire for the impossible", that his world "is quite intolerable" and because of this he wanted "the moon, or happiness, or eternal life — something, in fact, that may sound crazy, but which is not of this world" (Camus, 1958, p. 8). This can actually be seen as meaningful anticipation of Silbil/Varṣā's life journey. She also wants the moon, happiness, she wants something that seems impossible. And the contraposition between this desire and the suffering for her own condition is the element which causes Varṣā's life to progress. In order to fulfill her existentialist aspiration Varṣā reaches Bollywood and is completely seduced by its spell. Through the mechanism of the world of cinema the existentialist dimension is progressively passed, overshadowed by appearance and glamour. In Pacaurī's opinion, the existentialist aspiration definitely dies with Harṣ's death and its place is taken by money and me-

⁵⁹ Known also as Shobhana Siddique, she studied at the National School of Drama, and wrote short stories and plays. She tragically died by drowning in 1974. One of her short stories (*Full to the Brim*) is available in an English translation in Vanita and Kidwai, 2000, pp. 304-308.

⁶⁰ A popular Indian actress and director, Nīnā Guptā has worked both for Indian cinema and television. She starred alongside Madhuri Dixit in the film *Khalnāyak*; while in television, she worked for various serials, like *Khāndhān* (1985), *Yātrā* (1986), *Dard* (1994), *Cittī* (2003), *Merī bīvī kā javāb nahim* (2004), *Kitnī mohabbat* (2009). She also made appearances in several international films, like *Gandhi* (1982), *In Custody* (1993) and *Cotton Mary* (1993). Moreover, she ran a theater production company named "Sahaj Productions".

⁶¹ *Caligula* (begun in 1938 and published for the first time in 1944) is a play which shows the Roman Emperor Caligula who, torn by the death of Drusilla (his sister and mistress), ends up arming his murderers with his cruel and insane behavior. *The Seagull* (1895) stages the romantic and artistic conflicts between four characters, the fading actress Irina Arkadina, a storywriter Boris Trigorin, the aspiring actress Nina, and the playwright Konstantin Tréplev (Čechov, 1997).

dia. The great values related to art seem to disappear, leaving space to the law of supply and demand, to the values of the consumer society. Varṣā in fact, after her lover's death, does not abandon the world of cinema: she has acknowledged the primacy of the law of the market (this is the "right choice" of Pacaurī's title). In this acceptance, Varmā's protagonist has reached her moon, that is the consumer condition, where what was initially considered impossible becomes possible. For Pacaurī, without acknowledging these various levels of reading, it would be impossible to "reach the moon".

As a conclusion the critic defines the novel as a post-realist work (*uttar-yathārthvādī*⁶²), an innovation which he considers necessary to renovate Hindi literature. Post realism is, to the scholar, a possible chance for a postmodern time.

2.3. Some preliminary reflections

With the previous sections I have presented an overview of how postmodernism can be read within the Indian context, focusing on the perspectives offered by some Hindi literary critics. Particularly in Pacaurī's and Śītāmśu's contributions I found many thought-provoking aspects, which helped me to define a series of relevant postmodern features and to select the novels for my textual analysis. For instance Śītāmśu's discourse on the relationship between postmodernism and the urgency of going beyond institutional traditions inspired my reasoning on women and *dalit* writers. In section 4.4., in fact, I discuss an essential component of the recent Hindi literary scenario, which is the emergence of new voices, those of traditionally marginalized groups. These voices attempt to deconstruct two master narratives particularly pervasive in the Indian context, patriarchy and casteism, by questioning institutional traditions, such as marriage, family and societal relations. As two basic concepts of postmodernism (even from the most traditionalist Western perspectives) are plurality and a new attention for *petits récits*, it was necessary for me to understand if there is a common thread, linking postmodernism to the emergence of these new voices.

Particularly as regards women's writing, I consider Pacaurī's approach a little more problematic. As previously mentioned, during our meeting, he referred to *Mujhe cānd cāhie*'s protagonist, Varṣā, as to quite a shocking character, different from the heroines of the previous decades. Undoubtedly it is interesting to notice how this character is built by a male author and, moreover, by an author of the literary establishment like Surendra Varmā, however many predecessors can be found in women's writing even before the Nineties. Just to quote some macro-examples we may think of Kṛṣṇā Sobtī, Maitreyī Puṣpā or Mṛdulā Garg's protagonists. In *Uske hisse kī dhūp* (1975) by Mṛdulā Garg, for exam-

⁶² To the concept of post-realism, Pacaurī devoted an entire volume, entitled *Uttar-yathārthvād* (2012). Apart from recalling the analysis of *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī* and *Mujhe cānd cāhie*, the critic discusses many other novels like *Ḍūb* by Virendra Jain (pp. 99-106), *Khilegā to dekheṅge* by Vinod Kumār Śukla (pp. 107-114), *Idannamam* by Maitreyī Puṣpā (pp. 119-121) and *Apnī salībem* by Namitā Simh (pp. 122-127).

ple, Manīṣā, after a divorce and a love marriage, comes to conclude that love cannot provide satisfaction as creativity and professional realization do. Varṣā's choices and behavior, her artistic aspirations are probably no more provocative than Manīṣā's. Considering Pacaurī's text, not even in the chapter *Strītvavādī vimarś kī śuruāt* (*The beginning of the feminist discourse*) does he refer to any of these women-writers (Pacaurī, 2010, pp. 118-124). He acknowledges that social changes have begun in India, leading progressively to women's emancipation and that a new literature is emerging. He underlines that since the 1980s and 1990s women have started to claim freedom and to occupy new places in the public sphere, particularly by working outside of the home. Moreover, television has allowed question to be asked relating to the world of women, who were traditionally buried in the private dimension. This new atmosphere is leading to a new literature, but this process, at least in the Hindi literary field, is still in its earliest stages. To Pacaurī's mind (p. 120), women have to find a new way of writing, centered on their own peculiarities, they have to build a "destructive" literature, challenging males' predominant position and the phallogocentric⁶³ system. Nonetheless, according to the critic very few women-writers have already provided examples of this new literature and he mentions none of their names. When, during my interview, I asked him about this point, about these "successful women-authors", he (similarly to Pālīvāl in his *Uttar-ādhunikāvād aur dalit sāhitya*) only mentioned Mahādevī Varmā, who undoubtedly had great literary merit, but cannot be related to the changes that occurred at the dawn of the new millennium.

Another fruitful idea, which is present both in Śītāmśu and in Pacaurī and in almost all Western thinkers dealing with postmodernism, is that of intertextuality. A text is no longer a completely new creation, the result of individual genius⁶⁴, as it always carries traces of previous texts. Moreover, as Śītāmśu highlights, in the postmodern era, every text is multilayered, hence, apart from its more immediate and superficial meaning, it contains multiple hidden meanings. These can be caught by the reader according to his/her cultural background, but especially it is the aim of the postmodern critique to deconstruct the text and let these meanings emerge. These reflections were an essential point of reference while reading, for instance, *Dāstān-e-lāptā* by Mañzūr Ehteśām and *Pīlī chatrī vālī laṛkī* by Uday Prakāś (see section 4.2.1). In both novels, in fact, the intertextual dimension is crucial, with plenty of references to previous literary texts (both from the Indian and the Western traditions), movies, songs, which allow a subtler interpretation of the characters' experiences.

⁶³ Pacaurī explicitly refers to Derrida's neologism "phallogocentric", translating it in Hindi with the expression *śīśan-kendrik*. Phallogocentrism "grafts together logocentrism and phallogocentrism, a term used initially by the psychoanalyst Ernest Jones to critique Freud's analytical bias towards the phallus. Derrida brings the term into play in order to deconstruct the Lacanian reference to the phallus as master signifier within the symbolic order" (Wortham, 2010, p. 89).

⁶⁴ Actually this is much more of a Western idea than an Indian one. In general, in fact, in the South-Asian context the value of a literary work did not strictly depend on its originality. Creating new stories from pre-existing ones, re-elaborating a rich cultural heritage has been perceived natural since the earliest times.

A further concept that has been particularly relevant for my investigation is that of “literature of pleasure”. On one hand Śītāṃśu talks about *līlābhāṅ*, about the postmodern “game of seduction”, on the other Pacaurī points out a shift towards a post realist aesthetic, towards an entertainment literature, far from the hard tones of realism. I believe these concepts to be perfectly exemplified by Vinod Kumār Śukla and Manohar Śyām Jośī’s prose. In section 4.3. I analyze two of their novels — respectively *Dīvār meṃ ek khiṛkī rahī thī* and *Ṭ-ṭā profesar* — where, even through different techniques, the authors propose their alternatives to the traditional socially engaged realist novel. On one hand, Vinod Kumār Śukla builds his text by juxtaposing images of everyday life and nature, with a minimal plot, and no great events or teachings; he fascinates his readers thanks to the poetry of small things. On the other hand, Manohar Śyām Jośī plays with irony, with sexual and scatological references which at the same time contrast and mitigate the potential dramatic nature of his tale.

Undoubtedly Śītāṃśu and Pacaurī offered me a significant starting point in terms of “postmodern ingredients” to be taken into account, but, when I started my textual analysis, I decided to consider some further elements. As it will become clearer in chapter 4, some other postmodern traces are, for me, present in recent Hindi novels, that are “otherworldliness” (hence the presence of alternate realities, juxtaposed the characters’ usual ones), metafiction, historiographic metafiction (see 4.1) and fragmentation of stories and identities (4.2.2). In the light of my readings, particularly of Linda Hutcheon’s (1989, 2004) and Brian McHale’s (2004) works, I consider these elements extremely relevant within the postmodern discourse and if they were not completely excluded from Śītāṃśu and Pacaurī’s arguments (the former, for instance, refers to historiographic metafiction in his analysis of *Vāren Heṣṭings kā sāmḍ*), they were not discussed individually with detailed textual examples.

The last point that I want to touch here is how I used not only the texts of Śītāṃśu and Pacaurī, but also those of Paṭel and Cauhān to select my ten novels. All these critics, in fact, offered me an initial list of novels or at least of authors from which to start my readings and decisional process. Pacaurī, for instance, analyzes *Kuru kuru svāhā* and *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī* by Manohar Śyām Jośī (Pacaurī, 2010, respectively pp. 125-135, pp. 136-148), *Ḍūb* by Vīrendra Jain (pp. 149-156), *Mujhe cānd cāhie* by Surendra Varmā (pp. 157-166) and *Khilegā to dekheṃge* by Vinod Kumār Śukla (Pacaurī, 2012, pp. 107-114). Among these novels I chose to analyze *Ḍūb* (see 4.1.3 and 4.4.2), as it appeared to me a significant example, from the early Nineties, of the deconstruction of historical accounts and of explicit reflection on power and knowledge. I also maintained Jośī and Śukla, but I chose different texts. As regards Manohar Śyām Jośī I expressly avoided *Hariyā Harkyūlīz*, as it was already the object of my MA thesis and of an

article⁶⁵, and *Kuru kuru svāhā* as it was published in 1980, hence before the period here under investigation. My preference was given to *Ṭ-ṭā profesar* (1995), which condenses most of the prototypical features of Joṣī's writing. Regarding Vinod Kumār Śukla, I selected his last novel *Dīvār mem ek khiṛkī rahī thī*, as to me it represents a further evolution of his prose in a postmodern direction, with the introduction of otherworldliness as an essential feature. Like Śītāmśu and Paṭel, I worked on Uday Prakāś's prose and particularly on his short-novel or long-short story, *Pīlī chatrī vālī laṛkī*. In reading Cauhān (whose text, as I previously mentioned, could have perfectly fit my topic, but to which I resorted partially due to its inaccuracies) I decided to approach Mṛdulā Garg's and Alkā Sarāvgī's works. I chose *Kaṭhgulāb* and *Kali-kathā: vāyā bāipās* respectively, for quite different reasons: the first one combines stylistic experimentation with feminist stances on world-women's conditions, and a metafictional reflection; the second one plays with history and individual memories and resorts to interesting narrative techniques to foreground the fictional nature of the text.

The four remaining authors and novels — *Chinnamastā* by Prabhā Khetān, *Chappar* by Jay Prakāś Kardam, *Dāstān-e-lāptā* by Mañzūr Ehteśām and *Hamārā śahar us baras* by Gītāñjali Śrī — were chosen independently from the critics' contributions, with the aim of exemplifying two specific issues. The first is the emergence of new literary voices, the “voices of the margins”; the second, the importance of fragmentation, both at the level of narration and of characters' identities. For these reasons, on one hand, I selected Prabhā Khetān and Jay Prakāś Kardam, respectively a representative feminist and *dalit* author. More specifically *Chinnamastā* is a perfect example of Prabhā Khetān's writing, with a highly autobiographical component, while *Chappar* is one of the first *dalit* novels in Hindi and probably the author's major work (see 4.4). On the other hand, I decided to work with Gītāñjali Śrī and Mañzūr Ehteśām's novels, which deploy, albeit in quite different manners, the strategy of fragmentation (see 4.2.2). The plot of *Hamārā śahar us baras* is built through a series of snapshots juxtaposed by the narrator, but a unitary design is still visible. Fragmentation is the product of a predetermined plan, of conscious construction and deconstruction of the story. On the contrary, *Dāstān-e-lāptā* appears as an incomplete mosaic, with no chance to find a unifying, interpretive key.

These were my guidelines and reasonings while reading, selecting and analyzing the novels and allowed me to work on the actual core of my dissertation, that is to say on the possible postmodern traces within recent Hindi novels (chapter 4). Before approaching this part of my research, in the next chapter, I should like to introduce the ten authors and novels I selected individually and in a more systematic manner.

⁶⁵ I presented *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī: Reading the novel through the lenses of the kumāūmnī community* during the International conference on Hindi studies, held in September 2016 at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), Paris.

3

CHAPTER

Postmodernism and Hindi novels: introducing authors and texts

This chapter is devoted to a brief presentation of the authors and the novels that I selected for textual analysis. As anticipated in section 1.4., I chose ten different authors with different cultural and geographical backgrounds, with the aim of proposing a balanced representation of male and female writers. They belong to two successive generations of writers, the elder being born before India independence, the younger during the Fifties or early Sixties. Lastly, I considered the kind of relations these authors had with the mainstream critics. In most of the cases in fact, due to their experimentation, the subjects they chose and sometimes even due to their personal life, they had difficult or at least ambivalent relations with the literary establishment. Mṛdulā Garg, for instance, was even arrested in 1980 on charges of obscenity, because of her novel *Cittakobrā*, which recounts an extramarital affair between an Indian middle-class housewife and a foreign pastor. Garg's explicit references to sexuality caused her a charge of pornography and many years of ostracism from the literary establishment. Vinod Kumār Śukla, despite touching social issues, was criticized due to his formal experimentation: particularly his latest novels, *Khilegā to dekheṅge* and *Dīvār meṃ ek khiṛkī rahtī thī*, were considered a mere linguistic and stylistic amusement, and constructed around flimsy plots (see, for instance, Rāy 2002, pp. 362). Such an evaluation is based on a rather rigid interpretation of

the Marxist literary critique which dominated the Hindi literary scenario of the late Twentieth century⁶⁶. Another self-evident example is Uday Prakāś, who, for quite some time, was not greatly appreciated by the critics, but was extremely successful in terms of readership. In his blog (<http://udayprakash05.blogspot.it>) he defines himself as “most unbeloved by the power centers but most popular amongst people living in margins and edges of 'shining India'”.

Regarding the specific novels, I chose texts published during the Nineties (see section 1.3), which can be considered representative of the Hindi novel during that decade and which contain some possible postmodern traces. I will introduce authors and texts following a chronological order, taking into account the year of publication of the selected novel. Each synopsis of the plot will be anticipated by the quotation of the very first lines of the text. I think they may provide a clue to the author’s style and his/her way of building the story. As Nemesio (1999, p. 7) emphasized, in fact, by reading the first words of a text the reader activates frames and scripts necessary to its comprehension. Reading an incipit is similar to reading the rules of a game that the reader will start to play. An incipit provides a sort of anticipation, conveying to the reader what he/she can expect from the text and the kind of operations he/she will probably have to start.

3.1. Virendra Jain - *Ḍūb* (1991)

Virendra Jain was born on 5 September 1955 in the village of Sirsaud, Gunā district, Madhya Pradesh. His mother came from a *zamīndār* family and his father worked in agriculture. He studied at the Mahāvīr Viśvavidyālay and Lāl Bahādūr Śāstrī Sanskrit Vidyāpīṭh, passing the *ācārya* exams in literature and Jain philosophy. In 1973 he obtained a job at Bhārtīya Jñānpīṭh and in 1977 he joined Rājkamal Prakāśan in the publication and sales department. In 1979 he became sub editor of the Delhi magazines *Sarītā* and *Muktā*. In 1982 he joined the *Times of India Group* and from 1991 he held the post of assistant editor of *Sāndhya Times* (Mehtā, 2011, pp. 15-16). Since 2012 he has been managing editor for Madhubun Educational Books.

Virendra Jain wrote novels, collections of short stories, satire and children’s stories, with a special focus on contemporary social issues (see Mehtā, 2011, pp. 17-23; Rāy, 2002, pp. 391-392). His most famous novels include *Pratīk: ek jīvānī* (1983), *Śabd-badh* (1987), *Sabse barā sipahiyā* (1988), *Ḍūb* (1991), *Pār* (1994) and *Pañcnāmā* (1996). For *Pār* he was awarded the Śrīkānt Varmā Purskār, while for *Ḍūb*, the novel subject of my analysis, the Premcand Maheś Sammān. He wrote collections of short stories like *Bāyīm hatelī kā dard* (1989) and *Maim vahī hūm* (1990) and satirical works like *Rāvaṇ kī rākh*

⁶⁶ From the 1960s Hindi critique was largely influenced by the Marxist and structuralist principles. Rāmvilās Śarmā (1927-1990) and Nāmvar Siṃh (1927-) are probably the most relevant examples of this approach.

(1982), *Kissā mausmī prem kā* (1988) and *Paṭkathā kī kathā* (1992). He was also author of children's stories, such as *Tum bhī hamso* (1987) and *Khel premī Māmāśrī* (1991).

Dūb (Submergence) - the story

That day a piece of betel nut was stuck between the two teeth near the upper molar. In the last three hours Māte had employed all his efforts to chew it, but it didn't want to come out.⁶⁷

The novel recalls Indian history from Independence to the disaster of Bhopal in December 1984, from a marginalized point of view. The story, in fact, is set in a remote village in Bundelkhand, named Lārāi, and is built through the personal experiences of its inhabitants. Virendra Jain opts for a multiple focalization and a highly dialogical style (actual conversations, but more often mental monologues), giving the novel a choral aspect. Apart from the village itself, the main character is Māte, a conservative old *ahīr*⁶⁸, who represents a fundamental reference for the whole community.

The fulcrum of the novel is the government project to build the Rājghāt dam, which should provide water and electricity for a vast area across Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh⁶⁹. The dam, in politicians' speeches, is meant to be a symbol of progress and should benefit millions of people. In actual fact many villages along River Betvā are going to be submerged and their inhabitants do not know when and where they are supposed to re-settle. The villagers were not involved in any decision, nor informed about the government's plan. Moreover, they were not hired for any work, as the government preferred people from other Indian States: in its opinion villagers would never give up family and public feasts, so the project would be delayed (Jain, 2014, p. 191). The government offers compensation for villagers' losses, but here too there are multiple issues: the distribution is uneven among the villages, the procedures are complex, showing a system of connivance between public officials and the *bāniyā* community. The appraisals of many plots

⁶⁷ Unless differently specified all these translations are mine. Below *Dūb* original incipit:

उपरली दाढ़ के पास वाले दो दाँतों के बीच आज एक सुपूरी की टुकड़ी आ फँसी। माते पिछले तीन घंटे से उसे चुबलाने के सभी प्रयास कर चुके थे पर वह निकलने का नाम नहीं ले रही थी। (Jain, 2014, p. 9)

⁶⁸ Community of herdsmen.

⁶⁹ Rājghāt Dam in an Inter-state project being constructed on the River Betvā about 22km from Lalitpur. The first project report was submitted in 1970 but, due to some problems between UP and MP governments, there were some years of stasis. "The Rajghat Dam Project will serve as a mother storage for Irrigation in UP and MP through a cascade of hydraulic structures in the downstream of River Betwa. The total area submerged due to the project is 23390 Ha and the forestland submerged is 990 Ha. About 75 villages in UP and MP are partially and fully submerged, rendering 19000 people homeless as per official reports" (Thakkar and Chaturvedi, 2006, p. 127).

of land are incorrect and the peasants, to have them revised, have to ask for Sāv's⁷⁰ help, obviously paying a substantial amount of money. Many people from Laṛaiī slowly start to abandon their houses and reach the nearby cities, but others do not want to accept this fate and decide to wait until flooding begins. Among the latter there is Māte.

These events are intertwined with both private stories and facts of national relevance. Regarding official history, the reader finds brief references to the Mutiny of 1857 and to the role of Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in the Independence of India, but the majority of the references are connected to Indira Gandhi's terms as Prime Minister. Jain, with a critical attitude, refers to her involvement in the Rājghaṭ project (she participates in the inaugural ceremony), the state of Emergency, the forced sterilization program and her assassination on 31 October 1984. The novel ends with the gas disaster in Bhopal and the submergence of the village of Pañcamnagar. National decisions are seen as almost unintelligible, always imposed by the central powers, unconcerned about the impact on rural, marginalized areas. Essentially the authorities are considered liars, unreliable and this is particularly serious as they should be Indians' representatives and not their sovereigns (Jain, 2014, p. 109).

As far as the private stories are concerned, they depict various people from different *jāti*-s, showing lights and shadows of human beings. One of the most touching stories narrates the life of Rāmdulāre, the “son of sin” who becomes the hero of Laṛaiī. His father is a brahmin, Kailās Mahārāj, who raped an *ahīr* girl. A similar inter-caste marriage was considered impossible as well as the option of abortion (it would be the assassination of a brahmin and therefore a *mahāpāp*, an extremely serious sin). Thanks to a secret agreement between Bāman Mahārāj (Kailās's father) and Māte, the baby's custody is given to Gorābāi, a poor, childless woman, married to a eunuch. Gorābāi makes any possible efforts to give Rāmdulāre an education and a chance for a better life. The woman relies on Aṭṭū Sāv's help (the man is in love with her, but cannot express his feelings due to social norms) to take Rāmdulāre to Bhopal in order to allow him to continue his studies. For years the villagers do not receive any information about him, but one day a banking official for rural development knocks at Māte's door. Rāmdulāre has inherited vast lands from his grandfather Bāman Mahārāj (who has expressly left his property to Rāmdulāre before committing suicide) and now, that he could obtain substantial compensation from the government, he has decided to entrust them to Māte and the villagers. Moreover, the young man has become an example of success: he is in fact an engineer for the Water Resources Department in Delhi and a well-known writer.

Nonetheless, the village is populated by many shadows as well, especially among the upper castes. Ṭhākur Devīsimh, for instance, is the local spokesman for the Congress and a candidate for the post of *sarpañc* (the head of the *pañcāyat*). As a common habit among the *ṭhākur*-s, he exploits subaltern people and makes them work in his fields for

⁷⁰ Bundeli epithet used for the *bāniyā*, the community of merchants, bankers and money lenders.

no compensation. When Ghumā, a *camār* worker, asks for an allowance, his reaction is ruthless. The night after Ghumā's request he reaches the *camār-s'* settlement and beats everybody up with a club. He will be arrested by the police, but before the villagers can bear witness against him, he commits suicide (Jain, 2014, pp. 68-78). A second example is Hīrā Sāv, who takes advantages of the precarious situation of many people in the Rājghāṭ area. When the government cuts off the water supply to the village of Pānīpurā (it only had a canal, but no well), he suggests its inhabitants sell him their plots of land. In return, they will have another place in which to stay and wait for the government's decisions on re-settlement (Jain, 2014, p. 199). With similar speculations Hīrā Sāv acquires multiple properties and covets to give them his own name. However, to reach this aim, he has to settle for a compromise with the *tahsildār*, the sub-collector of revenue. The *tahsildār* has an assignment from the government: he has to oversee the forced sterilization of two thousand people. If Hīrā Sāv brings the *tahsildār* five hundred men, his wish will be granted. Hīrā Sāv accepts with no hesitation (Jain, 2014, pp. 201-202). Pretending to help the villagers obtain their compensation, Hīrā persuades them to go to Candai: there they undergo vasectomy and some of them die (pp. 209-212, 221).

3.2. Prabhā Khetān - *Chinnamastā* (1993)

Prabhā Khetān (1942 - 2008) was born in Calcutta into a *marvārī* orthodox family. Despite the opposition of her family she completed her studies in philosophy at the prestigious Presidency College and even took a doctorate from Calcutta University, focusing on Existentialism. Nevertheless, after a period in the USA, she realized that teaching philosophy would not bring her great satisfaction, at least from an economic point of view, and decided to become an entrepreneur. At the end of the Sixties, she opened the first Indian Figurette, a center for women's beauty and slimming; later, during the Emergency, she started a new business called New Horizons, for the export of leather goods (with much scandal within the *marvārī* community). Both Khetān's enterprises were successful and she even became the president of the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce (Consolaro, 2011a, p. 299). Prabhā Khetān's life was controversial, not only because of the above-mentioned choices, but also because she never married and did have a lifelong relationship with a well-known doctor, Dr. Sarrāf, married and father of five children.

Reading Simone de Beauvoir's text, *The Second Sex*, represented a milestone in the writer's life. The book was a sort of revelation for Prabhā Khetān, who even translated it into Hindi with the title *Strī: upekṣitā*. The text — which indicates economic independence as the basic condition for women's emancipation — represented a turning point in the author's experience, as it suggests an accessible way to break free from a traditionalist and oppressive social context (for more information on Khetān's feminist perspective see Tivārī, 2011).

Prabhā Khetān took her first steps in the literary field during the Seventies, composing poetry: her first collection of verses, *Aparicit ujāle*, was published in 1981, followed a year later by *Sīrhiyām caṛhī huī maim̃*. Nonetheless, she soon abandoned poetry for novels, perceived as a better device for self-expression (for an introduction to Khetān’s novels see Rāy, 2002, pp. 383-387; for more details see Rāṇāvat, 2015). Her works are characterized by a highly autobiographical component: for instance *Āo Pepe ghar caleṃ* (1990) is the story of a woman who migrates to America, proposing a reflection on female conditions; *Pīlī āmdhī* (1996) discusses how joint family and community relations can survive in contemporary society. *Chinnamastā* (1993), the novel which is the subject of my analysis, narrates the vicissitude of a *marvārī* woman who manages to reach self-realization, despite her conservative background. Her other works include the novels *Tālā-bandī* (1991), *Apne apne cehre* (1994) and the autobiography *Anyā se ananyā* (2007). In the latter — which was also published in English in 2012 with the title *A Life Apart* (translation by Ira Pande) — Prabhā Khetān recalls the most significant moments of her life, her lonely childhood, her difficulty in fitting into the Bengali milieu of Presidency College, her struggles in America and her relationship with Dr. Sarrāf. Apart from this, she devotes special attention to social issues and to historical and political events, such as the Emergency, students’ and workers’ protests and the Iran-Iraq war (on Prabhā Khetān’s autobiography see Browarczyk, 2015 and Consolaro, 2017).

Chinnamastā - the story

“Sitting on the plane, my loins have become stiff. My head is splitting. It’s my fault. I shouldn’t have taken such a long flight.”, thought Priyā rubbing her head with both hands.⁷¹

Priyā, a forty-eight years old *mārvārī* woman, faints at Belgrade airport in a stopover during a business trip. As she needs to take a rest, a Dutch friend, Philip, books a hotel room for her in Dubrovnik. The novel is a mosaic of Priyā’s memories and feelings, mostly recalled during her stay near the seaside, looking at the far, unsettled waves. In the first part of the text, her memories are mostly related to her own family. She has three sisters and two brothers, but she has always felt alone. Her mother always was harshly resentful towards her and her father died, poisoned by some business partners, when she was about nine. Priyā was used to feeling like a stranger in her family, even her skin was different from the other members’ skin, it was darker. When she was a child she found love and affection only in a servant, Dāī māṃ. She considered this woman her real mo-

⁷¹ ‘प्लेन में बैठे-बैठे कमर अकड़ गई। सर दर्द से फटा जा रहा है। गलती मेरी है। इतनी लम्बी फ्लाइट नहीं लेनी चाहिए थी।’ प्रिया ने दोनों हाथों से सर को दबाते हुए सोचा। (Khetān, 2004, p. 5)

ther, she who constantly looked after her and took care of her needs. Priyā's childhood was marked by terrible episodes of physical violence, as she was raped by one of her relatives. She revealed her secret burden to Dāī māī only, but the ayah advised her to remain silent: that episode was a sin, something shameful and she could not talk about it to anybody. Many times Priyā's thoughts went to her father, if he had been alive he would have protected her. Maybe because of this, throughout her life, she has looked for protection in all the men she has met. When she was in the tenth class the family started to talk about her marriage to a law student. Priyā never forgot when the boy rejected her, in front of the whole family. Some years later, during her MA, a man entered Priyā's life. He was a young, appealing professor. When he invited her to his home she accepted, lost in a dreamy world. For the first time she did not feel repulsion at a man's touch. Their affair went on for about six months, but in the end he disappeared. Worried, Priyā, went to his house: a nice woman opened the door. Her professor got married. The man humiliated her, shouting that she was just a stupid girl, they enjoyed each other for a time but he would have never married her. On that occasion, Priyā had allowed herself to love unconditionally, but again she had been hurt.

When she was twenty-three a marriage proposal arrived: Narendra belonged to a good, wealthy family. He was studying business management in America and he needed a well-educated wife. Shortly he and his family visited Priyā's house and after a few words in English he accepted to marry the girl. Nobody asked for Priyā's opinion and everything happened quickly. The marriage seemed to be a new beginning for the girl, and she was happy about leaving her home. Unfortunately, her hope was vain. While on their honeymoon the girl realized that her husband's interests were limited to money, food and sex. He did not want to know anything about her, about her past, about what she liked. Less than two years after the marriage they had a child, Sañjū.

During the first years of marriage Priyā, imitating her mother-in-law's behavior, served Narendra without complaining. She organized his beloved parties in every minute detail, she dressed and wore jewels to pander to his whim. But shortly she realized that this was not how she wanted to live: she was Narendra's wife, not his secretary or servant. Soon this new attitude led to tension. A significant episode is connected to Priyā's visits to Choṭī Māī and her daughter Nīnā. Choṭī Māī was the second wife of Priyā's father-in-law. The woman had to live separately, avoiding any contact with her husband's first family. One day, little Sañjū said something about his Nīnā Buā in front of his grandmother. The old lady and Narendra became furious: how had Priyā dared to take Sañjū into that house? Priyā for the first time attempted to stand her ground: she was Sañjū's mother and she could take him wherever she wanted, she would not obey Narendra's orders in silence. After this episode Priyā went back to her mother's home. She would like to stay there and divorce Narendra. Her mother gave her no support: Priyā was a married woman and there was no longer any room for her in her parent's house. Narendra soon reached Priyā and took her back to her married life.

Some years later the offer of a job broke the dullness of Priyā's existence. One of Narendra's friends was looking for somebody who could take care of an export activity of Indian handicrafts. Priyā started to work: to Narendra this job was nothing more than a pastime, but for Priyā it became an essential source of energy. She wanted to understand the whole business process, since the production of goods. Her knowledge proved to be fundamental during her and her husband's first visit to Europe. On this occasion they met Philip for the first time: the negotiations between Narendra and the Dutch man were not going well, so Priyā intervened. Even though Narendra did not recognize her merit, she managed to improve the situation and land a conspicuous order. Gradually Priyā started to dedicate more time to her job. Narendra started to complain that she was never at home, that she forgot being a wife and a mother. A decisive fight happened before a business trip to London: if she took that flight she would never again be accepted in Narendra's house. She would have to leave everything and everybody, included her son. They both knew that according to the law, custody of Sañjū would be given to his father. Despite this Priyā went to London. It was a difficult and painful decision and for some considerable time she felt guilty about abandoning her child. Some years later she did not even manage to attend her son's marriage: after this episode further relations with Sañjū were impossible.

Priyā's memories are frequently interrupted by glimpses of her present life. After a week in Dubrovnik she decides to visit her friends Philip and Judy; she likes their company and, moreover, she needs some more time to think about herself. She would like to start writing about her past, but it seems that she does not know how. In Judy's opinion she should just start writing about her experiences and traumas, it will not be necessary to give them a systematic and linear form. The aim of writing is the most important thing: a printed text is a unique way of giving voice to women who are traditionally dumb.

The final pages are dedicated to Priyā's dreams: she dreams about her life, about her future, but never about reuniting her family. Just two years before she had learned to drive a car, now she could wander alone all over India. She feels alive and happy: it seems that she has managed to close the door on her past.

3.3. Jay Prakāś Kardam - *Chappar* (1994)

Jay Prakāś Kardam was born on 5 July 1958 into a poor *dalit* family in Gāziyābād, Uttar Pradesh. His father died in 1976, while he was in his eleventh year at school. As the eldest of his brothers and sisters, he had to support his mother in the sustenance of the family and started to work as an un-skilled laborer. He dreamt about becoming an engineer, but due to his situation he was unable to gain admission to the Bachelor of Science degree. In 1978, thanks to the moral and economic support of a relative, he managed to start a Bachelor of Arts. Actually, during this period he did several jobs: he worked in a steel factory, as a Munshi with a tax advocate, he gave private tuitions. In 1980 he found

his first Government job as an Ameen in Sales Tax Department. In 1984 he joined the Vijaya Bank in Ilāhābād and in 1988 the Central Secretariat Official Language Service as a translator. A year later he was selected as Assistant Director, through the Union Public Service Commission, and joined the Ministry of Commerce. In 1996 he was promoted to the position of Deputy Director in the Department of Culture; in 2006 he became Second Secretary (Language and Culture) in the High Commission of India in Mauritius. Currently he is Director of the Central Hindi Training Institute of New Delhi. While working Kardam continued his studies: he obtained three master's degrees in philosophy, history, and Hindi and a doctorate in Hindi (Kumar, 2008).

Kardam published a collection of short stories, *Talās*, some collections of poetry, for example *Gūṅgā nahīm thā maim* (1997) and *Tinkā-tinkā āg* (2004) and various essays, particularly on Buddhism, *dalit* issues and the figure of Dr. Ambedkar. His novels include *Karuṇā* (1986) — the first *dalit* novel published in Hindi — *Chappar* (1994) and *Śmaśān kā rahasya* (on *Karuṇā* and *Chappar* see Wessler, 2014, pp. 19-30). Since 1999 he has been editor of the annual magazine *Dalit Sāhitya (Vārṣikī)*. As he explicitly declared in an interview his main concern “has been to introduce the socio-economic and political, religious backwardness and exploitation of dalits to sensitize the society to make their attitude towards dalits positive”. His aim is “to give voice to the voiceless and sense to the senseless and at the same time to warn the privileged classes to give their due rights to dalits and treat them as equal human beings. It is in the interest of development, progress and prosperity of the society” (Kumar, 2008).

Chappar (The shack) - The story

In Western Uttar Pradeś, on the banks of the Ganges, there is a small village, Mātāpur. As in other Indian villages, in Mātāpur too, a few people are happy and prosperous while the rest are poor and needy.⁷²

The novel is set in the small village of Mātāpur, Western Uttar Pradesh. From the first lines the author foregrounds his concern about social inequalities and discrimination, describing the harsh contrast between the dwellings of the *savarṇa*'s and the *avarṇa*'s. The protagonists of the novel are a *dalit* couple, Sukkhā and Ramiyā, and their son Candan. Despite their humble condition and against the resistance of the head of the village (*thakur* Harnām Simh) and the local priest (*paṇḍit* Kāṇārām), Candan is sent to the near-

⁷² गंगा के तट पर बसा पश्चिमी उत्तर प्रदेश का एक छोटा-सा गांव है मातापुर। अन्य भारतीय गांवों की तरह मातापुर में भी थोड़े से लोग सुखी और सम्पन्न तथा शेष लोग दीन और दरिद्र हैं। (Kardam, 2012: 5)

by city to continue his studies. Following the classic alternating structure of Premchand's *Godān*, the narration shifts between the village and the city to follow the vicissitudes of the family.

Since his arrival in the city, Candan has lived with Hariyā, a small toy seller, who considers the boy like a son, rather than a tenant. On numerous occasions, in fact, Hariyā supports Candan morally and financially. During the first rainy season in his new house, Candan observes how superstition still afflicts the lives of poor and illiterate people. That year, at the beginning of August the rains have not yet started and the people of Candan's settlement have started to think about a public sacrifice to placate the gods and cause the rain to arrive. Donations start to be collected, but Candan firmly opposes the initiative: he does not believe in sacrifices, he even doubts the meaning of worship and religion. Candan starts to explain to people that these rituals were used by the upper-caste to maintain the *status quo* and to bridle the poor and downtrodden. The boy suggests using the donations not for a sacrifice, but for something with a real social impact: they could open a school for their children or have the streets repaired before the arrival of the rains. People start to reflect on Candan's words and to ponder the effects of worship on their lives.

In college Candan progressively overcomes his shyness and sense of inferiority and creates a sort of circle with other young dalits where they discuss future and possible social change. The boy is firmly convinced that education is crucial to emancipation: people must understand the cultural origins of their exploitation. Because of this, Candan opens a school in his settlement and spurs the families to have their children participate. One day a young girl, Kamlā, enters the school with a child. She would like to enroll him for some lessons, but when Candan asks for the father's name, she runs away in tears. When Candan manages to find the girl, he discovers that she has no husband and that the child was conceived in a group rape. Due to the shame of this episode, Kamlā had escaped from home, leaving her widower father alone.

In the meantime, in the village, the situation of Candan's parents has further deteriorated. Sukkhā, due to his decision to allow Candan to study in the city, has no more job opportunities as a laborer with landowners, moreover he has to leave his small piece of land. Sukkhā and Ramiyā lose their house (which was mortgaged) and have to move into a nearby *kasbā*. Ramiyā sometimes thinks about having her son return to the village: he may find a job, marry and support them. Nonetheless, Sukkhā knows that first Candan has to conclude his studies, otherwise he will be unable to escape from the hell they are used to living in. In the village the couple find the help of Rajnī, the daughter of *thakur* Harnām Siṃh and a former schoolmate of Candan. The girl had developed special sympathies for him and, in the time of separation, helps the family with correspondence (as Candan's parents are illiterate). Moreover, on a number of occasions, she attempts to talk to her father and make him reflect on caste-based discrimination and inequalities.

Candan becomes closer to his host Hariyā and discovers his sad past. He is a widower who lost his only daughter, after a rape. He reported the episode, but nothing hap-

pened to the instigator of the violence. On the contrary Hariyā was put in jail. Candan realizes that Hariyā and Kamlā's stories are complementary: they must be father and daughter. Candan arranges an encounter to reunite the family. Meanwhile, Candan's project for dalits' education prospers. Not only children, but also youths, women and the elderly have started to study in his school. People do not only think about every day issues, but about emancipation and personal development as well. A *dalit* movement connected with the school emerges and quickly spreads throughout the city and in the nearby rural areas. The dependence of underlings on local notables progressively decreases, leaving the latter floored. Poor people no longer give money to pandits for ceremonies and sacrifices. They cease to be reliant on money-lenders for their little necessities, as they create cooperatives for mutual economic support. Such changes reach Mātāpur as well: the *thākur*'s fields are damaged, as people start to negotiate working conditions and Kāṇā Paṇḍit is even forced to leave the village. In the meantime, Rajnī has openly become the advocate of *dalit* interests in the village. Moreover, she helps Sukkhā and Ramiyā, who are on the brink of starvation, to reclaim their farmland.

