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Sudhīś Pacaurī and Pāṇḍey Śaśibhūṣaṇ 'Śītāṃśu': Postmodern Approaches to Recent Hindi Literature

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Abstract

Postmodernism is a highly controversial phenomenon that animated the debates of Western scholars during the closing decades of the Twentieth century. But has this term any meaning in the Indian context? This paper aims to introduce the notion of postmodernism in Hindi literary critique and more specifically the contributions of two scholars, Sudhīś Pacaurī and Pāṇḍey Śaśibhūṣaṇ 'Śītāṃśu', as the possible bases for textual analysis and further theoretical investigations.

Keywords: Hindi Literature, Postmodernism, Literary Criticism, Sudhīś Pacaurī, Pāṇḍey Śaśibhūṣaṇ 'Śītāṃśu'

This paper aims to discuss the concept of postmodernism in the field of Hindi literature, through the perspectives offered by two Indian scholars, Sudhīś Pacaurī and Pāṇḍey Śaśibhūṣaṇ 'Śītāṃśu'. This is an almost unexplored research field and may represent a thought-provoking challenge. Postmodernism has been debated in connection with multiple literary traditions — from Europe to Latin America, from the USA to Japan— but really few pages have been written on Indian literatures[1]. Undoubtedly a first issue has to be related to the origins of this cultural phenomenon, that are indissolubly connected with the Western world: can postmodernism be a suitable term for the Indian context? Or should it be considered a mere imported fashion? With the first section of this paper, after a general introduction to postmodernism, I attempt to answer this question, by discussing some possible acceptations of modernity and postmodernity in India. In sections 2 and 3, shifting from sociology towards literature (and particularly towards Hindi literature), I concentrate on Pacaurī's and Śītāṃśu's contributions, focusing on their analysis of some recent Hindi works.

1. Postmodernism: from the Western Origins to the Indian Context

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, 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, 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 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. In general, it challenges the modernist acceptation 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 Derrida and Lyotard's terminology, postmodernism *deconstructs* the *grands récits,* the totalizing ideologies related to the Enlighten-

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[1] To be more accurate, 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). Nothing similar happened, at least in any Western language, for Hindi literature.

ment and modernity. To be more accurate, postmodernism 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, 39). It interrogates the urge to sameness, certainty and homogeneity, foregrounding what is different, provisional and heterogeneous (Hutcheon 2004, 42).

Undoubtedly, 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 clarifies that the object of his study is the state of knowledge in highly developed societies (Lyotard 2008, 5). For this reason many Indian scholars are 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 conducted in February 2016 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 postmodernity in the revolution of telecommunications, in the participation in consumerism and globalization. From a sociological point of view, Doshi (2008, 79) 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, 79).

The economic reforms of the 1990s 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 situation, it is probably necessary 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 acceptation, 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. To the scholar «once modernity is understood in this fashion, it is apparent that India still has a long distance to go» (Gupta 2014, 8). 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, 88-9). Among these scholars, Doshi has emphasized that only a tiny percentage of the population (that is to say, the dominant groups) benefited from modernity. 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, despite widespread fears, the rise of modernity has strengthened local ethnicity, traditions and customs through the use of modern innovations, particularly information technology. Doshi (2008, 82) even states that «differentiated ethnicity, autonomous ethnicity and self-conscious ethnicity constitute the structure of postmodernity» in India.

Referring more specifically to Hindi literature, 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-ādhuniktā* (postmodernity) and rejected it as unsuitable for the Indian context.[2] From the end of the 1990s and especially after 2000, the first dedicated texts of literary criticism started to be published. A first example may be *Uttar ādhuniktā kuch vicār* (Postmodernity, some reflections; 2000), a miscellaneous book edited by Dev Śaṅkar Navīn and Suśānt Kumār Miśra. The volume recollects various essays dealing with Western thinkers who anticipated or contributed, more or less directly, to postmodernism. Other noteworthy texts of this period are *Uttar-ādhuniktāvād aur dalit sāhitya* (Postmodernism and dalit literature, 2008) by Kṛṣṇadatt Pālīvāl, *Uttar-ādhunik sāhityik vimarś* (Postmodern Literary Discourse, 2010) by Sudhīś Pacaurī and *Uttar-ādhuniktā: sāhitya aur saṃskṛti kī nayī soc* (Postmodernity: literature and new cultural thinking, 2012) by Devendra Issar. In the next section I will focus on Pacaurī's contribution, as the scholar not only provides a theoretical introduction to postmodernism, but also an example of postmodern reading of recent Hindi works.

