

Postmodern Traces and Recent Hindi Novels

Veronica Ghirardi

University of Turin, Italy

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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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Foreword

by Richard Delacy

Language, Literature and the Global Marketplace: The Hindi Novel and Its Reception

What did it mean to write a novel in Hindi at the end of the twentieth century and how has this practice changed from the time when the first novels in this language were published in the late 19th century? How have critics and scholars written about Hindi literary production in the global academic sphere in Hindi and in English, as well as in non-South Asian languages such as French, German, Italian, and even Russian? How should we think about the relationship between literary practice, production and consumption in Hindi and that which took place in other languages throughout South Asia? Finally, how has the market historically mediated this form of cultural practice, and what may we say about how market forces may have influenced this realm since the advent of liberalization of the economy in India from 1990 onwards? Questions such as these immediately arise when we approach Veronica Ghirardi's study of the influence of postmodernism on Hindi novels published between 1991 and 2001. After all, Ghirardi, who lives and works in Italy, has produced a study in English of novels originally written in Hindi (presumably for an exclusively Hindi-reading public), for the market in the US, now well and truly the global center of academic production.¹ This flow of creative and critical texts underscores how imbricated global markets and languages have become in particular sectors, as well as the impossibility of existing outside of

¹ The fact that Ghirardi's study was published in America underscores the idea that the US sits at the center of the academic enterprise.

this sphere, particularly if we wish to find an audience for academic production. Therefore, we may ask what it suggests about the field of academic literary criticism that Ghirardi produced her study of post-liberalization Hindi novels not in Italian, nor in the original language of the texts Hindi, in order to examine the very idea of the importation into literary practice in Hindi of what is conventionally understood to be originally a European movement or phenomenon: postmodernism in art and literature.

Ghirardi argues that this particular literary turn to postmodernism has received very little academic attention outside of the domain of critical scholarship produced in Hindi for a local academic audience. Her project, therefore, is two-fold. Firstly, she foregrounds twelve literary Hindi novels published over the final decade of the twentieth century that exhibit postmodern characteristics according –but not only– to criteria drawn from the writings of particular European and American theorists who have reflected on this cultural and artistic phenomenon. Secondly, she seeks to bring to the attention of those working in the Anglo-American academy the existence of this phenomenon in what she argues has remained a neglected field of literary production in the Anglo-American academy – the study of the contemporary Hindi literary novel.

It is true that the novel in Hindi, understood to have emerged in the late nineteenth century, has received proportionately less academic attention than other forms of literary practice in what came to be delineated as the Hindi language in South Asian area studies programs in the Anglo-American academy.² With the establishment of such programs in the US and Britain after

² The history of the rise of modern prose fiction in India during the colonial period has been well documented and does not need repeating. For more on this see, Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985). For the history of the rise of the novel in Hindi, see R. S. McGregor, “The

India achieved independence in 1947, most attention came to be focused on the study of precolonial Hindi literature, that is to say, compositional traditions that stretched from the thirteenth century until the late eighteenth century. In addition to this, many scholars turned their attention to the evolution of the vernacular languages throughout the nineteenth century and the colonial influence on and politics surrounding their modern forms, in particular after the establishment of the College at Fort William in 1800. Of great interest to scholars of Hindi was the political, social and linguistic relationship between Hindi and Urdu and the politics of language throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This relationship was examined as a part of the broader historical narrative of colonialism in India and the attempt to understand the circumstances that led up to the devolution of power and simultaneous division of the subcontinent into two independent modern nations in 1947.³

The relative neglect of the literary novel in Hindi as a field of study in South Asia area studies programs also stood in direct contrast to the growing importance of the novel in English departments in the Anglo-American academy over the same period. With the emergence of postcolonial studies in the early 1990s, novels in English written by those who had been described as Indo-Anglian writers from the 1950s also became an important field of

Rise of Standard Hindi and Early Hindi Prose Fiction,” in T. W. Clark, *The Novel in India: Its Birth and Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 142-178.

³ For examples of studies that focus on identity, language and the politics of Hindi and Urdu, see Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); and Christopher King, *One Language Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994).

intellectual enquiry in English departments in many universities throughout the world.⁴ The rise of this class of literary producer came to be traced back to the emergence of Salman Rushdie and his award-winning first novel, *Midnight's Children*.⁵ However, the novel in Hindi remained understudied over the same period, in spite of the fact that it continued to be an important genre for writers located across the length and breadth of the Hindi-speaking region of north India, as well as some outside of the geopolitical boundaries of the nation-state. This asymmetry could be said to speak to the broader asymmetry in the sphere of academic work in which the market for academic commodities became centered in the US over the course of the twentieth century.