In the closing chapters Candan returns to Mātāpur to visit his parents and he is astonished by the deep change that has occurred. The village has turned into an egalitarian society, where humanism is the real faith. People sit, drink and eat together, without caste discriminations. Even *thakur* Harnām Simh, after Sukkhā saves him from attempted suicide, has completely changed. He has distributed his lands among poor and landless people, he has abandoned his *haveli* to live in a common dwelling and he is happy with his new life.

When Candan returns to the city a tragedy occurs. During an assembly, Kamlā dies protecting Candan from an assault. Rajnī suggests to Candan to move back to Mātāpur and continue his project for the emancipation of dalits there, where together they will take care of Kamlā's child.

3.4. Manohar Śyām Jośī - *Ṭ-ṭā profesar* (1995)

Manohar Śyām Jośī was born on 9 August 1933 in Ajmer (Rajasthan) into a *ku-māūmnī* brahmin family from Almoṛā (now in the state of Uttarakhand). He attended the *pāṭhśālā* in Ajmer and focused his studies on English, without excelling at Hindi. As declared by the author himself, at that time a good knowledge of English was a priority, while Hindi was considered at the level of a spoken dialect. He passed the entrance exam for Civil Engineering at Banāras Hindū Viśvavidyālay, but after reading Premchand's *Saj-jantā kā daṇḍ*⁷³, he came to disdain a career as an engineer. As a consequence, Jośī, opposing the decision of his family, gave up his post. He would have followed his father and

⁷³ Lit. *Punishment for Honesty*. This short story, published in 1916 in *Sarasvatī*, denounced the plague of corruption.

elder brother's steps at the Muir Central College of Ilāhābād, but for various reasons he had to start a Bachelor of Science in Lucknow. During that period Jośī became a regular visitor at the literary circle in the home of the renowned writer Yaśpāl. Jośī's life was then turned upside down by the premature death of his father and his elder brother (respectively in 1941 and 1958), so despite his good results, he was forced to abandon his studies. He took several jobs: teacher, journalist, scriptwriter and was also the author of short stories and novels (Kharāt, 2008, pp. 15-23).

Jośī is often called the Father of Indian Soap Opera, since he was the scriptwriter of the first Indian TV serial, *Ham Log* (1982). A hugely popular show, this dealt with the everyday struggles of the Indian middle-class. A few years later Jośī created a new TV serial, *Buniyād* (1987-1988), based on the story of a family of refugees during the Partition of India. These serials largely influenced not only the television industry, but an entire generation of Indian viewers (for further details see Mankekar, 1999). Jośī wrote screenplays for films like *Bhraṣṭācār*, *Appū Rājā*, *He Rām* and *Nirmāṇādhīn Zamīn* and in some of these films he was also a dubber. He also worked as a journalist: after his first experience writing for *Jansattā* in Delhi, he became a contributor to *All India Radio* and *Films Division of India* in Mumbai. He became assistant to the acclaimed poet and writer Ajñey at *Dinmān* magazine and was part of the editorial staff of *Sāptāhik Hindustān*, *Weekend Review* and *Morning Echo*. He wrote for *Outlook India*'s column *Outlook Sāptāhik* until his death in 2006.

Regarding his literary work (see Kharāt, 2008, pp. 26-63; Rāy, 2002, pp. 364-366), Jośī dealt with a wide range of subjects: from love in *Kasap* to political satire in *Netājī kahin* (the latter was made into the tv serial *Kakkājī kahin*). His first novel *Kuru kuru svāhā* was published in 1980. Its protagonist is Manohar Śyām Jośī, who, in the author's own words, is supposed to be a completely fictional character. His identity is built on three different levels: Manohar, a young dreamer who does not want to grow up, the intellectual, Jośījī, and the narrative voice, a journalist and screenwriter, with the same name as the author. The novel was defined as a sort of *divertissement* (*mazāk*), a comedy, whose meaning and interpretation can vary in accordance with the reader's mood and life experiences. His other best-known novels include *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī* (1994), *Ṭ-ṭā professor* (1995), *Hamzād* (1999) and *Kyāp*, an allegory of modern India, for which he won the Sāhitya Akadēmī award in 2005. Unfortunately, his success as a scriptwriter for television has probably overshadowed his literary work.

‘Poets must die when they’re young and novelists be born only when they’re old.’ Can’t recall where I read that line, or its author’s name. God knows who wrote it: a failed middle-aged poet or a successful old novelist. Sounds more like the former, if you ask me⁷⁴ (Joshi, 2008, p.1).

The novel is the revised and enlarged version of a previous work, *Ṭ-ṭā professor* *Ṣaṣṭīballabh Pant*, which was published in *Hams* in December 1990. The short story had become the subject of widespread discussions and was even included in *Saṅkalp kahtā daśak*, the collection of the most important tales of the decade.

The story of *Ṭ-ṭā professor* is related by an internal narrator, Mr Joṣī (notice the name), a middle-aged writer, experiencing a period of crisis. The beginning of this short novel is in fact a bitter and disenchanting reflection on the potentialities of writing, progressively highlighting the impossibility of rendering through words the complexity of human nature and experiences. Nonetheless, thanks to a flashback to the protagonist’s youth, this gloomy tone soon gives way to a lighter one.

Mr Joṣī, after a fortuitous encounter with an old acquaintance, recalls his past as a teacher in the remote village of Sunaulīdhār. He particularly evokes a peculiar figure, *Ṣaṣṭīballabh Pant*, better known as Professor *Ṭ-ṭā*, due to his way of pronouncing the white soldiers’ salutation. Professor *Ṭ-ṭā* considered himself an authority on the English language and was used to wandering with a notebook to record any new English word. People from the school staff considered him a caricatural figure and Mr Joṣī even decided to write a comic tale based on him. *Ṭ-ṭā*’s love for the British world was not his unique peculiarity: he was literally obsessed by sex and found potential erotic allusions in any matter. Mr Joṣī, in order to obtain some tasty information, started to spend some time with *Ṭ-ṭā*, pretending to confide in him his first, improbable sexual experiences. Nevertheless, in this way the writer came to know about *Ṭ-ṭā*’s sad childhood in a widow’s house. The only remaining male member of his family, he had been brought up by his mother *Ījā*, overcome by her husband’s death and aged prematurely, by his overbearing aunt *Bubū* and his sister-in-law, *Bhojū*. With the latter, *Ṭ-ṭā* had his first sexual experiences. It seems that Mr Joṣī had reached his goal, but in actual fact his literary project crumbled. He was no longer able to write anything: the images of *Ṣaṣṭīballabh*, the sad

74 “कवियों को जवानी में ही मर जाना चाहिए और कथाकारों को बुढ़ापे में ही पैदा होना चाहिए!” — यह उक्ति पता नहीं मैंने अपनी जवानी में किस किताब में पढ़ी थी? लेखक का नाम भी अब याद नहीं रहा। जाने वह कौन था? कोई विफल अध्येष्ठ कवि था या सफल वृद्ध कथाकार? उसके अध्येष्ठ कवि होने की सम्भावना ही अधिक नजर आती है मुझे तो। (*Ṭ-Ṭā profesar* in Joṣī, 2008, p. 5)

orphan and the elderly lustful man, were colliding one with the other, with no possible conciliation. Later, Ṣaṣṭīballabh had a relationship with Prempyārī, a relative of his host in Lahore. When Prempyārī became pregnant she was forced to have an abortion and to marry a poor clerk. Ṭ-ṭā was sent away from Lahore and reached Sunaulīdhār, becoming the village teacher. Time passed, but Mr Joṣī was still unable to write about Ṭ-ṭā's life.

After the summer break, Mr Joṣī's post was not confirmed and he left for Lucknow, with no chance of saying goodbye to Ṭ-ṭā and the rest of the school staff. Some years later, during the funeral ceremony of a relative, Mr Joṣī discovers that Ṭ-ṭā has died of a heart attack on the first anniversary of his son's death. The novel ends with an impressive image: Mr Joṣī, walking on a river bank, stares at a dead foetus floating on the water's surface.

3.5. Mañzūr Ehteśām - *Dāstān-e-Lāptā* (1995)

Mañzūr Ehteśām was born in Bhopal on 3 April 1948, into a cultured Muslim family. He undertook studies at the Aligarh Muslim University and at the Maulana Azad College of Technology in Bhopal, but never completed them. In 1978 he started to work in the family company, selling furniture and items for interior decoration (Stark, 1995 p. 11).

His grandfather came to Bhopal from the North West Frontier Province in around 1860. He was a Pashto-speaker, with a background in Arabian and Persian languages. The memories of the time of displacement, of cultural and linguistic distinctiveness represent the basis of Mañzūr Ehteśām's fictional world. Over these almost mythical layers the author has created vivid pictures of postcolonial India and particularly of the city of Bhopal (Sahitya Akademi, 2007, p. 2).

Mañzūr Ehteśām's first short story, *Ramjān meṃ maut*, was published in *Sārikā* magazine in 1973, followed three years later by his first novel *Kuch aur din*. Probably his most well-known works are *Sūkhā bargad*⁷⁵ (1986), *Dāstān-e-lāptā* (1995) and *Baśārt maṃzil* (2004), which constitutes the so called Bhopali trilogy (on *Kuch aur din*, *Sūkhā bargad* and *Dāstān-e-lāptā* see Rāy, 2002, pp. 356-357). These novels deal with the deep changes in Bhopal ethos due to overwhelming outside forces, commemorating the unique and dying culture of the city. In particular, they "open up a view of the heterogeneity of Indo-Islamic culture and its ongoing dialogue with the rich local culture of a traditional Indian city in the throes of modernization" (Sahitya Akademi, 2007, p. 3). He wrote three collections of short stories — *Ramjān meṃ maut* (1982), *Tasbīh* (1998), *Tamāsā tathā anya kahāniyām* (2001) — and a play, *Ek thā bādsāh* (1981).

Ehteśām received various awards, such as the Śrīkānt Varma Memorial and the Bhārtīya Bhāṣā Paṛiṣad for the novel *Sūkhā bargad* and Vīrsimh Dev Purskār for *Dāstān-*

⁷⁵ The novel was translated into English by Kuldip Singh, with the title *A Dying Banyan*. On this novel see also Stark, 1995, pp. 35-37 and 139-142; Varmā, 2003.

e-lāptā. Moreover, he was the incumbent of the Nirala Srijanpeeth (the chair for creative writing, instituted by the government of Madhya Pradesh) in Bhopal from 2001 to 2005, and he was also conferred the Padmā Śrī (2003) in recognition of his literary merits.

Dāstān-e-lāptā (The Tale of the Missing Man) - the story

The doctor looked at him with interest.
Gold teeth littered his mouth.

The doctor had just finished repeating the same barrage of tests he'd done on a number of prior visits—ones not only this doctor had put him through, but also several others. They had a name for this absurdity: the check up⁷⁶ (Ehteśām, 2010, on *Pratilipi*).

The novel's protagonist is Zamīr Ehmād Khān, a middle-aged Indian-Muslim, living in Bhopal. He is convinced that he is suffering from a undiagnosable mental disease and, from the earliest pages, he is depicted as a patient in a doctor's office. He seems to be incapable of any action and because of this he has lost his wife, his daughters and his job. The story alternates between Zamīr Ehmād Khān's present life in 1987 and fragmented memories of his past: he goes on throwing together half truths and half lies in order to excuse the failures of his life. The novel is sprinkled with multiple characters — his parents and relatives, his friend, Vivek, his mentor Azīz, his wife Rāhat, his two lovers Anīsā and Vasīmā Begam — but it is often difficult to understand their actual role in Zamīr Ehmād Khān's life. The text appears as a complex but incomplete mosaic, where it is almost impossible to reconstruct a unitary design.

During his first forty years Zamīr Ehmād Khān has collected many fruitless experiences: this is the case of his education as an engineer in Aligarh and in Bhopal, of his unlucky relationships with women and finally of his unsuccessful business partnership. At the end of the Seventies, for instance, he opened a shop, the Treasure Trove, selling carpets, expensive furniture and decor. He started this business with a friend, Śarāphat Miyām, who actually made the initial investment. Nonetheless, Zamīr Ehmād Khān's contribution appeared fundamental, particularly due to his loquacity and good relations with the customers. When Zamīr Ehmād Khān starts to develop the hardly comprehensible symptoms of his mental disease, Śarāphat Miyām agrees to let him have some days off. The man's attitude seems quite sympathetic: he will wait for his partner to recover, but then he

76 डॉक्टर उसकी ओर दिलचस्पी से देख रहा था। उसके मुँह में कई दाँत सोने के थे।

अभी कुछ देर पहले वह उसके साथ वही तमाम हरकतें दोहरा चुका था जो पहले कई बार कर चुका था और उसके अलावा कई अन्य डॉक्टर भी कर चुके थे। उनकी भाषा में इस बेहूदा क़वाइद का नाम चेल-अप था। (Ehteśām, 2000, p. 9)

will require dedication to the shop and a sense of responsibility. Zamīr Eħmad Khān stops working for some days, but as his friend does not visit him, his condition gets worse. He thinks that his partner is dispossessing him of their creation, to make room for his son. Zamīr Eħmad Khān remains at home for a long period. For two months Śārāphat Miyām continues to send him his salary without complaining, but then all relations end with no agreement nor explanations between the two former friends.

Zamīr Eħmad Khān’s private life is intertwined with the life of the city of Bhopal and more generally with the life of the nation. In many cases the protagonist observes how the city is quickly changing due to the impending modernization process. The streets are always busy and, despite being enlarged, appear smaller than in the past; old buildings and green areas have disappeared, replaced by shops and malls. Zamīr Eħmad Khān is unable to find his place in this new reality, he feels left behind. As Ulrike Stark pointed out, it is not “a mere sense of disorientation in a rapidly modernizing and impersonal society, but rather a disconcerting sense of detachment from the self, an uneasiness about one’s existence in a contingent world” (Stark, 2001, p. 477). The author not only refers to this aspect of the recent history of Bhopal, but also quotes events of national and international relevance: the gas leak disaster which killed thousands of people in December 1984 (Eħteśām, 2000, p. 84); the upsurge in communal violence and the consequent demolition of the Bābrī Masjid (pp. 243-245); the effects of Partition on the Muslim community (p. 89); the Iran-Iraq war and Gorbachev politics (Eħteśām, 2000, pp. 86-87).

The novel was conceived in a Muslim context and this is clearly visible from the earliest pages⁷⁷. There are references to prayers and children’s traditional education with *maulvī-s*, but also some irreverent episodes. This is the case of Dulhan Cacī — an old relative considered crazy by many people due to a past illness, but particularly due to her strange way of behaving — who relates her pilgrimage to Mecca. When she approached the Black Stone she realized that it was stained by devotees’ saliva. She felt so nauseated that she was unable to kiss it. Moreover, as many members of the family secretly hoped that she would die during the pilgrimage, she ironically adds to her narration that she will pray that such a privilege would be conceded to those people. Dulhan Cacī is so glad to return: she does not need any first-class paradise, she can die in her own house (Eħteśām, 2000, pp. 42-43).

A last noteworthy aspect of the novel is the author’s presence in the text: Eħteśām, in fact, intervenes directly twice to discuss with his readers the relationship between the creator and his creation. In two “prefaces” — placed at the end of part I (*Prastāvnā: ek hastakṣep*) and part II (*Ek aur hastakṣep: punaḥ prastāvnā*) — the writer initially underlines the fictional nature of his novel, rejecting any correspondence between himself and

⁷⁷ It is probably worth clarifying that, with this statement, I do not wish to suggest an equivalence between “normality” and the Hindu context. Simply the religious element and, more specifically, the reflection on the protagonist’s identity as an Indian muslim (see section 4.2.1) is particularly relevant within this novel. On identity and society in the novels of Muslim Hindi writers see Stark, 1995.

his character, but he gradually arrives at a more complex interpretation. The reader comes to know that the *lāptā*, the missing man, is “a lookalike ‘I’, the alter ego that always stays out of one’s reach: it is the Lost One, the Unknown, the Missing, which, despite the obvious differences between man and man, is essentially the same in all” (Sahitya Akademi, 2007, p. 4; on this aspect of the novel see also Vajāhat, 1996, p. 45).

3.6. Mṛdulā Garg - *Kaṭhgulāb* (1996)

Mṛdulā Garg was born in Calcutta on 25 October 1938. She was a sickly child and could not attend school for three years. Nevertheless, thanks to her father, at an early age she started to read the masters such as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Henry James, Shakespeare, Jainendra, Rabindranath Thakur. Her mother — an avid reader of literature in three languages, Hindi, English and Urdu — also bolstered her love for reading. The woman was an invalid, but Mṛdulā loved her exactly because she was different: later her figure will inspire the non-stereotypical female characters of Mṛdulā’s novels and stories. Ironically, Mṛdulā Garg married into a completely different family, down to earth and unimaginative. Her loneliness pushed her into creative writing, but this form of escape soon turned into a passion (Jain, 2010; Jājū, 2012, pp. 17-21).

Mṛdulā Garg, after graduation, taught Economics at Delhi University for three years. During the 1980s she wrote a fortnightly column in a Calcutta magazine, *Ravivār*; and more recently, from 2003 to 2010, she collaborated with *India Today* writing the column *Kaṭākṣ*. She was a research associate at the Center for South Asian Studies of the University of California-Berkeley in April 1990. She has been invited to speak on Hindi literature and criticism, on discrimination against women at Universities and conferences in several countries.

Her first short story, *Rukāvaṭ*, was published in *Sārikā* magazine in 1971 and was followed by many others. A collection of more than eighty short stories, *Sangati-Visangati*, was published in two volumes in 2004. She wrote three dramas and various collections of essays. Her first novel, *Uske hisse kī dhūp* was published in 1975 and caused quite a stir, as it was probably the first text in Hindi literature to call into question the sanctity of both arranged and love marriages, leading in a natural way to sexually uninhibited behavior. Her principal novels include *Vaṃśaj* (1976), *Cittakobrā* (1979; because of which she was arrested on charges of obscenity), *Anitya* (1980), *Maim aur maim* (1984), *Kaṭhgulāb* (1996) and *Miljul man* (2009), for which she won the Sāhitya Akademi award in 2013. Most of her work can be read as a feminist struggle for self-emancipation (Consolaro, 2011a, pp. 286-290; Jājū, 2012, pp. 22-34; Rāy, 2002, pp. 352-354)

MY NAME IS Smita. I am home after nearly twenty years. The same old home, under layers of dust. A little faded in memory, a little unfamiliar, perhaps, when you see it unexpectedly, but that didn't last (Garg, 2003, p. 1).⁷⁸

The novel is structured in five chapters depicting five different characters: Smitā, Marianne, Narmadā, Asīmā and Vipin. Each of them relates her/his own individual experiences and traumas, but at the same time proposes a different point of view on other characters' stories.

Smitā is a middle-aged woman who returns to India after twenty years in America. The text begins with the memory of her childhood in her parents' house and, after their deaths, of her living with her sister Namitā and her brother-in-law *jījā*. Here we have a first traumatic episode: Smitā is raped by a mysterious man (probably her *jījā*, but she will never know for sure) in her own room, in front of a mirror and under bright lights. The following morning the girl leaves the house and goes to Kānpur to start her undergraduate courses. Afterwards, avoiding any contact with her sister and her family, Smitā flies to the USA. She lives in great solitude for some months, far from the bright lights of the shopping malls, looking at the trees as her only friends. During the Christmas period she starts some psychotherapy sessions. We do not know exactly what is being related by Smitā, but it seems that Doctor Jarvis misrepresents the girl's situation, without understanding her painful past. After some months Smitā marries Jim Jarvis, but this relationship leads to a second episode of abuse: he beats his wife, causing her to have a miscarriage. The girl runs away and seeks a shelter in RAW (Relief for Abused Women), an association where she has already been working. The first person that Smitā meets in RAW's office is Marianne, the protagonist of the second chapter.

Marianne is a sociologist, with a lively artistic flair. If Smitā agrees to talk about her life in America shrouding her past, Marianne talks about her first unsuccessful marriage, but she is rather evasive about her present life. As a child she suffered because of her selfish mother, who only cared about appearances and money, therefore she married an aspiring novelist, without any pragmatic interest. The man asks for her help in his research in order to find materials for his perfect building, his great novel. He changes his mind continually but in the end he finds a suitable subject: stories of women who migrated from Europe to America in different historical moments. Marianne, after being persuaded to

⁷⁸ मेरा नाम स्मिता है। कोई बीस साल बाद मैं अपने घर लौटी हूँ। वही मिट्टी से भरा घर। कुछ याददाश्त में धुँधलाया, कुछ एकाएक सामने पड़ जाने पर अनचीन्हा। पर अपरिचय ज्यादा देर नहीं टिका (Garg, 2013, p. 9)

have an abortion, dedicates all her energies to this new project. She provides her husband with the stories of four women, which will be published under the name of Irving Whitman with the title *Women of the Earth*. This man has firstly taken away her flesh and blood child and now her spiritual child. Marianne divorces him and gradually tries to forget her hatred for men. She remarries, this time a more pragmatic man, with the aim of having three children. Unfortunately, after several miscarriages and analysis, she has to abandon her dream, and decides to adopt a child. Time goes by among legal procedures, but finally a little girl should arrive in Marianne's house. Only in this moment does her husband reveal his real thoughts: he does not like little children, he already has two from his previous marriage and he does not want to repeat the experience. After this second divorce Marianne abandons the idea of motherhood and frees her creative energy in writing novels.

In the third chapter the reader goes back to India to listen to Narmadā's story. When Smitā returns to Delhi, Narmadā is working as a maidservant at her sister's house. While receiving Smitā in Namitā's absence, the woman relates her memories. It is very often difficult to understand whether Narmadā is answering Smitā's questions or if she is just thinking. It is worth noting that this chapter is written in a more colloquial form of Hindi, in order to gain a mimetic effect. Narmadā had to start working in a bangle factory when she was still a child. After her mother's death she lived with her married sister Gaṅgā and their mentally retarded brother. Her *jījā* was a violent and cruel man, who oppressed and exploited the two sisters. Furthermore, Narmadā was obliged to marry him: that custom was allowed in their community. Narmadā worked for some years at the home of Darjin Bībī (Asīmā's mother), learning to sew, then she worked in a school and finally arrived as a maidservant at Namitā's house. Here, Narmadā, who had neither a husband nor a child, brought up Namitā's children (Nīrjā and Pardīp) and took care of her invalid husband. The atmosphere in the house is gloomy, there is no love among the members of the family. Especially Namitā seems to be unable to feel any affection: she spends very little time with her children and has only words of bitterness for her husband. After his death, when Nīrjā and Pardīp are grown up, Narmadā cannot manage to stay any longer in the house.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to Asīmā's story. She is an assertive feminist working in the Delhi branch of Oxfam. She hates all men, starting with her father and her brother Asīm, and she considers marriage a terrible sentence for all women. Originally her name was Sīmā, a more conventional feminine name, that means limited, but significantly she decided to change it into Asīmā (unlimited). She was a childhood friend of Smitā and, after many years, she is going to meet her due to a common project for the empowerment of deprived girls. This means a new opportunity to relate Smitā's escape from India from an alternative point of view. She mentions that Smitā's sister had a relationship with her brother Asīm: she found out by chance, as she went to Namitā's house to talk to Narmadā. Narmadā's story is recalled as well, with special attention on her forced marriage with her *jījā* and the impossibility of receiving any help from the authorities. One day, Asīmā's

mother suffers a severe heart attack: as her last wish she requests that Narmadā takes over her work in the tailoring shop. Furthermore, with Asīmā's help, she would like to open a little school where the seamstress-girls can have their little brothers and sisters admitted. A few days later, Asīmā's mother dies. The chapter ends with almost all the main characters of the novel meeting in front of Asīmā's house: Namitā and her daughter Nīrjā are looking for Narmadā, while Smitā and Vipin are looking for Asīmā.

In the last chapter, we find the only male voice: Vipin is a middle-aged colleague of Asīmā, a very sensitive man, with a deep desire of fatherhood, who considers absolute sorrow the only omnipresent reality. He has decided to make his marriage proposal to Asīmā in order to adopt a child, but some unexpected events occur causing him to change his mind. After Darjin Bībī's death, he encounters Nīrjā and he is immediately fascinated by her youth and vitality: she could be the mother of his children. They become lovers and decide to try to have a baby, later they can also get married. Unfortunately, Nīrjā is unable to become pregnant. After some painful months, during which the girl becomes a sort of robot, "a numb woman-machine" (Garg, 2003, p. 216), she leaves Vipin and marries a widower with two little children. Vipin decides to join Asīmā and Smitā in the village of Godhar, where they are involved in a project for the development of marginalized areas.

3.7. Vinod Kumār Śukla - *Dīvār mem ek khiṛkī rahī thī* (1997)

Vinod Kumār Śukla was born on 1 January 1937 in Rājnāndgāmv (Chhattisgarh). He graduated from high school in 1954 and enrolled at the Agricultural University of Jabalpur, with the hope of finding a good position upon graduation. He obtained his M.Sc. in 1962 and was soon hired as Demonstrator at the Agricultural University of Gwalior. In 1966 he was transferred to Raipur, where he currently lives. He worked as Associate Professor at the Indira Gandhi Agricultural University until his retirement in 1996.

Thanks to his older brother, Śukla met the well-known poet and writer Muktibodh. The latter, in fact, was appointed Hindi Lecturer in Rājnāndgāmv in 1958, where Śukla's brother was studying. At that time Śukla had started writing poetry and meeting Muktibodh represented a sort of revelation. Later, during his studies in Jabalpur, Śukla became a regular visitor to the house of the satirist and humorist Hariśaṅkar Parsāi (Siṃh, 2013 pp. 26-34; Śukla, 1999, p. viii).

Vinod Kumār Śukla wrote several collections of verses (see Offredi, 1998), among them *Lagbhag jay Hind* (1971), *Sab kuch honā bacā rahegā* (1992), *Atirikt nahīm* (2001) and *Ākāś dhartī ko khaṭkhaṭātā hai* (2006). His first novel, *Naukar kī kamīz*, was published in 1979 and, about twenty years later, was adapted into a movie by Maṇi Kaul. The text can be considered the first part of a trilogy on the Indian lower-middle class, which was completed by *Khilegā to dekheṅge* (1996) and *Dīvār mem ek khiṛkī rahī thī* (A win-

dow lived in a wall, 1997)⁷⁹. The protagonist of *Naukar kī kamīz* is Santū Bābū, a young clerk, living with his wife in a humble house, rented from a physician. He relates in the first person some episodes of his life, about his household and his job at an excise office. *Khilegā to dekheṅge* is the story of a teacher who is forced to move from his school, destroyed by a storm, to an abandoned police station. The other characters are the village watchman — convinced that his popgun really can be lethal, just by aiming properly at the target — and a shopkeeper searching for his beautiful, runaway wife. As in the previous novel, the plot is extremely reduced and composed of a collage of images of daily life. The same structure characterizes *Dīvār meṅ ek khīrkī rahtī thī*, the novel selected for my analysis, with which Śukla won the Sāhitya Akadēmī award in 1999 (Rāy 2002, pp. 361-363). *Dīvār* was translated into several Indian and European languages and inspired a stage adaptation by Mohan Maharṣi.

Śukla's novels — despite dealing with the living condition of the lower middle class — significantly diverge from the tradition of social realism: there are no specific references to the Indian historical and political situation, no great ideals or veiled teachings. The author seems to rediscover the poetry of small things, mixing reality with what is possible or with what can be imagined. For these reasons, Śukla's prose is often connected to magical realism. Actually, as the writer underlined, this is never an effect artificially obtained:

I believe, and it is only my personal view, that my imagination is also my reality. Sometimes, in the face of relentless reality, that imagination seems truer. So often, in times of distress, we tell each other, 'Sab theek ho jayega (Everything will be alright).' Can anything be further from truth? Everything will never be alright. But it seems, at that moment, to be possible. (Chakrabarti 2015)

⁷⁹ All three novels were translated into English by Satti Khanna, respectively with the title *The servant's shirt*, *Once if Flowers* and *A Window Lived in a Wall*.

It was this morning. The sun played no tricks. It did not steal away and appear elsewhere. It rose in the East. Some days it would rise and hide behind clouds but it rose for sure (Shukla, 2007, p.1).⁸⁰

The protagonist is Raghuvar Prasād, a twenty-two-year-old math lecturer, newly married. His life is divided between two poles, his modest house and his college, eight kilometers away. The house (as in Śukla's first novel *Naukar kī kamīz*) represents the place to return to, the place of intimacy, while the workplace is characterized by formal and hierarchical relations. Usually to connect these two realities there are jitneys, bikes and scooters, but one day an elephant appears. A *sādhū* is riding on the huge animal and offers Raghuvar a ride home. The young man initially feels nervous, but progressively he manages to relax. Raghuvar starts traveling regularly with the *sādhū* and discovers a new and at the same time ancient way of traveling, in slow motion and in accordance with nature.

Raghuvar Prasād's domestic life is humble, but happy. His young wife Sonsī has just joined him, but they quickly develop great complicity and intimacy. Moreover, her arrival allows him to discover a new, magical world just beyond their window. There, they can enjoy the beauty of an edenic garden, which becomes the ideal landscape for their love. There is lush vegetation, a river with fresh clear water, ponds full of lotuses, birds twittering, children playing and an old woman taking care of their needs. Raghuvar's parents, during one of their visits, manage to enter this world, nevertheless this dimension is not accessible to everybody. The Head of the Math Department, for example, has a glimpse of it, but is not able to access to it. He attempts to bring his wife and his children beyond the window, but in vain.

The couple leads a quiet life, amidst Raghuvar's lessons and Sonsī's domestic duties, but one day they find the elephant alone in front of their house. They cannot see the *sādhū* anywhere. Raghuvar is doubtful: what would he do if the *sādhū* has left for Benares as he once mentioned? Actually, it is just a false alarm, as the same evening the *sādhū*, who had felt sick, appears and takes the animal back. Some days pass and this time both the *sādhū* and the elephant seem to have disappeared. Worried, Raghuvar reaches the *sādhū*'s place to check on what is going on. The *sādhū* has almost recovered, but the elephant has injured a foot and is unable to walk properly. Finally, Raghuvar's

⁸⁰ आज की सुबह थी। सूर्योदय पूर्व की दिशा में था। दिशा बही रही आई थी, बदली नहीं थी। ऐसा नहीं था कि सूर्य धोखे से निकलता था, उसके निकलने पर सबको विश्वास था। किसी दिन सूर्य बादलों में छुपा हुआ निकला होता पर निकला हुआ जरूर होता था। (Śukla, 2014, p. 11)

fear becomes true: the *sādhū* actually sets out for Benares, leaving the pachyderm chained in the compound where he used to live. As the young man discovers what has happened, he immediately goes to the animal and frees it. When he returns home he imagines that the elephant will follow him (as it did on a previous occasion), but this does not happen. The animal has not gone to Raghuvar's settlement, nor has it remained in its compound: it has simply disappeared (Śukla, 2014, pp. 154-156). The elephant is undoubtedly a central metaphor of the novel (together with the "window on the wall"), nonetheless it is quite complex to decode. The huge, slow animal represents an alternative to the frenzy of contemporary life:

In the days when the world moved at a slower pace, the elephant's swaying gait could keep up. The elephant was no longer in step with the world but it ported a world of its own and into this world Raghuvar Prasad was gradually gaining entrance. (Shukla, 2007, p. 14)⁸¹

The elephant is a reminder of another type of life, which proceeds slowly, but in accordance with nature. Moreover, the elephant, traditionally a symbol of majesty, seems to elevate Raghuvar from his low social status. But why does the *sādhū* abandon the animal, leaving it presumably to Raghuvar Prasād and Sonsī's care? And why does the elephant finally disappear? Taking into account the whole story, and particularly the protagonist's trajectory, the elephant may also be read as a symbol of the power of imagination (see also 4.1.1). Initially, Raghuvar needs the *sādhū*'s help to feel comfortable with it, but progressively he becomes capable of handling this power. Therefore, when the *sādhū* finally leaves, Raghuvar definitively frees the physical and metaphorical animal from its chains. The elephant disappears as the young man has internalized the power of imagination.

3.8. Gītāñjali Śrī - *Hamārā śahar us baras* (1998)

Gītāñjali Śrī was born on 12 June 1957 in Mainpurī (Uttar Pradesh). She started her career as a historian and sociologist, dealing with modern Indian history. Under her real name, Gītāñjali Pāñdey, she published four papers on the role of intellectuals in the movement for Independence. In 1989 her PhD thesis was published with the title *Between Two Worlds: An Intellectual Biography of Premchand*. She became known as a novelist and author of short stories with the name Gītāñjali Śrī, taking her mother's first name Śrī as her last name.

Her first short story, *Belpatr* was published in 1987 in *Ham̄s* and was followed by the collection *Anugūñj* in 1991. Successively, she published three more collections of

⁸¹ ...जब शुरू की दुनिया धीमे चलती थी तब हाथी दुनिया के साथ डगमग चलता था। अब भी हाथी पहले जैसा धीमे चल रहा था। दुनिया के साथ हाथी हो न हो पर हाथी के साथ दुनिया अभी भी थी। हाथी की इस दुनिया में रघुवर प्रसाद शामिल हो रहे थे। (Śukla, 2014, p. 20)

short stories, *Vairāgya* (1999), *Mārc, Mām aur Sākurā* (2008) and *Pratinidhi kahāniyām* (2010). Gītāñjali Śrī's first novel *Māī* (1993) is set in a typical joint family in Northern India, and depicts the complex relations between a modern daughter and a mother deeply rooted in her conventional role (for an introduction to this and to the following novels see Consolaro 2006, pp. 124-141). The novel was translated into several languages, including English, French, German, Serbian and Urdu. Her other novels include *Hamārā śahar us baras* (1998), *Tirohit* (2001), *Khālī jagah* (2006) and *Ret-samādhi* (2018) If *Tirohit* is another intimate story, dealing with women's identities and relationships (it describes an improbable friendship between two women, with completely different backgrounds), both *Khālī jagah* and *Hamārā śahar us baras* are related to social issues with a global impact, such as terrorism and communalism (see Shree 2011, at <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reviews-essays/polyphonic-world-hindi-fiction/2>). Gītāñjali Śrī is also associated with the theatre and writes scripts for Delhi-based theatre groups.

Hamārā śahar us baras (Our city that year) - the story

This is the place. Our city.
In this city where the three of them had emerged perplexed, they will bring up everything, guilt and guilty parties, injured and dead bodies.⁸²

Hamārā śahar us baras (1998) is the story of a broken friendship and ideals, where history enters everyone's life and moulds it. The protagonists are four intellectuals unable to face the spreading communal violence. Set in an unnamed city in Northern India, the novel deals with the tension between the Hindu and the Muslim community in an undefined year⁸³ in the late Twentieth century. The story is related in fragments by a narrator, who lives in the same city as the main characters and experiences the same time of distress, but who is external to their group. From the beginning of the novel the narrator explicitly says that she wants to bear witness to what was going on in the city, that year (Śrī, 2010, pp. 7-8, 12, 60). In an interview the author stated that she started writing *Hamārā śahar us baras* "because it was a very painful time in India: it was a moment when people like me were very troubled by the world we were living in. [...] We were going in directions that were completely hateful to us but we were helpless, we could do nothing" (Consolaro, 2006, p. 128). As a reaction, she thought that she had to write a

⁸² यही जगह है। हमारा शहर।

घबराकर जिस शहर में निकल गए थे वे तीन कि अपरध और अपराधी, घायल और मुर्दे, सबको निकाल लाएँगे। (Śrī, 2010, p.7)

⁸³ The events may be set during the 1980s or early 90s before the demolition of the Bābrī Masjid.

novel about this situation, about this atmosphere. She felt she could not write about anything else. Nonetheless, added Gītāñjali Śrī, “it was not at all an easy subject. We were too much in the middle of it. It was all around us. There was not any distance from it, and yet you need a little bit of distance, because it’s not easy to talk about something when there’s just a cacophony around” (Consolaro, 2006, p. 129).

The novel’s main characters are Śruti, Hanīf (a married couple) and their neighbors Śarad and Daddū. Śruti and Hanīf could represent a successful example of mixed culture⁸⁴, as she is a Hindu writer and he is a Muslim university lecturer. On many occasions, Śruti is depicted while sitting, in an attempt to start writing. She knows that during such a period she should write about social and political issues, but she is not able to do so (Śrī, 2010, pp. 7, 74, 98). She can only write love stories (pp. 33-34, 52). Hanīf is a well-known scholar, committed to both research and teaching. He participates in several seminars, even abroad, and he has a good, informal relationship with his students, which, however, causes envy among his colleagues. Furthermore, he is set to become the new Head of the Department. Śarad is a Hindu university lecturer, a childhood friend of Hanīf; his old father, Daddū, holds in great esteem Urdu poetry and literature as a pure expression of beauty. Daddū’s *divān* is a fundamental meeting point in the novel, where numerous discussions take place.

The narrator, through a fragmented plot, recreates a situation which is deteriorating, both on private and public levels. In the city, loudspeakers have started to spread violent and fanatic messages; the riots have become frequent and bombs terrorize the inhabitants. But the communal prejudices and violence reach the protagonists’ homes as well. A first occasion of friction between Hanīf and Śarad is offered by the rotation to the headship of the department. Hanīf should be the candidate, but he does not want the position. He is afraid that until Professor Nandan’s retirement, he will be like a puppet in his hands. Śarad on many occasions tries to persuade his friend to accept the post, but in vain. At the end of the novel the position will be held by Śarad himself (Śrī, 2010, p. 333), while Hanīf will be isolated both by colleagues and students. A turning point in the novel is an episode of physical abuse suffered (paradoxically) by Śarad (pp. 236-240). During his speech, in the last public assembly of that year, three stones are thrown by a Hindu fanatic. After the first stone, the scholar addresses the assailant: how can he be a real Hindu? Does he not know that discussion represents the basis of the Hindu *dharma*? A second stone is thrown, breaking a window. Śarad is intimidated, he should remain silent as, in the assailant’s words, he is a “non-Hindu”. Hanīf, even if he is the only Muslim participant, attempts to respond. A third stone hurts Śarad and the police have to intervene. Quickly the episode is distorted by rumors: someone says that the assembly was interrupted by a Muslim attack. Several letters appear in newspapers and in the department,

⁸⁴ Significantly their names represent the union of two revealed truths. Śruti (Sanskrit, lit., what is heard) denotes the revealed truth heard by the saint seers of the Vedic time; while Hanīf (Arab: *hānif*) means “true believer” (Consolaro, 2010, p. 97).

criticizing Hanīf's participation and asking for his apologies (Śrī, 2010, pp. 246, 252-253, 263). Even Śarad, in private, disapproves of his friend's speech: he is a Muslim, he should not have spoken in such a context. If in the first part of the novel Śarad attempts to profess his faith in secularism, he is now defining his and other people's self in communal terms. Hanīf is losing the students' support as well: in fact the students' union passes a resolution to dismiss him from the university (Śrī, 2010, p. 272). Furthermore, fourteen BA students ask to be exonerated from his class and to substitute it with some other lecturers' lessons (p. 307). Finally, a disquieting hitlist is hung on the walls of the university: Hanīf's name is included (pp. 296, 304-305). This professional and personal crisis makes him surrender and decide to go on sabbatical.

The impossibility of reconciling the situation is shown by one of the last fragments of the novel. Daddū and Śruti are attacked by a group of young fanatics, while they are at home, discussing what is real and what is not (pp. 344-350). Even the most intimate sphere (here represented by Daddū's home) is violated by the external world.