2. Sudhīś Pacaurī: Intertextuality and Playfulness

Uttar-ādhunik sāhityik vimarś (Postmodern Literary Discourse) by Sudhīś Pacaurī was published for the first time in 1996 and is probably one of the most thought provoking texts published in Hindi on postmodernism. By highlighting the skepticism towards postmodernism which dominates the world of Hindi literary critique Pacaurī affirms that 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. As previously mentioned, Pacaurī provides a theoretical overview of postmodernism, based on Western thinkers. The critics he cites include Baudrillard and his concepts of signs and simulacra; Lyotard and the end of the modernist master-narratives; Derrida and his philosophy of deconstruction. From Jameson Pacaurī recalls the well-known definition of postmodernism as the cultural logic (*sāṃskṛitik tark*) of late capitalism, the ideas of death of the subject (*kartā kī mṛtyu*), effacement of history (*itihās ke vilop*) and schizophrenic writing. 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 deals with the text *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literature* (1992), in which Ahmad discusses the role of theory and intellectuals in the movement against colonialism and imperialism.

Regarding the features of postmodern literature, Pacaurī (2010, 96-117) indicates intertextuality as probably the most relevant. 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* (clipping literature) — the boundaries between what is literary and what is not are broken. The critic claims:

> 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, 99)

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

> 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.[3]

Parody is defined as an ironic form of intertextuality (*antarpāṭhīytā kā vyaṅgyātmak rūp*) and as 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 (Pacaurī 2010, 100). Parody unmasks the misconception that it is possible to reach an ultimate truth about the past (Pacaurī 2010, 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.

A further relevant postmodern feature is playfulness. During my interview with the critic he argued that 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 previous realistic tradition), but well-being and happiness. Therefore, towards the end of the Twentieth century, 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, 102-3).

I would now like to introduce Pacaurī's analysis of two Hindi novels —Manohar Śyām Jośī's[4] *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī* (The Perplexity of Hariya Hercules) and Surendra Varmā's[5] *Mujhe cānd cāhie* (I want the moon) — that he cites as possible postmodern works. Pacaurī commences his discourse on Hariyā's story by comparing significantly its author to Umberto Eco:

> अपने उम्बर्टो इको ने हिन्दी में हरिया लिख दिया है। हरिया हरामी इको के 'पैंडुलम' और 'रोज' दोनों को छका रहा है (Pacaurī 2010, 136).
>
> our Umberto Eco wrote Hariyā in Hindi. Hariyā the illegitimate is surpassing Eco's 'Pendulum' and 'Rose'".

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 *kumāūṁnī*[6] community in Delhi. Hariyā is depicted as a simple man, devoted to the care of sick people, unconcerned about the pleasures of life. De-

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[3] All English translations from this text are done by the author.

[4] Manohar Śyām Jośī (1933 - 2006) is often called the Father of Indian Soap Opera, since he was the scriptwriter of the first Indian TV serial, *Ham Log* (1982). He took several jobs: teacher, journalist, scriptwriter and was also the author of short stories and novels. His best-known novels include *Kuru kuru svāhā* (1980), *Hariyā Harkyūlīz kī hairānī* (1994), *Ṭ-ṭā professor* (1995), *Hamzād* (1999) and *Kyāp*, an allegory of modern India, for which he won the Sāhitya Akademi award in 2005.

[5] Surendra Varmā (born 1941) is a well-known Hindi novelist and playwright. His novels include *Mujhe cānd cāhie* (1993), *Do murdoṁ ke lie guldastā* (2000) and *Kāṭnā śamī kā vṛkṣa padmapaṅkhurī kī dhār se* (2010).