3.9. Alkā Sarāvgī - *Kali-kathā: vāyā bāipās* (1998)

Alkā Sarāvgī was born into a *marvārī* family in Calcutta on 17 November 1960. She focused her PhD in Hindi literature on Raghuvīr Sahāy's work. Her first short story *Āp kī hamṣī* was published in 1991 in the Hindi literary magazine *Vartmān Sāhitya*, followed five years later by a collection of short stories, *Kahānī kī talās meṃ* (Parson, 2012, p. 116). Her most famous novel is *Kali-kathā: vāyā bāipās* (1998), for which she won the Śrīkānt Varmā Purskār and the Sāhitya Akadēmī award. The novel became a great literary success, with relevant echoes on an international scale. *Kali-kathā* was translated into English (by the author herself), French, Italian, Spanish and Urdu. The novel, as the author stated, was largely influenced by her grandmother's accounts of her past as an exile from Rajasthan to Calcutta (she was one of the first women of the *marvārī* community to accompany her husband to Calcutta). When she started to write on Kiśor Bābū's life (*Kali-kathā* protagonist), Sarāvgī realized that one hundred and fifty years of history buried in her memories through her grandmother began to be reaffirmed by what she was reading, or what the old *marvārī* citizens of Calcutta were telling her (Saraogi, 2004, pp. 18-21).

Sarāvgī's other novels include *Śeṣ kādambarī* (2001), *Koī bāt nahīm* (2004), *Ek brek ke bād* (2008) and *Jānkidās Tejpal Mansion* (2015). The latter is the story of Jaygovind, a computer engineer who returns to Calcutta after his studies in the USA and becomes involved in the Naxalite movement. The protagonist's life follows the disappointments of the first post-Independence generation, from the early optimism for freedom to the broken dreams of the present (Kumār, 2015).

Calcutta. Lansdowne Road. Exactly in the middle of exhaust gases of buses and hurtling cars, of screaming horns and screeching breaks, Kiśor Bābū was seen crossing the road, unconcerned about looking back and forth, in front of the newest and most expensive restaurant of the city, the Golden Harvest.⁸⁵

The main character is Kiśor Bābū, a seventy-two-year-old *mārvārī* man, who has just been subjected to a bypass operation. When he wakes up in the hospital, he has a lump on his head and starts to behave in a strange and unexpected way. His family — his wife Saroj, his daughters and his son — see him wandering on foot in the streets of Calcutta and reading his ancestors' diaries. Everything is quite unusual for a parvenu who used his car to reach each and every place and who spent most of his life deleting a past of poverty. The bypass operation seems to reawaken Kiśor Bābū and determines the beginning of the third phase of his life: the first phase covered his childhood and youth until the Independence of India, while the second the following fifty years, until 1997. Most of the story, moving back and forth between the 1940s and 1990s, connects the first and the third phase of the protagonist's life. This offers a privileged perspective from which to observe the recent history of India, from the struggle for Independence to its fiftieth anniversary. The ideological thrust of the past and the plurality of its voices have disappeared, leaving room for a consumeristic, empty society.

In a remarkable example of analepsis, the narrator introduces the story of Kiśor Bābū's ancestors, who left the village of Bhivānī and tried to make their fortune in the city of Calcutta. However, analepsis is used mainly to relate Kiśor's childhood and youth. After the premature death of his father and his elder brother, he grew up with two widows, with the economic support of his maternal uncles. At school he had two friends Śāntnu, an enthusiastic follower of Subhāṣ Candr Bos, and Amolak, a committed Gandhian. He admired their firm belief in their ideals, but he could never deeply share any of their positions. Kiśor has to start working in his uncles' shop, which provides clothing to the Western military. This puts him in a complex situation, as he considers the soldiers invaders, responsible for many atrocities; but at the same time, he is aware that the survival of his family depends on them. Kiśor's story intertwines with History: the Second

⁸⁵ I was unable to find the English translation, hence all translations from this text are mine. As a reference in a Western language, I consulted *Bypass al cuore di Calcutta* (2007), a translation into Italian by Mariola Offredi. कलकत्ते के लैंसडाऊन रोड पर तेजी से दौड़ती गाड़ियों, बसों-मिनी बसों के धुएं, चीखते हॉर्न और ब्रेक लगाने की आवाजों के ठीक बीचोंबीच किशोर बाबू आगा-पीछा न देखते हुए शहर के सबसे नए और सबसे महंगे रेस्तरां 'गोल्डन हारवेस्ट' के सामने से सड़क पार करते देखे गए। (Sarāvgī, 2003, p. 5)

World War which terrifies Calcutta with the fear of a Japanese air assault, the famine of 1943, the communal violence. After all these events Kiśor's heart hardens and he loses any contact with his friends and with the word of his childhood.

One day, after the bypass operation, Kiśor finds out that Amolak died in 1992 during the demolition of the Bābrī Masjid, while he was trying to stop the Hindu extremists. Kiśor manages to contact Śāntnu, but discovers that he has completely forgotten his past and grown rich on foreign aid. A third episode, on 15 August 1997, discourages Kiśor completely. His son has promised him a gift for the 50-year Independence Day. He wrongly thinks that it might be a flag. Instead, Kiśor receives the key of a Ford Freedom, a limited edition in one of the colors of the Indian flag. All ideals of the 1940s are defeated or betrayed, both on individual and national scales.

The last pages of the novel are suspended in a dreamlike, imaginary atmosphere. On the threshold of the new millennium, the world has completely changed: the planet is dying, the earth is drying up, the air lacks oxygen. Government leaders have suspended industrial production and the use of gas, oil and coal. The only way to save the earth is to increase fields and vegetation and to replace the industrial machinery with men's labor. As in the past, the small farmers are now in the best condition to live in contact with the earth. Kiśor, remembering a promise made to his childhood friends, goes to the old Victoria Memorial to meet both Śāntnu and Amolak.

3.10. Uday Prakāś - *Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī* (2001)

Uday Prakāś was born on 1 January 1952 in Sītāpur, a remote village in Śahdol district, Madhya Pradesh. It was a quite backward area, with a high percentage (about 52%) of *ādivāsī* inhabitants (Paṭel, 2013, p. 61). This biographical information will be particularly relevant while reading *Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī*, the novel selected for analysis, in light of its special attention on marginalized areas and *ādivāsī* issues.

Uday Prakāś's family belonged to the middle class and his parents handed him down their interest in literature at an early age. Unfortunately, when he was only twelve his mother died and his father started to have a drink problem. Five years later, in 1969, his father also passed away. Despite the situation Uday Prakāś managed to enroll at Dr. Harisimh Gaur University, in the city of Sāgar (Madhya Pradesh) and supported himself by giving tuition. During the Emergency, he left his native region for Delhi. He took several jobs: he worked as a teacher in the Mañipur center of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, he wrote for *Dūrdarśan*, he made documentaries and worked for the magazine *Times of India*. He translated into Hindi many international poets and writers, including Pablo Neruda, Federico García Lorca, and H. Luis Borges. Uday Prakāś authored poems and prose, but initially the return to this activity was not sufficient to live on. A turning point was the

publication of *Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī* which provided him with a conspicuous income (Paṭel, 2013, pp. 61-63).

His literary work includes various collections of poems (for an introduction to Uday Prakāś's verses see Paṭel, 2013, pp. 73-82), such as *Suno kārīgar* (1980), *Abūtar-kabūtar* (1984), *Rāt meṃ hārmoniyam* (1998) and collections of short stories, like *Dariyāyī ghoṛa* (1982), *Tirich* (1990), *Aur ant meṃ prārthnā* (1994), *Pol Gomrā kā skūṭar* (1997), *Dattā-treya ke dukh* (2002) and *Maingosil* (2006). His short story *Vāren Hestings kā sāmḍ* (see section 2.2.2), from the collection *Pol Gomrā kā skūṭar*, was adapted for the theater by Arvind Gaur (2001). In 2010 Uday Prakāś won the Sāhitya Akadēmī award for his long short-story *Mohandās* (on this see Consolaro, 2011b). Its protagonist is a young *dalit*, whose identity is stolen by the son of a local notable during the selection for a government post. In September 2015 Uday Prakāś returned the prestigious award as a protest against the Akadēmī's indifference over the murder of the Kannada littérateur Kalburgi. On this and other episodes of violence against intellectuals he said "the Akademi organises a tamasha of sorts, presents you an award and forgets about you. When something like this happens, there is no word of consolation and support from them. Writers are a family but they don't seem to care" (Ghosh, 2015). In less than two months his decision was emulated by more than thirty writers (see Lal, 2015).

Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī (The Girl with the Golden Parasol) - the story

Here's the bare backside of Madhuri Dixit, the same one Salman Khan had aimed at and hit with the pebble from his slingshot. Her back stiffened at the sting, she bent at the waist, and then turned around (Prakāś, 2013, p. 3).⁸⁶

Pīlī chatrī vālī laṛkī was published for the first time in installments in *Hams* in 1999. The tale was initially conceived as a love story, enriched with a humorous flavor, but due to the extraordinary success of the first installment among the subaltern classes, the author emphasized its dimension of social criticism (see the introduction to the English translations by Grunebaum, pp. xi-xii). In actual fact, *Pīlī chatrī vālī laṛkī*, even under the guise of a love story, appears as a direct attack on the consumer society and the traditional caste system. Rāhul, a non-brahmin boy, falls in love with Añjalī, the daughter of a brahmin minister and a Hindi MA student. Rāhul, despite his interest in anthropolo-

⁸⁶ यह माधुरी दीक्षित की वही नंगी पीठ थी, जिस पर सलमान खान ने गुलेल से निशाना ताक कर बंदी मारी थी. लचकती हुई कमर और पीठ उस चोट से अचानक रुक गयी थी और माधुरी दीक्षित ने गर्दन मोड़कर पीछे देखा था. (Prakāś, 2011, p. 7)

gy, decides to follow his heart and transfer to the Hindi department. The background of their story is a corrupt and deteriorated university campus, where local criminals (*gunḍa*) steal from students and beat them up, without being prosecuted by the police or by the authorities. One of the worst cases of violence involves a student from Manipur, Sāpām. The *gunḍa*-s enter his room, steal some money and force him to pee on the hot electric heater, giving him an electric shock. They also try to sodomize him. Sāpām, whose brother has just been killed in a shooting, cannot face the situation and commits suicide by jumping down an old well. Nobody in the campus can guarantee students' safety. A special task force is created by the students (S.M.T.F, Special Militant Task Force) to prevent *gunḍa* attacks. For any successful plan they have to suffer reprisals: a local magazine describes them as criminals who threaten the citizens, like agents from Pakistan and naxalites; their rooms are searched by the police, some of them are arrested and beaten.

On the other hand, Rāhul realizes that the Hindi department is completely dominated by brahmins. Only three of the thirty-four students are non-brahmin and almost all the teachers are brahmins. The majority of mainstream authors, writers and editors of newspapers, almost all people involved in institutions, academies linked to the world of Hindi literature are brahmin. Rāhul is afraid of this situation and also of his own feelings towards Añjalī: as some friends have underlined she is a brahmin girl, as soon as she has to take a decision she will abandon Rāhul and choose a boyfriend from her own caste. Despite the adversities, their love game starts. They try to find any chance for touching each other slightly without being noticed, they develop a new non-verbal language, made of sensations and energy. One day they are alone in Rāhul's room and realize that someone is looking at them from the ventilation space above the door. In a short time some people enter the room, among them is Añjalī's brother: the girl is taken away and Rāhul is intimidated.

In narrator's words "The story after this becomes very brief for the reason that it's not something that took place once upon a time, long, long ago. The story is, in fact, just a fraction of a larger narrative that is still taking place, even today. It's a work in progress, a tale that's under construction, a report of what just happened one second ago in a life very much still being lived" (Prakash, 2013, p. 192). The short novel ends with the image of Rāhul and Añjalī on a night train, trying to escape from the restrictions of their system.

4

CHAPTER

Postmodern traces within Hindi novels

4.1. Ontological plurality or instability: projected worlds

4.1.1. Otherworldliness

The first time I started thinking about the idea of “otherworldliness” and contemporary fiction, I was reading Murakami Haruki’s *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and The End of the World*⁸⁷ (2008). Here we have a small, ghostly city, enclosed by high walls, which separate it from anything else. Its inhabitants have no shadows and no feelings. A new arrival is charged with the task of reading people’s old dreams in unicorns’ skulls. In parallel, in a futuristic and inhuman Tokyo, a mad scientist involves a man in an inconsiderate experiment. The man has to climb down in the subsoil, facing monstrous creatures which represent mental fears and distress. These two stories, initially apparently separate, start to converge into a single line, revealing the connection between the two worlds. I liked the novel and I was fascinated by the author’s style, so I moved to a more recent work, *1Q84* (2011). Here the young protagonists — Aomame, a fitness instructor and professional killer, and Tengo, a math teacher and aspiring writer — unconsciously start a journey to an alternate reality, “1Q84.” The new world appears identical to the one they know except for the machinations of the Little People (sort of dwarves who speak

⁸⁷ The novel was published in Japanese for the first time in 1985, with the title *Sekai no Owari to Hādo-boirudo Wandārando*.

through the leader of a religious cult) and the presence of a second, greenish moon. Surprisingly this world mirrors exactly the one depicted in a novel, *Air Chrysalis*, written by a teenage girl and “stylistically adjusted” by Tengo. The role of otherworldliness is evident and fundamental in both novels: I thought that it could be a peculiar feature of Murakami’s writing, but I did not investigate the issue too deeply.

Quite recently, I was working again on Manohar Śyām Jośī’s *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī* (see 1.1 and 2.2.4.) and I noticed something that I had been unable to see during my MA thesis. Here too there is another world: Gūmāliṅg. It can be the mysterious Himalayan site, but also the Australian town which appears to the protagonist in his impaired mental state. Towards the end of the novel, the reader only discovers that Hariyā supposedly met the lama of Gūmāliṅg and — at least according to the only *kumāūmnī* witness of his pilgrimage — disappeared in a mirror. But what does Gūmāliṅg/Goomalling represent within the story? What is the connection with Hariyā’s real world? As underlined by Pacaurī, it is evident that Gūmāliṅg becomes Hariyā’s other world (Pacaurī, 2010, p. 145), a sort of alternate reality to Hariyā’s everyday life. This aspect led me to think about otherworldliness as a possible, more substantial ingredient of recent literary works. McHale’s reflections (2004) on the ontological dominant of postmodernist fiction provided me with an extremely thought-provoking perspective. From his point of view, if modernist fiction was characterized by epistemological uncertainty, postmodernist fiction is characterized by ontological plurality or instability:

...the dominant of postmodernist fiction is ontological. That is, postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like the ones Dick Higgins calls post-cognitive: “which world is this? What is to be done in it?” Other typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects, for instance: What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects? (McHale, 2004, p. 10)

These questions could refer perfectly to Hariyā’s story. Here we are not wondering whether we are able to learn of the hero’s real vicissitudes (as there is no univocal and indisputable truth to be discovered), but we focus on the ontological basis of the story.

According to McHale, ontological plurality or instability can be traced at various textual levels, from the most evident content level (of reconstructed worlds) to the text’s structure, from the lexical choices to the text’s layout. The basic element is that postmodernist fiction brings to the foreground its ontological status and raises questions about the world (or worlds) in which we live. But why do we assist to this kind of phenomenon? It would be impossible to provide here anything like an exhaustive sociological explanation

of the situation, but I would at least like to point out one macro-element. To do this — and to follow McHale’s reflections — I need to go back to the well-known text *The Social Construction of Reality* by Berger and Luckmann. The authors defined everyday life as a sort of collective fiction, a shared, self-evident reality, temporally and spatially structured and with its own language. They argued:

The reality of everyday life further presents itself to me as an intersubjective world, a world that I share with others. This intersubjectivity sharply differentiates everyday life from other realities of which I am conscious. I am alone in the world of my dreams, but I know that the world of every day life is real to others as it is to myself. (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 37)

Hence, we are all mediating between our paramount reality and those other individual realities, which we have always met in the world of dreams, of fiction or while playing. However, in the consumer and globalized world the available stimuli and alternate realities have multiplied: television, video games, cinema, internet, vacations, all types of advertisements constantly evoke new, possible realities to escape from our daily routine. And these are just the most innocuous ways. Much more dangerous and problematic are the use of alcohol and drugs, conversions to religious sects, and mental diseases (Cohen and Taylor, 1992). Within such a context, what does postmodernist fiction do? According to McHale it imitates “the pluralistic and anarchist ontological landscape of advanced industrial cultures”, it mirrors a reality, which is plural more than ever before (McHale, 2004, p. 38).

Obviously, it would be impossible to argue that otherworldliness is something completely new, proper of the postmodern condition only. In fact, parallel worlds, dreamlike realities, illusions are elements occurring throughout classical Indian texts, from the Vedas to *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, and medieval *Purāṇas* (see, for instance, Bautze-Picron, 2008 and O’Flaherty, 1986). Before proceeding with my analysis, I would like to quote just a single, well-known example of otherworldliness in such texts, that is the *Līlākhyāna*, a tale included in *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (on this see, for instance, Hanneder, 2008 and Lo Turco, 2015). Its protagonist, queen Līlā, is shattered by the pain of having lost her husband, Padma, and asks goddess Sarasvatī to be led in his presence. Sarasvatī grants her wish and brings her to a parallel world, where Padma appears as a young sovereign, at the age of sixteen. This new world exactly duplicates Līlā’s world and even includes a copy of the queen herself. When Līlā returns to her ordinary “reality”, she is taught that, in actual facts, both the worlds are fictitious and based on reminiscences. Moreover, the queen realizes that her life is the dreamworld of Vāsiṣṭha, a brahmin who has just died and desired to be a king: the brahmin and his wife were Padma and Līlā in their former lives. Therefore, within the *Līlākhyāna*, otherworldliness is a device that allows to unmask world experience as unreal. In *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī* the situation is rather different: Manohar Śyām Joṣī resorts to otherworldliness, but without a similar philosophical purpose. As I

demonstrate throughout my whole work, postmodernism does not invent anything completely new. It utilizes preexisting materials and literary techniques, giving them a new life and meaning.

But let us go back to the Hindi novels that are the subject of analysis. In addition to *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī*, another text employs otherworldliness to foreground the idea of ontological plurality. This is *Dīvār meṃ ek khiṛkī rahtī thī* by Vinod Kumār Śukla. The main character, Raghuvar Prasād, leads a humble but happy life. After the arrival of his young wife Sonsī, he discovers a new, magical world just beyond his window. Here, he and his beloved can enjoy the beauty of an edenic garden, *another world* which transcends material and social boundaries. Here nature is clement: even when a storm is coming, the world beyond the window remains calm, with just a gentle breeze blowing (Śukla, 2014, p. 55). Nature is flourishing, with plenty of perfumed flowers and mango trees which generously offer their fruits. The *natural* inhabitants of this world are children, always playing and laughing, and an old, caring lady, Būrhī Ammā. The woman is always attentive to the couple's little needs (as they finish bathing in a pond, she always brings them some *cāy*), but also gives Sonsī some precious gifts, such as two golden bracelets (Śukla, 2014, p. 91). The window is a sort of breach through which to escape the restrictions of everyday life. As Raghuvar and Sonsī explicitly argue “the window is in the mind” (Śukla, 2014, p. 52), it is first of all a mental condition of openness and candor. And once the world beyond the window seems to enter the couple's home:

“The earth seemed like the sky,” Sonsi whispered in Raghuvar Prasad's ear in the darkness.
 “Are we floating out through the window?”
 “No, it is the outside coming in.”
 “First the pond came, then the shore of the pond.”
 “First the path came, then the earth.”
 “First the stars came, then the sky.”
 “First the rustling of the trees, then the trees.”
 “Then the swift air came.”
 “Fragrance came.”
 “After fragrance, flowers bloomed.”
 “The bicycle couldn't get through the window. Then space outside the window came inside to where the bicycle was.” (Shukla, 2007, p. 133)⁸⁸

⁸⁸ “धरती आसमान की तरह लगती थी।” अन्धेरे में सोनसी ने रघुवर प्रसाद के कान में फुसफुसाकर कहा।
 “क्या हम अपने आप खिड़की से बाहर जा रहे हैं।”
 “नहीं खिड़की का बाहर अन्दर आ रहा है।”
 “तालाब पहले आया फिर तालाब का किनारा आया।”
 “पगडण्डी पहले आई फिर धरती आई।”
 “तारे पहले आए फिर आकाश आया।”
 “पेड़ का हरहराना पहले आया फिर पेड़ आए।”
 “फिर तेज हवा आई।”
 “महक आई।”
 “महक के बाद फूल खिले।”
 “साइकिल खिड़की के बाहर नहीं गई खिड़की का बाहर साइकिल तक आ गया।” (Śukla, 2014, p. 100)

The world beyond the window can even reach Raghuvar and Sonsī in the intimacy of their small dwelling. However, it is not so easy for everybody to enter this world: the Head of the Math Department, for example, has a glimpse of it, but is not able to gain access to it (Śukla, 2014, pp. 47-49). Hence, what is the key to benefit from this idyllic place? The answer seems to be imagination. For those people who can experience their feelings (especially love), who can let their imagination flow unconstrained, reality discloses unexpected features. The excerpt below, for example, could depict an extremely ordinary situation: a couple who have gone outside to wash their clothes. Raghuvar and Sonsī are standing near a pond and on the ground, there are some *raṅgolī* patterns drawn in clay powder: there are a *svastik*, two *cakra*-s, diagrams of conch shells, a lotus and a sacred fish. The bar of soap falls into the pond, but is soon found by the water's edge. In the dialogue below husband and wife provide an almost magical explanation of the soap is retrieved:

“Here's the soap”, his wife said. She looked into the still water. She saw swastika, conch, energy wheel and fish painted in red dye. A sacred fish drawn in white clay swam in the water. The fish must have rescued the bar of soap. Raghuvar Prasad was astonished to see it. “Perhaps a big fish mistook the bar of soap for food and the left it on the shore.”

“It must be the fish in the sacred drawing that found the soap. I glimpsed the red dye fish in the river.”

“Really?” Raghuvar Prasad was surprised. He focused his attention on the water. He could see a lotus flower made of red dye. “I can see a lotus”, he said.

“I can see a lotus too”, she said looking at many lotuses.

“They aren't real lotus,” Raghuvar Prasad said.

“Which ones do you mean?” the wife asked.

“This lotus was painted on the path paved with cow dung.”

“The fish too.” (Shukla, 2007, p. 61)⁸⁹

A simple episode of everyday life is transformed through the power of imagination: drawings seem to come to life, being mixed and confused with natural elements. In the world beyond the window nature seems to play empathetically with the two lovers, to beautify

⁸⁹ “साबुन है” पत्नी ने कहा। पत्नी ने स्थिर पानी में देखा, उस पानी में अल्पना के स्वस्तिक, शंख, चक्र, मछली दिखी। छूही मिट्टी की धूल की रंगोली-मछली तैर रही थी। उसी ने तैरते हुए साबुन की बट्टी को निकाला होगा। साबुन देखकर रघुवर प्रसाद आश्चर्यचकित हो गए थे। “शायद एक बड़ी मछली ने खाने की चीज़ समझकर साबुन को पकड़ा होगा फिर यहीं किनारे छोड़ दिया होगा।”

“हाँ, रंगोली की मछली ने साबुन को निकाला होगा। अल्पना की मछली को मैंने जल में तैरते देखा है।”

“अच्छा!” आश्चर्य से रघुवर प्रसाद ने कहा। उन्होंने तालाब के जल को एकटक देखा। उन्हें अल्पना का बना हुआ कमल दिखा।

“मुझे कमल दिख रहा है” रघुवर प्रसाद ने कहा।

“मुझे भी दिख रहा है” पत्नी ढेर से खिले हुए कमल को देखकर कह रही थी।

“यह सचमुच का कमल नहीं है!” रघुवर प्रसाद ने कहा।

“कौन सा कमल!” पत्नी ने पूछा।

“यह कमल उस जगह गोबर से लिपी जगह पर बना था।”

“मछली भी वही थी” (Śukla, 2014, p. 51)

their reality. Here, even the perception of life and death changes. In the lines below Raghuvar's parents have passed beyond the window and are experiencing in their own personal way this new reality:

“Life seems so good, it appears we have lived a long time and death is very near,” Father said.

“So good that there is much life left. It will take a long time to cover the distance to death.”

“You're right. We still have long to live. Do you think we can see death from here?”

“If we have attention to spare from living, only then. A living eye never sees death, only life.” (Shukla, 2007, p. 97)⁹⁰

As described in section 3.7., the plot of *Dīvār* is extremely simple, there are no great events or conflicts, but imagines of pure life and of nature with all its sensuous effects (Śukla, 2014, p. 168).⁹¹ The metaphor of the window and the world beyond it plays a fundamental role: it allows Raghuvar and Sonsī's reality — hence the reality of the lower-middle class — to be depicted with new and lighter nuances. Otherworldliness suggests another possible way of recounting their lives, which considerably differs from the harder tones of social realism.

Otherworldliness, obviously, is not the only literary device to render ontological plurality at the content level of projected worlds. The authors may include in their texts other realities, which are explicitly perceived as fictional: this is the case, for example, of *novels talking about novels*, hence of metafiction.

4.1.2. Metafiction

Patricia Waugh defined metafiction as “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh, 1984, p. 2). Metafictional works, she suggested, are those which “explore a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction”. They are characterized by a tendency to self-reflexivity or, in other words, by a tendency to call attention to the writing process itself. In actual fact, even in dedicated critical works, it is not easy to find a clear and all-encompassing definition of metafiction. Generally, various types of texts are mentioned under this term: texts re-

⁹⁰ “यहाँ जीवन इतना अच्छा लग रहा है कि लगता है बहुत जी गए और मृत्यु यहाँ से बहुत समीप हो।” पिता ने कहा। “इतना अच्छा कि बहुत जीने के बाद भी बचा हुआ है। मृत्यु यहाँ से पास हो परन्तु वहाँ तक पहुँचने में बहुत देर लगोगी”

“ठीक कहती हो देर का जीवन बचा है। क्या हम यहाँ से मृत्यु को देख सकते हैं”

“बचे जीवन को देख लेने के बाद फुरसत मिलेगी तब। जीवित आँख से मृत्यु नहीं जीवन दिखता है।” (Śukla, 2014, p. 75)

⁹¹ See the novel's afterword by Viṣṇu Khare.

counting their origin and birth, dealing with the history of narrative, recounting stories of writers.

Metafiction is generally considered an important feature of postmodern literature. In the postmodern era pure realistic writing is perceived as a limitation and an unsuitable device to render the complexity of the contemporary world. As Baudrillard said, we no longer live in a world made of unequivocal meanings, we live in a world of signs. In this context the authors reflecting on the writing process foreground the fictional nature of their narratives. As a consequence, the role of metafiction (which obviously cannot be considered as an innovation introduced by postmodernism) has become predominant in the postmodern era. Metafiction can follow different paths to reach its aims: its experimental component can be evident and radical or can be limited to a few pages or lines, without unduly affecting the perception of the story. In some cases, the reader will find no reflections on the structure or on the textual functions of the novel, but on its artistic and intellectual meaning.

Within the history of Hindi literature (referring here to Khaṛī Bolī Hindi only), probably the most famous example of a metafictional novel is *Sūraj kā sātvaṃ ghoṛā* (*The Sun's Seventh Horse*, 1952) by Dharmavīr Bhāratī. The novel consists of three narratives about three women recounted by Māṅik Mullā to his friends over seven afternoons, in the style of *Pañcatantra* or *Hitopadeśa*. Later, in the Seventies, Kṛṣṇa Baldev Vaid published *Vimal urph jāyem to jāyem kahām*. From the first pages of the novel, the narrator addresses his readers with provocative monologues.⁹² According to my findings, there are not many other examples of self-reflexive novels until the 1990s: from this decade, in fact, the metafictional component seems to gain new importance. In this section I will focus on two novels, *T-ṭā profesar* (by Manohar Śyām Jośī) and *Kaṭhgulāb* (by Mṛdulā Garg), where the authors explicitly reflect on the meaning of writing, in a personal and intimate dimension.

Jośī's protagonist and narrator, whose name is significantly the author's own name, is a storyteller suffering from writer's block, reflecting on the role of writing and of literature. Within a story made up of amusing episodes with plenty of sexual allusions, Mr Jośī introduces a much deeper and more complex reflection on writing potentials. From the beginning of the novel we find noteworthy excerpts foregrounding a basic question: can words still be immortal?

'Poets must die when they're young and novelists be born only when they're old.' Can't recall where I read that line, or its author's name. God knows who wrote it: a failed middle-aged poet or a successful old novelist. Sounds more like the former, if you ask me.

⁹² The novel is a harsh and ironic picture of the hypocrisies of the Indian middle class. It was *transcreated* (I am quoting the text's frontispiece) into English by the same author, with the title *Bimal in Bog* (Vaid, 2002).

[...] Look, successful or not, I am a middle-aged novelist too, and although I may now write to live, I no longer live to write. All the stories I put off writing, because I waited for them to mature, have grown old along with me. In fact, they are as close to death as I am now. So what immortality can this dying baggage have? (Joshi, 2008, p. 1)⁹³

The narrator talks to his readers, expressing a painful and disenchanted point of view on life and on the role of writing. We can find some interesting similarities with Italo Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. On one hand both novels are, at one and the same time, a comedy and a tragedy. In Calvino's text we have a "light plot" with two protagonists, the Reader and Ludmilla, the Other Reader, who ultimately end up marrying each other; but the tragedy emerges through a reflection on the difficulties of writing and the solitary nature of reading. On the other hand, Calvino, like Jošī, introduces his own double, an old writer named Silas Flannery, who reveals his intellectual crisis in a diary.

Returning to Mr Jošī's story, he recounts the sensations he used to experience through reading: he could burst out laughing or explode into tears and dreamt of recreating these same sensations in his future readers. In adulthood, however, the magic of words seems to have disappeared. Those unfinished stories of youth are growing old and slowly dying.

All those stories that I did not write in my youth have aged and died a little — like me — some outside me, and some within. However, there were some promising stories that I looked at from time to time, to test their health, as it were. I raged against their ageing as I raged against mine. I have piles of dusty files with several opening chapters written between long gaps. All they seem to me now are mute reminders that both my imagination and handwriting have deteriorated over years. Among that collection of trash are also some luckless plots that took birth, developed, and died of suffocation in my mind even before they saw

⁹³ "कवियों को जवानी में ही मर जाना चाहिए और कथाकारों को बुढ़ापे में ही पैदा होना चाहिए!" — यह उक्ति पता नहीं मैंने अपनी जवानी में किस किताब में पढ़ी थी? लेखक का नाम भी अब याद नहीं रहा। जाने वह कौन था? कोई विफल अधेड़ कवि था या सफल वृद्ध कथाकार? उसके अधेड़ कवि होने की सम्भावना ही अधिक नजर आती है मुझे तो। [...] देखिए, सफल न सही, वृद्ध कथाकार तो मैं भी हूँ और मेरा अनुभव यह है कि जीने के लिए लिख भले ही लूँ, लिखने के लिए मुझसे अब जीया नहीं जाता। अपने कथाकार के बुढ़ापे में पैदा होने के इन्तजार में मैंने जो ढेर सारी कहानियाँ जवानी में नहीं लिखीं, वे मेरे साथ-साथ बूढ़ी होती चली गयी हैं और जिस हद तक मैं मृत्यु के निकट पहुँच चुका हूँ, उसी हद तक वे भी पहुँच चुकी हैं। मरती हुई कहानियाँ लिखकर अमर हुआ जा सकता है भला? (*T-Īā profesar* in Jošī, 2008, p. 5)

ink and paper. What I am about to write is a requiem for just such a tale. (Joshi, 2008, pp. 3-4)⁹⁴

This last line may be seen as an anticipation of one of the last images of the novel, which will be mentioned below. In the narration flow I traced several references to the impossibility of expressing properly in words the complexity of human nature and life. When Mr Joṣī finds out about Ṭ-ṭā's painful past in the widows' house, he feels paralyzed. He continues to think about the three widows waiting for their *bhāū*⁹⁵ Ṣaṣṭīballabh to come back from school: he would like to depict their sorrow and the innocence of that small boy. But this task appears impossible: every time the image of the old lustful man that Ṣaṣṭīballabh had become insinuates itself into Mr Joṣī's mind. Nothing can be interpreted in a simplistic way: for any fact, for any behavior there could be multiple reasons. Every person is a multifaceted entity, which must be considered from several points of view. Moreover, every story is filtered through the lenses of the narrator and of the listener (or reader) and this awareness makes any univocal meaning impossible.

In the last page of the novel there is a decisive metaphorical reference to a tale, prematurely dead, to which the narrator is dedicating his requiem. During the funeral ceremony of a relative, Mr Joṣī is chatting with a young poet on the bank of a river. A crow is pecking at "something" on the surface of the water.

'What are you watching there, sir?' he asked. 'It looks like some dead child's body. I'm sure it is someone's illegitimate child,' he added in a disgusted tone.

I looked carefully then, and he was right. The crow was feasting on a dead foetus. Things blurred before me and the cawing of the crow sounded, to me, like someone calling: 'T'ta.'

I couldn't tear my gaze away: the dead child's bloated body bobbing on the waves appeared to be asleep. A crow was singing it a lullaby and the lullaby had just two syllables: Kay-ne. Kay-ne. No-thing. No-thing. (Joshi, 2008, p. 138)⁹⁶

94 तो जो कहानियाँ जवानी में लिखी नहीं गयीं, मेरे साथ-साथ बुढ़ाती चली गयीं, मरती चली गयीं — मेरे बाहर भी, मेरे भीतर भी। इन कहानियों में से भी कुछ की मैं बीच-बीच में वैसे ही सुध लेता रहा जैसे कि स्वयं अपनी। अपने बुढ़ापे से लड़ने की कोशिश करते हुए उनके बुढ़ापे से भी लड़ा। यही कारण है कि मेरी फाइलों में उन कहानियों के आरम्भिक पृष्ठों के, लम्बे अन्तरालों पर लिखे गये, कई-कई संस्करण मौजूद हैं, जो मूक साक्षी हैं मेरी कल्पना और मेरी लिखावट के बुढ़ाते चले जाने के। लेकिन कुछ अभागी कहानियाँ ऐसी भी हैं, जो मन में ही लिख-लिखकर मन में ही मिटा दी गयीं। कभी उतारी नहीं गयीं कागज पर। जो भीतर ही जन्मीं, पली-बढ़ीं और भीतर ही घुटकर मर गयीं। ऐसी ही एक कहानी का मर्सिया लिखने बैठा हूँ मैं। (*Ṭ-Ṭā profesar* in Joṣī, 2008, pp. 6-7)

95 Kumāūmnī word that means "child", "little boy". Manohar Śyām Joṣī uses this term adding, for the first occurrence, its Modern Standard Hindi equivalent (*Ṭ-Ṭā profesar* in Joṣī, 2008, p 60).

96 बोला, "क्या देख रहे हैं सर? कोई मारा हुआ बच्चा है। पता नहीं किसकी नाजायज औलाद है!" तब मैंने गौर से देखा। कौआ सचमुच एक भ्रूण की लाश पर ही बैठा हुआ था। मैंने देखा और मुझे इस सारे दृश्य में सब कुछ शिशुवत-सा लगने लगा। कौवे की काँ-काँ भी मुझे उस शिशुवत विदाई सी सुनाई देने लगी — ट-टा। मैं देखता रहा — लहरों में झूलती शिशु लाश को थपथपाते हुए एक कौवे को। मैंने सुनता रहा एक लोरी को जिसमें दो ही शब्द थे — 'के नै, के नै', कुछ नहीं, कुछ नहीं। (*Ṭ-Ṭā profesar* in Joṣī, 2008, p. 92)

Mr Joṣī cannot explain to the poet that he is staring at the substance of T-ṭā's life, whose story could not be told. He is staring at it "as a child looks at his hand — without disgust or understanding — when he has smeared it with his own shit" (Joshi, 2008, p. 139).

The perspective on the power of writing is completely different in Mṛdulā Garg's *Kaṭhgulāb*. Especially through Marianne, the second character introduced, writing becomes a fundamental device to express female creative power. To explain this assertion, I need to recall two fundamental ingredients of the novel: the unresolved ideal of parenthood and the deconstruction of conventional female and male roles (see Castaing, 2013, pp. 78-84). Even though the feminine identity is usually associated with motherhood, none of the main characters manages to conceive a child: Smitā and Marianne experience the pain of abortion, Narmadā dedicates her whole life to raising someone else's children and Asīmā does not feel any desire for pregnancy until her menopause. Almost all the mothers that we encounter in the text are far from being positive figures devoted to their children: there is Namitā, Smitā's sister, who spends very little time with her children and has a harsh attitude towards everybody; and Marianne's mother, who does not care about human relations, but only about appearance and money. While Smitā and Asīmā try to obviate their suffering through a life in close contact with nature and of social commitment, Marianne presents a different way to express female creative power: this is writing. Since her first marriage, while writing the journals about emigrant women, she has had a special experience, presented below in the dialogue with her husband:

"This, my dear Marianne, is the difference between academic and creative writing," said he. "We writers erect a big, perfect structure with our imagination but the slightest puff of ill wind can raze it to the ground. Isn't it a wondrous thing, this imaginary structure? We lay brick upon brick when there is not a brick in sight. The plan, the design, the materials... all imaginary. Incredibly light and evanescent, but once the bricks have been cemented and the structure stands, nothing can bring it down until the Day of Judgement. The truth is revealed to you in an instant of blinding insight. If you lose your concentration and the wrong door swings open, the flame is extinguished leaving only the inky darkness of soot behind." For a split-second Marianne thought that Irving was talking about her. He had homed right in. This is exactly what had happened when she wrote the diaries of Ruth, Roxanne, Elena and Susan. The door of the cage had opened on its own. Freed from the constraints of facts, she soared lightly with the wind. With a snap of her fingers, she had fashioned bricks out of nothing and created a castle which was whole. This

was her home, personal and intimate, which she owned in entirety. (Garg, 2003, p. 70)⁹⁷

The fictional nature of literature is here wonderfully explained: a writer does not deal with pragmatic reality, he/she creates his/her own imaginary castle. Ontological plurality is evident. There is no objective truth, but imagination and personal interpretations of experiences and feelings. Literature is a projection of the author's inner world. This idea is strengthened by the very structure of the novel. In fact, the five life stories are not simply juxtaposed, but intertwined and they propose alternative points of view on other characters' stories. Furthermore, in each chapter a first person and third person narrator alternates creating a fascinating game of perspectives (see 4.2.2). This complex structure highlights the importance of looking at any episode from several points of view, as there are no plain facts, but partial and subjective versions of the story.

When Marianne's husband, Irving, uses her journals about women emigrants in the USA in order to build and publish his novel, *Women of the Earth*, he does not recognize her contribution. The novel is defined as Marianne's stolen spiritual child: through this first image the writing process is associated with pregnancy, with the act of giving birth. Actually, Marianne will not try to write again until the end of her second marriage. In fact, after several miscarriages and an unsuccessful attempt to adopt, she decides to seek personal realization in writing her new, recognized novels. Through writing she can therefore free her female creative power. As Mṛdulā Garg stated in an interview with Ambika Ananth (2007), "There is no such thing as barren women. Any woman willing to nurture anyone is a mother". In this case it seems that Marianne has gone beyond nurturing human beings; she can experience an alternative motherhood through her art. This chapter is not only a celebration of the creative power of writing, but also an indictment of the male literary establishment. Marianne's husband is not the only writer to steal a woman's creative work; great names in the history of literature did the same to their wives (D.H. Lawrence and Scott Fitzgerald are mentioned in the novel as examples of this practice). Moreover, the majority of critics consider women to be essentially pragmatic, incapable of "abstract thought and historical sense", as if there was not too much to expect from them

⁹⁷ "यही तो फर्क है, प्यारी मारियान, एकेडेमिक और सृजनात्मक लेखन में," उसने कहा था, "हम लेखक लोग कल्पना का सहारा लेकर, जो लहीम-शहीम लाजवाब महल बनाते हैं, उसे बदनुमा हवा का हल्का-सा झोंका पलभर में धराशायी कर सकता है। कितनी कमाल की चीज है, नहीं, यही हमारी काल्पनिक इमारत? ईट-पर-ईट चिनते चले जाते हैं हम, बिना एक ईट के। नक्शा काल्पनिक, सीमेंट काल्पनिक, ईंटें काल्पनिक। इतनी हल्की और वायवीय कि हवा का एक विपरीत झोंका उन्हें उड़ा ले जा सकता है। पर एक बार ईंटें चिन दी जाएँ, इमारत खड़ी हो जाए तो कयामत तक उसे कोई गिरा नहीं सकता। एक क्षण में पूरा सच सामने कौंध जाता है। पर वह क्षण झूट जाए, ध्यान बँट जाए, गकत दरवाजा खुल जाए तो एक फूँक में, लौ बुझकर सिर्फ स्याही छोड़ जाती है।"

एक क्षण के लिए मारियान को लगा था, इर्विंग अपनी नहीं, उसकी बात कह रहा था। मारियान की मनःस्थिति को क्या खूब पकड़ा था उसने। ठीक ऐसा ही तो हुआ था उसके साथ, जब उसने रुथ, रॉकजॉन, सूजन और एलेना की डायरियाँ लिखी थीं। तथ्यों का पिंजरा खुद-ब-खुद खुल गया था। उसने खुद को आजाद बहती हवा के साथ झूलते पाया था। चुटकी बजाकर उसने शून्य में से मायावी ईंटें ईजाद कर ली थीं और एक भरा-पूरा महल तैयार कर लिया था। वह उसका एकदम निजी और अन्तरंग घर था; उसकी मालिक वह स्वयं थी, केवल वह, उसके सिवा और कोई नहीं। (Garg, 2013, pp. 86-87)

(Garg, 2003, p. 84). Particularly within the Hindi literary field, female voices are still subjugated by men and it is difficult to find space for women in a literary tradition dominated by patriarchy. Women writers, in fact, have been broadly marginalized and even when their works have been taken into account, it was done through careless and hurried references (on this issue see Consolaro, 2011a, pp. 268-272).

In addition to these two novels, I would briefly mention another text, *Ek naukrānī kī dāyirī* by Kṛṣṇa Baldev Vaid (*The diary of a Maidservant*). This is a fictional diary, written by a young maidservant named Śāntī. The reader does not only find out about her daily routine, but he/she sets out on a kind of journey through her inner world. Śāntī relates her dreams and aspirations, her fears and her doubts. Moreover, a fundamental element of the novel is the reflection on the meaning and the effects of writing. As the text proceeds, Śāntī develops an increasing awareness of her ambivalent relationship with the diary. Sometimes she feels that she is just wasting her time, that nothing good will come from filling so many notebooks, but she cannot stop writing. The diary allows her to reflect on a number of subjects, to find relief from troubles and also to concentrate on her own body and on its sensations. Writing is like “taking all your clothes off. Not just your clothes, but your skin. Not just your skin, but the skin off your thoughts too” (Vaid, 2007, p. 154). The girl knows that writing is a unique instrument enabling her to have a better understanding of her experiences and deepest feelings, a way to communicate with her own heart. And sometimes there is a sense of urgency related to writing which can be compared to a kind of possession: “Sometimes I feel I’m not the one who writes, that the writing gets done by itself. Just like certain words escape your lips on their own. Just like a goddess or a ghost suddenly possesses some people. Just like some women fall into trance. Just like some crazy people go on talking to themselves for no reason” (Vaid, 2007, p. 69).

The perspectives on the writing process which emerge from the above novels are heterogeneous and may even appear contradictory. If Jośī’s text vehicles a sense of disillusion and skepticism on writing potentials, both Garg and Vaid propose a more optimistic perspective. In Garg’s *Kathgulab* writing is a powerful instrument for self realization, while in Vaid’s novel it becomes an essential device to better understand one’s own inner and external world. Despite these differences, the key point is the central role assigned by the authors to metafiction. Paying explicit attention to the writing process foregrounds the fictional nature of literature and of its projected worlds. These authors cannot present any monolithic reality or indisputable truth; they can only offer their personal view of life and of literature, hence their own imaginative world. If we compare the above texts to famous postmodern novels — such as those of Borges, Calvino or Nabokov — their metafictional experimentation is less radical and does not affect the perception of the story. Nevertheless, as Wladimir Kryszinski states, metafiction should not be considered as

“a homogeneous mono referential discourse arising out of a limited series of problems linked to the narrative or novelistic process. Metafiction is rather a polyvalent problematisation of the critical, reflexive, analytical, or playful perspective of that which is narrated reflected upon itself” (Krysinski 2002, p. 186).

But what happens — and it happens quite frequently — when the novel not only talks about novels, but about history as well? To answer this question, in the next section, I will recall the well-known concept of historiographic metafiction, as defined by Linda Hutcheon.

4.1.3. Historiographic metafiction

Linda Hutcheon attempted to define the main characteristics of postmodern literature and highlighted its “intense self-reflexivity and overtly parodic intertextuality” (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 3). However, in her opinion, metafiction is just one of the basic components of a postmodern text. If we think about novels such as Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Doctorow’s *Ragtime*, Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* and Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, the self-conscious dimension of history cannot be neglected. There is a need to go back to history, but in a new, desecrating manner. The authors know that the past cannot be destroyed or disregarded, otherwise they would simply remain silent, having exhausted all expressive chances. The gap with traditional historical fiction is substantial, and because of this Hutcheon labelled this new literary dimension “historiographic metafiction”. She argued:

Today, there is a return to the idea of a common discursive “property” in the embedding of both literary and historical texts in fiction, but it is a return made problematic by overtly metafictional assertions of both history and literature as human constructs, indeed, as human illusions-necessary, but none the less illusory for all that. (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 4)

When I endeavored to transpose this reflection to the Hindi literary field, I immediately linked it to a short story by Uday Prakāś, *Vāren Hestings kā sām̐*⁹⁸. In an interesting preamble the author says:

In this story there is as much history as salt in *dāl*. If you try to search for history, you will be left with a heap of sand or a small branch of oleander in your hand. In fact, when dream is mixed with history, imagination with reality, fantasy with facts and future with past, the divine *līlā* starts, the illusion of *māyā* is born and the encounter with them is the real journey towards the truth.

⁹⁸ See section 2.2.2., note 33.

For this reason, every divine game and every illusion are as true as history.⁹⁹

With these words Prakāś introduces his short story, based on the historical figure of Warren Hastings and at the same time warns his readers: they will not find the official, common version of the Governor's life and it will be impossible to establish what is true and what imaginary. Reflections of this type can be found, more or less explicitly, in several novels of the Nineties and, to me, can be read as a possible clue of postmodernism. Obviously, I am not arguing that the presence of history or its mingling with fantasy has to be considered as something new for the Indian context. On the contrary, starting with the Sanskrit *Itihāsa*, the description of facts has implied a mixture of real episodes and fiction. Rethinking the past has always meant a rediscovery of history and, at the same time, popular narratives where fantastic and amazing ingredients are essential (Consolaro, 2011a, p. 111). However, in recent Hindi literature the presence of history takes new shapes and the authors explicitly play with the artificial nature of the historiographical accounts. I will explain this assumption, providing examples from *Kali-kathā: vāyā bāipās* by Alkā Sarāvgī, *Ḍūb* by Vīrendra Jain and *Pīlī chatrīvālī larḱī* by Uday Prakāś.

My starting point is Alkā Sarāvgī's novel. It is evident that history plays a fundamental role in *Kali-kathā*: the story, in fact, moves constantly between the 1940s and the 1990s suggesting a parallel between the recent history of India and the protagonist's life:

In one life Kiśor Bābū lived three lives. One of his lives was until Independence, hence until he was twenty-two. After that his second life started, a fifty-year-long life. In this second life there was not even a shadow of the first one. Because of this Kiśor Bābū looks upon it as a new birth. Who can say that these fifty years of Kiśor Bābū's life were like the fifty years of Indian democracy, where not even the scrapings of the ideals of the struggle for independence have remained?¹⁰⁰

The starting point of the novel is 1997, significantly fifty years after the Independence of India, but the narrative repetitively goes back to the final years of the British *rāj*. Analepsis is used in five out of seven examples to shift the narrative to the 1940s, during

⁹⁹ This translation from the original Hindi text is mine.

इस कहानी में इतिहास उतना ही है जितना दाल में नमक होता है. अगर आप इसमें इतिहास खोजने की कोशिश करेंगे तो आपके हाथ में रेत की ढूह या कनेर की टहनी भर आएगी. असल में जब इतिहास में स्वप्न, यथार्थ में कल्पना, तथ्य में फैटेसी और अतीत में भविष्य को मिलाया जाता है तो आख्यान में लीला शुरू होती है और एक ऐसी माया का जन्म होता है जिसका साक्षात्कार सत्य की खोज की ओर की एक यात्रा ही है. इसीलिए हर लीला और प्रत्येक माया उतनी ही सच होती है, जितना स्वयं इतिहास। (Prakāś, 2004, p. 103)

¹⁰⁰ किशोर बाबू की एक जिंदगी में तीन जिंदगियां जी गई हैं। देश की आजादी तक यानी बाइस साल की उम्र तक उनकी एक जिंदगी थी। उसके बाद उनकी दूसरी जिंदगी शुरू होती है - पूरे पचास साल की जिंदगी। इस दूसरी जिंदगी में पहली जिंदगी की कोई छाया तक नहीं थी। इसलिए किशोर बाबू उसे एक नए जन्म की तरह ही अब देख पाते हैं। यह भला कौन कह सकता है कि किशोर बाबू की जिंदगी के ये पचास साल भारतवर्ष के 'लोकतंत्र' के पचास सालों की तरह रहे हैं, जिनमें आजादी की लड़ाई के आदर्शों की खुरचन तक नहीं रही। (Sarāvgī, 2003, p. 109)

the struggle for Independence (see also Parson 2012, pp. 116-139). In the first example of analepsis we find the memories of Kiśor's sad childhood, marked by the premature deaths of his father and elder brother. Moreover, there is a first reference to the ideological plurality of the 1940s, which is symbolized by Kiśor's schoolmates Śāntnu and Amolak. The first is a passionate follower of Subhāṣ Candra Bos; he would like to become a revolutionary and to reject the ancient wealth of his family, as it was achieved through connivence with the British. Amolak, on the other hand, is a Gandhian and spends all his energies fighting peacefully against oppression and inequalities. Kiśor, in his personal struggle for everyday life, cannot find his own place in this context. When Śāntnu accuses the *mārvārī* community (to which Kiśor Bābū belongs) of having helped the British to settle in the area of Calcutta during the Eighteenth century, Kiśor Bābū feels embarrassed and disconcerted. This episode offers the narrator a chance to step back to 1756-1757, with a short historical digression about the fall of the *navāb* Sirājuddaulā. During the other cases of analepsis relating to the 1940s, the narrator recalls several aspects of Kiśor's youth and, at the same time, underlines the sense of ethical depletion of the present. One of the two remaining parts of analepsis recalls the story of Kiśor's ancestors since his great-grandfather Rāmvilās (1860-1926). It is a story of alternating successes and failures, of troubled feelings towards the British *rāj*, which strengthen the connection of Kiśor's family with the city of Calcutta. The last example of analepsis refers to the second phase of Kiśor's life. Significantly only a few pages are dedicated to this period. We only know that after moving to the Southern part of Calcutta (the former British part of the city), Kiśor was a strict father and husband, who devoted all his energy in order to give his house a modern look, and to sever any links with his past (Sarāvgī, 2003, pp. 56-63).

Kiśor Bābū's story may seem quite conventional, the story of an ordinary man who becomes representative of the state of the nation, hence a national allegory. Nonetheless, there are some other elements which render the novel more intriguing. First of all, the narrator clarifies that "history does not tell about common men, but every history is full of common men who spend their lives struggling with this history. Because of this Kiśor Bābū, by recounting what history left unsaid, nurtures the aspiration of raising his story to the level of history"¹⁰¹. Hence individual stories may bring light to some "dark areas" of official history and propose an alternate version, or at least interpretation, of facts. Moreover, if the majority of the story is related by an external voice, in charge of reporting Kiśor Bābū's life and memories, in some occasions the narrator interrupts the flow of the narration to justify his/her choices.

This is the story of Kiśor Bābū and the presence of the writer will
be exactly as requested by the narration. Actually, after reading

¹⁰¹ इतिहास मामूली आदमियों की कथा नहीं कहता, पर हर इतिहास मामूली आदमियों से पटा पड़ा होता है जो इस इतिहास से जूझते हुए जीवन काटते हैं। इसलिए किशोर बाबू इतिहास के अनकहे को कहकर अपनी कथा के लिए इतिहास के स्तर तक उठ जाने की आकांक्षा पाले हुए हैं। (Sarāvgī, 2003, p. 27-28)

some new modern works and before having this story written, Kiśor Bābū made the author promise to write a twenty-two-carat story, like the jewels of the most notable Bengalin goldsmith. The writer got the concession of mixing two carats to twenty-four carats of pure gold: this, because Kiśor Bābū knows that without them gold jewelry cannot be forged.¹⁰²

These types of intervention remind the reader of the fictional nature of the text: the story is not made of pure gold, some extra-elements are added. But what does it mean exactly? The metaphor is later recalled on some other occasions, with additional explanations for the reader. The narrator initially states that “the story is Kiśor Bābū’s story and over twenty-four carats twenty-two are his own will”¹⁰³. The reader is therefore informed that the whole story is the result of a subjective perception of reality and besides, it is filtered through the narrator’s words. Later the narrative voice points out that:

This is Kiśor Bābū’s story, but it seems to the narrator that without knowing the background of some events, the story would not completely manifest itself. He/she has the freedom of adding only two carats to the twenty-two, but this is probably enough. He/she is one of those narrators who believe in preserving story-telling and who suspect that, otherwise, they will only be read by people similar to themselves.¹⁰⁴

This short digression is used by the narrator to introduce some historical facts related to Great History, particularly to the tensions between the Congress Party and the Muslim League during the 1940s. The narrator, therefore, feels free to add, within these two carats, all those elements (fictional or based on historical events) that may be useful to build his/her story. As in Uday Prakāś’s *Vāren Hestings kā sāmā* dream and history, imagination and reality, fantasy and facts are indissolubly intertwined and it would be impossible to separate one from the other.

The discourse on historiographic metafiction inevitably leads to the liminal area between postmodernism and post-colonialism. I do not intend to recall here the whole debate surrounding the possible relations between the two *posts* (on this see Ian and Tiffin 1990; Albertazzi 1999; Appiah 1991; Ashcroft, Gareth and Tiffin 1995, pp. 117-147;

¹⁰² यह कथा किशोर बाबू की कथा है और कथा-लेखक की उपस्थिति इसमें इतनी ही होगी जितनी कि खांटी शुद्ध किस्सागोई में होनी चाहिए। दरअसल कुछ एकदम नयी आधुनिकतम रचनाओं को पढ़ने के बाद इस कथा को लिखवाने के पहले किशोर बाबू ने कथा-लेखक से ऐसा कौल करवाया कि वह बंगाल के ख्यातिप्राप्त सुनारों की तरह बाईस बाई बाईस (22 x 22) कैरेट शुद्धि के गहनों जैसी कथा लिखे - यानी विशुद्ध सोने के चौबीस कैरेट में दो कैरेट की मिलावट करने जितनी ही कथा-लेखक को छूट है: यह इसलिए कि किशोर बाबू जानते हैं कि इसके बिना सोने के गहने गढ़े ही नहीं जा सकते। (Sarāvgī, 2003, p. 10)

¹⁰³ “कथा किशोर बाबू की है और चौबीस कैरेट में बाईस कैरेट मर्जी उनकी ही चलनी है।” (Sarāvgī, 2003, p. 28)

¹⁰⁴ यह कथा किशोर बाबू की है, किंतु कथाकार को लगता है कि कुछ घटनाओं की पृष्ठभूमि जाने बिना पूरी तरह कथा खुलती नहीं। बेशक उसे छूट है बाईस कैरेट में सिर्फ दो कैरेट मिलाने की और शायद इतना ही काफी है। यह कथाकार उनमें से ही एक है, जो अब भी किस्सागोई को बनाए रखने में यकीन करते हैं और जिन्हें संदेह है कि अन्यथा उन्हें पढ़नेवाले सिर्फ उन्हीं के जैसे कुच्छेक लोग होंगे। (Sarāvgī, 2003, p. 164)

Bhabha 1994; Dirlík 1994, pp. 328-356; Friedman Stanford 2006, pp. 425-443), but I would briefly like to mention some reflections on the role of history in both literary phenomena. If critics generally acknowledge the need to rethink history as a common feature, some of them argue that some discriminations have to be made. Silvia Albertazzi, for example, points out that Postcolonial authors, while re-writing history, are looking for a sense of belonging, for a way to exist. History necessarily has a choral, collective connotation. On the contrary, the Postmodernists, by establishing relations between individual stories and public history, reflect on the crisis of historicity, on the impossibility of knowing and interpreting history (Albertazzi, 1999, pp. 7-8). What is certain is that, in both postmodern and postcolonial texts, history is perceived as a partial and non-objective picture of the past: traditional historical accounts are seen as ideological representations made by dominant groups, where humanity seems to walk, in a teleological process, towards increasing liberty and democracy. But let us return to the Hindi novels. This very topic — hence the need for an alternative history, which resembles the perspective of the common men, of those people who were traditionally excluded from historical accounts — is explicitly introduced in another novel, *Ḍūb* by Vīrendra Jain. History is directly introduced in a “bottom-up” perspective: in the foreground, we have common people’s lives, in a rural, marginalized area, and in the background, official history. The perception and comprehension of events by the villagers do not always mirror the official accounts. A first example can be found at the beginning of novel, introducing the origins of Laṛaiī village and talking about the attainment of independence:

Even now very few people from the village of Laṛaiī — on three sides surrounded by the mountains and on one enclosed by a river — know that they became independent not from the king’s mother, but from the British.

Many people only know that their ancestors, in 1857, gave complete support to the queen of Jhāmsī. When the queen died in battle, the whole princely state was plundered and pillaged, to teach her supporters a lesson in audacity. Therefore, their ancestors left the princely state and, wandering in the forests, they arrived at the borders of the realm of Candaiī.

After some time, the rule of the king of Laśkar reached Candaiī as well. From that time, they became subject to the king. And now they gained independence.

Everybody is happy about independence.

The origins of the village are traced back to the Mutiny of 1857 and to the well known Rānī of Jhāmsī: in fact, many of the inhabitants' ancestors helped the Queen in her resistance to the British *rāj*, but after her death they had to escape and start a nomadic life. Finally, they arrived in the area where the village now stands, and settled there, naming it Laṛaiī, the “warriors’ fort” (Jain, 2014, p. 17). All the villagers knew that part of their history very well, but, quite surprisingly, they came to know late, and almost by chance, that they were finally successful and that they had gained independence from the British. The first person who brings this piece of news to Laṛaiī is Māte, after a trip to a nearby city. There he has heard “that a great Mahātmā named Gandhi had died after leading the country to Independence” and that “now Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is the Prime Minister of our king-less Country”.¹⁰⁶ The villagers do not understand the meanings and implications of Independence. The main evident effect for them are the elections for Laṛaiī’s *pañcāyat* and the creation of two fronts: the first one led by Motī Sāv, a *bāniyā* supporter of the *Rājmatā party*, and the second led by *thākur* Devīsīmh, the local spokesman of the Congress. Common people of that remote area do not know anything about Partition either, about what really happened between Hindus and Muslims. They only know that, during the struggle for Independence, the two or three Muslims of the village were killed and buried in the forest (Jain, 2014, p. 11).

National history hits the village again some years later. Māssāv, the teacher of Laṛaiī’s *madrasā*, comes back from the city with some terrible news: the government has decided to close the school, despite its good results and high number of pupils. The school will be relocated as the entire area will be submerged due to the Rājghāt dam project (Jain, 2014, pp. 105-107). From that moment on villagers’ lives seem to be suspended, waiting for a forthcoming calamity. The seed of distrust towards the authorities starts to germinate: how is it possible that the government took similar decisions without involving them? The government is defined as being worse than thieves: at least thieves

¹⁰⁵ All English translations from this text are mine.

तीन तरफ से पहाड़ों से घिरे और एक तरफ से नदी से छिके इस लडैई गाँव के अभी यह भी बहुत कम लोगों को मालूम है कि वे राजमाता से नहीं, अंग्रेजों से स्वतंत्र हुए हैं।

बहुत-से लोग बस यहाँ तक जानते हैं कि सन् 1857 में उनके पूर्वजों ने झाँसी की रानी की भरपूर मदद की थी। जब रानी युद्ध में वीरगति को प्राप्त हुई, उसके बाद पूरी रियासत में लूटपाट मची थी — रानी के जितने भी हितू थे, उन्हें इस गुस्ताखी का सबक सिखाने के लिए। सो इनके पूर्वज उस रियासत से भाग खड़े हुए थे और जंगल-जंगल भटकते हुए चंदैई महाराज की सीमा में आ बसे थे।

फिर कुछ ही समय बाद चंदैई पर भी लश्कर के राजा का शासन हो गया था। तब से वे उसी राजा के अधीन थे। और अब वे आजाद हो गए हैं।

आजादी की खुशी सबको हुई थी।

क्यों? — यह कोई नहीं बता सकता। (Jain, 2014, p. 11)

¹⁰⁶ — कि गाँधी नाम का एक बड़ा महात्मा देश के आजाद करवाकर स्वर्ग सिधार गया है।

— कि अब पंडित जवाहरलाल नेहरू हमारे बिना राज वाले देश के महामंत्री हैं! (Jain, 2014, p. 11)

harm people with property, while the government is affecting the poor (Jain, 2014, p. 108). In the name of progress, the authorities do not even stop to think about the side effects. As underlined by Sudhīś Pacaurī, the novel deeply questions a modernist idea of progress: the basic idea should be a material improvement of human conditions, but often the results turn against people (Pacaurī, 2010, p. 155).

There is a jarring discordance between public debates on the project and the real situation of these areas. The government is dumb and blind in front of villagers' conditions and completely ignores their real needs. Very often, Māte is completely absorbed in these reflections: the rulers are supposed to be well-educated people, how is it possible that they do not consider the importance of knowing citizens' thoughts and needs? (Jain, 2014, p. 207)

The government would like to silence the villagers by offering them compensation, but here again, there are multiple issues. Nobody knows when and how much money would be given and, more importantly, nobody knows if the government has a real plan for re-settlement. It is worth emphasizing here that Jain's story depicts the situation of millions of rural Indians affected by alleged development projects:

since Independence about 30 to 50 million Indians—mainly from adivasi (tribal) and low caste communities—have lost their lands and livelihoods due to the forced displacement caused by the reservoir flooding of large dams. [...] Out of the millions displaced only 25 per cent have been rehabilitated (Parasuraman, 1997). The rest have undergone drastic changes in their economic, socio-cultural, and nutritional contexts. (Mehta, 2000, p. 268)

And the situation of the villagers worsens during the years of the Emergency, especially due to the plan of forced sterilization to limit population growth. Again, with the exception of a couple of *bāniyā* and the local *tahsīldār*, nobody is aware of the government plans. One day, hundreds of men follow Hīrā Sāv to Candaiī, in the hope of obtaining compensation for their lands. They return three days later, unable to talk about what happened. They had to undergo vasectomy and some of them died as a result of the operation.

Time passes and one day, Māte, while listening to the radio in a nearby village, hears that Indira Gandhi has been killed and that her son Rajeev has taken her place as Prime Minister. Māte, in a long mental monologue, hopes that Rajeev will not follow his mother's path. Indira Gandhi is considered responsible for having caused generalized distrust: after all her empty pledges and after forced sterilizations, how could people still believe the authorities? Māte prays for a new course, which may resume Nehru's plans (Jain, 2014, pp. 246-248).

Soon, two other tragedies reach Laṛaiī: the gas leak in Bhopal and the submergence of the nearby village of Pañcamnagar. Among the victims of Bhopal there is Māssāv: he is hospitalized and his conditions are serious (Jain, 2014, pp. 281-82). The second inci-

dent, due to the dam project, shocks the entire area, but the authorities distort it by denying the existence of victims. The morning after the flood Māte is eager to know how the authorities will talk about the incident. It is 15th August and the radio talks about the Prime Minister's speech at the Red Fort in Delhi. He has greeted the nation on Independence Day and remembered the men and women who sacrificed their lives for India's freedom. The incident at the Rājghāṭ dam is mentioned, but without acknowledging its consequences. According to the official report, in fact, the water submerged an uninhabited land. Supposedly the government had evacuated the areas years before, distributing compensation to the inhabitants for their loss. Without the government foresight, who knows how many people would have died! Māte is overpowered by anger and throws the radio against a tree. Its components fall to the ground, being submerged by water. Māte slowly goes back to Laraī, cursing the deceitful government: he wants everything and everybody to finally know its true nature (Jain, 2014, pp. 286-288).

The entire novel, and more explicitly the latter episode, highlights the partiality and often falsehood of official accounts. Far from being objective representations of facts, they emanate from the powerful and mirror a specific point of view. Jain, moving from the “dark areas” of the historical reports, deeply questions their reliability. Concerning this aspect, I would like to quote some lines by McHale, describing the postmodernist historical novel. He points out that it is revisionist in two senses:

First, it revises the *content* of the historical record, reinterpreting the historical record, often demystifying or debunking the orthodox version of the past. Secondly, it revises, indeed transforms, the conventions and norms of historical fiction itself.

The two meaning of revisionism converge especially in the postmodernist strategy of apocryphal or alternative history. Apocryphal history contradicts the official version in one of the two ways: either it *supplements* the historical record, claiming to restore what has been lost or suppressed; or it *displaces* official history altogether. (McHale, 2004, p. 90)

The third novel that I wish to discuss, *Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī*, is not actually a historical novel, but it contains some noteworthy reflections. The character who is charged with questioning official history is Kinnu Dā, the protagonist's cousin. He is an anthropologist and he has published a book on *ādivāsī* people and their role in India independence. It seems that before his essay, people assumed that only brahmins, feudal landlords and traders had participated in the fight against the British. Historians' accounts have never given space to the *ādivāsī* and *dalit* communities (Prakāś, 2011, p. 10). Kinnu Dā wanted to re-assess the role of *ādivāsī* people, who are able to live in accordance with nature and, at the same time, to be involved in the country's vicissitudes. They fought for the independence of India but historians did not recognize their participation. Talking to Rāhul he says:

The most significant thing about the adivasis is that they have so few needs. They leave a minimal mark on the environment. [...] But keep in mind, they fought like hell against the British for their autonomy, their right to self-rule. But historians never included that chapter in their version of history. The truth is that history is a highly political record of power. The class, caste, or ethnic group on the top will fashion history to suit their needs. I've always said that the history of this indigenous state and its people remains to be written. (Prakash, 2013, p. 14)¹⁰⁷

It is necessary to give voice to marginal groups and to make the dominant groups listen, otherwise the consequences may be dramatic. The insurgencies in the North East of India mentioned in the novel are just an example. Through some students from Assam and Manipur, Prakāś touches upon the difficulties suffered by the inhabitants of these areas. The emblem of this situation is a young Manipuri, Sāpām. When he learns that his brother has been killed in shooting during some riots, he cannot even go home for the funeral. First of all, he has no money, but it would also be too dangerous: he would probably be considered a member of the People's Liberation Army¹⁰⁸ and killed (Prakāś, 2011, p. 19). Sāpām's story ends tragically: he will commit suicide after being tortured by some *gunḍa-s*.

The reflection on history and power pervades Prakāś's whole novel and is developed through another critical line, which addresses the limitations and distortions of the globalized, consumeristic world. Rāhul, at the beginning of the novel, wants to emulate Kinnu Dā's social commitment and decides to abandon organic chemistry and take up anthropological studies. He does not want to be a pawn of consumerism, as many greedy, lecherous, corrupt men of contemporary society. The system has created a kind of humanity which wants to throw the past away and to disregard all principles and restrictions of religious, sociological and political knowledge.

In the final decades of the twentieth century, this man has sized all the forces of wealth and power and technology into his hand and has declared: freedom! Freedom! he cries. Let all your desires be awakened! Let all your senses graze freely upon this earth. Whatever is in this world is yours for your enjoyment. There is neither nation nor country. The entire planet is yours. Nothing is moral, nothing is immoral. There is no sin, no act of virtue. Eat, drink, and have fun. Dance! Boogie-woogie. Sing! Boogie-woogie. Eat! Boogie-woogie. Pig out! Boogie-woogie. Make that six-figure salary! Boogie-woogie. All the earth's com-

¹⁰⁷ 'आदिवासियों की सबसे बड़ी विशेषता यह है कि उनकी ज़रूरतें सबसे कम हैं. वे प्रकृति और पर्यावरण का कम से कम नुकसान करते हैं. [...] अपनी स्वायत्तता और संप्रभुता के लिए उन्होंने भी ब्रिटिश उपनिवेशवाद के खिलाफ़ महान् संघर्ष किया था. लेकिन इतिहासकारों ने उस इस्से को भारतीय इतिहास में शामिल नहीं किया. इतिहास असल में सत्ता का एक राजनीतिक दस्तावेज़ होता है... जो वर्ग, जाति या नस्ल सात्ता में होती है, वह अपने हितों के अनुरूप इतिहास को निर्मित करती है. इस देश और समाज का इतिहास अभी लिखा जाना बाकी है.' (Prakāś, 2011, p. 14)

¹⁰⁸ The People's Liberation Army (PLA) was founded by N. Bisheshwar Singh in September 1978. It is a separatist armed revolutionary group fighting for a separate independent socialist state of Manipur.

modities are yours for your consumption! Boogie-woogie. And remember to count women among those commodities. Boogie-woogie. (Prakash, 2013, pp. 10-11)¹⁰⁹

The emblem of this deteriorated system is Nikhlānī, a rich, fat, lustful man who often comes to Rāhul's mind. Prakāś introduces this character placing him in an expensive island resort, surrounded by half-naked models. He is talking on the phone to the Prime Minister about the privatization of each sector of civil life, health, food, education. In the meantime, he is having sexual intercourse with one of his Miss Universe (Prakāś, 2009, pp. 12-13). Everything and everybody can be considered commodities. Thanks to globalization and liberalization, Indian society is rapidly changing, and this is visible in the university area as well: fast food joints are springing up everywhere, condom and oral contraceptives are readily available, throughout the night tv channels broadcast porn films (Prakāś, 2009, pp. 132-133). It seems that Indian society is absorbing especially the worst aspects of contemporary Western reality:

People here want the worst from the West, but want to kill and destroy the best it has to offer. [...] Buy a gun from America. Use it to shoot Jesus. Use the vilest thing invented by the West to commit the greatest murder in history. Buy a car from Japan. Use it to run over Buddha's head. Find biochemical weapons from Iraq. Use to kill the Prophet Mohammad. Get a missile launcher from Israel. Use it to blow Jehovah's body to bits. (Prakash, 2013, p. 171)¹¹⁰

And this is not enough. If for many people the world has become a smaller place today, and each country can be reached easily, it is not the same for millions of rural Indians. When Sāpām commits suicide, his father has to face a three-day trip by train to reach the mortuary and there is no money for a flight or to send the corpse back to Imphāl (Prakāś, 2009, p. 60). Undoubtedly, *Pīlī chatrī vālī laṛkī*, even under the guise of a love story, is harsh criticism against multiple aspects of India's present and past history: it is against the degeneration of the consumer society, against the caste system and other forms of discrimination.

¹⁰⁹ इस आदमी ने बीसवीं सदी के अंतिम दशकों में पूजा, सत्ता और तकनीक की समूची ताकत को अपनी मुट्टियों में भर कर कहा था: स्वतंत्रता! चीखते हुए आज़ादी! अपनी सारी एषणाओं को जाग जाने दो. अपनी सारी इंद्रियों को इस पृथ्वी पर खुल्ला चरने और विचरने दो. इस धरती पर जो कुछ भी है, तुम्हारे द्वारा भोगे जाने के लिए है. न कोई राष्ट्र है, न कोई देश. समूचा भूमंडल तुम्हारा है. न कुछ नैतिक है. न कुछ अनैतिक. न कुछ पाप है, न पुण्य. खाओ, पियो और मौज़ करो. नाचो... SS. वूगी... वूगी. गाओ.. SS वूगी... वूगी. खाओ...! खूब खाओ. कमाओ, खूब कमाओ. वूगी... वूगी. इस जगत के समस्त पदार्थ तुम्हारे उपभोग के लिए है. वूगी... वूगी...! और याद रखो स्त्री भी एक पदार्थ है. वूगी... वूगी! (Prakāś, 201, p. 12)

¹¹⁰ पश्चिम का सबसे निकृष्ट, सबसे पतित प्रोडक्ट इन्हें चाहिए... लेकिन वहां का जो सबसे उत्कृष्ट है, ये उसे मिटा डालना चाहते हैं! [...] 'अमेरिका से ये गन खरीदेंगे और उससे क्राइस्ट को शूट कर देंगे... पश्चिम की सबसे निकृष्ट चीज़ से, पश्चिम के सबसे महान् 'कांस्ट्रक्ट' की हत्या... ये जापान से कार खरीदेंगे और उससे बुद्ध का सिर कुचल देंगे. इराक से ये बायोकेमिकल औजार लेंगे और उससे हज़रत मोहम्मद को मारेंगे. इस्राइल से मिसाइल लांचर लेंगे और उससे याहोवा के जिस्म के टुकड़े उड़ा देंगे.' (Prakāś, 2011, p. 131)

To conclude this section, I wish to emphasize one last point. Let us consider Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), probably the most famous Anglo-Indian novel. Its narrative, in a mixture of history and fantasy, links Indian history to the fate of the children born at midnight, 15 August 1947. The Emergency, for instance, is explained as Indira Gandhi's attempt to eliminate the midnight children. Basically, the author, by joining fantasy and historical facts, foregrounds the fictional nature of history. I think that Rushdie's goal is exactly the same that Sarāvgī, Jain and Prakāś pursued. Rushdie's text is one of the most studied and discussed in the field of postcolonial Indian literature and was even defined as the first postmodern Indian novel (Das, 2010, p. 2). Its magical realism, its historiographic and metafictional components are extremely thought provoking, but my point is that it cannot be considered an isolated phenomenon, nor simplistically "the original model". With my analysis I wish to show that these kinds of features, which I consider possible postmodern traces, are spread over a wider area than generally acknowledged. Not only within the Hindi literary field, but probably in all Indian languages, there are numerous texts unknown to the majority of the reading audience that deserve attention and dedicated studies.

4.2. Ontological plurality and text structure

As generally acknowledged, the postmodern world is dominated by plurality and randomness, by the refusal of hierarchical models and unifying narratives. Otherworldliness, metafiction and historiographic metafiction, discussed in the previous sections, allow the authors to foreground such perception through the *multiplication* of projected words. As Fokkema wrote "the Postmodernist ideal of non-selection or aleatory selection often is transformed into the application of combinatory rules which imitate mathematical devices" (Fokkema, 1986, p. 92). In this context *multiplication* and *duplication* become meaningful devices which may mould all textual levels. In the following sections I will focus on these processes when applied to the textual structure: with duplication I will refer to the intertextual games characterized by analogy, while with multiplication to the fragmentation of a text into various, juxtaposed parts (Fokkema, 1986, pp. 90-95 and 135-155).

4.2.1. Duplication: multi-layered texts and intertextual games

One of the possible forms of duplication implies intertextuality, that is quotations or allusions to pre-existing texts, with which there is a relationship of analogy. Before providing examples from my selected novels, it can be useful to recall some basic theoretical concepts. As highlighted by Martínez Alfaro (1996), intertextuality cannot be considered a time-bound feature, as we find theories of intertextuality whenever there have been discourses about texts, from the classics to the critics of the late Twentieth century. Cicero and Quintilian, for instance, considered imitation as an intertextual practice useful not

only in forging one's discourse, but also in defining individuality. In Renaissance literature there were constant allusions or quotations to previous authors and this practice was perceived as a means of adhering to the cultural heritage with infinite potentiality. If the discourse on intertextuality was overshadowed during the Modernist era — when writers endeavored to separate themselves from their textual past, proclaiming their individual genius — the authors of the late Twentieth century gave it a new meaning. “The contemporary preoccupation with intertextuality”, writes Martínez Alfaro, “tends to question the usefulness of previous critical narratives of unified progression in order to suggest, instead, a view of literary works as crowded with layered images of multiple reflections and unexpected relationships” (Martínez Alfaro, 1996, p. 271). Postmodernist works use and recycle previous ones, leveling down conventional distinctions between past and present, high and popular literature.

Among the theorists of the late Twentieth century, Julia Kristeva — in her essays *Word, Dialogue and Novel* and *The bounded text* — provided one of the most significant definitions of intertextuality. Starting from Bakhtin's reflections on literary language, she defined the literary word as “an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 65). Kristeva's reflections represented a fundamental turning point, from which any text started to be seen “as a system (or an infinity) of other such textual structures” (Martínez Alfaro, 1996, p. 271). A literary text should not be considered as the “product” of a single author, as a self-sufficient entity, but as a mosaic from previous texts.

The concept of intertextuality requires, therefore, that we understand texts not as self-contained systems but as differential and historical, as traces and tracings of otherness, since they are shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures. Rejecting the New Critical principle of textual autonomy, the theory of intertextuality insists that a text cannot exist as a self-sufficient whole, and so, that it does not function as a closed system. (Martínez Alfaro, 1996, p. 268)

Another fundamental contribution to the theory of intertextuality was provided by Roland Barthes, who proclaimed the death of the author and defined intertextuality as “the impossibility of living outside the infinite text” (Barthes, 1975, p. 36). The critic argued that any text is made of fragments of social languages, formulae and rhythmic models, mostly unconscious or with uncertain origins. He maintained that “the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them” (Barthes, 1977, p. 146). Moreover, Barthes, shifting the focus from the figure of the author to that of the reader, stated that “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation,

but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not as was hitherto said, the author” (Barthes, 1977, p. 148).

Despite their theoretical value, Barthes’ and Kristeva’s accounts are often considered only applicable to textual analysis with some difficulty. Among the critics who adopted a more pragmatic approach, Gérard Genette (1997) used a new term, *transtextuality*, to refer to any implicit or explicit element which connects one text to another. Among the five sub-categories of transtextuality¹¹¹, *hypertextuality* is particularly useful for my analysis. With this term Genette referred to the connection between a more recent text (*hypertext*) which is derived from a pre-text (*hypotext*); the relation could be that of imitation, parody, translation, but not of commentary. According to Genette hypertextuality may be considered a universal literary feature: “there is no literary work that does not evoke (to some extent and according to how it is read) some other literary work, and in that sense all works are hypertextual” (Genette, 1997, p. 9). Obviously, this characteristic can be more explicit or massive in some texts than in others, however, during the post-modern era, hypertextuality becomes an extremely meaningful feature.