[6] The community to which both character and author belongs. Its origins are in Kumāūṁ region of Uttarakhand. The name Kumāūṁ derives from the hill Kūrmāchala, in Almoṛā district, where it is believed that Viṣṇu resided for three years in the form of Kūrmāvtār (tortoise) in order to save the earth. Kumāūṁnī is also one of the most representative *central pahāṛī* languages (together with Gaṛhvālī) 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).

spite 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 (perhaps Gūmāliṅg 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 no longer able to recognize her relatives. Hariyā is chatting with Banno's son when she enters the scene swearing and evoking Goomalling. Hariyā is completely disconcerted: how is it possible that Banno knows about Goomalling? And is that Goomalling the same as the one on 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 had his father never 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, 35-6)

But the reader is made to ask some further questions: did Banno really say Goomalling or something like *gū kā liṅg* (a *liṅga* 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 Gūmāliṅg, 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 Gūmāliṅg 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, never to return. 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 (2010, 142), this is a crucial aspect of the story, which can be linked to post-structuralism: every man can provide a different reading of the story, as nothing is universal and eternal. There is no chance to establish a final truth, only 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 thus keeping 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, 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? After hearing about Goomalling, Hariyā is affected by 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 inside the mirror (Joshi 2009, 28). The story hence becomes a game of reflected images, a game of mirrors. 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, 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

> 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, 146)

> 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 doctrines.

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 (Pacaurī 2010, 148).

The second example I wish to mention is 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

> 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-सधान यानी चाँद-संधान यानी वर्षा-संधान के बारे में सोचती है। (Pacaurī 2010, 157)

> 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, about her search for the moon and for Varṣā.

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 city 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 begins 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 named 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 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 with Varṣā, a courageous young lady ready to challenge her world. Moreover, according to Pacaurī (2010, 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 Bhūṭānī[7] and Nīnā Guptā[8]). Nonetheless, to Pacaurī (2010, 160) it would be too simplistic to read the novel through the lenses of realism alone. For instance, a psychological reading would be possible: in such a perspective, 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*[9] and Anton Čechov's *The Seagull*[10]. It is noteworthy that, before the novel begins, Varmā evokes some lines from *Caligula*, in which 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, 8). These statements can be seen as meaningful anticipation of Silbil/Varṣā's life journey. She too wants the moon, happiness, 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 media. 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, following her lover's death, does not abandon the world of cinema: she has acknowledged the primacy of the law of the market. In this acceptation, Varmā's protagonist has reached her moon, that is the consumer condition, through which what was initially considered impossible becomes possible. For Pacaurī, without acknowledging these various levels of reading, it would be impossible to 'reach the moon'. In conclusion, the critic defines the novel as a post-realist work (*uttar-yathārthvādī*[11]), an innovation which he considers necessary for the sake of renovating Hindi literature. Post realism is, to the scholar, a possible chance for a postmodern time.

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[7] 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.

[8] 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 nahiṁ* (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".

[9] *Caligula,* begun in 1938 and published for the first time in 1944, is a play showing 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.

[10] *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.

[11] 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 Vīrendra Jain (Pacaurī 2012, 99-106), *Khilegā to dekheṃge* by Vinod Kumār Śukla (107-14), *Idannamam* by Maitreyī Puṣpā (119-21) and *Apnī salībeṁ* by Namitā Siṃh (122-7).

In the next section I will introduce another thought provoking contribution, provided by Pāṇḍey Śaśibhūṣaṇ 'Śītāṃśu', that attempts to outline a sort of Hindi declension of postmodernism. The relevance of the article is testified by later texts like *Uttar-ādhuniktā aur Hindi upanyās* (Postmodernity and Hindi novels, 2011) by Sañjay Cauhān and *Uttar-ādhuniktā aur Uday Prakāś kā sāhitya* (Postmodernity and Uday Prakāś's literature, 2013) by Sureś Paṭel, that explicitly refer to it as an essential source.