Apart from these classic Western theoretical discourses, in order to contextualize the examples from my selected novels, it will be useful to recall the idea and the role of intertextuality within the Indian context. Traditionally, in India but generally in South-Asian countries, the relevance and value of a literary work did not strictly depend on its originality. Creating new tales from pre-existing ones, re-elaborating a rich cultural heritage was perceived as a natural process. This is the case, just to quote a macro-example, of the many *Rāmāyaṇas* (Richman, 1991), the multiple versions of Rāma’s story, widespread in India, Southeast Asia and beyond. From Tulsidās’ *Rāmcaritmānas* (in Avadhī) to Kampan’s *Irāmāvatāram* (in Tamil) the basis is the Rām *kathā*, but the actual discourses may be vastly different, with considerable dissimilarities in terms of style, detail, tone, and texture. These diverse narratives were and are extremely popular in their relative contexts and are not considered a mere variant of the original Sanskrit text. Even so, the attitude towards intertextuality involving foreign literary traditions is much more problematic. Particularly with reference to the most recent period there is a sort of anxiety about

¹¹¹ The five sub-categories are intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality and archtextuality:

- intertextuality: denotes the actual presence of a text within another one. It happens whenever we find quotations, allusions or plagiarism;
- paratextuality: refers to multiple elements belonging to the text (such as title, chapter titles, notes, illustrations, prefaces, etc...) and outside the text (advertisements, interviews, reviews, etc...) which help to direct the readers’ reception;
- metatextuality: refers to commentaries, in Genette’s words “it unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it” (Genette, 1997, p. 4);
- archtextuality: refers to the genre a text belongs to, it determines thematic and general expectations about the text.

being influenced by the British world. As Harish Trivedi (2007) points out, Indian critics can be divided into two broad categories: those who find such influence everywhere and those who are reluctant to acknowledge it. For instance, Bhāratbhūṣaṇ Agravāl (1919-1975) — poet, novelist and critic, who also held a senior administrative post in the Sāhitya Akadēmī — denounced the influence of a Western work by Edwin William Pugh on Ajñeya's novel *Śekhar: ek jīvanī*. Nevertheless, ironically, while Ajñeya's work is considered one of the greatest Hindi novels of the Twentieth century, Pugh's *The eyes of a child* almost fell into obscurity. Moreover, Agravāl appeared eager to find analogies between Jainendra Kumār's *Sunitā* and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, even when they are rather contrived. For example, he mentioned an episode where Sunitā is told to lie down by a male character and she lies down. Agravāl claimed that the same sentence was used by Lawrence, but actually he is completely overlooking all additional information provided by the English novelist and the sentence contextualization. Another critic with a similar attitude was Jaidev, English Professor at the university of Śīmlā. In his work *The Culture of Pastiche: Existential Aestheticism in the Contemporary Hindi Novel* (1993) he examined the work of four of the most well-known Hindi novelists of the postcolonial era, Nirmal Varmā, Kṛṣṇa Bāldev Vaid, Mṛdulā Garg and Mohan Rākeś. He too quotes various passages from these authors, finding improbable similarities with Western novelists such as Camus and Beckett. According to Trivedi, similar criticism (referring particularly to Jaidev) was largely determined by moral indignation at finding that although the country had attained independence, some Indian authors were still creating stories and characters with a "Westernised" sensitivity (Trivedi, 2007, pp. 129-130). A much more fruitful interpretation of the Western influence was proposed by Sisir Kumar Das in his *History of Indian Literature* (2005), as he analyzed both the "Western impact" and the "Indian response" during the colonial period. It was a period of conflict between local and foreign values and sensibilities, marked by a love-hate relationship with the Western world. The Indian writers borrowed new literary genres and forms, such as the tragedy and the novel, but they did not forget the older forms of the Sanskrit or Perso-Arabic tradition. As Trivedi highlights, "the Western influence on Indian literature was nothing if not dialectical and dialogic, which makes it perhaps as vast and complex an example as one could find anywhere in world literature not only of influence but also of reception" (Trivedi, 2007, p. 127).

Moving now to the hypertextual dimension of my selected novels, I will start my discourse with *Dāstān-e-lāptā* by Mañzūr Ehteśām. The first element of this novel to be taken into consideration is contained in the title: the *dāstān*. This is a Urdu-Persian folk romance, where the main character sets an example of how a person should act, protecting his people from the enemies. Actually, in this case the relationship between hypotext and hypertext is not that of analogy, as the novel can be seen more as a negative of a traditional *dāstān*. After a few pages, in fact, the reader realizes that all the expectations de-

iving from this indicator are disregarded: the explicit reference to the *dāstān* is an ironic and misleading clue. The Urdu-Persian model is literally subverted, as the protagonist is a “missing man”, who fails in every field of his life, unable to save anybody, including his own identity. If the hero usually follows a linear path, which leads to an improvement of the situation, Zamīr Ehmād Khān is essentially a static character, looking passively at the outside world as it changes. Furthermore, if usually a *dāstān*’s hero is rewarded with love, Zamīr undergoes several frustrations. During his adolescence he missed his chance with his schoolmate Āīsā: he was in love with her, but he kept his feelings secret until she married somebody else (Ehteśām, 2000, pp. 97-98). Later he had an unfortunate and ambiguous relationship with a medical student, Anīsā, which finally led to her to commit suicide (Ehteśām, 2000, p. 155). He is abandoned by his wife, Rāhat, who cannot stand his attitude to life, and his affair with Vasīmā Begam shows his complete failure both as a father and a husband (Ehteśām, 2000, pp. 213-221).

Apart from the reference to the *dāstān*, the novel is sprinkled with quotations from Urdu *ghazals* and film songs as well as by several explicit references to famous literary works. I will focus on the latter, as they provide some clear examples of duplication: the texts quoted in fact offer, through analogy, a possible interpretive key of some episodes (see Stark, 2001, pp. 477, 483-485). During his studies in Aligarh, Zamīr Ehmād Khan starts reading Forster’s novel *A Passage to India*, which becomes an important incentive to reflect on his own identity as an Indian muslim. He recognizes himself and other schoolmates in the protagonist, doctor Aziz, who has to face many difficulties after India’s independence and partition. Forster’s novel provides

...a singular portrait of the Indian Muslim, in which he appeared alive and breathing with all his problems, complexes prejudices and sensibilities. In Aligarh he had seen different editions of Dr Aziz walk around and talk. Their law-suits were now, because of the country’s independence and partition, dismissed from all courts and they had to learn the art of staying alive along with their complaints, because now there was no other cure for them but time (English translation in Stark, 2001, pp. 483-484)¹¹².

Zamīr Ehmād Khan is fascinated by the novel and he is surprised at the writer’s understanding of the complexity of Indian society. The text becomes an instrument through which he interprets his present and his identity as an Indian muslim.

Another noteworthy reference is to Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from Underground*. Zamīr Ehmād Khan, after losing his job, moves to a first-floor room, an “upper underground” (*ūprī talghar*; Ehteśām, 2000, p. 28), where he can be alone with his

¹¹² (डॉक्टर अजीज़ का) चरित्र हिंदुस्तानी मुसलमान का एक ऐसा इकलौता चित्रण था जिसमें वह अपनी समूची समस्याओं, ग्रंथियों, पूर्वग्रहों, भावुकताओं के साथ जीता और साँस लेता लग रहा था। अलीगढ़ में उसे डॉक्टर अजीज़ के वभिन्न संस्करण चलते-फिरते-बोलते नज़र आए थे जिसका मुकदमा देश की आज़ादी और विभाजन के कारण अब सारी अदालतों से खारिज था। उन्हें अपने शिकवे-शिकायतों सहित जिंदा रहने का सलीका सीखना था क्योंकि वक़्त के अलावा अब उनका कोई इलाज नहीं था। (Ehteśām, 2000, p. 107)

thoughts and where he would start writing his story. Here we find a first reference to the dimension of the underground, even if explicitly overturned (as the underground should not be upstairs). Later, he is depicted as being “by nature an underground person” (*svabhāv se talghar kā ādmī*, Ehteśām, 2000, p. 80), with a clearer reference to Dostoyevsky’s protagonist, the Underground Man. Actually, it is easy to find many similarities between the two texts, as they both collect the memories of a bitter and isolated man.

Two more texts are quoted in connection with the protagonist’s unfortunate relationship with the medical student, Anīsā: *La Porte Étroite* by André Gide and *The Listeners*, by Walter de la Mare. Gide’s novel depicts the passionate feeling between two teenagers, Jerome and his elder cousin Alissa (notice the similarity of the two feminine names). While growing up Alissa decides to devote her life to religion and spirituality, drifting apart from Jerome. The novel ends tragically with Alissa’s death from an unknown malady. As underlined by Stark, the novel provides the protagonist with a literary example and a sort of legitimation to his affair (Stark, 2001, p. 484), which starts as a supposedly brother-sister relationship. The narrator highlights that Zamīr Ehmā Khan gave that novel to Anīsā, without properly understanding its meaning:

Even today, when he remembers *Strait is the Gate*, he starts feeling ashamed. When he read the book, he did not spend much time on it and later he thought that, despite being extremely impressed by the reading, he could not get its true meaning. This misunderstanding was the reason why he gave that novel to Anīsā and, after some days, it became the reason for an argument between them and of its consequent small and big quarrels.¹¹³

But such misunderstandings lead to more serious consequences: when Anīsā opens her heart to Zamīr Ehmā Khan revealing a past of sexual abuse, she is abandoned by him. Anīsā commits suicide (Ehteśām, 2000, p. 155), linking again her destiny to Gide’s character. Immediately after hearing about Anīsā’s past, the protagonist is walking back home and some verses come to his mind: “Tell them I came, and no one answered, that I kept my word”¹¹⁴. Zamīr Ehmā Khan remembers these lines from *The Listeners* by Walter de la Mare (2007, p. 48). In the poem a traveller on horseback knocks on a moonlit door in a mysterious forest. He knocks many times, but no response comes from the eerie building. “Only a host of phantom listeners, that dwelt in the lone house then, stood listening in the

¹¹³ This translation from the original Hindi text is mine.

स्ट्रेट इज़ द गेट को याद करते आज भी वह खुद अपनी ही नज़रों में शर्मिंदा होने लगता है। तब उपन्यास को पढ़े खुद उसे ज़्यादा समय नहीं बीता था और यह अंदाज़ा तो बाद में होना था कि पढ़कर बेहद प्रभावित होने के बावजूद वह सही अर्थ में उसे समझ नहीं पाया था। समझ की यह ग़लती कारण बनी थी उसके अनीसा को उस उपन्यास के भेंट करने का और कुछ दिन बाद यही सबब बनी थी उन दोनों के बीच एक बहस और उसके नतीजे छोटे-मोटे झगड़े का। (Ehteśām, 2000, pp. 127-128)

¹¹⁴ “टेल देम आई केम, एण्ड नो वन आनसर्ड, दैट आई केप्ट माई वर्ड।” (Ehteśām, 2000, p. 153)

quiet of the moonlight” (lines 13-15). The traveler disheartened leaves. Only the listeners remain hearing his foot upon the stirrup and the sound of iron on stone. It seems that here, as on many other occasions, Zamīr is justifying himself: he tried to keep his promise with Anīsā but, because of external factors, he was unable to achieve his aim. He convinced himself that he tried to build a relationship with her, but social conventions would never accept it. But this quotation may also be seen as an anticipation of Anīsā’s surrender and suicide: she was looking for Zamīr’s support, but when she “knocked at his door” with her revelation she received no answer.

A final hypertextual game is related to Azīz urf Acchan, a hotel owner and friend of the protagonist. Before leaving India to seek a better life in America, he gives Zamīr 10,000 Rupees and a copy of Irving Stone’s *The sailor on horseback*. This is a popular biography of Jack London, which he considers as the greatest lesson and source of inspiration for his life (Ehteśām, 2000, pp. 188-189).

It is the strange story of a man’s struggle in life which like any classic comes with a tragic ending... keep it and read it with much affection and seriousness, thinking of the fact that sometimes the very stones which are rejected as useless by the mason may turn out to be more important than the whole building (English translation in Stark, 2001, p. 485)¹¹⁵.

As pinpointed by Stark, this passage has to be read also as a suggestion for the authors of (auto)biographical texts and this is particularly important if we read *Dāstān-e-lāptā* as a fictionalized autobiography. I wish to clarify this aspect of the novel a little. If the whole text is related by an omniscient third person narrator, who recollects fragments of the *hero's* present and past life, Ehteśām directly intervenes in two “prefaces” — placed at the end of part I (*Prastāvnā: ek hastakṣep*) and of part II (*Ek aur hastakṣep: punaḥ prastāvnā*) — proposing a rather ambiguous interpretation of the novel. Initially he underlines the fictional nature of his work, rejecting any correspondence between himself and his character, but gradually his speech leads to a more complex scenario.

Let me make it clear that the protagonist of the novel - that “he” or Zameer Ehmud Khan, whoever it is - is not me. I wish to emphasize this because as it is, I expect many to disagree. And they would not be entirely wrong, either-this too, I think, it’s my duty to concede. Why? Because the fictional character and his world that I have tried to put in black and white may well be taken for a reflection of my own personality by people who have witnessed a similar play of light and darkness around me. But how many of them can I convince when I myself often do not know when it is that my imagination comes to dominate the reality, rendering me into somewhat of a fictional character, into someone who begins to breathe, hear, see and speak like a person

¹¹⁵ यह एक आदमी के जीवन-संघर्ष की विचित्र कहानी है किसी भी क्लासिक की तरह अपने ट्रेजिक अंत सहित।[...] इसे अपने पास रखो और बहुत प्यार और संजीदगी से यह सोचते हुए पढ़ना कि जिन पत्थरों को राजगीर बेकार समझकर रद्द कर देते हैं कभी-कभी सारी इमारत से अधिक महत्वपूर्ण वही पत्थर साबित होते हैं। (Ehteśām, 2000, pp. 188-189)

who never was. The situation is indeed complex, for I am not sure if what I do I do of my own accord or if there is some hidden force that compels me to do it.

[...] I believe every man on earth is fated to live with a persona of his imagination which is as difficult to distinguish from the person who imagined it all as it must be for Sufis and saints to tell Allah from God. I call this persona of mine The Lost because even though it is a flower of my own creation, I am the least aware of its fragrance. On the contrary, sometimes, it seems to me that The Lost is none other than my exact counterpart-my twin, which, as borne out by the rest of the facts, is not really completely true. Were one to oversimplify it, one could say that all of us in truth live our lives with a Lost One who, though a lookalike of "I", is not "I". Another interesting thing is that, despite the obvious differences between man and man, the Lost Ones of all are most alike so that it is far easier to understand the Lost rather than the man of flesh and blood.¹¹⁶

The separation between author, narrator and protagonist is therefore quite vague and this effect is stressed by several autobiographical references spread across the text. For example, Zamīr Ehmād Khān was used to writing short stories and having them published with a pseudonym and, as the author, he is an engineering drop-out who started to work in a furniture shop. On some occasions, he is also depicted while thinking about writing his autobiography (Ehteśām, 2000, p. 30). The intrusion of the author in the novel is particularly relevant as it implies a transgression of the border between fiction and nonfiction; moreover, it questions the traditional hierarchical order between author, narrator and character.

¹¹⁶ Translation from Hindī by Kuldip Singh, *cit* in Stark, 2001, p. 480. For a complete translation of this "preface", see Lotz and Khare, 1998, pp. 3-11.

इसी बात को मैं थोड़ा और स्पष्ट करते हुए कहूँ तो उपन्यास का चरित्र — 'वह' या 'ज़मीर एहमद खान' — जो है, वह मैं नहीं हूँ। इस बात को मैं इतना ज़ोर देकर इसलिए कह रहा हूँ क्योंकि मैं जानता हूँ कई लोगों को यह स्विकार करने में आपत्ति हो सकती है। वे लोग भी पूर्णतः ग़लत नहीं होंगे, यह बाताना भी मैं खुद अपना ही ज़िम्मा समझता हूँ। क्यों? क्योंकि जिस काल्पनिक चरित्र और उसकी दुनिया कि मैंने यहाँ स्यहो-सफ़ेद में रचना करने की कोशिश की है उसकी धूप-छाँव उन लोगों ने मेरे इर्द-गिर्द फैलती-सिमटती देखी है और उसे मेरे ही व्यक्तित्व का एक हिस्सा समझते रहे हैं। मैं खुद कब-कब और किस-किस को ऐसा करने से मना कर सकता हूँ, खासकर ऐसी परिस्थिति में जबकि अक्सर खुद मुझे भी नहीं पाता चलता कि कब मेरी कल्पना यथार्थ पर हावी होकर खुद मुझको एक काल्पनिक अस्तित्व में बदल देती है और मैं एक ऐसे व्यक्ति की तरह साँस लेने, देखने-सुनने और बोलने लगता हूँ जिसने कभी जन्म ही नहीं लिया। स्थिति खासी जटिल इसलिए है कि मुझे सही-सही यह भी नहीं मालूम कि मैं ऐसा खुद अपनी मर्ज़ी से करता हूँ या कोई मजबूरी मुझसे ऐसा कराती है। [...]

मेरे मान्यता है कि संसार में हर व्यक्ति अपनी कल्पना के एक ऐसे चरित्र के साथ जीने पर मजबूर होता है जिसकी कल्पना और उस कल्पना को करनेवाले के दरमियान तमीज़ कर पाना कभी-कभी उतना ही मुश्किल साबित हो सकता है जितना सूफ़ी-सांतों या पहुँचे हुए लोगों के लिए ईश्वर और अल्लाह के बीच अंतर करना होता होगा। मैं अपने इस चरित्र को खुद का 'लापता' कहता हूँ क्योंकि मेरी खुद की कल्पना का फूल होते हुए भी शायद इसकी खुशबू से सबसे ज़्यादा अनजान मैं ही हूँ। कभी-कभी इसके बिलकुल विपरीत यह भी महसूस होता है कि यह 'लापता' कोई और नहीं बिलकुल यक़ीनी मेरा ही हमज़ाद है जो जैसा कि बाक़ी सारी बातों से फिर प्रमाणित होता है, पूरा सच नहीं। सरलीकरण की थोड़ी और कोशिश की जाए तो वास्तव में हम सब अपने एक ऐसे 'लापता' के साथ अपनी ज़िंदगी गुज़ारते हैं, जो 'हम' होते हुए भी 'हम' नहीं होता। एक और दिलचस्प बात यह कि विभिन्न व्यक्तियों के बीच बहुत ही स्पष्ट रूप से नज़र आनेवाली असमानताओं के बावजूद लगता है सबके 'लापता' आपस में एक-दूसरे से बहुत मिलते-जुलते और एकसमान होते हैं और किसी भी 'लापता' को समझना हड्डी-बोटी के इनसान को समझने की निस्वत कहीं आसान काम है। (Ehteśām, 2000, pp. 80-81)

The second novel that I will discuss is *Pīlī chatrī vālī larkī* by Uday Prakāś. Here too, we find many cases of duplication — that is of literary references which resemble the protagonist’s experiences — and multiple intertextual games. In chapter twenty-six, for instance, Rāhul establishes a parallelism between himself and the monk of Hazārīprasād Dvivedī’s *Anāmdās kā pothā*¹¹⁷. When Rāhul is with Añjalī he feels new indescribable sensations, the same that the holy man experiences when he sees a woman for the first time in his life (Prakāś, 2011, pp. 117-118). Rāhul feels that, with his beloved, he can forget all his troubles and sail in calm and loving waters of existence. Thanks to the girl’s presence he “had forgotten how his life, and the lives of countless others like him, was like a boat with weak sails, trapped inside a typhoon, in a decisive battle for its very existence, struggling desperately against the deranged and omnivorous waves churned up by the violent and crazed ocean of today’s world” (Prakash, 2013, p. 157)¹¹⁸. In a highly poetic image Añjalī becomes the moon, writing with her beams a new life story on Rāhul’s forehead. The chapter ends with some emblematic verses, explicitly connected to Rāhul’s beloved poet, Federico García Lorca:

On my forehead
The moon’s immortality
I want to sleep for a short time
An hour, a night, a week, a year
A century, perhaps
I am tired, endlessly tired.
(Prakash, 2013, p. 157)¹¹⁹

Actually these words recall a poem, *Gacela de la muerte oscura*, but not in a literal form. In fact Lorca wrote:

No quiero que me repitan que los muertos no pierden la sangre;
que la boca podrida sigue pidiendo agua.
No quiero enterarme de los martirios que da la hierba,
ni de la luna con boca de serpiente
que trabaja antes del amanecer.

¹¹⁷ The protagonist is a young sage who, due to his thirst for knowledge, undergoes different experiences; finally, he becomes a responsible social being, sensitive to human conditions.

¹¹⁸ राहुल यह भूल गया था कि उसका और उसके जैसे असंख्य लोगों का जीवन उन कमज़ोर पाल वाली नौकाओं की तरह है, जो इस समय के हिंसक और उन्मत्त महासमुद्र में, किसी तूफान में फंसकर, पागल और सर्वभक्षी लहरों से किसी तरह, प्राणपन के साथ, अपने अस्तित्व की निर्णायक और अंतिम लड़ाई में, जूझ रही है. (Prakāś, 2011, p. 118)

¹¹⁹ ‘...मेरे माथे पर
चंद्रमा की अमरता है
मैं सोना चाहता हूँ एक पल,
एक घंटा, एक रात या एक सप्ताह, एक वर्ष
या शायद एक पूरी शताब्दी...
मैं बहुत थक गया हूँ...’ (Prakāś, 2011, p. 119)

Quiero dormir un rato,
 un rato, un minuto, un siglo;
 pero que todos sepan que no he muerto;
 que haya un establo de oro en mis labios;
 que soy un pequeño amigo del viento Oeste;
 que soy la sombra inmensa de mis lágrimas.¹²⁰

Prakās — who worked on Lorca’s poetry (see, for instance, his article *Federico Garcia Lorca kī raktgāthā* available at http://kavitakosh.org/kk/लोर्का_की_रक्तगाथा/_फ़ेदेरिको_गार्सिया_लोर्का) — elaborates these verses, connecting Rāhul’s condition to that of the Spanish poet: they are both exhausted because of the oppression and anguish of their epoch and need to find a shelter where to rest. Moreover, it is worth noticing that by referring to *Gacela de la muerte oscura*, Uday Prakās offers a wonderful example of intertextuality within intertextuality. In fact, as the Spanish title suggests, Lorca develops his reflection on death by referring explicitly to Persian *ghazals*.

A few pages before the narrator describes the struggle in Rāhul’s heart between love and hatred towards the brahmins: they discriminate non-brahmin people like him, but Añjalī belongs to this caste, as well as the majority of the authors that he is studying. Absorbed in such thoughts he starts reading some lines from Nirālā’s *Rām kī śakti pūjā*:

Oh night of deep silence! The heavens vomit darkness;
 all sense of direction lost, even the wind’s flow stilled;
 thundering behind them the vast unconquerable sea;
 the mountains as thought plunged in thought, only one
 torch burning.
 Again and again doubt rocks Lord Rama, and gradually
 with the dread of Ravana’s victory in the universe...
 (Prakash, 2013, p. 130)¹²¹

¹²⁰ These verses are the second and third stanza of *Gacela de la muerte oscura* and are taken from *Diván del Tamarit*, a collection of poetry published posthumous in 1940. The entire collection is available at http://federicogarcialorca.net/obras_lorca/divan_del_tamarit.htm#08. Below the English translation by Robert Bly (see Lorca, 1973):

I don’t want them to tell me again how the corpse keeps all its blood,
 how the decaying mouth goes on begging for water.
 I’d rather not hear about the torture sessions the grass arranges for
 nor about how the moon does all its work before dawn
 with its snakelike nose.

I want to sleep for half a second,
 a second, a minute, a century,
 but I want everyone to know that I am still alive,
 that I have a golden manger inside my lips,
 that I am the little friend of the west wind,
 that I am the elephantine shadow of my own tears.

¹²¹ है अमा निशा; उगलता घन अंधकार
 खो रहा दिशा का ज्ञान, स्तब्ध है पवन चार,
 अप्रतिहत गरज रहा पीछे अंबुधि विशाल,
 भूधर ज्यों ध्यान मग्न; केवल जलती मशाल
 स्थिर राघवेन्द्र को हिला रहा फिर-फिर संशय
 रह-रह उठता जग जीवन में रावण-जय-भय... (Prakās, 2011, pp. 98-99)

Rāhul has the feeling that someone is watching at him silently and invisibly, knowing exactly what his consciousness is experiencing.

Two more hypertextual links accompany the reader respectively to Czech and South African literature. The first connection is with *Romeo, Juliet and Darkness* by Jan Otčenášek¹²² (Prakāś, 2011, p. 127). The novel deals with a young couple during the Nazi occupation, who had to live in hiding inside a room for a whole year, with their love for each other and the fear of death. Rāhul, who read this novel in Nirmal Varmā's Hindi translation, notices the book in the library during one of his rendezvous with Añjalī. The boy perceives the burden imposed by social norms: he has to live his love secretly, as it would not be accepted by the high, powerful castes. The second connection is with *In the Heart of the Country* by John Maxwell Coetzee¹²³ (Prakāś, 2011, p. 145), and it is used by the author to better describe some of Rāhul's fears and negative thoughts. He is afraid that Añjalī's love is not pure, that sooner or later she will abandon him because of her origins. The first time they have sex, Rāhul seems to become a wild animal: he is full of desire for revenge and uses all his strength as if he were fighting the injustice inflicted on the lower castes. A scene from Coetzee's novel flashes through his mind: a black servant, after killing his white master, rapes his daughter, but this act of violence seems to turn in something pleasurable for the girl. What if Añjalī simply considers him a pleasure-giving toy?

All these references, apart from mirroring the protagonist's experiences, underline the author's open-minded approach to literature. He is interested in the worldwide production and wants to break free from the restrictions imposed by the most traditionalist Indian scholars. This criticism is clearly visible in another episode, when Rāhul, in front of the head of the Hindi department, has to prove his knowledge of literature. The boy enumerates many international texts, such as Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and *Resurrection*, Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*, Tagore's *Gora*, *Gitanjali*, *The Home and the World*, Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Milan Kundera's *The Joke*, Italo Calvino's *Adam and Eve*, Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things*. From the Hindi literary field, he mentions Premchand's novels, Nirmal Varmā's *Antim Araṇya*, Alkā Sarāvgī's *Kali Kathā Vāyā Bāipās*, Vinod Kumar Śukla's *Naukar kī kamīz*. Unfortunately, the Professor does not seem to be interested in either international nor in recent Hindi literature: as the first thing he advises Rāhul to read the

¹²² Otčenášek was a Czech novelist and playwright. His most popular work, *Romeo, Juliet and Darkness*, in 1960 was made into a film and in 1963 into an opera.

¹²³ Coetzee is a South African novelist, essayist, linguist, translator and recipient of the 2003 Nobel Prize for Literature. He is considered one of the most important postmodern and postcolonial authors of the 20th century. *In the Heart of the Country* was published for the first time in 1977 and narrates the vicissitudes and mental distress of Magda, a white lady living with her widowed father in the Karoo region, South Africa. Magda's narrative may be perceived unreliable, as it is almost impossible to distinguish what is actually taking place and what is occurring within her imagination (Coetzee, 2004).

History of Hindi Literature by Rāmcandra Śukla, which was published for the first time in 1929 (Prakāś, 2011, pp. 38-39). By quoting all these works, Prakāś suggests a sort of alternative literary canon, which should at least be considered in literature departments. The author's attitude towards the old-style academic world is highly critical, as it is considered too far from the actual literary world.

In Uday Prakāś's novel, intertextuality not only involves previous literary works, but also mythical tradition and contemporary media. When Rāhul looks at the mountains surrounding the university campus, he notices on the highest peak a gigantic, naked man, with a tiny woman fastened to his waist. He thinks that they are Śiva and Pārvaī during the cosmic union, from which the world was created (Prakāś, 2011, p. 17). On another occasion the author describes a dry bamboo forest, where the wind, blowing through the canes, seems to play thousands of *bāṃsurī*. This is a reference to Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī's love in a bamboo forest, where the god used to play the flute, teaching the bamboo canes how to play (Prakāś, 2011, p. 31). The majority of Indian readers perceive such images as natural, as the result of a shared cultural heritage. Nonetheless, they have to be read as a form of intertextuality, simply in a wider acceptation. Prakāś not only looks to his own cultural roots, but also to the most recent forms of entertainment. The reader, in fact, finds multiple references to movies, famous characters and actors. When the students' Task Force wait for the *gunḍa*-s to arrive at their hostel, they seem to become the heroes of some action movies:

Ajay Devgan took a giant leap from somewhere in the crowd and landed both his boots on the goondas' back, just like Bruce Lee, shouting "ho, shu, shu", showing off his karate-judo moves, whipping his belt around in the air. He removed his shirt with the bloodthirsty look of Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Terminator* and, grabbing the bewildered goondas by the scruff of their necks, hoisted them in the air, just as a massive monkey arrived on the scene and used his bare fist to rain blow after blow on the goondas' ugly mugs. (Prakash, 2013, p. 115)¹²⁴

Rāhul becomes James Bond (*Jems Bāṇḍ kā Piyars Brāsnen*), some other students Johnny Lever and Jim Carrey from *The Mask (Jonī Līvar aur "Māsk" ke Jim Kairī)*, and another Amitābh Baccan (Prakāś, 2011, p. 89). Furthermore, a horror science-fiction film (*Critters*) is used in one of the most important and recurring metaphors of the story: the dominant groups are usually compared to critters, the small, furry aliens of the movie, devouring everything in their way. Moreover, Prakāś's text is not made of written pages alone, but of images as well. It could be considered a case of iconotext as defined by Micheal

¹²⁴ उस भीड़ में से कहीं से अजय देवगन ऊंची छलांग लगाकर सीधे गुंडों की पीठ पर अपने बूटों के साथ टपकता था, कभी ब्रूस ली 'हो... शू... शू... SS ओच्च... ओच्च... शू SS' करता हुआ, कराटे-जूडो के दांव दिखाता अपनी बेल्ट 'सांय... सांय.. सटाकू' लहराता था. अपनी शर्ट उतारकर खूंखार तरीके से चलता हुआ 'टर्मिनेटर' का अर्नाल्ड श्वात्जेनेगर उन पस्त पड़े गुंडों को कॉलर पकड़कर ऊपर उठा लेता था और ठीक इसी वक़्त कहीं से एक महाबानर आकर उस गुंडे के थोबड़े पर मुष्टिका प्रहार करता था और एक-साथ जय घोष गूंजता था. (Prakāś, 2011, pp. 88-89)

Nerlich¹²⁵, hence a work of art composed of verbal and visual signs. The author in fact introduces fourteen drawings — mostly concentrated in the central and final part of the book — containing sketches of a couple or of a female image. During an interview that I had with the author in December 2017, he mentioned this aspect of novel, highlighting that the visual component enriches and completes the verbal.

With this enumeration I wish to stress the Prakāś's tendency to blend ingredients from heterogeneous fields: literature, myth, visual art and cinema, they all equally contribute to Rāhul's story. Through this strategy Prakāś emphasizes the plural nature of his work and, at the same time, erases the conventional boundaries between high and popular culture.

The last novel that I will analyze here is Surendra Varmā's *Do murdom ke lie guldastā* (2012, lit. *A bunch of flowers for two corpses*). Actually, this text was not originally included in my dissertation plan, but I think it may provide some interesting causes for reflection. The novel is a sort of reversed *Bildungsroman*, where the two main characters, Nīl and Bholā, leave their home for Mumbai, lured by easy money. At the beginning of their new lives their aims, their intents are high (they would like to help their families, Nīl dreams about finishing his PhD course), but slowly and almost unconsciously, they are captured by the metropolitan spell. It seems that Mumbai, through different paths (Nīl becomes a gigolo, while Bholā becomes part of a criminal gang), leads them to degeneration and self-destruction. Within the novel, I traced several scattered references to the *Itihāsa*. A first brief and ironic reference to the ṛṣī Viśvāmitra is included at the beginning of the story, when Nīl is forced to leave Delhi and his academic career after an unapproved relationship with his mentor's niece. In an indirect discourse the young man reflects on his misfortune: after all, many ṛṣī like Viśvāmitra deviated from the *brahmacarya*, but none of them had to abandon their careers (Varmā, 2012, p. 12). This is an allusion to Viśvāmitra's relationship with Menakā, one of the most beautiful Apsaras, narrated in both the *bāla-kāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (see Vālmīki, Book I, Canto LXIII) and in the *Sambhava-parvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (see Vyāsa, Section LXXI-LXXII). Indra, afraid of Viśvāmitra's ascetic powers, sent the charming nymph Menakā to seduce him and break his meditation. The ṛṣī surrendered to Menakā's beauty but, despite this, he managed to reach the desired condition of *brahmarṣi*.

A little later, Nīl and Bholā, on the train to Mumbai, narrate their stories to one another. After hearing his new friend's misadventures, Bholā remarks that behind any conflict in the world there is always a woman. Without Kaikeyī's unfair request there would not be Rām's exile and without Draupadī there would be no *Mahābhārata* (Varmā, 2012,

¹²⁵ Nerlich coined the term *iconotext* in reference to Evelyne Sinnassamy's work, *La Femme se découvre*, and its fusion of text and photographic images.

pp. 15-16). Here the mythical reference mirrors Nīl's past, but can also be considered as an anticipation of his new, short life in Mumbai.

Two other significant references can be quoted, both related to the *Mahābhārata*. The first is inserted during Nīl's job interview with Śrīmatī Mehtāb Dastūr, an old lady looking for a well-educated person with whom to share her thoughts and time. The woman immediately puts him to the test, asking him to comment on one of her paintings. Nīl starts to talk fluently about Arjuna's inquietude at the beginning of the great war of the *Mahābhārata* (Varmā, 2012, pp. 31-32). The author seems to suggest a kind of parallelism between Arjuna's and Nīl's conditions: their minds have become weak and they seem to be unable to understand what they should do. Kṛṣṇa's answers to the spiritual turmoil of the Pāṇḍava will be quoted later on, when Nīl, working as a gigolo, starts to be disgusted by his customers. After a particularly unpleasant encounter, in fact, he remembers the *Gītā*'s teachings about the detached action: Nīl has become a paid companion and he has to "fulfill his duties", his *dharma* as a gigolo. He has to subjugate his senses with his mind and remain detached from what he is doing: only in this way he will be able to tolerate his customers' lustful behavior. Obviously, a biting irony characterizes this association between the sacred teaching of the *Bhagavad-gītā* and Nīl's thoughts.

What emerges from the above examples of inter- or hyper-textuality is the impossibility of depicting human life in a completely new way: Zamīr Ehmād Khān, Rāhul and Nīl find their own reflections and experiences (albeit with a more or less ironic connotation) in previous literary works. As Umberto Eco (1984) wrote in his postscript to *The Name of the Rose*, books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told. Moreover, duplication represents one of the possible devices to render the complexity of contemporary reality and its plural, multifaceted nature. Obviously, other strategies are possible in order to foreground, on the level of textual structure, the idea of ontological plurality. In the following section I will focus on fragmentation and on the proliferation of narrative voices and embedded stories.

4.2.2. Multiplication and fragmentation

In the globalized society we are bombarded by multiple stimuli and pressures, it becomes increasingly difficult to define a clear system of values and priorities. Our lives seem to be broken into multiple little fragments, having lost any possible unitary design. As Fokkema wrote "the Postmodernist world view appears to be characterized by the conviction that any attempt towards constructing a world model — however much qualified by epistemological doubt — is pointless" (Fokkema, 1986, p. 82) Within such a context stories become fragmented, broken into a succession of disjoined actions. Fragmentation implies a process of multiplication, of proliferation of situations and actions, which are simply juxtaposed, since they are no longer dominated by the logic of cause-effect.

Characters' identities as well appear multifaceted and discontinuous and their vicissitudes frequently leave the reader a sense of disorientation.

Disorientation is exactly what I experienced when I read *Dāstān-e-lāptā* for the first time. It seems that the narrator provides the various tiles composing the mosaic of Zamīr Ehmād Khān's life (touching about forty years until his present time in 1987), but no unifying, interpretive key. Even at the end of the novel the mosaic remains incomplete: there is always something *missing*. The reader encounters images of Zamīr's family and origins, of his studies and job, but he/she is left unable to recreate a complete, clear picture. As anticipated by the title, what is actually missing is a stable identity, a conscience which could provide the story a linear form. In this sense it is particularly interesting to notice the meaning of the protagonist's name. In a dialogue with his friend, Vivek (Ehtešām, 2000, p. 57), he explicitly states that Zamīr means "consciousness". This specification creates a parodic effect as consciousness is exactly what is missing. The story's fragmentation in a string of juxtaposed events appears as a fundamental device to render the protagonist's crisis. Basically, he keeps on escaping from his duties, from his paramount reality and seeks refuge in an alternative dimension of a supposed mental disease. In such a narration no *unifying* or *centralizing* account can be found.

Another novel which deploys the strategy of fragmentation, albeit in a substantially different way, is *Hamārā šahar us baras* by Gītāñjali Śrī. The story is built through a series of snapshots, again simply juxtaposed by the narrator (see also Consolaro, 2010, pp. 120-125), but, in this case, the reader is able to reconstruct the plot. If *Dāstān-e-lāptā* appears to be dominated by entropy and random combinations, Gītāñjali Śrī's novel seems to be the product of a predetermined plan. The account was deliberately broken up by the author into fragments, which were subsequently organized in a discontinuous way. In my opinion, Ehtešām's novel renders today's atmosphere by submerging his tale and his character into it; on the contrary, Gītāñjali Śrī looks at it from an external point of view, constructing and deconstructing her story in a critical way. On this issue the narrator of *Hamārā šahar us baras* provides the reader some meaningful clues. The narrator — a female figure, who lives in the same city and period as the main characters, but who is not directly in contact with them — explicitly says that she only wants to bear witness to what she sees and hears. She is not omnipresent (Śrī, 2010, p. 12), nor omniscient (21). She knows that the reality she is experiencing is too difficult to be completely understood and to be narrated in a plain, linear form. When professional writers and intellectuals cannot fulfill their task, what can the narrator do? She can only record her own experiences (Śrī, 2010, p. 7), juxtaposing rumors, events and moments of life (p. 8). If not today, maybe in the future, thanks to these recollected fragments, it will be possible to give a meaning to the period.

In Gītāñjali's novel the fragmented narrative mirrors the fragmentation of characters' identities in a new age of communalism. If at the beginning of the novel the protagonists — Śruti, Hanīf and Śarad — define themselves as secular, at the end of the novel

they fall into the trap of communal labels. Initially they feel they all belong to the “neutral” group of well-educated people, opposed to that of common people, moved by passions and prejudices. Their divider is a bridge near their house, which separates the area of the university from the rest of the city. However, gradually, due to external events and pressures, they start to set a new opposition: Hindu versus Muslim, or better said “non-Muslim” versus “non-Hindu” (Śrī, 2010, p. 240). In the dialogue below, it is evident that the doubt has been instilled in Śruti’s mind:

“Hanīf!” she suddenly calls out. From the bathroom comes an answering “Yes.”
“Am I a Hindu?” No answer.
“Whether I like it or not, am I a Hindu?”
“Maybe,” a voice comes out of the bathroom.
“Śarad too?”
“Yes.”
“What about you?”
“No.”
“Are you a Muslim?”
“Yes.”
“But I’m not?”
“Śruti!” in the bathroom voice there is a laugh.
“I am more like Śarad, less like you?”
“There must be some more or less similar fibre” the bathroom says.
“And that fibre is not in you?”
The bathroom is silent.
“I am a woman.”
“I don’t know.”
“What?” Śruti asks louder.
“We were talking Hindu fibres, not women’s,” the bathroom spurts abruptly.
“My father was Pañjabi?”
The bathroom is silent.
“Was he or not?”
“He was, darling,” comes forward from behind the splashing sound of water.
“Mother was from Banaras?”
“Yes.”
“Then how many fibres are there, that are in me and in Śarad but

not in me and you?" (English translation from Consolaro, 2010, p. 124)¹²⁶

This excerpt shows in an extremely simple way Śruti's awareness, but at the same time incredulity, of how identities are fragmented and the strength of fragmentation is empathized by the use of brief and quick lines. It seems that a person is no longer a unitary entity, but a sum of disjoined features. According to the context, one of these traits may be considered predominant, causing the others to fade. This reflection is explicitly proposed again through Śruti's words:

Why should I separate fibre by fibre, nerve by nerve, from this whole and complete identity? What I am is clearly definite in my consciousness, why should I wake it up, choose some parts of it and leave out others? If I do so, my self would shrink. My self-pride would be impaired. Its essential beauty, its real shape would be spoilt. Dimming it, thickening it, pushing this out and pulling that in . . . we ourselves are breaking into pieces our form and

126 "हनीफ़!" वह अचानक चिल्लाती है। बाथरूम से जवाबी 'हाँ' आता है।

"मैं हिंदू हूँ?" कोई जवाब नहीं।

"चाहूँ या न चाहूँ, हिंदू हूँ?"