3. Pāṇḍey Śaśibhūṣaṇ 'Śītāṃśu': the Four Ingredients of a Postmodern Text

Pāṇḍey Śaśibhūṣaṇ 'Śītāṃśu''s article *Uttar ādhunik sāhitya-sṛṣṭi aur samīkṣā dṛṣṭi ke bīc "Vāren Hesṭings kā sāṃḍ"* ("Warren Hastings' bull", between the postmodern literary creation and critical perspective) was published in the literary magazine *Madhumatī* in 2000. 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, 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 will (*icchā*)[12]. While modernity describes the era of ideologies and defines national borders, postmodernity sanctions 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 (*ghaṭnīytā*), untimeliness (*asamayparaktā*) and anachronism (*kāldoṣtā*). 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 the well-known Hindi writer Nirmal Varmā stated, an artist does not say anything, does not teach anything, he 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, 8).

After this general introduction to the topic, Śītāṃśu (2000, 8-10) discusses four elements which he deems crucial to approaching postmodern literary critique. These elements are: the effectiveness of seduction versus production[13] (*līlābhāv banām utpādan kī sakriytā*), the urgency of overcoming institutional traditions (*sāṃsthānik paramparā kā atikramaṇ),* escaping from cultural dogma *(sāṃskṛtik anuśāsan se palāyan)* and aurality versus visuality *(śravaṇśīltā banām cākṣuṣtā).* The author explains each of them as follows:

I) *Līlābhāv banām utpādan kī sakriytā*: 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 a pleasure, an alluring game.

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.

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.

IV) *Śravaṇśīltā banām cākṣuṣtā*: 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

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[12] Śītāṃśu (2000, 6) provides the English equivalent of *sampūrṇtā, vivek* and *icchā.* To be more accurate, he translates *vivek* as 'rational'.

[13] The English translation of the key terms *līlābhāv* and *utpādan* is provided by Śītāṃśu.

philosophy of deconstruction, in fact, shows that there are no pure texts (*śuddh pāṭh*), as there are always traces of previous ones (*antar pāṭhoṁ* 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. The critic refers also to other concepts of the Derridian philosophy, such as *différance*[14], iterability[15] (translated into Hindi with the world *āvṛtti*) and reversal[16] (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 Hesṭings kā sāṁḍ* (*Warren Hastings' bull*)[17], highlighting the relevance of each of the above listed elements. *Vāren Hesṭings kā sāṁḍ* is described as a postmodern text, in which the historiographic component plays a fundamental role (Śītāṃśu 2000, 10). Nevertheless, this component is indissolubly intertwined with fantasy and the reader is unable to distinguish the former from the latter. 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's start from the presence of *līlābhāv* within the text (Śītāṃśu 2000, 10-2). 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 first consider Mohinī's case: initially, with her lascivious behavior, she aims at gaining 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 relinquishes rationality (*vivek*) for the sake 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:

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[14] 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, 38). The word *différance* comes from a graphic alteration of the French world *différence*, which can be noticed in a written text, but which cannot be heard.

[15] 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, 78).

[16] 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, 73-4).

[17] A well-known short story from the collection *Pol 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.

> 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)
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> As time went on, 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.[18]

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 seek 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 the hymns of Jayadeva[19] and to many traditional concepts and elements. Cokhī, for example, during her last encounter with Warren Hastings, is compared to Durga. When she stabs herself she seems to become the terrible goddess riding on a tiger's back, which the Governor kept on seeing in statues and paintings. 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:

> 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 (Śītāṃśu 2000, 13 and Prakāś 2004, 133).
>
> 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 us.

Śītāṃśu highlights how Uday Prakāś plays with the present and the 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.

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,

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[18] All English translations from this short story are done by the author.

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

myth, dream, fantasy and spirituality are the main ingredients of the Indian culture. Nevertheless, nowadays, people from all around the world (including Indians) 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 presence within the text of multiple echoes (*śravaṇśīltā*). The reader, browsing through the short story, immediately notices that Uday Prakāś inserted the pictures of two paintings. It may seem that he is bowing to visuality (*cākṣuṣtā*), 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:

> उसकी बड़ी-बड़ी आंखें हैं। उसके दाहिने हाथ में वारेन हेस्टिंग्स की पत्नी का हैट है, जिसमें किसी दर्लभ शवेत पक्षी के परों 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 ढ़ांपने 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, 127-8)

> 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 symbol.

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 fell 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 tearing 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 superficial plot: it is necessary to investigate its deeper structure. Uday Prakaś 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, 16).

Moving from the concept of *différance*, Śītāṃśu (2000, 17-8) 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, 19).

Śītāṃśu concludes his analysis of *Vāren Hesṭings kā sāṁḍ* 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.

4. Conclusive Reflections

Postmodernism is an extremely complex cultural phenomenon the reflections of which within the Hindi literary field it would be impossible to discuss exhaustively here. Nonetheless, with this article I wished to introduce a significant issue largely overlooked so far, particularly by Western scholars. Resorting to any kind of literary label may be risky as every literary tradition, every author has its own peculiarities. Nonetheless, to me, during the closing decades of the Twentieth century, there are some common features that must

be acknowledged. From this perspective Pacaurī's and Śītāṃśu's contributions are particularly relevant as they outline a sort of 'local declension' of postmodernism by reading and working with specific texts. Śītāṃśu's discourse on the relationship between postmodernism and the urgency of going beyond institutional traditions, for instance, can be linked to the flourishing of women and dalit writing. These new literary 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. The importance of pluralism through these new voices is emphasized by Pacaurī as well, even though his discourse on women's writing is more controversial. In the chapter *Strītvavādī vimarś kī śuruāt* (*The beginning of the feminist discourse*), Pacaurī (2010, 118-24) acknowledges that social changes have begun to take place in India, leading progressively to women's emancipation and that a new literature is now 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, traditionally bound to the private dimension. This new atmosphere is gradually 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 (2010, 120), women have to find a new way of writing, centered on their own peculiarities, they have to build a 'destructive' literature, challenging the predominant position of male writers. 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 only mentioned Mahādevī Varmā[20], who undoubtedly had a great literary merit, but cannot be related to the changes that occurred at the dawn of the new millennium.

As regards the idea of *līlābhāv*, the postmodern 'game of seduction', it is echoed by Pacaurī's reflections on playfulness and possible post-realist aesthetic. These concepts become crucial towards the end of the Twentieth century, as a considerable part of recent mainstream literature is progressively detaching itself from the tradition of social realism inaugurated by Premcand. Many recent Hindi novels (we may think of Vinod Kumār Śukla's[21] and Manohar Śyām Jośī's prose) start to be free from the necessity of narrating great issues or proposing high moral teachings, abandoning the hard tones of social realism.

A final noteworthy idea, which is present both in Śītāṃśu 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 genius, as it always carries traces of previous texts[22]. Moreover, as Śītāṃśu highlights, in the postmodern era, every text is multilayered, hence, apart from its more immediate and superficial meaning, it contains multiple hidden meanings, which can be caught by the reader according to his/her cultural background. It is the special aim of the postmodern critique to deconstruct the text and let these meanings emerge.

Even if it is probably hard to define a sort of poetic of Hindi postmodernism with fixed features, Pacaurī's and Śītāṃśu's reflections highlight the importance of the issue and may represent a valiant starting point for the analysis of many recent Hindi works.

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[20] Mahādevī Varmā (1907-1987) was an outstanding Hindi writer of the *chāyāvādī* generation.

[21] Vinod Kumār Śukla (born 1937) wrote several collections of verses and three novels — *Naukar kī kamīz* (1979), *Khilegā to dekheṃge* (1996) and *Dīvār meṃ ek khiṛkī rahtī thī* (1997) — which constitutes the so called trilogy of the Indian lower-middle class. Śukla's prose is often connected to magical realism, as he seems to rediscover the poetry of small things, mixing reality with imagination.

[22] 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.

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