"शायद।" बाथरूम से आवाज़ निकलती है।

"शरद भी?"

"हाँ"

"तुम?"

"नहीं"

"तुम मुसलमान हो?"

"हाँ"

"मैं नहीं?"

"श्रुति।" बाथरूम की आवाज़ में हँसी है।

"मैं शरद की तरह ज़्यादा, तुम्हारी तरह कम हूँ?"

"होगा कोई रेशा एक-सा।" बाथरूम कहता है।

"वह रेशा तुममें नहीं?"

बाथरूम चूप है।

"मैं औरत हूँ।"

"पता नहीं।"

"हैं?" श्रुति और ज़ोर से पुकारती है।

"हिंदू रेशे की कह रहा था, औरत की नहीं।" बाथरूम ललक से फेंकता है।

"मेरे बाप पंजाबी थे?"

बाथरूम चूप।

"थे कि नहीं?"

"थे बाबा।" पानी की आवाज़ के आगे पीछे आता है।

"माँ बनारसी?"

"हाँ"

"तो कितने रेशे हुए, जो मुझमें और शरद में हैं, मुझमें और तुममें नहीं?" (Śrī, 2010, pp. 206–207)

figure, but we are just becoming ugly. (English translation from Consolaro: 124)¹²⁷

The issue of multiplication on the level of textual structure led me to think about a third novel, *Kaṭhguḷāb* by Mṛdulā Garg. On the macro level, the novel is constructed around the juxtaposition of five chapters containing five life stories. The author devotes a chapter to each main character and starts all of them with the same syntactic structure *merā nām X hai*, so that we have respectively Smitā, Marianne, Narmadā, Asīmā, Vipin. It seems that every chapter is a self-contained diary, written in the first person, simply juxtaposed to the others. Actually, this simplicity is only apparent as every character, as well as relating her/his individual experiences and traumas, proposes a different point of view on the other protagonists. Smitā's sudden escape from India, for instance, is narrated with two different focalizations, through Smitā's eyes in the first chapter and later on through Asīmā's memory and partial knowledge of the events. In the same way we read about Narmadā's marriage with her cruel *jījā* and her experiences at Darjīn Bībī and Narmitā's house in her own chapter, but also in the following one, dedicated to Asīmā. A further example could be that of the first and only encounter of almost all the main characters after the death of Asīmā's mother: this moment represents the conclusion of Asīmā's story, but it is also a turning point in Vipin's chapter, as he meets Nīrjā with whom he will decide to create a family.

The proliferation of life stories and focalizations is stressed by two further elements: the alternation, within each chapter, of a first person and third person narrator and the presence of some other embedded life stories. Regarding the first point, it is particularly relevant as the systematic duplication of the narrative voice creates a fascinating game of perspectives. It seems that, for each life story, the dimension of the self-referential narrative has to be transcended in order to put some distance between the events, especially traumatic ones, and the characters. We can think about the two episodes of abuse suffered by Smitā: the first one presumably committed by her *jījā* (Garg, 2013, pp. 19-24) and the second by her American husband (Garg, 2013, pp. 49-55). Both of them are narrated by a third person narrator, as if similar traumatic experiences cannot be confessed in the first person.

The second element refers specifically to Marianne's chapter: the American sociologist, in order to find material for her husband's novel, started to research into female migration in America during different historical periods. She quickly developed a special affection towards four women and started to compile their diaries. Hence the reader learns of Roxanne's exile from Poland and her impossible love for a Russian boy; Susan from

¹²⁷[...] 'मैं क्यों रेशे-रेशे, रंग-रंग अलग करूँ अपनी इस भरी-पूरी आइडेन्टिटी के? मैं जो हूँ, मेरी चेतना में सुषुप्त है, क्यों उसे ज़बरदस्ती जगाऊँ, उसमें से कोई अंश चुनूँ, कोई त्यागूँ? ऐसा करने में मेरी आत्मा सिकुड़ती है। मेरी अस्मिता की गरिमा घटती है। उसका वैविध्य, उसका सहज सुंदर रचाव बिगड़ जाता है। इसे धुँधला कर, उसे गाढ़ा करके, इधर बाहर खींचकर उधर दबाकर, हम अपने ही रूप को तोड़-मरोड़कर भद्दा बना रहे हैं। (Śrī, 2010, p. 207)

Scotland, who took part in the struggle against native Americans in order to grab their land. But especially he/she reads about Elena, a beautiful Italian woman, whom Marianne feels like a spiritual mother, and about Ruth from Spain, Marianne's alter-ego. Ruth's story is particularly meaningful as her and Marianne's identities progressively overlap.

Ruth? But I'm Ruth, I was telling you my story, wasn't I? Who am I, Ruth or Marianne? Today I am Marianne. But long ago, in another age? I wish I had met Smita earlier, I wish I didn't hesitate to declare my belief in reincarnation, because then I would say unambiguously that in this life I am Marianne, and in an earlier one I was Ruth. My Christian upbringing only allowed me to say that at some time Ruth must have been my mother's mother... but I had already declared Elena was my mother. I had even told Irving about it because I had a well-reasoned argument worked out for it. But Ruth was an intuition, a mere feeling. I couldn't analyze my relationship with her. How could I tell Irving Whitman that I was Ruth? My need and my pain make me Marianne today; the other day I was Ruth. Not because Ruth was the antidote to Virginia or because, she had liberated me from her tyranny, broken my helplessness in the face of beauty. Elena had done all that. That's why I called her as my spirit mother in public. But Ruth was my echo, my alter ego. (Garg, 2003, p. 75)¹²⁸

In my opinion, the prismatic structure of Mṛdulā Garg's narrative represents a counterpart of fragmentation in Mañzūr Ehteśām and Gītāñjali Śrī's novel, as it highlights, through a multiplication of voices and perspectives, the complexity and plural nature of reality.

4.3. Challenging the realist aesthetic: the poetics of small things and the literature of pleasure

During the Nineties, two apparently opposite phenomena gained some considerable importance in the field of Hindi novels. On one hand, the flourishing of women and *dalit* writing, with their condemnation of discrimination and oppression, and their claim for social recognition. On the other hand, mainstream literature, progressively detaching itself from the tradition of social realism. New mainstream literature starts to be free from

¹²⁸ रुथ? मैं ही तो हूँ रुथ। अपनी कहानी सुना रही थी न आपको? कौन हूँ मैं, रुथ या मारियान? ठीक है, मानती हूँ आज मैं मारियान हूँ। पर तब? काश, मैं स्मिता से पहले मिली होती। काश, मुझे पुनर्जन्म में अपना विश्वास घोषित करने में हिचक न होती। तब मैं साफ-साफ कह सकती थी, इस जन्म में मैं मारियान हूँ, उस जन्म में मैं रुथ थी। पर उस समय, मेरा क्रिश्चियन संस्कार मुझसे केवल यह कहला सकता था कि कभी रुथ मेरी माँ की दूरस्थ माँ रही होगी... पर माँ तो मैं एलेना को करार दे चुकी थी। इर्विंग से भी कह चुकी थी। एलेना को माँ कहने में संकोच नहीं हुआ था, क्योंकि उसे बल देने के लिए मेरे पास ठोस वैचारिक तर्क था। पर रुथ केवल भावना या इंट्रूशन थी। दिमाग लगाकर, उससे अपने सम्बन्ध को विक्षेपित कर पाना नामुमकिन था। इसलिए मैं इर्विंग को अपना हमराज नहीं बना सकी। कैसे कहती उससे कि मैं ही रुथ हूँ। चाहत से, अहसास से, तकलीफ से मैं आज मारियान हूँ, कभी रुथ थी। इसलिए नहीं कि रुथ वरजिनया की एंटीडोट थी, उसके त्रास से उसने मुझे मुक्ति दिलवाई थी, खूबसूरती खौफ खाने की मजबूरी से निजात दी थी। वह सब एलेना ने किया था। इसलिए उसे मैं सरेआम अपनी जेहनी मां बता सकती थी। पर रुथ तो मेरी प्रतिध्वनि, मेरी प्रतिच्छाया थी। (Garg, 2013, pp. 91-92)

the necessity of narrating great issues or proposing high moral teachings. In actual fact these two phenomena have to be considered as the two faces of the same coin. Both of them, even through different devices and with different aims, challenge the tradition of the modern Hindi novel, as inaugurated by Premchand. In section 4.4., I will discuss how women and *dalit* authors, still deploying the instruments of realism, challenge the male-high caste literary canon. In this section, I will focus on that part of mainstream literature which is seeking a new, post-realist aesthetic.

According to Sudhīś Pacaurī, at the dawn of the new millennium, playfulness has become a key concept of Hindi fiction. As the scholar argued, in an interview that I had with him, in the contemporary world *pleasure* has gained a central role, taking the place of reality. In the consumer society, people do not want to buy sorrow and suffering (which is a fundamental part of the realistic tradition), but well-being and happiness. Therefore, we start encountering texts whose plot is extremely reduced, with no great ideals or eternal truths and especially no didactic intention. We find mosaics of daily-life images (no longer charged with the idea of social commitment), apparently “light plots” with plenty of sexual allusions and fascinating puns. Moreover, contemporary literature becomes a product of the consumer society and progressively erases the distance between high and popular literature. This is a typical feature of postmodern art, whose authors do not try to conceal the tensions between aesthetic, historical and textual dimensions (Pacaurī, 2010, pp. 102-103). The border between reality and imagination becomes evanescent, as well as the separation between genres and the distinction between life and art (Pacaurī, 2010, pp. 99-100).

In my readings, the search for a post-realist aesthetic is particularly visible in the work of Vinod Kumār Śukla and Manohar Śyām Jośī, albeit with different connotations. The plot of Śukla’s novel *Dīvār mein ek khirkī rahtī thī* is extremely reduced and, as Viṣṇu Khare underlines in the novel’s afterword, there are no great events or conflicts, but images of pure life of the lower middle class and images of nature with all its sensuous effects (Śukla, 2014, p. 168). Rāy (2002, p.362), in a somewhat critical tone, even argues that if in Śukla’s first novel *Naukar kī kamīz* linguistic amusement (*bhāṣik krīṛā*), still supported by a rather structured plot, was a tolerable component, in *Dīvār* it becomes a mere diversion (*khilvār mātr*).

The world depicted by Vinod Kumār Śukla, despite the humble conditions of his protagonists, is imbued with poetry and magic. Śukla seems to suggest that people, in order to gather this aspect of reality, only have to approach it with openness and candor. In particular in the novel, love is the engine of this revealing process. The protagonist, Raghuvār Prasād, in fact, discovers the edenic world beyond his window (see 4.1.1.) and the poetics of small things thanks to the presence of his new wife Sonsī. Through the images of the couple in their idyllic garden, through the images of their intimacy and complicity, the author provides a new way of representing the life of the lower-middle class, free from the harder tones of social realism. Nonetheless, it does not mean that he conceals the

protagonists' poor conditions, nor their daily preoccupations. The couple live in a rented single-room house, with just a few things supplied by Raghuvar Prasād's elder sister (Śukla, 2014, pp. 24-25). Sometimes the young man feels guilty, he is afraid that he does not provide sufficient support for his parents. During the first visit of his father, Raghuvar notices:

Father looked weak. If Raghuvar Prasad asked about his health, Father would tell him everything that was wrong. Raghuvar Prasad would become agitated. Had his salary been better he'd have shown his father how much a son can care. Raghuvar Prasad felt helpless faced with his father's expectations; he had failed as a son (Shukla, 2007, p. 29)¹²⁹

Despite the big and the little troubles of everyday life the tragic tone never prevails. The young couple is able to see the beauty and the magic of small things. Śukla conveys this particular sensitivity through a language with a highly poetic flavor. In his descriptions the author provides the reader with a multi-sensorial painting, with unusual associations and frequent synesthesia. In the excerpt below, for example, Raghuvar Prasād follows his wife beyond the window. He likes following her, as if she were the center of his world:

Raghuvar Prasad walked on the path behind Sonsi. As feet leave prints, Sonsi's movement ahead left a Rhythm in its wake. The scene on every side was rhythm made visible. The pond, the tree, the blossoms on the tree, the path — these were composed of rhythm. Raghuvar Prasad walked as if his feet were dancing. From the earth to the sky, Sonsi's rhythm prevailed. What was still swayed in the way still things sway. A large rock looked still as it swayed. Raghuvar Prasad walked in step with Sonsi's rhythm. (Shukla, 2007, pp.180-181)¹³⁰

It seems that the rhythm of Sonsi's steps has become visible and has pervaded the whole of reality. The rhythm pervades the same stylistic choices, with the constant repetition of words and sounds and with the juxtaposition of short sentences. One might recall, at this point, the fact that, according to social etiquette, a woman in South Asia should walk be-

129 रघुवर प्रसाद को पिता कमजोर लग रहे थे। पिता से तबियत के बारे में पूछेंगे तो अपनी सब बीमारियाँ बतलाने लगेंगे। तब रघुवर प्रसाद को घबराहट होने लगती थी। उसका वेतन अच्छा होता तो वह बताता कि एक पुत्र अपनी पिता की किस तरह परवाह करता है। पिता की छोटी-छोटी अपेक्षाओं के सामने वह असहाय हो जाता था कि वह अच्छा पुत्र नहीं समझा जा रहा है। (Śukla, 2014, p. 30)

130 पगडण्डी पर रघुवर प्रसाद सोनसी के फिर पीछे हो गए। जैसे पैर के चिह्न छूटते हैं उसी तरह आगे चल रही सोनसी के पीछे सोनसी के चाल की कय के छूटे हुए चिह्न की तरह सब कुछ सब तरफ था। लय का दृश्य था। तालाब लय का तालाब था। पेड़ लय का था। पेड़ में खिले फूल लय थे। लय की पगडण्डी थी। रघुवर प्रसाद के पैरों में चलते हुए थिरकन थी। आकाश से लेकर धरती तक सोनसी और रघुवर प्रसाद का घराना था। जो स्थिर था उसका झूमना स्थिर झूमना था। एक बड़ी चट्टान झूमते हुए स्थिर दिख रही थी। रघुवर प्रसाद सोनसी की चाल देखते हुए चल रहे थे। (Śukla, 2014, pp. 131-132)

hind her husband or lover, as in a famous Urdu sher by Mirza Ghalib¹³¹. In Vinod Kumār Śukla's excerpt the model is reversed, as Raghuvar Prasād follows the rhythm of his wife's steps. The world beyond the window is free from conventional social norms. The power of love and in particular of conjugal love is celebrated throughout the novel. Its importance is highlighted from the very beginning of the text — before the novel's beginning — by the dedication to the author's wife and by a poem written by Śukla.

A poem lived first in the novel

From countless stars a star emerged.
How did the one from countless appear?
Parted from the countless
One alone,
For a while it was the first.

A gust of wind blew
Blowing from the countless gusts of wind,
For a while it was the first.
From the countless waves a wave emerged
For a fleeting moment the first.

From the countless,
The countless all alone,
From the countless, one emerged —
A life companion for always.
(Shukla 2007, no page)¹³²

Actually, the celebration of conjugal love was present in another well-known novel by Śukla, *Naukar kī kamīz*¹³³ (*The Servant Shirt*, 1979). Also in this case, the relationship between the protagonist (Santū Bābū) and his wife is marked by their daily routine, by little incomprehensions, but also by delicate thoughts and moments of intimacy. In several occasions, for instance, Santū Bābū underlines how his wife looks beautiful despite not using any make-up or wearing inexpensive clothes. One day, Santū Bābū sees, unob-

¹³¹ मत पूछ कि क्या हाल है मेरा त्तिरे पीछे/ तू देख कि क्या रंग है तेरा मिरे आगे (Ghazal 208, 5 available on Pritchett's website), "Don't ask how I feel traipsing behind: look how you blush as audience to me" (translation by the American poet Andrew McCord, available on <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/poetry/four-ghazals-mirza-ghalib>).

¹³² उपन्यास में पहले एक कविता रहती थी
अनगिन से निकलकर एक तारा था।/ एक तारा अनगिन से बाहर कैसे निकला था?/ अनगिन से अलग होकर/ अकेला एक/
पहला था कुछ देर।/ हवा का झोंका जो आया था/ वह भी था अनगिन हवा के झोंकों का/ पहला झोंका कुछ देर।/ अनगिन से
निकलकर एक लहर भी/ पहली, बस कुछ पल।/ अनगिन का अकेला/ अनगिन अकेले अनगिन।/ अनगिन से अकेली एक/
संगिनी जीवन भर। (Śukla, 2014, p. 7)

¹³³ The protagonist is Santū Bābū, a young clerk, who relates in the first person some episodes of his life, about his household and his job at an excise office. The title of the novel refers to an episode, in the middle of the narration, where Santū Bābū is forced to put on the shirt of his boss's previous servant and to work for some days at his place. When Santū Bābū goes back home, wearing the servant's shirt, he feels everybody's eyes on him; he does not want to be seen even by his wife. The shirt is perceived as a dirty blemish which has to be removed quickly, something to be ashamed of: Santū Bābū is a clerk, not a servant and he wants to defend his status.

served, his wife accompanying their landlady on her errands. She looks so different, so secure. As if he were seeing her for the first time, he is amazed by her beauty and by the musicality of her voice (Śukla, 2000, pp. 168-170). Moreover, towards the end of the novel, her pregnancy awakens a further caring attitude: “when I saw her panting I lay down next to her being careful not to put any pressure on her belly. My cheek resting next to hers, my breath keeping pace with her breath, I began to breathe, not just for myself but for her”¹³⁴ (Shukla, 1999, p. 225).

Together with love, nature is the other basic component which creates the magic of Vinod Kumār Śukla’s world. Nature seems to play empathetically with *Dīvār*’s protagonists. Especially the moon and the stars are frequently described in connection with them. In the excerpt below, for instance, Raghuvar Prasād is looking for his wife outside the window, but it is completely dark and for a some time he is unable to see his beloved. Suddenly the moon rises in the sky:

As the moon rose, Sonsi became visible to him lying on a rectangular black block. The border of her pale yellow sari seemed laced by moonbeams, not shiny thread. Her silver anklet was bathed in the moonlight. The substance of her silver earrings was moonlight. The gold pin in her other ear gifted to her by Mother-in-law, was made of golden light. The gold bracelets were moulded of intense golden light. Different parts of Sonsi’s body shone as if they were adorned by ornaments made of moonlight. (Shukla, 2007, p. 125)¹³⁵

The rising moon reveals Sonsī’s presence to Raghuvar and moonbeams seem to adorn her body: the decorations of her *sārī*, her earrings, anklet and bracelets seem to be made of moonlight¹³⁶. On other occasions, nature seems to play a more active role, for example, helping the couple during the time of separation. When Sonsī has to visit her in-laws and her parents, the sky becomes their most intimate way of communication:

“Whenever I find the time I will lie down on the touchstone rock and look up at the sky”.
“Through my window, I will view the sky you will have seen.”
Raghuvar Prasad’s looking at the sky would be his letter. The

¹³⁴ मैं बिस्तर पर उसे हाँफता देखता रहा। फिर उसके गाल से गाल सटाकर इस तरह चिपट गया कि उसके पेट पर थोड़ा भी दबाव न पड़े। आँख मूँदे-मूँदे उसकी साँस से सटा हुआ मैं भी साँस लेना लगा। हम लोग अपने-अपने लिए अलग-अलग जीवनदायिनी हवा नहीं इकट्ठा कर रहे थे, एक दूसरे के लिए इकट्ठा कर रहे थे। (Śukla, 2000, p. 187)

¹³⁵ तभी बड़ा सा चन्द्रमा निकला। बहुत बड़ा चन्द्रमा था। एक बड़ी, चौरस, काली, चिकनी चट्टान पर लेटी हुई सोनसी चन्द्रमा के निकलते ही दिखी। पीली हल्दी साड़ी की चाँदी की प्लास्टिक जरी चन्द्रमा के प्रकाश की किनार लगी साड़ी लग रही थी। चाँदी की पैर पट्टी चन्द्रमा के प्रकाश से बनी पैर पट्टी थी। चाँदी के बाले चन्द्रमा के प्रकाश से बने कान में थे। दूसरे कान में छोटी सी कनफुल्ली जो अम्मा ने दी थी वह सुनहरे प्रकाश बिन्दु की फुल्ली थी। हाथ में सोने के कड़े भारी सुनहरे प्रकाश से बने लग रहे थे। इसके अलावा भी सोनसी का शरीर कहीं-कहीं इतना रह-रहकर प्रकाशित होता था कि वह भी चन्द्रमा के प्रकाश के गहने से सजा हुआ लगता था। (Śukla, 2014, p. 94)

¹³⁶ Moon and moonlight connoting erotics can be actually found in several texts in modern Hindi literature and, more in general, in South Asian literatures. On this topic see, for instance, Damsteegt, 2001.

moon would be his form of address for Sonsi. The star would be his handwriting which Sonsi would be able to decipher instantly. Raghuvar lying on the touchstone rock would see a cast sky. The cast sky would be a long letter. Sonsi looking out the window would see a smaller sky. Her letter would be smaller. The sky would be the letter they had written each other. (Shukla, 2007, p. 209)¹³⁷

The episode immediately recalls the *kavyā* tradition, Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* for instance, where a *yakṣa* entrusts a cloud with a message for his wife far away. Hence the magical and poeticized reality, the participation of nature in humans' vicissitudes has not to be considered as something completely new: it belongs to an ancient tradition, which is now rediscovered as an alternative filter by which to read the world.

The magic of reality is not only conveyed by the sense of sight, but by hearing too. On numerous occasions Raghuvar and Sonsī transform each other's words in a creative and personal manner. They mould each other's utterances, some times delete part of them, revealing their hidden intentions and desires. In one case, for example, Raghuvar wants to go to the college quickly, avoiding meeting the *sādhū* with his elephant. Sonsī has just prepared some rice and offers to bring some at his workplace. When Raghuvar refuses, she hears a completely different answer, as she wants to join him at the college: "it wasn't the eight kilometers to college that she was crossing but the distance of her loneliness. Her destination was Raghuvar Prasad, eight kilometers away" (Shukla, 2007, p. 110).

In other cases, Raghuvar and Sonsī are able to hear unspoken words. In the excerpt below, they are at home, Raghuvar is preparing his lessons, while Sonsī is doing some housework. She thinks about her daily routine and he immediately repeats her thoughts.

"I will cook the leaves if the jari vegetable now. I will dice the stems in the evening and cook them for supper." The she changed her mind. "I will cook the stems now."

"What were you saying?" Raghuvar Prasad asked Sonsi.

"I wasn't saying anything," Sonsi replied.

"Aren't you planning to cook jari stems now?"

"Yes," she said. "How do you know?"

"I know."

After a while Raghuvar Prasad heard, "I swept the room but I forgot to mop it."

"You finished sweeping but you forgot to mop. If you mop now you will have to bathe a second time. That's what you were thinking. My advice is: don't mop now."

"That's just what I was thinking, but how do you know?"

"Just like that." Raghuvar Prasad spoke like a magician.

"Can you tell me what I think of next?"

¹³⁷ "जब भी समय मिलेगा मैं कसौटी के पत्थर पर जाकर लेट जाऊँगा। और आकाश को देखता रहूँगा।"

"मैं भी खिड़की से तुम्हारे देखे हुए आकाश को देख लूँगी।" रघुवर प्रसाद का आकाश देखना रघुवर प्रसाद का चिट्ठी लिखना होगा। चन्द्रमा सोनसी के लिए लिखा हुआ सम्बोधन होगा। तारों की लिपि होगी जिसे तत्काल सोनसी पढ़ लेगी। रघुवर प्रसाद कसौटी के पत्थर पर लेटकर एक बड़ा आकाश देखेंगे। बड़ा आकाश लम्बी चिट्ठी होगी। सोनसी खिड़की से छोटा आकाश देखेगी तो छोटी होगी। आकाश एक दूसरे को लिखी चिट्ठी होगी। (Shukla, 2014, p. 151)

“I’ll tell you. Not now. In my own time.”
 “When the bangle-seller comes by, I will buy bangles from her today,” Sonsi said in the middle of her task. Raghuvar thought she was speaking to him.
 “What did you say?”
 “Nothing.” Sonsi was preoccupied.
 “Buy some bangles from the bangles-seller this afternoon,” Raghuvar Prasad said.
 “That’s just what I was thinking,” Sonsi said with a child’s amazement on her face. (Shukla, 2007, p. 205)¹³⁸

We may assume that she is just thinking out loud, simply unaware of it, but some other episodes lead us to understand that there is a special and more subtle way of communication between husband and wife. When they are not alone — for example during the visit of Raghuvar’s mother and younger brother — they can talk mentally while sleeping (Śukla, 2014, pp. 137-138). Their special relationship transforms the simple act of listening into a sort of magical act, which can reach the deepest and most unexpected levels of comprehension.

For all the characteristics described above, Vinod Kumār Śukla’s prose is often associated with magical realism¹³⁹, a phenomenon which achieved worldwide attention with Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and with the so-called

138 “अभी जरी की भाजी बना लेती हूँ, शाम को डण्डल काटकर बना लूँगी।” थोड़ी देर बाद उसका मन बदल गया। “अभी डण्डल बना लूँगी” तब रघुवर प्रसाद ने सोनसी से पूछा “तुम क्या कह रही थी?”
 “कुछ तो नहीं” सोनसी ने कहा।
 “सोनसी अभी तुम जरी की डण्डल बना रही हो ना।”
 “हाँ” उसने कहा।
 “तुमको कैसे मालूम?”
 “मालूम है”
 थोड़ी देर बाद रघुवर प्रसाद ने सुना “देखो झाड़ू लग गई पर पोंछा लगाना भूल गई।”
 “तुम झाड़ू लगा की हो और पोंछा लगाना भूल गई। अब तो तुम पोंछा लगाओगी तो तुम दुबारा नहाओगी यही सोच रही थीं ना। ऐसा करो तुम पोंछा मत लगाओ”
 “हाँ मैं तो यही सोच रही थी, पर तुमको कैसे पता चला?”
 “ऐसे ही” जादूगर की तरह रघुवर प्रसाद ने कहा।
 “अब मैं जो सोचूँगी तो मुझको बता दोगे?”
 “हाँ बता दूँगा। पर अभी नहीं। जब बताना होगा तब।”
 “चूड़ी वाली निकलेगी तो उससे आज चूड़ी लूँगी।” सोनसी ने काम करते-करते कहा। रघुवर प्रसाद को लगा कि उनसे कहा गया।
 “क्या बोली?” रघुवर प्रसाद ने पूछा।
 “कुछ तो नहीं” व्यस्त सोनसी ने कहा।
 “सुनो आज दोपहर को चूड़ी वाली से तुम चूड़ी खरीद लेना” रघुवर प्रसाद ने कहा।
 “मैं यही सोच रही थी।” एक बच्ची के आश्चर्य से वह चकित खड़ी थी। (Śukla, 2014, pp. 148-149)

¹³⁹ On magical realism a conspicuous number of texts have been published, among the most recent ones Bowers, 2004; Faris, 2004; Hart and Ouyang (eds.), 2005; López-Calvo, 2014; Gaylard, 2005; Sasser, 2014.

Latin American boom¹⁴⁰. Theo D'haen, in a thought-provoking essay (1995), provided an interpretation of magical realism which fits Śukla's prose perfectly. According to the scholar magical realism is strictly connected to ex-centricity, "in the sense of speaking from the margin, from a place "other" than "the" or "a" center" (D'haen, 1995, p. 194). He argues that:

In literary-critical terms, this ex-centricity can in first instance be described as a voluntary act of breaking away from the discourse perceived as central to the line of technical experimentation starting with realism and running via naturalism and modernism to the kind of postmodernism Lernout assigned to his second group of authors, the "metafictionists" or "surfictionists" à la Beckett, Robbe-Grillet or Ricardou. Even though these various movements may have thought of themselves as critical or subversive of one another, and of the respective societies they stemmed from, their issuing from "privileged centers" made their discourse suspect to those marginalized -- geographically, socially, economically -- by these same societies. To write ex-centrally, then, or from the margin, implies dis-placing this discourse. My argument would be that magic realist writing achieves this end by first appropriating the techniques of the "centr"-al line and then using these not, as is the case with these central movements, "realistically," i.e. to duplicate existing reality as perceived by the theoretical or philosophical tenets underlying said movements, but rather to create an alternative world correcting so-called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this "reality" depends upon (D'haen, 1995, pp. 194-195).

Vinod Kumār Śukla's writing does not share the perspective of the privileged centers either on the level of worldwide literature or on the level of Hindi literature. On one hand, because of his origins (from a former colony and, moreover, from a peripheral region like Chhattisgarh) and because of the language he is writing in, he is immediately situated in a marginal position, far from the shining world of Anglophone fiction. On the other hand, he finds his own way of expression, breaking free from the tradition of social realism that largely shaped the Hindi literary canon.

The second novel that I consider a perfect example of the new literature of pleasure is Manohar Śyām Jośī's *Ṭ-ṭā profesar*. In the short preface (*Ṭ-ṭā profesar* in Jośī, 2008, p. 3), the text is explicitly defined as a postmodern joke (*uttarādhunik majāk*), an example of the postmodern game (*uttarādhunik līlā kī namunā*), which allows the reader to savor a story even if in reality no complete story has been written. As described in section 4.1.2., *Ṭ-ṭā profesar* is not only the story of a character, but also the story of a series of stories which the protagonist was unable to complete. A noteworthy aspect of the novel is the alternation and mixture of a comic and tragic tone. There is a kind of unexpected discon-

¹⁴⁰ The Latin American boom was a flourishing of Latin American literature, which took place primarily between the 1960s and 1970s. It is mostly associated with Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia), Julio Cortázar (Argentina), Carlos Fuentes (Mexico) and Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru) all of whom incorporated magic realist elements into their work.

tinuity, which repeatedly shakes the reader. The caricatural image of Professor T-ṭā, an old man obsessed with sex, for instance, dramatically contrasts with that of his sad childhood in a widows' house. Moreover, the presence of frequent frivolous episodes, with plenty of sexual allusions, contrast with the seriousness of the epilogue, where Mr Joṣī, looking at a dead foetus floating on a river, reflects on the unfinished stories on T-ṭā's life.

If in section 4.1.2. I focused on the most serious and dramatic aspects of the novel — that is, on the narrator's disenchanted reflections on life and on the potential of writing — here I will concentrate on the comic aspects of the story, those which, even at a first glance, make the story diverge radically from the tradition of social realism. The characterization of Professor T-ṭā makes him inevitably a caricatural figure, from many points of view. Firstly, he proudly mimics the appearance and way of speaking of the British:

Professor Khashtivallabh Pant, Dubbul MA, T'ta' was a thin, short man, with a vanity that colored every aspect of his personality: mind, heart and body. He held his frail body so erect that it seemed in imminent danger of toppling over any minute. He wore what he imagined was an Englishman's attire: a black-and-white pin striped suit. This, however, only enhanced his comical appearance, especially as the seat of the trousers and the elbow of the jacket had patches of another fabric. [...] Not only did T'ta admire the white man's attire, he was also deeply in awe of the white man's language. And so, he always carried a pocket notebook to jot down all those English words that he heard for the first time. (Joshi, 2008, pp. 18-19)¹⁴¹

He is convinced he is an authority on the English language and due to this he is the object of hilarity among the school staff. People often ask him the meaning of English words that he presumably does not know, only to see him conscientiously check them in his sacred Oxford Dictionary. The mere fact that T-ṭā is the only person in the school to own such a dictionary, seems to make him the repository for a deeper knowledge. Because of this attitude ongoing quarrels and contests start between T-ṭā and the school principal, both eager to parade their mastery. One day, Mr Joṣī, with the aim of winning T-ṭā's trust and gathering information for his collection of tales, informs the Professor that the principal will attempt to embarrass him by using the phrase "hanky-panky". T-ṭā will simply have to answer that he knows the meaning, that is "hocus-pocus". On this occasion, indicating the expression in his inseparable dictionary, the Professor gives an amusing spelling: "*yuch o si you yes, pee o si you yes, hocus-pocus*. There you are, maharaj, that is the

¹⁴¹ दुबले-पतले और नाटे प्रोफेसर षष्ठीबल्लभ पन्त डदुल एम.ए. 'ट-टा' बेहद अकड़ू थे और यह अकड़ उनके दिल-दिमाग-देह तीनों में समान रूप से व्याप्त थी। वह अपनी कमजोर काया को इतना अकड़-तानकर चलते थे कि इस बात का बराबर खतरा बना रहता था कि पीठ के बल गिर जायेंगे। अपने सींकिया बदन को वह गोरे साहबों वाले पतले सफेद धारियों वाले काले सूट में लपेटकर कुछ और हास्यास्पद बना लेते थे। इस ऊनी सूट में पतलून के पीछे और कोट की कोहनियों पर बदरंग टल्ले लगे हुए थे। [...] प्रोफेसर ट-टा न केवल अंग्रेजों की पोशाक पहनते थे, बल्कि उन्हें अंग्रेजों की भाषा से भी बहुत प्रेम था। वह अपनी एक जेबी-नोटबुक में अंग्रेजी के ऐसे तमाम शब्द दर्ज कर लिया करते थे जो उन्होंने पहली बार सुने हों। (Joshi, 2008, pp. 15-16)

meaning of hanky-panky” (Joshi, 2008, p. 36). The hilarity of the situation is increased by the principal’s reaction: he angrily grasps the book and throws it out of the window. The book lands in the sewer, making Ṭ-ṭā’s brahmin soul shudder. This was a very serious affront. Professor Ṭ-ṭā would even have the dictionary cleansed with Gange’s water, if it did not further ruin the pages (Jośī, 2008, pp. 27-28). And the quarrel goes on. Professor Ṭ-ṭā even threatens the principal to launch a *satyāgrah*, to restore in the school the respect for knowledge:

‘Then you had better remember, Manager-saip, that I am a Freedom Fighter,’ [...] ‘If I launch a satyagraha, they will have to give me charge of the entire school, forget a mere dictionary,’ he went on. ‘I will tell all the leaders of this country that the man you appointed as principal is bent upon dragging the school down into the stinking gutter that he tossed the dictionary in. I have nurtured this school with my blood and sweat and this is what he has turned it into! I had saved that dictionary for twenty long years and you have chucked it into a disgusting sewer. I refuse to remain silent after this, I am telling you all today. I will scream and tell the leaders the truth about this principal and this school!’ (Joshi, 2008, pp. 37-38)¹⁴²

As the narrator empathizes some pages later, the irony of the episode is related not only to the absurdity of the fight itself, but particularly to its historical background. The fact happened just five years after the British had departed from India and there, in the remote village of Sunaulīdhār, a *satyāgrah* was invoked to restore the respect for an English dictionary.

Another fundamental element which makes Ṭ-ṭā a comic figure is his obsession for sex, his ability to find erotic allusions in any subject. For instance, one day, he is discussing with Mr Jośī the difficulties his son, Yatīś, has with maths, particularly with geometry. Ṭ-ṭā suddenly remembers that he has noticed his son carrying his geometry textbook to the toilet. Initially he feels outraged at his son taking a book into such an impure place, but finally he thinks that he may use its diagrams for a better masturbation. As Mr Jośī gapes at this suggestion, Ṭ-ṭā adds: “Don’t you know that our tantric traditions have always used the triangle as a sex symbol? Now if you tell me that it doesn’t indicate some kind of sexual act, you will only strengthen my belief that you are actually a very

¹⁴² “आप भी यह मत भूलना मैनेजर सैप कि मैं फ्रीडम फाइटर हूँ। [...] मैं सत्याग्रह पर बैठ गया तो वह डिक्शनरी क्या, यह सारा स्कूल आपको मुझे दे देना पड़ेगा महाराज। मैं बताऊँगा, कंट्री के तमाम लीडर्स को कि आपका लाया हुआ यह प्रिंसिपल स्कूल को भी उसी तरह गू-मूत की नाली में फेंक रहा है, जिस तरह इसने मेरी डिक्शनरी उसमें फेंकी। जिस स्कूल को मैंने अपने खून-पसीने से सींचा ठहरा, उसे इसने गन्दी नाली में फेंक दिया। जो डिक्शनरी मैंने बीस साल से सँभालकर रखी ठहरी, उसे इसने मूत की नाली में विसर्जित कर दिया। अब मैं चुप नहीं रहूँगा। चिल्ला-चिल्लाकर कहूँगा कीडर्स से। सारी पोल-पट्टी इस आपके स्कूल और प्रिंसिपल दोनों की।” (Jośī, 2008, p. 29)

ill-informed person!” (Joshi, 2008, p. 61)¹⁴³. Moreover, when Mr Jośī starts to teach maths to Yaťīs, who is just a twelve-year-old boy, and to Kelāvťī Yen, the beautiful half-Chinese primary school teacher, he is asked to never leave them alone. For Ț-ťā “youth is a very bad thing” (Joshi, 2008, p. 57 and 58) and it is necessary to protect the virtue of their pupils. Soon Mr Jośī decides that Ț-ťā will be the ideal protagonist of a comic-erotic romp and starts to meet him everyday for an evening walk in the hope of gleaning some tasty information. The Professor boasts about his virility, but is reluctant to provide many details. To win Ț-ťā’s trust, Mr Jośī starts to invent improbable sexual experiences and to provide the Professor some texts, like the controversial text by Marie Stopes on birth control and a porn title called *Ideal Marriage*. Ț-ťā like an adolescent devours the latter while Mr Jośī is tutoring Kelāvťī and Yaťīs. Moreover, sometime later, he furtively asks Mr Jośī the meaning of an expression he found in his readings, that is “coitus interruptus”. When he hears the answer, he is a little upset: he was convinced that he had discovered that “contraceptive method” (Jośī, 2008, p. 48).

Actually, both the scatological tone and the presence of multiple sexual allusions are not something new for Manohar Śyām Jośī. In his previous novel, *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī* (see 1.1. and 4.1.), in fact, the first part of the protagonist’s life is marked by his father’s chronic constipation. The author lingers over many detailed descriptions of how Hariyā attempts to soothe his father’s sufferings. Moreover, when Hariyā hears for the first time the name Goomalling (or Gūmāliṅg), he starts to muse about the affinity with the word *gū*, which means “feces”, and of the possible existence of a *liṅga* made of excrements (as if Gūmāliṅg derived from *gū kā liṅga*). Regarding the sexual component, it becomes particularly relevant on the death of Hariyā’s father and the consequent discovery of his unexpected treasure. Hariyā, in fact, opens a mysterious trunk and finds some pornographic pictures, portraying his father in intimate poses with a British *sāhab* and with his wife. After this episode Hariyā, who has never shown any interest for sexual matters, starts to behave in a strange way. The community is particularly perplexed when, during the days of mourning, he gives hospitality to Hemulī Bojyū, an old but still attractive relative, with the excuse of having some help in preparing food for his father’s visitors. Hariyā and Hemulī are seen chatting and whispering in a way which is considered highly improper.

Manohar Śyām Jośī’s writing is ironical and playful and, in my opinion, perfectly exemplifies the concept of *līlābhāv* in the acceptation of Pāṇḍey Śāśibhūṣaṅ “Śītāṃśu” (see section 2.2.). According to the critic, *līlābhāv* — which he explicitly translates as “seduction” (Śītāṃśu, 2000, p. 8) — is an essential feature of postmodern works and makes literature a sort of pleasurable game. In particular, Śītāṃśu highlights that the-

¹⁴³ आपको तो इतना भी पता नहीं है कि ट्राइएंगल हमारे यहाँ तन्त्र में सेक्स का ही प्रतीक माना गया है। उल्टे ट्राइएंगल को किशोर-कल्पना क्या समझ सकती है इतना भी अगर आप नहीं समझ सकते मिस्टर जोशी तो आपके समझदार होने के बारे में मेरा डाउट पक्का ही हो जायेगा! (Jośī, 2008, p. 43)

se new texts are a mixture of veiled and unveiled meanings and are often characterized by an explicit sexual component.

As I anticipated, Vinod Kumār Śukla and Manohar Śyām Jośī resort to different strategies, but they achieve the same goal, which is to make their novels innovative and independent from the tradition of social realism. They seem to overcome the idea of *weight of living*, recovering the value of *lightness*. In this sense Śukla's and Jośī's prose may evoke a well known lecture delivered by Italo Calvino. The Italian author, in his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, stated:

After forty years of writing fiction, after exploring various roads and making diverse experiments, the time has come for me to look for an overall definition of my work. I would suggest this: my working method has more often than not involved the subtraction of weight. I have tried to remove weight, sometimes from people, sometimes from heavenly bodies, sometimes from cities; above all I have tried to remove weight from the structure of stories and from language. [...] When I began my career, the categorical imperative of every young writer was to represent his own time. Full of good intentions, I tried to identify myself with the ruthless energies propelling the events of our century, both collective and individual. I tried to find some harmony between the adventurous, picaresque inner rhythm that prompted me to write and the frantic spectacle of the world, sometimes dramatic and sometimes grotesque. Soon I became aware that between the facts of life that should have been my raw materials and the quick light touch I wanted for my writing, there was a gulf that cost me increasing effort to cross. Maybe I was only then becoming aware of the weight, the inertia, the opacity of the world—qualities that stick to writing from the start, unless one finds some way of evading them. (Calvino, 1988, pp. 3-4)

Similarly Śukla and Jośī describe their world, with its lights and shadows, but they manage to evade its harshness and opacity. Śukla, with his poetry of small things, draws the attention to a humble but magical world, which takes shape thanks to the power of love and to the complicit attitude of nature. Jośī provides his readers with a multilayered tale, which is both the story of a man suffering from writer's block and the story of a series of incomplete stories. Irony represents the basic way of expression, mitigating the potential dramatic nature of the tale. Moreover, its playful and often desecrating tone distances the novel from the tradition of high literature, making it closer to the most popular forms of entertainment. In conclusion, what I wanted to emphasize in this section, together with the previous ones, is that at the dawn of the new millennium, new expressive prospects have appeared, making the Hindi novel part of a worldwide literary discourse on post-modernism.

4.4. Literature against traditional totalizing powers

One of the most interesting aspects of the recent Hindi literary scenario is the emergence of new voices, particularly of women and *dalit* writers. These groups have been marginalized for a long time, suffering because of discrimination and oppression, but have started to denounce their conditions and to demand social recognition. It is almost impossible to talk about the Hindi literature of the late Twentieth century without mentioning *strī vimarś* and *dalit vimarś*. Nevertheless, as most of this literature is characterized by realistic tones and limited stylistic experimentation, its link with postmodernism could be controversial. In the following sections, I will discuss this issue, analyzing, on one hand, the subversion of conventional gender roles, and on the other, two different pictures of marginalization offered by a *dalit* and a non-*dalit* author.

4.4.1. Women's writing: subverting conventional gender roles

As highlighted by Pāṇḍey Śaśibhūṣaṇ Śītāmśu, one of the fundamental ingredients of a postmodern text is the urgency of going beyond institutional traditions (see section 2.2.2.). Marriage, family and society are undergoing a major change as well as the traditional concepts of femininity and masculinity. Literature, especially through its feminist voices, necessarily mirrors this situation and tries to deconstruct conventional gender roles.

If we look at the history of Hindi literature, female characters are usually depicted as devoted wives and mothers and if they try to escape from their boundaries they feel guilty and troubled. Although in the second part of the Twentieth century, women start to lay claim to their rights, only from the 1990s they are bold enough to try to subvert the system. We can consider the characters depicted by Kṛṣṇā Sobtī, probably one of the most important and innovative authors of the Twentieth century. Mitro from *Mitro marjānī* (1966), for example, gives voice to female sexual desire as a natural impulse, but she does not break with her world. She feels repressed in her house, but she keeps on living a conventional monogamous life, simply asking for more sexual gratification. In *Sūraj-mukhī aṁdhere ke*, the protagonist Rātī, after suffering abuse, is unable to have a stable love story. She seems to find satisfaction through a relationship with a married man, who is ready to leave his family for her. Despite this, she ultimately gives him up. Kṛṣṇā Sobtī explained that Rātī was looking for herself and nothing more: the conclusion of the novel should not be read through the lenses of the sublimation of love, but of self-assertion. Nevertheless, it seems that in this way the author creates sympathy towards some socially condemned behaviors and at the same time reaffirms the *status quo* (Consolaro, 2011a, pp. 279-281).

During the 1990s some well-known female authors, such as Prabhā Khetān and Mṛdulā Garg, made some fundamental steps for women's emancipation. Through their

lives and writings, they undermined the traditional roles imposed on women by a patriarchal society. In particular they both deconstructed the conventional equivalence woman-mother, suggesting multiple alternatives to realize women's identity.

One of the fundamental themes of Mṛdulā Garg's novel *Kaṭhgulāb* is the unresolved ideal of parenthood and the deconstruction of conventional female and male roles (see also Castaing, 2013, pp. 78-84). Even though the feminine identity is usually associated with motherhood, none of the main characters manages to conceive a child: Smitā and Marianne experience the pain of abortion, Narmadā dedicates her whole life to raising someone else's children and Asīmā does not feel any desire for pregnancy until her menopause. Almost all the mothers that we encounter in the text are far from being positive figures devoted to their children: there is Namitā, Smitā's sister, who spends very little time with her children and has a harsh attitude towards everybody; and Marianne's mother, who does not care about human relations, but only about appearance and money. If we consider all these characters the conventional image of woman-mother seems outdated. Motherhood is an extremely complex condition and is not the only chance for women's self-realization. Smitā and Asīmā find their own way of living in contact with nature and through social commitment, while Marianne expresses her female creative power through writing (see 4.1.2.). On the other hand, Vipin, the only male character, is described with a special emotional sensitivity. He seems to be closer to women, as traditionally considered, than to men. Using his own words:

To tell you the truth, the subtle sensitivity and delicate appreciation of beauty that I shared with women, I could never find in men, I don't know if this difference between men and women is natural or historical, but I do know that it exists. Whether it's the beauty of nature or of a work of art, the pleasure I have had in experiencing it with a woman I have never felt with a man. (Garg, 2003, p. 189)¹⁴⁴

Moreover, he feels a deep desire of fatherhood and seeks in the women that he meets a possible mother of his children. At first, he would like to adopt a child with Asīmā, he even thinks that if he had possessed a womb, he would have asked her to seed it (Garg, 2013, p. 216). Later, he identifies in young Nīrjā an opportunity to have his own flesh-and-blood child. His ambivalent nature — he seems to have a masculine body but a feminine soul — is underlined by the reference to “the Ardhanārīśvar in him” (Garg, 2013, p. 220), the androgynous form of Śiva and Pārvatī, depicted as half male and half female. In Castaing's words “the novel thus implicitly questions the ‘gender trouble’ by highlighting

¹⁴⁴ सच कहता हूँ, जो सूक्ष्म भावानुभूति और उत्कट सौन्दर्यबोध, मुझे स्त्रियों में मिला, पुरुषों में कभी नहीं मिला। मैं नहीं जानता कि स्त्री-पुरुष का यह भेद प्राकृतिक है या ऐतिहासिक। पर इतना अवश्य जानता हूँ कि वह है। प्राकृतिक सौन्दर्य हो या कलाकृति, उसे भोगने में अनुभूति का जो आनन्द, स्त्री के संसर्ग में मुझे मिला, पुरुष के साथ कभी नहीं मिला। (Garg 2013: 213)

the paradoxes of the characters' gender identity, alienated to both a biological and a social condition which they deplore" (Castaing, 2013, p. 81). Finally, also Vipin abandons his dream of fatherhood and joins Smitā and Asīmā in the remote village of Godhaṛ. Nature becomes a refuge, an alternative dimension where to feel free from social constrictions and transcend the male/female opposition. This is the called eco-feminist perspective. On the issue Garg stated:

"In the post-imperialist era, women writers refashioned a central metaphor, that of motherhood. It is now recognized that there is no such thing as barren women. Any woman willing to nurture any one is a mother. From nurturing human beings, they have gone on to nurture and replenish nature itself. Then started an astute interest in the protection and revival of the environment and ecology. It has spread into their writing; the image of their male protagonists has also under gone a change. One of my male protagonists, as I told you earlier in my novel '*Kathgulab*', I depicted as the new 'ardhanareshwara', who along with the female protagonists, transcended the womb and became one with the 'bio-sphere'. This is the metaphor common to the eco-feminist writing". (Ananth 2007)

Three of the five main characters (Smitā, Asīmā and Vipin) find relief from their demons by living in close contact with nature. Especially in Smitā's story nature is a lifelong support, from the woodrose of her childhood to the sugar maple of her first months in Boston. She received the woodrose (which significantly gives the title to the novel) from a friend of her father when she was a child. She immediately developed a special, almost magic, relationship with the plant: as soon as it grew enough, it became her *personal space*, her *very home*. Later, when she sought refuge in America from her past, she lived for some time in complete solitude and a sugar maple became her best and only friend. "Under the sugar maple's deep rainbow shade, I felt safe from the cold, the wind, my loneliness and the merciless light" (Garg, 2003, p. 21), Smitā says. Nature participates in people's vicissitudes, offering a refuge from sufferings. It becomes a safe haven where most of the main characters land, attempting to escape from their troubled lives and identities. Nevertheless, nature requires attention and energy, exactly like a child. By taking care of it Smitā, Asīmā and Vipin try to fulfill, in an alternative way, their desire for parenthood.

Prabhā Khetān in her novel *Chinnamastā* suggests a further chance for female emancipation and self-realization: her protagonist, Priyā, manages to liberate herself from an extremely conservative background through her job. "I was born the fifth daughter in an extremely narrow-minded Hindu orthodox family. Right after my birth my mother started to be ill. My mum liked beautiful children. I had a dark complexion and because of that my mum didn't feel proud of me. My mum in fact was Dāī mām (the ayah). Dāī

mām nurtured me”¹⁴⁵. These are Prabhā Khetān’s words about her own childhood, but they can easily refer to the protagonist of *Chinnamastā*. From her childhood Priyā starts to feel the burden of being a girl. Her mother dislikes her and refuses any affectionate gesture (Khetān, 2004, p. 35). At the age of nine she comes to know the conventional meaning of guilt (*aparādh*) and sin (*pāp*), words that will leave a mark on most of her life. She is repeatedly raped by Baṛe Bhāī, but she cannot even alleviate her suffering by reporting it. Dāī mām, the only person aware of what has happened, requests her to remain silent, a similar episode is too shameful to be recounted to anybody. The memory of this violence persecutes Priyā. She cannot avoid asking herself why in all societies there are so many taboos on incest. Why are innocent girls not protected from men’s lust? She had remained silent for years, but how much time could she tolerate that silence (Khetān, 2004, pp. 119-120)?

On many other occasions Priyā perceives the fact of being a girl as a motive for guilt, a curse. When she begins to menstruate (too early according to her mother’s wishes) she has to stay isolated from the rest of the family. In a conservative context this was a common feminine problem, as menstrual blood was considered impure. Priyā is told that menstruation is something shameful, a sin (again), weighing on the shoulders of the girls’ parents. Priyā cannot understand this explanation: how could it be possible that every girl, every month, increases the weight of her sin (Khetān, 2004, pp. 49-50)? Shortly her breasts start to represent another problem. At twelve years old she has to start trying to conceal them. Her sister brings her a really tight *kamīz*: by wearing it she will be considered a child for some time longer and she will avoid a premature marriage. After some initial reluctance, Priyā starts to tighten the *kamīz* herself: she does not want to become a woman and to live the life her mother or her elder sister lead (Khetān, 2004, p. 85). But finally, Priyā is married. For some time, she tries to act as a good bride should do: she is compliant and accommodating with her husband, Narendra, taking her mother-in-law as a model. After less than two years she has a child: it seems that her life is taking the direction that she wanted to avoid.

Priyā’s life takes a new path when she accepts a job offer from one of Narendra’s friends and starts an export activity. A real chance of self-realization has materialized. Actually, she has always perceived that she could not feel complete in the role of wife and mother only, but now she has found a possible answer to her concerns. Gradually she becomes aware that the basic condition for women’s emancipation is economic independence: this is the capstone in order to escape from traditionalist contexts which put

¹⁴⁵ All English translations from this text are mine. The original Hindi text is as follows:

एक बेहद ही संकीर्णतावादी हिंदू सनातनी परिवार में माता-पिता की पाँचवीं संतान के रूप में मेरा जन्म हुआ। मेरे जन्म के बाद से ही माँ बीमार रहने लगीं। माँ सुन्दर बच्चे अच्छे लगते थे। मेरा रंग साँवला था इसीलिए माँ मेरे लिए प्राउड फील नहीं करती थी। मेरी माँ तो असल में दाई माँ (आया) ही थी। दाई माँ ने ही मुझे पाला-पोसा। (Rānāvāt, 2015, p. 196)

women on a level of inferiority.¹⁴⁶ Unfortunately, her husband's anger increases proportionally to her satisfaction and finally he gives her an ultimatum: she has to choose between her career and her family. Priyā decides to continue working; she knows that her identity is deeply interwoven with her job. This was a shocking element for the Hindi readers of the 1990s: this was one of the first cases where a female character deliberately abandons her traditional roles of wife and, especially, of mother. Obviously, it is not an easy decision, but Priyā knows that she cannot keep living her previous life. She is very often described while thinking about that decisive moment of her existence: she feels guilty, but she does not surrender. Significantly at the end of the novel, there is a reference to her dreams: everything refers to personal realization (such as acquiring a driving license and wandering across India alone) and not to romance or to her family. All these elements are particularly important if we consider the author's life. Prabhā Khetān, despite her conservative background, managed to assert herself and become a successful entrepreneur. Moreover, she was an assertive feminist and she had a long-term relationship with a married man. Like her character, Prabhā Khetān wanted to decide how she would live and was ready to face the consequences of her choices.

Within this discourse, the title itself appears meaningful: Chinnamastā is in fact the name of one of the Mahāvidyā, the ten Tantric goddesses and terrific aspects of Devi. Chinnamastā (which means "She whose head is severed") is traditionally depicted while holding her own head in one hand and scimitar or a knife in the other. She stands on Kāma and Rati, who are joined in sexual intercourse; her severed head, as well as her attendants Dākinī and Varṇinī, is drinking blood spurting out of her neck. This aspect of Devi is usually associated with the concept of self-sacrifice as well as the awakening of Kuṇḍalinī, latent spiritual energy (for more details see Kinsley, 1997, pp. 144-166). The novel mirrors both of these aspects well: Priyā is a brave woman, hurt physically and psychologically, who manages to discover and free her inner energies. Through her job she achieves a self-determined life, but her rebirth entails severe consequences in the private sphere.

Before summing up this section with my conclusions on women's writing and postmodernism, I wish to point out a possible further investigation into the changing concepts of femininity and masculinity. Often this change is studied through the works of women-writers, but it would be interesting to discover if there is any change in the mainstream male literature as well. Does the characterization of male-authors' protagonists reflect this new atmosphere? I will provide an example from Surendra Varmā's novel, *Do murdom ke lie guldastā* (see also 4.2.1.). In this text female characters are active, determined, even aggressive, while men seem to be dragged along by events. In particular Nīl,

¹⁴⁶ This idea comes from *The second sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, which was defined by Khetān as a sort of revelation (she will also translate it into Hindi with the title *Strī: upekṣitā*). Its importance was even compared to *Gītā*'s (Rāṇāvat, 2015, p. 197).

one of the two protagonists, is fundamentally depicted as a passive character: he takes very few decisions and the major events of his life are determined by other people, especially by women. In his life-journey, from being a promising PhD student to becoming a gigolo, women always start the action. In the first pages we read about Kiran, his mentor's niece, who confesses her interest and explicitly seeks physical contact. Very often, Nīl blames himself for not having restrained her. She became pregnant and his academic chances were over (Varmā, 2012, pp. 9-10). Nīl was excluded from all universities and research institutes in Delhi and had to migrate. In Mumbai he starts a new relationship with Kumud, a thirty-eight-year-old woman, a friend of his mistress: even in this case it is Kumud who makes the first move (Varmā, 2012, pp. 53-58). Even Nīl's career as a gigolo is started by a woman. Blossom appears in Nīl's life one day, while he is waiting in vain for Kumud. They are in a cafe, both sitting alone. The woman keeps on observing Nīl and finally approaches him, proposing to go to her place. At first, he does not know what to do, but finally he surrenders to temptation (Varmā, 2012, pp. 82-85). Just before leaving Blossom's house, he is given eight hundred rupees: only at this moment does Nīl realize what has happened (Varmā, 2012, p. 88). At the end of the story, Nīl's death also comes from one of his lovers.

In *Do murdom ke lie guldastā*, the traditional feminine and masculine images are broken. A man can be fragile, unable to take decisions and to persist in his intents. On the other hand, women can be self-confident and use their sexuality without hesitation. I think that this specific viewpoint (of mainstream male authors) on gender and social changes would deserve deeper analysis, as it is the necessary counterpart of the feminist perspective.

Returning to *Kaṭhgulāb* and *Chinnamastā*, I consider both of them perfect examples of feminist¹⁴⁷ texts, as they subvert conventional social and gender roles, questioning the traditional concept of femininity. A female character, in fact, is no longer determined by the monolithic role of wife-mother alone, but has a multitude of opportunities for self-determination. She can access the public sphere (through her work, writing or social commitment) and find her personal realization there. This is an essential conquest for the Hindi women's literature of the Nineties. Undoubtedly it is easier to associate *Kaṭhgulāb* to postmodernism as it adds some further ingredients to the critique on the content level. Its metafictional dimension (4.1.2.) and prismatic structure (4.2.2.) show the complexity of the *realities* that we all experience, foregrounding the fictional nature of literature and the basic idea of ontological plurality. These are typical postmodern issues and related literary strategies. Nonetheless, texts such as *Chinnamastā* are much more problematic within my discourse, as they follow the path of realism, with almost no formal experi-

¹⁴⁷ As regards the meaning and history of feminism in India, and particularly its controversial relationship with "Western feminism" see, for instance, Agnew, 1997, pp. 3-19; Gandhi and Shah, 1992; Khullar, 2005; Kumar, 1997; Mohanty, 1985, pp. 333-358.

mentation. As previously mentioned, Prabhā Khetān's text is highly autobiographical and seems to translate an assumption of many feminist theorists into a literary form: "experience-oriented writing brings into public discussion questions and concerns excluded in dominant ideologies, ideologies which sustain and are sustained by political and economic hierarchies" (Stone-Mediatore, 1998, p. 126). Moreover, such writing "can help women facing multiple oppressions — oppressions sustained by globally organized powers — to develop the insight and agency necessary to resist those powers" (Stone-Mediatore, 1998, p. 127). Prabhā Khetān, in fact, by re-elaborating her personal experience, wanted to write about social issues related to the world of women and shake people's conscience. According to her, in order to achieve this goal and reach her readers as directly as possible, there is no need for stylistic experimentation which, on the contrary, could lead to tricky texts (Rānāvāt, 2015, pp. 200-201). In one interview, Prabhā Khetān even criticized recent literary tendencies, where stylistic experimentation has obtained an unprecedented importance obscuring the content. In the author's words:

If we give awards for style and style only, there will be nothing more than style... After all it is editors, critics and professors who promote writing. A writer knows which things will be accepted. Novels like *Śeṣ kādambārī*, *Tirohit*, *Kaṭhguḷāb*, *Dīvār meṃ ek khipkī rahtī thī*, on a stylistic level, are full of so much experimentation. A similar experimentation was not visible before the '90s. Achieving freedom of experimentation is one of the effects of postmodernism. [...] In the previous ten years the writer's commitment has decreased. The writer has stopped participating in the struggle of the common man. [...] what do we have to write about? After writing about Horī and Hariyā there was really a change in society. But if there were Premchand today, what would he write about? Would he write these same things? He wouldn't. In Latin America, Marquez creates a magic halo in his works. His themes are always really strong. Some authors tried to imitate his magical realism, but they couldn't recreate that in their writing. All they did was play with language after twisting words.¹⁴⁸

In the light of these reflections can I still link works such as Prabhā Khetān's to postmodernism? Is stylistic experimentation an essential prerequisite? Or can I identify a postmodern trace in the urgency of breaking free from traditional roles and social norms? These questions can be easily applied not only to most women's writing but to *dalit* narra-

¹⁴⁸ स्टाइल ही स्टाइल को एवार्ड देंगे तो स्टाइल ही आएगा...। आफ्टर ऑल संपादक, आलोचक, प्रोफेसर लेखन को प्रमोट करते हैं। लेखक जानता है कि ये चीज एक्सेप्ट होगी। शेष कादम्बरी, तिरोहित, कठगुलाब, दीवार में एक खिड़की रहती थी जैसे उपन्यास शैली के स्तर पर इतने सारे प्रयोगों से भरे हुए हैं। 90 के दशक से पहले ऐसे प्रयोग नहीं दिखाई पड़ते। एक तो इस पर पोस्टमॉडर्निज्म का असर है कि प्रयोग करने की छूट मिली। [...] पिछले दस सालों में लेखक के सरोकार कम हो गए। लेखक ने आम आदमी की लड़ाई में ही शामिल होने बंद कर दिया। [...] तो किस पर लिखना है? होरी और हरिया पर लिखकर सच में समाज में परिवर्तन आया। पर यदि आज प्रेमचंद होते तो किस पर लिखते? क्या वे यही लिखते? नहीं लिखते। लैटिन अमेरिका के मार्खेज अपने लेखन में जादुई परिवेश क्रियेट करते हैं। उनकी थीम बहुत स्ट्रांग होती है। कुछ लेखकों ने उनके जादुई यथार्थ की नकल करने की कोशिश की परंतु अपने लेखन में वो चीज नहीं ला पाये। केवल शब्दों को तोड़-मरोड़कर भाषा के साथ खिलवाड़ कर रह गये। (Rānāvāt, 2015, pp. 200-201)

tives as well, and because of this, I will postpone my answers to the end of the next section, after the analysis of two more stories of marginalization.

4.4.2. Stories of marginalization: *dalit* and non-*dalit* accounts

In the previous section I have focused on a very relevant aspect of *strī vimarś*, which is the deconstruction of the patriarchal system through the subversion of conventional gender roles. The feminist authors of the Nineties want to overcome traditional female marginalization and gain a new place for women in the public sphere. In this section, I will deal with other types of marginalization, due to geographical, cultural and casteist reasons, discussing different ways and perspectives of representation.

Since the era of Premchand, passing through progressive and *āñcalik*¹⁴⁹ writers, the history of Hindi literature has been largely characterized by realism and social commitment. It is mostly understood that the duty of a writer is — as Premchand stated during the first meeting of the Progressive Writers Association (Lucknow, 1936) — “to support and defend those who are in some way oppressed, suffering or deprived whether they be individuals or groups” (quoted in Gajarawala, 2013, p. 6). If social realism suffered a setback in mainstream literature of the Nineties (see 4.3.), it flourished, even with some substantial changes, through *dalit* writing.

The term *dalit* literally means “oppressed” and was used for the first time by Jyotirao Govindrao Phule (1827-1890), a thinker, activist and social reformer from Maharashtra, to denote the untouchable (Consolaro, 2011a, p. 237). *Dalit* literature during the Twentieth century became a central discourse in all Indian languages, raising some burning issues, especially that of untouchability, of the cultural roots of oppression and exploitation. *Dalit* literature, in India, has become part of the syllabi at various levels of education and the topic of many research works. But what does *dalit* literature exactly mean? In a broadest sense, it denotes writing with empathy on *dalit* issues, with an anti-casteist, anti-capitalistic and anti-traditionalist position. Nevertheless, some critics and the majority of *dalit* authors consider personal experience essential: only dalits can really describe their sufferings and marginalized conditions. On this Jay Prakāś Kardam, one of the most prolific Hindi *dalit* authors and editor of the journal *Dalit Sāhitya*, said:

I would like to quote here the words of Dr. Manager Pandey, a renowned Hindi critic, who wrote in the preface to a collection of Dalit short stories edited by Ramnika Gupta that “Only ash knows the experience of burning”. This indicates that Dalits know the experience of burning-- burning in the fire of sorrows, hatred, disrespect, injustice, inequality and untouchability. Non-Dalits do not have this experience. Dalits have specific experiences of life, which non-dalits do not have. Only Dalit writers can express their experiences in an authentic manner but not others. Non- Dalit

¹⁴⁹ See section 1.3, notes 5 and 6.

writers may be sympathetic to the Dalits, they may be their well-wishers but their experiences about Dalits are not their self-experiences. They are the observers of torture and exploitation of Dalits, they are not sufferers. This difference of experiences between Dalit and non-Dalits makes the difference between the writings of Dalit and non-Dalit writers. Hence, Dalit literature is the literature of Dalits based on their lives and experiences (Kardam in Kumar 2008).

As regards, the Hindi literary field, *dalit* literature — following the path marked by other Indian languages, particularly Marathi — saw extraordinary growth, during the Nineties, in the form of autobiographies, lyrics and short stories, while the number of novels remained comparatively low (Consolaro, 2011a, pp. 240-241 and Wessler, 2014, pp. 17-19). This aspect, due to the basic coordinates of my project, determined the decision to analyze just one *dalit* text, *Chappar* by Jay Prakāś Kardam.

Chappar (*The Shack*, 1994) is one the first *dalit* novels in Hindi¹⁵⁰ and probably the author's major work. It narrates the utopian transformation of a backward rural area, dominated by the casteist system, into an ideal world characterized by equality and fraternity. Candan is the only son of a *camār* couple from Mātāpur, a small village in Western Uttar Pradesh. Despite poverty and through great privations Sukkhā, Candan's father, manages to send him to the city to study up to the highest level of education. Thanks to this and to Candan's efforts, a *dalit* movement arises, promoting a deep change in many people's lives. The story is characterized by a highly didactic intent and proposes two basic values: education, as an essential device in reawakening people's consciousness, and nonviolence. The importance of education — which is almost a leitmotif of *dalit* literature — is emphasized throughout the story, as Candan, through his studies and consequent social commitment, becomes the village's hero and the engine of the whole reforming process. His father, despite being illiterate, is ready to sacrifice everything to allow Candan to complete his studies. Sukkhā endures trials and tribulations, but he wants to free his son from the hell he is used to living in (Kardam, 2012, pp. 35, 60). Sukkhā and his wife, Ramiyā, suffer many losses because of this choice, as it is unpopular among the village's notables. Both the *paṇḍit* and the *thākūr* find it intolerable that the first person who went to the city to study was a *camār*. They try to persuade Sukkhā to call his son back to the village, but as he refuses, they hinder him with all their power. The *pañcāyat* even decides that Sukkhā will not be hired anymore for any kind of work and he will have to abandon his piece of land (Kardam, 2012, pp. 30-35). Despite this Sukkhā does not surrender: he and his wife almost starve, but they do not want to obstruct their son's training (Kardam, 2012, pp. 92-94). In addition to this, Candan, on a number of occasions, explicitly highlights the importance of education. While talking to some friends, with whom he has created the first *dalit* circle, he says:

¹⁵⁰ Probably the first Hindi *dalit* novel was Jay Prakāś Kardam's *Karuṇā* (1986); on this text see Wessler 2014, pp. 19-24.

I will use my education to improve this wretched, miserable society. I will work to elevate those suffering, exploited and marginalized people, who live like insects. [...] I will give them an education. I will reawaken these sleeping people and make awareness sprout in them so that they will stand to break and throw away the chains of their exploitation. I will teach them to stand up. I will open a school and I will teach the children of these poor people, who are still playing on the bare earth. Who else will teach to these people who have already gone to school, but who, like me, were made to sit on the last bench, from where they could neither see properly what was written on the blackboard, nor listen to the teacher speaking? In similar conditions how could these people study and if they don't study how can they know the country and the world? How will they demand their rights and for progress? How will they be set free from this hell, from the shackles of this slavery? No, no, I will teach them, I will give them an education.¹⁵¹

Education is the key to understanding the world and one's own condition. Particularly dalits have to understand the origins of inequalities to fight against them and to break the chains of oppression. According to Candan this struggle has to be peaceful: the movement has to reach its goals through non-violent action (Kardam, 2012, pp. 101, 107). As Candan explains once to the villagers, they have to fight against the *status quo*, against conservative habits, but never against people (Kardam, 2012, p. 109).

Chappar can be seen as a utopian journey which leads the village of Mātāpur to know justice, equality and a new culture of “humanism” (*mānavvād*, Kardam 2012, p. 95, or *manuṣyatā*, p.112). When Candan, at the end of the novel, visits his parents — initially with the aim of taking them to the city — he encounters a completely new world. Behaviors which were unbelievable before his leaving for the college have become true: now people sit, eat and drink together no matter what their origins. Poor people, who were used to trembling in front of *thākur* and *zamīndār*, now talk with them without any fear (Kardam, 2012, pp. 102-103). Untouchability is over. Even the *thākur* Harnām Simh — initially a conservative person and one the hardest opponents of Candan's education — has undergone a deep change. After being rescued from attempting suicide, he has started a new life. He has distributed his fields to the poor and landless people, he has abandoned

¹⁵¹ All English translations from this text are mine. Below the original Hindi lines:

मैं अपनी शिक्षा का उपयोग अपने दीन-हून समाज के उत्थान के लिए करूंगा। मैं उन पीड़ित, शोषित और उपेक्षित लोगों को ऊपर उठाने के लिए काम करूंगा जो कीड़े-मकौड़ों की तरह जीते हैं। [...] उन लोगों को शिक्षित करूंगा मैं। इन सोए लोगों को जगाऊंगा और उनमें जागृति पैदा करूंगा ताकि अपने शोषण की जंजीरो को तोड़-फेंकने के लिए वे उठ खड़े हों। उन्हें खड़ा होना सिखाऊंगा मैं। स्कूल खोलूंगा और इन गरीबों के रेत-मिट्टी में खेलते फिर रहे बच्चों को पढ़ाऊंगा। दूसरा तो इनको पढ़ाएगा कौन और पढ़ाया भी तो वह मेरी तरह सबसे पीछे वाली बेंच पर बैठकर जहां से न तो ब्लैक बोर्ड पर लिखा ही ठीक से पढ़ने में आता है और न ही अध्यापक का बोला कानों में पड़ता है। ऐसे में क्या पढ़ पाएंगे ये लोग और पढ़ेंगे नहीं तो कैसे जानेंगे देश और दुनिया को। कैसे करेंगे हक और उत्थान की मांग। कैसे मुक्त होंगे इस नर्क से, दासता की इन बेड़ियों से। नहीं-नहीं मैं पढ़ाऊंगा, मैं शिक्षित करूंगा उन्हें। (Kardam, 2012, pp. 39-40)

his *havelī* to live, like the other villagers, in a small house. Furthermore, he does not want to be called *thākur sāhab* anymore: he is simply Harnām. He has understood that they are all human beings, all equal and that humanism is the real faith (Kardam, 2012, pp. 112-113).

The novel promotes the culture of distinction, of attention for the peripheral areas of society through the centrality earmarked to Candan's family. This is undoubtedly something pertinent to postmodernism as well, where the *petits récits* are generally considered the alternative to the modernist metanarratives. Specific local context and human experiences have to replace the grand narratives and Kardam, thanks to his origins, provides the reader with a picture of the outcasts from an alternative point of view, that is from the inside. Differently from Premchand or the progressive authors, he knows personally what it means to be a *dalit*. Connected to this, another fundamental aspect of *dalit* literature has to be considered, that is its implied deconstructive will. As underlined by Gajarawala, "the act of Dalit critique should be understood as not simply one means of assertion of identity but as a rereading of cultural products via the foregrounding of the problem of caste" (Gajarawala, 2013, p. 8). According to him, *dalit* writing has to be read in opposition to the tradition of social realism initiated by Premchand and to the *āñcalik sāhitya*, to Anglophone modernism and to the contemporary novels and their blending of caste and class issues (p. 4). At this point, I think it is important to refer to the renowned episode of the burning of Premchand's novel *Raṅgbhūmi*, by members of the Bharatiya Dalit Sahitya Akademi in July 2004. The president of the Academy, Sumanakshar, explained that they were not opposed to Premchand or to his creative works, but to the casteist perspective that the novel conveyed. They were particularly rejecting the choice of including *Raṅgbhūmi* in the Delhi standard school curriculum (see Brueck, 2014, pp. 1-5 and Gajarawala, 2013, pp. 5-8). Despite his sympathies for the poor and marginalized, Premchand was still considered an author of the establishment, who was not really able to use new lenses to read his world. The burning of Premchand's novel has to be considered an example of the *dalit* challenge to a crystallized literary canon.

The second novel for analysis is *Ḍūb* by Virendra Jain. Also in this case there is a rural setting, but the perspective, due to the author's background, is radically different. If *Chappar* follows the classic alternating structure of Premchand's *Godān* — swinging between the parents' life in the village and their son's in an urban context — *Ḍūb* may recall Reṇu's *Mailā āñcal* and its choral narrative. In fact, the plot is formed by the juxtaposition of several subplots, depicting the village's life in all its aspects: political, religious and socio-economic. There are several characters, but one of them, Māte, a conservative old *ahīr*, represents a fundamental figure for the community and throughout the narrative. Compared to Reṇu (whose novel depicts a remote village in Bihar from 1946 to 1948), Jain covers a much longer period, from India's Independence to the end of 1984, with the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the gas leak in Bhopal. The novel is set in the village

of Laṛaiī, in Bundelkhand, and through the characters' personal experiences recalls official history from a marginal point of view.

If *Chappar* focuses on *dalit* issues, *Dūb* highlights the pervasive nature of power which seeps in at all levels of society, from the relations between the central government and the rural areas to the village's inner dynamics. In this novel, there are also some episodes related to *dalit* groups, but these are just examples among others of the mechanisms of power. Jain describes, for instance, a poor *camār*, Ghūmā, who boldly asks *thākūr* Devīsīṃh for an allowance for his work in the fields. Initially Devīsīṃh pretends to accept his request, but actually he is furious. "Today they are opening their mouths for wages, tomorrow they will ask for the right to vote. And the day after tomorrow one of them will stand against us!"¹⁵², he thinks. The *thākūr* wants to reaffirm his power and to take revenge on Ghūmā. During the night, he reaches the *camār*'s settlement and enters all the houses, beating the inhabitants with a cane. When Ghūmā finally shows up, Devīsīṃh is disarmed and has to run away (Jain, 2014, pp. 68-71). Some time passes, but finally the *thākūr* is caught by the police. A legal proceeding starts and the *camār* community should be called to bear witness against him. Actually, this opportunity will never be given to these poor people. After a year of repeated legal delays, the *thākūr* commits suicide, escaping from any kind of responsibility. The episode ends with a puzzling sentence: the *thākūr* was found innocent because of a lack of witnesses (Jain, 2014, pp. 75-78). The story denounces a case of social injustice based on casteism, but it has to be included in a wider picture of wicked power games. As I have previously stated, Jain's focus is not on *dalit* issues, but on the mechanisms of power in all layers of society. The reflection on power — with some resonances from Foucault's philosophy — is strictly connected to knowledge: knowledge is power, but at the same time power determines knowledge. I will explain this assumption through the following examples. In many cases, powerful people in Laṛaiī detain knowledge and mould it for their own advantage. One of the village's notables Hīrā Sāv — the first person in the village to discover the forced sterilization program — uses his knowledge to deceive the villagers. The poor peasants do not know anything about the Emergency, but Hīrā Sāv tells them that for a year and half India has been in a state of "Emergency... a period of crisis, of police rule. Indirājī, Indirājī only has power in the Country — and within this rule everything is going on readily"¹⁵³. The man stresses that now government projects will be completed quickly, including the dam, hence the Laṛaiī area will soon be submerged. He persuades the villagers to follow him to the nearby city of Candaiī, pretending to help them with compensation for their land. But nothing is true: the men have to undergo vasectomy and some of them die following the

¹⁵² आज ये मजूरी के लिए मुँह खोल रहे हैं, कल को वोट की कीमत माँगेंगे। परसों कोई इन्हीं में से एक हमारे मुकाबले में खड़ा होना चाहेगा। (Jain, 2014, p. 69)

¹⁵³ पिछले डेढ़ बरस से इस अपने भारतवर्ष में आपातकाल है... संकट क काल, पुलिस का शासन है। इंदिराजी का, अकेली इंदिराजी का शासन है देश में — कि इस शासन में सब-कुछ पूरी मुस्तेदी से हो रहा है। (Jain, 2014, p. 209)

operation (Jain, 2014, pp. 209-212). Hīrā Sāv uses his knowledge just to accomplish a deal with the local *tahsildār*: by helping the collector with the forced sterilization program, he will obtain the authorization to rename a vast area with his own name (pp. 201-202). However, despite this and other immoral actions on the part of the *bāniyā*, responsibilities are mainly charged to the government. The villagers were obliged to rely on *sāv*'s help, because of a lack of government aid. "When the government doesn't take care of us, if we don't go to the *sāv*, where shall we go? We did it yesterday, we do it now and we will do it tomorrow..."¹⁵⁴ — thinks one of the main characters sadly. Politicians are charged with empty pledges: the Rānī first (Jain, 2014, pp. 62) and Indira Gandhi later (p.181) talks about the Rājghāṭ dam project as a chance to improve the living conditions of many people, but they both omit to mention all of its consequences. According to the government, the dam will benefit thousands of peasants, providing water and electricity for a vast area across Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, but the other side of the coin is concealed. Despite all propagandistic discourses, in fact, the plan for resettlement is quite vague and the villagers, threatened by a forthcoming flood, are left alone, not knowing what to do. The authorities are only interested in votes and give people nothing in return:

Apart from votes, did you want anything else from us? You created our condition, what else do we have to give? Every five years, you request back the things you gave, sometimes through your voice, sometimes through the robbers. You don't even inform us that you took our decisions. Apart from this, what did you give us?
You just seized from us. You seized our school, our cars, our streets, our work with *tendū* leaves, you seized Māssāv, Raghu Sāv, the Muslims, Aṭṭū Sāv, you seized peace and conciliation.¹⁵⁵

Even in the face of a tragedy the government conceals the truth to defend its own image. At the end of the novel an accident occurs at the dam and the village of Pañcamnagar is submerged. Many people die. Nevertheless, the authorities proclaim the opposite: through the radio they say that, thanks to their foresight, the village had been evacuated a long time before, avoiding a disaster (Jain, 2014, p. 287). For the whole country the "truth" concerning the submergence of Pañcamnagar is that established by the government. Power becomes knowledge and determines which and how information is to be spread.

¹⁵⁴ जब सरकार को हमारी सुध ही नहीं, तब हम साव के पास न जाएँ तो कहाँ जाएँ? कल भी जाते थे, आज भी जाते हैं, और कल को भी... (Jain, 2014, p. 241).

¹⁵⁵ हमसे वोट के सिवा तुमने कुछ चाहा है भला? हमारी जो दशा बनाई है तुमने, उसमें और देने को है ही क्या हमारे पास? तुम्हारी दी चीज तो तुम हर पाँच बरस पीछे माँग ही लेते हो, कभी मुँह से तो कभी भँडयाई से। हमें खबर भी नहीं देते कि तुमने हमारी चीज बर्ती भी है। इसके सिवा तुमने दिया क्या है हमें? हमसे तो तुमने छीना ही छीना है। मदरसा छीना, मोटर छीनी, सड़क छीनी, तेंदू पत्ते का रोजगार छिना, मास्साव छिने, रघु साव छीने, मुसलमान भाई छीने, अट्टू साव छीने, शांति छीनी, मेलजोल छीना। (Jain, 2014, p. 181)

A final aspect that I would like to investigate is how Virendra Jain gives voice to the village of Laraī. Obviously, he does it through the experiences of its inhabitants, but not only. Jain, in fact, uses a highly dialogical style tracing the way of speaking of the common people and using frequent common sayings. The novel is scattered with Bundeli words (for more information on the Bundeli language see Grierson, 1916, pp. 86-94 and Jaiswal, 1962) and, in many cases, the author provides for the first usage the Modern Standard Hindi equivalent. Here are some examples: the epithet *sāv* for the *bāniyā* (Jain, 2014, p. 13)¹⁵⁶, *bhamryā* for *ḍākū giroh* (“group of robbers”, 20), *prchāl* for *snān* (“bathing”, 30), *garhmāt* for *sarak* (“street”, 54), *paipāvne* for *mehmān* (“guest”, 56), *divāle* for *mandir* (“temple”, 66) and *pār* for *pahār* (“mountain”, 134). In other cases, there is no explicit explanation, so I had to attempt to understand the meaning from the context or to check the unknown terms through studies on Bundeli. Among these words: *sāun* to indicate a *bāniyā*’s lady (in the whole text), *laḍuvā* for *laḍḍū* (16), *darvajjā* for “door” (26), *babbā* for *bābā* (28), *maurhī/maurhā* for “daughter/son” (105). Moreover, Māte, the name of the main character, is a Bundeli word and significantly means “water carrier” (Jaiswal, 1962, p. 62).

In some dialogues the author uses the interrogative pronoun *kā* instead of *kyā* (Jain, 2014, p. 63), and *naiyām* as the present negative form of “to be” (63). Especially in women’s speech (we find several examples in a dialogue between Gorābāi and Aṭṭū Sāv’s mother) we have *morā* instead of *merā* (138) and *torī* instead of *terī* (140), *moy* for *mujhe* (140). Some other noteworthy examples can be found in a proverb, used by *thākur* Devīsimh while talking to Māte about his political campaign¹⁵⁷:

बिलैया (बिल्ली) ने जनाउर (शेर) को सब-कुछ सिखा दओ तो, अकेलें (लेकिन)
रूख (पेड़) पर चढ़वो नहीं सिखाओ तो! (Jain, 2014, p. 13)
The cat taught the tiger everything, but didn’t teach him how to
climb a tree!

From this sentence I want to underline Jain’s choices regarding vocabulary (*bilaiyā* = cat, *janāur* = tiger, *akelem* = but, *rūkh* = tree) and on verbal conjugation, *sikhā dao* (= *sikhā diyā* = taught) and *caṛhvo nahīm sikhāo* (= *caṛhna nahīm sikhāyā* = didn’t teach to climb), both resembling Bundeli speaking.¹⁵⁸

The presence of Bundelkhaṇḍī can be read as a further device in strengthening the importance of traditionally marginalized contexts: the author not only wants to narrate a *petit récit*, but he wants to reproduce the village’s voice. Jain’s story, thanks to its multi-faceted language, becomes polyphonic. Moreover, by adding the Standard Hindi equivalent

¹⁵⁶ In the following examples I will indicate the pages only, omitting the author’s name.

¹⁵⁷ The proverb is explicitly defined as being Bundelkhaṇḍī. According to my readings, it refers to a classical Chinese tale.

¹⁵⁸ An example of basic conjugation is provided by Grierson, 1916, pp. 93-94.

lent for some words, the author not only provides his readers with a support, but he underlines that the readers may not belong to the world depicted. Their point of view can be different. In this sense language can be interpreted as a further device for giving emphasis to the plurality of theoretical standpoints. Undoubtedly, using a language with regional shades is not something new for the Hindi literary tradition. To quote *Mailā āñcal* again, Reṇu already enriched his Khaṛī Bolī with loanwords and syntactical structures from the local languages (see Hansen, 1981). Nevertheless, if we consider this aspect of *Ḍūb*, together with its historical component (see section 4.1.3 on historiographic metafiction), and the explicit reflection on power and knowledge, a postmodern reading becomes possible.

As shown by textual examples, both *Chappar* and *Ḍūb* foreground the importance of looking at reality from new perspectives, breaking conventional cultural dogmas. If *Ḍūb*'s reading in a postmodern key is essentially related to the deconstruction of historical accounts and to the reflection on power and knowledge, the discourse on *Chappar* maybe assimilated to that on feminist writing. Basically, Kardam's novel is written in opposition to casteism, with almost no stylistic experimentation and with the implicit aim of proposing an alternative literary canon. With some necessary adjustment (essentially substituting casteism to patriarchy) the basic paradigm of *Chappar* is the same as that of *Chinnamastā*. As I mentioned in the previous section, linking these kinds of novels to postmodernism can appear quite problematic. Actually, in the earliest stages of my project I was tempted to consider them separate from postmodernism. Or better said, I considered their critique on a content level as a non-sufficient clue. Nevertheless, when two of the most pervasive master narratives of the Indian context are patriarchy and casteism, a deeper analysis was necessary. Both Jay Prakāś Kardam Kardam and Prabhā Khetān propose an alternative point of view from which to interpret reality. They do not accept the monolithic literary tradition of the male-high-caste writers, even when they show sympathy for the oppressed and marginalized. In the light of the deconstruction of these Indian *grand récits* and of the plurality of perspectives, the connection between these texts and postmodernism became possible. To me, texts like *Chappar* or *Chinnamastā*, with their attention to difference and marginality, are opening the path to postmodern writing. Linda Hutcheon, in referring to feminist and Afro-American authors in the North American context, stated something similar:

My sense has always been that there were certain important social movements in the 1960s (and before) that made the postmodern possible: the women's movement (though, of course, the movement existed much earlier, but this wave of it in the 1960s was crucial) and, in North America, the civil rights movement. Suddenly gender and racial differences were on the table for discussion. Once that happened, "difference" became the focus of much thinking -- from newer issues of sexual choice and postcolonial history to more familiar ones such as religion and class. I think

feminisms (in the plural) were important for articulating early on the variety of political positions possible within the umbrella term of gender -- from liberal humanist to cultural materialist. Feminist discussions "complexified" questions of identity and difference almost from the start, and raised those upsetting (but, of course, productive) issues of social and cultural marginality. (O'Grady, 1997)

Even if with uneven levels and forms of experimentation, I consider both *strī vimarś* and *dalit vimarś* the ground of Indian postmodernism and the starting point for a new way of writing. They represent a peculiarity of postmodernism in Hindi literature, which may enrich and enlarge its most traditional (and Western) acceptance. Among women and *dalit* writers some of them, like Mṛdulā Garg or Gītāñjali Śrī (see 4.2.2), have already adopted innovative textual strategies to vehicle their social criticism, but, during the Nineties, they were not yet the majority. With this statement I do not wish to suggest any kind of literary hierarchy, rather I want to describe different and coexisting stages of the same cultural phenomenon, which is postmodernism.

5

CHAPTER

Conclusions

5.1. Postmodernism and Hindi novels: from critique to creative works

I like to compare my dissertation to an exploratory journey across Hindi novels written at the dawn of the new millennium. Through my work, in fact, I wanted to investigate an issue — that of the possible postmodern traces to be found within recent Hindi novels — that has been largely overlooked, particularly by Western scholars. In general, the majority of Western studies on Hindi literature (I am referring here to *Khaṛī Bolī Hindi* only) are focused on its earliest phases until *nayī kahānī* and *nayī kavītā*, or, if they refer to the most recent period, they are often related to specific issues, like *dalit* literature (see Brueck, 2014; Gajarawala, 2013; Mehra, 2014) or Muslim Hindi writers (see Stark, 1995), or to specific authors (e.g. Rita Krajnc, from Zurich University, has been working on Mṛdulā Garg and her novels for her PhD thesis). In fact, I found almost no structured work in a Western language which attempts to create a wider panorama, highlighting contemporary or at least recent literary tendencies. Approaching an almost unexplored research field, despite some initial difficulties, represented for me both a significant challenge and a great opportunity.

First of all, in order to build my project, it was necessary to introduce the topic of postmodernism in its original acceptance, as outlined by its most representative Western theorists. Postmodernism is an extremely complex cultural phenomenon, which has spread in Europe and the USA since the 1960s. It is mainly characterized by a sense of disillusion, by lack of faith in modernist certainties, like scientific positivism, Enlightenment rationalism and the inevitability of human progress. Postmodernism is usually

linked to the late-capitalist condition, to the global, consumer world and to the mass-media society. Philosophers such as Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) provided some of the most relevant arguments related to postmodernism and it would be impossible to ignore their contributions. Baudrillard with his concept of hyper-reality, for instance, depicted a condition typical of postmodern societies, where people experience what is only a simulation of reality. It is a condition where reality and fiction are blended together with no possibility of being distinguished one from the other, where symbols and signs have replaced reality. Lyotard identified the deep crisis of the modernist master-narratives — like Marxism, structuralism, economic liberalism — which were traditionally used to provide a unifying and consistent interpretation of the world. In the postmodern era, in fact, plurality and heterogeneity become key concepts, substituting sameness, certainty and universality. Finally, Derrida, with his philosophy of deconstruction highlighted the original and unsolvable complexity of any text, questioning the accepted basis of meaning.

In the second instance, after this brief theoretical introduction, I focused on the concept of postmodernism within the Indian context and particularly on its perception among Hindi literary critics. Although questionable, I think that India — and likewise many other countries outside the Western world — has reached, at least partially, a postmodern condition. Since the economic reforms of the 1990s, in fact, the country has started on its path towards liberalization, consumerism and globalization. This has led to a widespread Westernization of urban areas, but at the same time to a new attention towards marginal regions and groups. What is worth emphasizing here is that the situation of contemporary India is highly composite, a kaleidoscopic reality where tradition, modernity and post-modernity play together, creating a complex and fascinating context.

Regarding the Hindi literary field, the concept of *uttar-ādhunikāhvād* (which translates the English “postmodernism”) has been long overlooked. Apart from some previous sporadic exceptions, it started to be discussed towards the end of the 1990s, and especially after 2000. Critics such as Pāṇḍey Śaśibhūṣaṇ “Śītāṃśu” and Sudhīś Pacaurī provided some of the most thought-provoking analyses, joining together theoretical reflections and examples from recent Hindi creative works. Śītāṃśu, for instance, identified four post-modern ingredients which he deems peculiar to a postmodern text and supported his reasoning through the analysis of a short story by Uday Prakāś, *Vāren Heṣṭings kā sāmḍ*. In his view, *līlābhāv* is the first possible feature of a postmodern text: *līlābhāv* alludes to a game of seduction, through which literature does not necessarily remain a reflection on society, but rather it becomes a pleasure. Nonetheless, at the same time, a postmodern text can foreground social changes, challenging restrictions imposed by traditional institutions such as society, family, marriage, and overpassing traditional cultural boundaries. Lastly, to the critic, a postmodern text is essentially a multi-layered one, with multiple embedded meanings that cannot be caught in a superficial reading. It is necessary to deconstruct the text to reveal all its resonances and potentialities.

As regards Sudhīś Pacaurī, first of all, I owe to him a key expression of my thesis, that of “postmodern traces”. During my interview with him, he immediately stated that, for the Hindi literary field, we cannot probably talk about postmodernism as a full-bloom phenomenon, but undoubtedly, at the end of the Twentieth century, there are some noteworthy “postmodern traces” (in his words *uttar ādhunik niśān*). This expression immediately appealed to me. It rendered perfectly in two words the basic idea that I had in mind, which was, at that stage of my research, still quite nebulous. With this expression, what I actually mean is some features typical of recent Hindi novels, which can be evident or a little more veiled, recalling Western postmodernism. I am not saying that Hindi authors have merely imported a foreign fashion, rather that, in the globalized era, some elements are in the air. They are floating and spreading in different contexts, being moulded by the various backgrounds they encounter. Therefore, a feature such as historiographic metafiction — that the Canadian theorist Linda Hutcheon (1989 and 2004) identified as prototypically postmodern — characterizes many Western postmodern masterpieces (just to quote some examples Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Doctorow’s *Ragtime*, Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* and Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*) as well as many recent Hindi novels. In section 4.1.3. I exemplified this statement through three texts, *Ḍūb* (1991) by Vīrendra Jain, *Kali-kathā: vāyā bāipās* (1998) by Alkā Sarāvgī, and *Pīlī chatrīvālī larḳī* (2001) by Uday Prakāś. Particularly in the first two, the historical ingredient is crucial. *Ḍūb*, from the marginalized perspective of a remote village in Bundelkhand, recalls Indian history from Independence to Indira Gandhi’s murder and the gas leak in Bhopal in 1984. *Kali-kathā*, through the experience of a common man, moves back and forth between the 1940s — years animated by great ideals and by the struggle for independence — and the 1990s, when consumerism seems to shape all situations and relationships. It is evident that, compared to traditional historical novels, the presence of history plays a different role. It foregrounds some different perspectives from which to look at official historical records, openly contradicting them. Particularly *Ḍūb*’s narrator explicitly questions the reliability of official accounts, as they are built in order to support powerful social subjects. Above all, the government manipulates reality with the aim of providing a positive image of its actions. At the end of the novel, for instance, when the small village of Pañcamnagar is submerged due to an accident at the Rājghāṭ dam, the authorities proclaim that everything happened in a deserted land, that those areas had been conscientiously evacuated some time before. But it was a falsehood. Power determines which kinds of accounts have to be spread amidst the population. In the case of *Kali-kathā*, the old protagonist, Kiśor Bābū, wants to recount what history left unsaid, bringing light to some historical “dark areas”. His personal story, the history of the city of Calcutta and of the nation are intimately intertwined. Moreover, the narrator, through the image of a twenty-two-carat story (hence of a story which is not exclusively made of pure gold) foregrounds the fictional nature of both literature and official history. Even in *Pīlī chatrīvālī larḳī*, which is on a more superficial level a love story set in a university campus,

the historical reflection plays an important role. Through the dedication of the protagonist's cousin, the narrator emphasizes the role of *ādivāsī* and *dalit* communities in the struggle for independence, a role which was usually neglected to the advantage of high-caste groups.

If I had to indicate a key-term of postmodernism, I would undoubtedly choose *pluralism*. As previously stated, plurality substitutes the modernist "commandment" for uniformity and centralization. In this sense, historiographic metafiction has to be considered as a highly significant postmodern trace: by questioning official accounts, it stresses the plurality of perspectives from which it is possible to look at and investigate the real. Nonetheless, historiographic metafiction is just one among many possible literary strategies to foreground this idea. On the level of content, for instance, metafiction and otherworldliness aim at the same goal, that is the *multiplication* of projected worlds. Metafiction (section 4.1.2.) causes the reader to reflect on the writing processes and hence on the fictional nature of what he is savoring. Through otherworldliness (section 4.1.1.) a second world is included in the story, as an alternative to its protagonist's paramount reality. On the level of textual structure, contemporary authors have at least two more chances: the first one is the duplication of characters' experiences through intertextual references; the second, the fragmentation of the story into multiple snapshots. Duplication through intertextuality or, using Genette's term, *hypertextuality* implies quotations or allusions to pre-existing texts, with which there is a relationship of analogy. In many recent Hindi novels, the reader can find multiple references to both Indian and Western literary traditions, but also, in a broader acceptance of the term, to philosophy, movies and songs. This is evident, for example, in *Dāstān-e-lāptā* (1995) by Mañzūr Ehtešām. The author, in fact, starting from the title, proposes a sort of parallel between the protagonist's vicissitudes and the *dāstān*, even if this allusion is rather ironical and misleading. Moreover, the explicit references are not limited to the Urdu-Persian folk romance, but include many well-known Western works. Mañzūr Ehtešām recalls, for instance, Forster's novel *A Passage to India*, through which Zamīr Ehmād Khān reflects on his own identity as an Indian Muslim; *La Porte Étroite* by André Gide and *The Listeners* by Walter de la Mare, which are associated with a love affair of the protagonist's youth with a medical student. Uday Prākāś in *Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī* plays with intertextuality even more extensively: apart from making multiple literary allusions, he refers to Hindu myth as well as to Western movies. For example, the horror science fiction film *Critters* becomes a central metaphor of the story, as the brahmins are often compared to its disquieting and ravenous aliens.

Fragmentation is a second textual strategy foregrounding the postmodern tendency towards pluralism. In particular, it allows the authors to mirror the crisis of identity of his/her protagonists through a plot which is discontinuous and fragmented. This is the case of *Hamārā śahar us baras* (1998) by Gītāñjali Śrī. The author depicts a social context (which may characterize any city of Northern India during the final decades of the Twentieth century) dominated by communal violence, where personal identities seem to become a

sum of disjointed features. As a consequence, the plot is deliberately broken up into multiple fragments and re-organized in a discontinuous form. Mañzūr Ehteśām, too, deploys fragmentation, but in a completely different manner. *Dāstān-e-lāptā* is a sort of incomplete mosaic — touching about forty years from the protagonist’s childhood to his present days in 1987 — where it is almost impossible to find a *unifying* centre. As I argue in section 4.2.2., despite the differences, both the novels render through fragmentation the complexity of contemporary life, where people are bombarded by multiple stimuli and pressures, and can easily lose their centre, their system of values and priorities. Basically, Mañzūr Ehteśām makes his story collapse in this nebulous atmosphere, while Gītāñjali Śrī looks at it with a more detached attitude, constructing and deconstructing her story.

Another essential concept deriving from the fundamental principle of pluralism is *challenge*, and more specifically challenging pre-existing literary strategies and canons. According to Sudhīs Pacaurī, during the 1990s, two apparently opposite phenomena started to characterize Hindi prose, questioning the realist tradition and the male-high-caste canon. On the one hand, in fact, mainstream literature began to liberate itself from the tradition of social realism inaugurated by Premchand, incorporating elements typical of the consumer world. The tones of these new novels are no longer hard and tragic, nor do they propose any great teaching or truth. Their plots are, at least apparently (and I specify apparently, as it is often possible to deconstruct the text and discover its multi-layered nature), lighter. On the other hand, the narratives by traditionally marginalized voices, particularly of women and dalits, acquire a new relevance. In this case, largely by resorting to the realist model, the authors challenge a literary canon marked by a high-caste, patriarchal perspective, foregrounding the urgency of looking at reality through different lenses, their own lenses.

As regards the first point, I used *Ṭ-ṭā profesar* (1995) by Manohar Śyām Jośī and *Dīvār mem ek khiṛkī rahī thī* (1997) by Vinod Kumār Śukla as two self-evident examples. The former is at the same time the story of a disillusioned writer recounting his experience in teaching as a young man in a remote village, and the story of a series of stories which the protagonist was unable to complete. A potentially tragic account is converted into an amusing short novel, full of sexual and scatological references, spiced with a sharp irony. Vinod Kumār Śukla opts for another strategy: he depicts some moments in the life of a young, lower-middle class couple, avoiding the usual harsh tones of many previous Hindi texts. Despite everyday troubles, in fact, the couple experiences a sort of alternate reality, full of beauty and positive feelings. Through the power of their love and imagination they do not concentrate on economic restrictions or other issues, they perceive and live the poetry of small things and the benevolence of nature.

When I moved to the second point, that of women and *dalit* writing, I had to face some of the most problematic aspects of my dissertation. As discussed in section 4.4., this part of the recent literary production is still largely characterized by realism and almost no

formal experimentation. In this sense, it may appear difficult to link such writing to postmodernism. Nonetheless, in light of what I argued thus far, of the key concepts that I had identified, women and *dalit* authors bring into their stories some prototypical postmodern features. Firstly, they want to narrate their life-experiences and traumas from their personal points of view. These authors, who traditionally had no voice, oppose their *petit récits* to the predominant master narratives, foregrounding the importance of plurality and heterogeneity. Moreover, they explicitly challenge the preexisting literary canon and break a centralizing and unifying model. In this sense, to me, texts like *Chinnamastā* (1993) by Prabhā Khetān, *Kaṭhguḷāb* (1996) by Mṛdulā Garg and *Chappar* (1994) by Jay Prakāś Kardam have to be linked to postmodernism. *Chinnamastā* and *Kaṭhguḷāb* (I have to specify here that the latter is also characterized by formal experimentation; see sections 4.1.2. and 4.2.2.) assert that new roles are possible for women within society. A woman's identity is not only determined by her position within the domestic walls; in particular being a mother is not the only way of being a woman. Women can find their places in the public sphere and be emancipated from patriarchal restrictions. Prabhā Khetān's protagonist and alter-ego achieves personal realization through her job, while Mṛdulā Garg's main characters do this essentially through writing or social commitment. As regards *Chappar*, the only *dalit* novel that I included in my list (I made this choice basically due to the fact that, during the Nineties, *dalit* authors generally opted for other genres, like autobiographies and short stories rather than novels), it deals with discrimination and oppression that *dalit* groups used to experience, but proposing an almost utopian case of social change. The novel's setting, a backward rural area dominated by the casteist system, in fact, is transformed into an ideal world characterized by equality and fraternity. And the main promoter of this revolution is a *camār* boy, who in spite of the humble conditions of his family, had been sent to the nearby city to complete his studies. What is worth remarking here is that everything is recounted by a *dalit* writer, hence from a perspective which was absent from the Hindi literary canon. Jay Prakāś Kardam is not a high-caste author who attempts to look empathetically at the poor and downtrodden, he personally knows the world that he is describing and proposes an active role for his protagonist.

In light of all these observations, I argue that a *postmodern reading* is possible for many recent Hindi novels, as they render in a literary form the basic postmodern tendency to pluralism and challenge. At the same time, I believe that it would be impossible and meaningless to define a poetic of Hindi postmodernism with fixed features, as it would contrast with the composite and contradictory nature of this cultural phenomenon. For these reasons, starting from the title of my thesis, I have insisted on the concept of postmodern traces or clues.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that, with my work, I did not intend to provide a qualitative evaluation of this literary phenomenon, rather a description of its most relevant features. I do not consider postmodernism a sort of demon, devouring everything in

its way, nor the highest expression of human intellect. It is undeniable that the notion of postmodernism was born in the Western world, but it has not been necessarily read as an artificial construct superimposed to non-Western cultures. As any other label, it probably simplifies a complex and composite reality, but it can be a useful device to approach its study. In my opinion, in the era of mass communication the “seed” of postmodernism — in terms of pluralism and challenge as described above — germinated in different contexts, developing peculiar features and shades. Therefore, the study of different and less conventional (at least from our European perspective) literary traditions should represent a key point in order to enrich the conventional paradigm of Western postmodernism.

5.2. Alternative readings and possible further developments

In the previous section, I briefly re-discussed the postmodern ingredients that I identified through my analysis, associating them to at least one of the ten novels that I selected. Let me recall once more (and all together) these novels: *Ḍūb* (1991) by Vīrendra Jain, *Chinnamastā* (1993) by Prabhā Khetān, *Chappar* (1994) by Jay Prakāś Kardam, *Ṭ-ṭā profesar* (1995) by Manohar Śyām Jośī, *Dāstān-e-lāptā* (1995) by Mañzūr Ehteśām, *Kaṭhgulāb* (1996) by Mṛdulā Garg, *Dīvār meṃ ek khiṛkī rahtī thī* (1997) by Vinod Kumār Śukla, *Hamārā śahar us baras* (1998) by Gītāñjali Śrī, *Kali-kathā: vāyā bāipās* (1998) by Alkā Sarāvgī, and *Pīlī chatrīvālī laṛkī* (2001) by Uday Prakāś. Undoubtedly, it could have been possible to enlarge or to modify this list: I was actually tempted to introduce two alternative texts, that are *Do murdoṃ ke lie guldastā* by Surendra Varmā and *Ek naukrānī kī ḍāyṛī* by Kṛṣṇa Baldev Vaid. If we look at sections 4.2.1., 4.4.1., for instance, we see that *Do murdoṃ ke lie guldastā* is characterized by intertextuality and that it represents a sort of counterpart to women writing in terms of representation of femininity and masculinity. In section 4.1.2. I address *Ek naukrānī kī ḍāyṛī* as a noteworthy example of meta-fictional writing. Nevertheless, I decided to use both these novels as additional references only (see sections. and 4.1.2.), as, compared to the other ten texts, they seem to me to be less representative of the postmodern tendencies of the Nineties.

In any case, I do not consider the possibility of extending or modifying my list as a limitation of this work: on the contrary, it may represent a first opportunity for further studies. Due to its exploratory nature, this investigation needed clear and fixed boundaries, but, for this very reason, it may become the starting point for additional investigations. Firstly, as I have just mentioned, it would be possible to broaden the scenario that I depicted by selecting more authors and texts, or by expanding the temporal boundaries and see, for instance, what happens in the first decade of the new millennium. Secondly, with a reverse direction, it would be possible to focus on a narrower number of features (e.g. on the multiplication of projected worlds) and conduct a more in-depth analysis. Nonetheless, apart from these rather obvious possible developments, during my readings I identified another element which may deserve attention. I observed that in almost all the

novels from the Nineties that I approached there is a suicide of a marginal character. Let me provide some examples. In *Ṭ-ṭā profesar* Yaṭīś, Ṭ-ṭā's son, after the end of his marriage in the USA commits suicide on the day of his second wedding (Jośī, 2008, pp. 90-91). In *Dāstān-e-lāptā*, Anīsā, the protagonist's lover commits suicide on her birthday, after having confessed a past of sexual abuse (Ehteśām, 2000, p. 155). Uday Prakāś (2011, p. 57) inserts into his *Pīlī chatrī vālī laṛkī* the story of Sāpām, a Maṇipurī boyfriend of the protagonist, who jumps into a well after a severe episode of violence and his brother's death. In *Ek naukrānī kī ḍāyirī* we read about Jharnā (the eldest daughter of a Bengali family where the protagonist works as a maidservant), who hangs herself in her bedroom. She had a love affair with a Muslim boy, but her family opposed it firmly. The girl took that extreme decision after aborting secretly (Vaid, 2014, pp. 85-91). These are just some examples, but many others could be mentioned. It is therefore natural to suspect that the recurrence of suicides cannot be a mere coincidence. So, why are these episodes so frequent in recent Hindi novels? Were they so common even in earlier works? My hypothesis is that these suicides may be associated to the complexity of contemporary reality and represent a sort of "extreme escape attempt". As Cohen and Taylor discuss in their text *Escapes Attempts: the Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life* (1992), people put into practice multiple strategies to manage their reality and, from time to time, they need to break out from its restrictions. These strategies may be innocuous and people resort to fantasy (pp. 88-111), hobbies, games, sex (Cohen and Taylor refer to them as to *activity enclaves*, pp. 115-130), holidays and adventures (pp. 130-145). Nevertheless, sometimes these options are not enough. People may seek refuge in *mindscapes* like drugs (pp. 145-147), or in alternate shared realities like communes (pp. 164-169), and the situation may degenerate into various forms of excesses and outrages (pp. 195-198) or madness (pp. 202-203). The authors explicitly say that one of the "obvious extreme escapes" that they actually do not consider in their text is suicide (p. 209). "The killing of oneself" — they argue — "as the killing of others, becomes a declaration that personal identity transcends every societal inhibition: individual autonomy is absolute" (p. 210). In conclusion, it could be extremely thought-provoking to investigate the recurrence of suicides in recent Hindi novels and understand if it can be related to the theory of escape attempts and to the postmodern condition.

Having said that, my current work allowed me to approach various kinds of sources, to meet important writers and, more in general, it has been a great opportunity for personal and professional growth. I hope that it might represent a tile in the field of contemporary Hindi literature and that it can promote cross-research, passing conventional separations between Western and Eastern literatures.

Appendix A basic postmodern glossary

This glossary includes some of the most relevant and/or recurrent terms related to post-modernity, contemporary society and their necessary counterpart, modernity. It is based on the texts of Hindi critique discussed in chapter 2, and it aims to support students and/or scholars dealing with these issues for the first time. In order to render its use easier, I decided to prepare both the Hindi-English version and its reverse. For some terms I have added in brackets the name of the Western author/thinker who used the term in a specific acceptation and to whom Hindi critics explicitly refer. This is the case, for instance, of *atiyathārth*, which stands for “hyper-real” as per Baudrillard’s use.

Hindi-English

अंतर-पाठीय (*antar-pāṭhīya*) = f. intertextuality

अतियथार्थ (*atiyathārth*) = m. hyper-real (ref. Baudrillard)

अनुभववाद (*anubhāvavād*) = m. empiricism

अल्पसंख्यक (*alpasankhyak*) = adj., small in numbers, or population; forming a minority

अस्तित्ववाद (*astitvavād*) = m. existentialism

आधुनिकता (*ādhuniktā*) = f. modernity

आधुनिकतावाद (*ādhuniktāvād*) = m. modernism

आनुवंशिकी (*ānuvaṃśikī*) = m. genealogy (ref. Foucault)
 आवृत्ती (*āvṛtti*) = f. iterability (ref. Derrida)
 उच्च यथार्थ (*ucc-yathārth*) = m. hyper-real (ref. Baudrillard)
 उत्तर-आधुनिकता (*uttar-ādhunikā*) = f. postmodernity
 उत्तर-आधुनिकतावाद (*uttar-ādhunikātvād*) = m. postmodernism
 उत्तर-औद्योगिक (*uttar-audyogik*) = adj. post-industrial
 उत्तर संरचनावाद (*uttar saṃracnāvād*) = m. post-structuralism
 उदारवाद/उदरतावाद (*udārvād/udartāvād*) = m. liberalism
 उपनिवेशवाद (*upaniveśvād*) = m. colonialism
 उपभोक्तावाद (*upabhoktāvād*) = m. consumerism
 कतरन साहित्य (*katran sāhitya*) = f. + m. lit. clipping literature = pastiche
 केंद्रवाद (*kendrvād*) = m. centrism
 चाक्षुषता (*cākṣuṣtā*) = f. visuality
 चिह्न (*cihn*) = f. trace (ref. Baudrillard)
 छलना (*chalnā*) = f. simulacra (ref. Baudrillard)
 जनसंस्कृति (*jansamskṛti*) = f. mass culture
 ज्ञानोदय (*jñānoday*) = m. illuminism
 तर्कवाद (*tarkvād*) = m. rationalism
 दलित विमर्श (*dalit vimarś*) = m. dalit discourse
 नव व्यवहारवाद (*nav vyavhārvād*) = m. new-pragmatism
 नाशवाद (*nāśvād*) = m. nihilism
 पुनरुत्थान (*punarutthān*) = m. renaissance
 पूँजीवाद (*pūñjīvād*) = m. capitalism
 पूर्णतावाद (*pūrṇatāvād*) = m. holism
 पेरोडी (*perodī*) = f. parody
 पेष्टीच (*peśṭīc*) = m. pastiche
 प्रतीक (*pratīk*) = m. symbol
 प्रतीकवाद (*pratīkvād*) = m. symbolism
 प्रतीपता (*pratīptā*) = f. reversal (ref. Derrida)
 प्रत्यक्षवाद (*pratyakṣavād*) = m. positivism

प्रबोधन युग (*prabodhan yug*) = m. + m. Enlightenment
 प्राच्यवाद (*prācyavād*) = m. orientalism
 बहुलतावाद (*bahultāvād*) = m. pluralism
 बहुसंस्कृतिवाद (*bahusamskṛtivād*) = m. multiculturalism
 बिंब (bimb) = m. reflection, image
 बिंबवाद का आंदोलन (*bimbvād kā āndolan*) = m. + m. imagism
 भूमंडलीकरण (*bhūmaṇḍalīkaraṇ*) = m. globalization
 महावृत्तांत (*mahāvṛttānt*) = m. grands récits (ref. Lyotard)
 मार्क्सवाद (*mārksvād*) = m. marxism
 मानवतावाद (*mānavtāvād*) = m. humanism
 मेटा-ऐतिहासिक फिक्शन (*meṭā-aitihāsik phikṣan*) = m. historiographic metafiction
 राष्ट्रवाद (*rāṣṭrvād*) = m. nationalism
 विखंडन (*vikhaṇḍan*) = m. deconstruction
 विडंबना (*viḍambnā*) = f. irony
 विविभिन्नता (*vivibhinnaṭā*) = m. différance (ref. Derrida's philosophy)
 विश्व-गाँव (*viśv-gāmv*) = m. global village
 विश्ववाद (*viśvvād*) = m. cosmopolitanism
 विषमभाषास्थिति (*viṣambhāṣāsthiti*) = f. heteroglossia
 विसंरचनावाद (*visamracnāvād*) = m. deconstruction
 विस्थ-विकीर्णता (*visth-vikīrṇatā*) = f. différance (ref. Derrida)
 वृद्ध (*vṛddh*) = adj. late (i.e. *vṛddh-pūmjītvād* = late capitalism)
 व्यंग्य (*vyaṅgya*) = m. irony
 व्यक्तिनिष्ठता (*vyaktiniṣṭhta*) = f. subjectivity
 व्यांजना (*vyañjnā*) = f. suggestion
 व्यावहारिकता (*vyāvahāriktā*) = f. paralogy (ref Lyotard)
 शब्दकेंद्रवाद (*śabdkenḍrvād*) = m. logocentrism (ref. Derrida)
 शिशन-केन्द्रिक (*śiśan-kendrik*) = adj. phallogocentric (ref. Derrida)
 शीत-युद्ध (*śīt-yuddh*) = m. cold war
 शून्यवाद (*śūnyavād*) = m. nihilism
 श्रवणशीलता (*śravaṇśīltā*) = f. aurality
 संकेत (*sanket*) = m. allusion

संरचनावाद (*saṃracnāvād*) = m. structuralism
सापेक्षवाद (*sāpekṣvād*) = m. relativism
साम्प्रदायिकता (*sāmpradāyiktā*) = f. communalism
साम्राज्यवाद (*sāmraajyavād*) = m. imperialism
स्त्रीत्ववाद (*strītvavād*) = m. feminism
स्त्री विमर्श (*strī vimarś*) = m. women discourse

English-Hindi

Allusion = संकेत (*saṅket*; m.)
Aurality = श्रवणशीलता (*śravaṇśīltā*; f.)
Capitalism = पूँजीवाद (*pūñjīvād*; m.); late capitalism = *vṛddh-pūñjīvād*
Centrism = केंद्रवाद (*kendrvād*; m.)
Cold war = शीत-युद्ध (*śīt-yuddh*; m.)
Colonialism = उपनिवेशवाद (*upaniveśvād*; m.)
Communalism = साम्प्रदायिकता (*sāmpradāyiktā*; f.)
Consumerism = उपभोक्तावाद (*upabhoktāvād*; m.)
Cosmopolitanism = विश्ववाद (*viśvvād*; m.)
Dalit discourse = दलित विमर्श (*dalit vimarś*; m.)
Deconstruction = विखंडन (*vikhaṇḍan*; m.); विसंरचनावाद (*visaṃracnāvād*; m.)
Différance = विविभिन्नता (*vivibhinnaṭā*; m.); विस्थ-विकीर्णता (*visth-vikīrṇaṭā*; f.)
Empiricism = अनुभववाद (*anubhavvād*; m.)
Enlightenment = प्रबोधन युग (*prabodhan yug*; m. + m.)
Existentialism = अस्तित्ववाद (*astitvavād*; m.)
Feminism = स्त्रीत्ववाद (*strītvavād*; m.)
Genealogy = आनुवंशिकी (*ānuvaṃśikī*; m.)
Globalization = भूमंडलीकरण (*bhūmaṇḍalīkaraṇ*; m.)
Global village = विश्व-गाँव (*viśv-gāmv*; m.)
Grands récits = महावृत्तांत (*mahāvṛttānt*; m.)
Heteroglossia = विषमभाषास्थिति (*viśambhāśāsthiti*; f.)
Historiographic metafiction = मेटा-ऐतिहासिक फिक्शन (*meṭā-aitihāsik phikśan*; m.)

Holism = पूर्णतावाद (*pūrṇatāvād*; m.)

Humanism = मानवतावाद (*mānavtāvād*; m.)

Hyper-real = अतियथार्थ (*atiyathārth*; m.); उच्च यथार्थ (*ucc-yathārth*; m.)

Illuminism = ज्ञानोदय (*jñānoday*; m.)

Image = बिंब (*bimb*; m.)

Imagism = बिंबवाद का आंदोलन (*bimbvād kā āndolan*; m. + m.)

Imperialism = साम्राज्यवाद (*sāmraajyavād*; m.)

Intertextuality = अंतर-पाठीय (*antar-pāṭhīya*; f.)

Irony = विडंबना (*viḍambnā*; f.); व्यंग्य (*vyāṅgya*; m.)

Iterability = आवृत्ती (*āvṛtti*; f.)

Liberalism = उदारवाद/उदरतावाद (*udārvād/udartāvād*; m.)

Logocentrism = शब्दकेंद्रवाद (*śabdkendrvād*; m.)

Marxism = मार्क्सवाद (*mārksvād*; m.)

Mass culture = जनसंस्कृति (*jansamskṛti*; f.)

Minority (forming a-) = अल्पसंख्यक (*alpasamkhyak*; adj.)

Modernism = आधुनिकतावाद (*ādhuniktāvād*; m.)

Modernity = आधुनिकता (*ādhuniktā*; f.)

Multiculturalism = बहुसंस्कृतिवाद (*bahusamskṛtivād*; m.)

Nationalism = राष्ट्रवाद (*rāṣṭrvād*; m.)

New pragmatism = नव व्यवहारवाद (*nav vyavhārvād*; m.)

Nihilism = नाशवाद (*nāśvād*; m.); शून्यवाद (*śūnyavād*; m.)

Orientalism = प्राच्यवाद (*prācyavād*; m.)

Paralogy = व्यावहारिकता (*vyāvahāriktā*; f.)

Parody = पेरोडी (*perodī*; f.)

Pastiche = कतरन साहित्य (*katran sāhitya*; f. + m.); पेश्टीच (*peśṭīc*; m.)

Phallogocentric = शिश्न-केन्द्रिक (*śiśan-kendrik*; adj.)

Pluralism = बहुलतावाद (*bahultāvād*; m.)

Positivism = प्रत्यक्षवाद (*pratyakṣavād*; m.)

Post-industrial = उत्तर-औद्योगिक (*uttar-audyogik*; adj.)

Postmodernism = उत्तर-आधुनिकतावाद (*uttar-ādhuniktāvād*; m.)

Postmodernity = उत्तर-आधुनिकता (*uttar-ādhuniktā*; f.)

Poststructuralism = उत्तर संरचनावाद (*uttar samracnāvād*; m.)

Rationalism = तर्कवाद (*tarkvād*; m.)

Relativism = सापेक्षवाद (*sāpekṣvād*; m.)

Renaissance = पुनरुत्थान (*punarutthān*; m.)

Reversal = प्रतीपता (*pratīptā*; f.)

Simulacra = छलना (*chalnā*; f.)

Structuralism = संरचनावाद (*samracnāvād*; m.)

Subjectivity = व्यक्तिनिष्ठता (*vyaktiniṣṭhā*; f.)

Suggestion = व्यांजना (*vyañjnā*; f.)

Symbol = प्रतीक (*pratīk*; m.)

Symbolism = प्रतीकवाद (*pratīkvād*; m.)

Trace = चिह्न (*cihn*; f.)

Visuality = चाक्षुषता (*cākṣuṣṭā*; f.)

Women discourse = स्त्री विमर्श (*strī vimarś*; m.)

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