The disregard for the novel as a significant site of scholarly focus was also evident in the emerging critical field in Hindi language and literature departments in universities in India from the time the first of these departments were established in Allahabad University and Banaras Hindu University in the 1920s. For much of the twentieth century, research agendas in Hindi language and literature departments were dominated by a focus primarily on devotional literary traditions from the fifteenth century onwards. In addition to this much work was done on tracing the purported origins of the language to around the beginning of the second millennium CE. This resolute focus on the precolonial literary world, in particular devotional traditions, was especially evident in the writings of the founder of modern Hindi literary criticism in India and its most dominant exponent, Ramchandra

⁴ Gayatri Spivak, "How to Read a "Culturally Different" Book," in her, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), 73.

⁵ For more on this, see Jon Mee, "After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and 1990s", in Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (ed.), *A History of Indian Literature in English* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 318-336.

Shukla (1884-1941), in particular in his seminal contribution to this field, his *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās* [*A History of Hindi Literature*]. First published in 1929, Shukla's historical survey quickly became the standard college-level textbook for the study of Hindi literature, and remained so at least until the end of the twentieth century. It was updated only once in 1940, just prior to its author's death, extending its reach until the death of modern Hindi's greatest short-story writer and novelist, Dhanpat Ray Srivastava 'Premchand' (1880-1936). Shukla's survey was then reprinted more than thirty times in exactly the same form over at least the next fifty years.⁶ It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that *A History of Hindi Literature* came to delineate the boundaries of the critical sphere, providing the impetus for much critical scholarship by academics writing in Hindi for over fifty years. In a sense, it could be said to have defined what was to be enumerated as literature in Hindi for at least two generations of scholars spread throughout the universities of the subcontinent.⁷ The fact that it was never updated suggests that it became an inviolable text in its own right and, as such, it appeared to keep the critical emphasis squarely on literary production up until its endpoint. Scholars did begin to turn their attention to some degree in the 1960s and 1970s to literary production in the genre of the short story and modern Hindi poetry produced after 1940, in particular those movements that came to be understood as *prayogvād* (Experimentalism) and *pragativād* (Progressivism). Towards the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twentieth-first century,

⁶ Shukla's *Itihās* remains in circulation today and is presumably still utilized in college-level Hindi courses in universities.

⁷ The fact that devotional poetry constituted a significant part of the canon of Hindi literature as codified by Shukla in his *History* in itself was fascinating and demonstrated the importance of determining a literature in order to underpin the very existence of a language in the age of nationalism.

an increasing number of academics working in Hindi language and literature departments in Indian universities began to turn their attention to more recent shifts in the literary sphere, in particular the rise of Dalit literature and novels by women writers.⁸ However, precolonial and colonial literary traditions continued to dominate the critical sphere arguably for at least fifty years after Shukla's death.⁹

What was it about the novel in particular that failed to capture the imagination of scholars and literary critics working on Hindi and its literature both in India and in the South Asian area studies programs abroad? A partial

⁸ The study of Dalit literary texts in a variety of languages also became increasingly important in the Anglo-American academy around the beginning of the new millennium. Apart from a few notable exceptions, however, writers predominantly favored the short story and poetry when it came to literary expression. Of the few novels that were published in Hindi, *Chappar* [*The Thatched Hut*] by Jay Prakash Kadam (1994) remains the most discussed in scholarly works. For more on Dalit literary production, see Laura Brueck, *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013). In Hindi, see Devendra Chaube, *Ādhunik sāhitya mē dalit vimarś* [*Dalit Discourse in Modern Literature*] (Delhi: Orient Publishers, 2009).

⁹ An example of Hindi literary criticisms overriding concern for precolonial literary traditions would be the influential work of one of Hindi's most important twentieth century literary critics, the Marxist critic Namvar Singh (1926-2019). For many years he taught at BHU in Banaras, and also spent a considerable portion of his later academic life at JNU in Delhi. While he did turn his attention to contemporary literary trends in his early studies, he also attempted to reconsider precolonial literary traditions in Hindi through a Marxian lens. Among his most influential writings are: Namvar Singh, *Dūsri paramparā kī khoj* [*The Search for Another Tradition*] (Dillī: Rājkamal Prakāśan, 2020 [1982]) and, Namvar Singh, *Ādhunik sāhitya kī pravṛtīyā* [*Trends in Modern Literature*] (Dillī: Lokbhārtī Prakāśan, 2020 [1962]).

answer to this may lie in the historical difficulty Hindi writers faced reaching a significant audience for their literary novels throughout the twentieth century. Persistently low literacy rates in the Hindi-speaking states, coupled with an absence of basic education and oppressive poverty, made it almost impossible to establish a market for the exchange of literary novels in Hindi even fifty years after independence. Importantly, much lower literacy rates among women, long understood to represent the traditional target readership for novel literature in Europe, Britain and the US from the nineteenth century onwards, probably meant that arguably a key demographic of a robust literary marketplace did not exist in north India. In an age when notions of the masses and their lives were becoming increasingly important politically, this struggle to find a market stood in direct contrast to the idea that earlier devotional poetic traditions were demotic by their very nature. If average print-runs reveal anything, it is that historically the readership for literary novels in Hindi remained extremely small throughout the twentieth century, being perhaps limited to the class of producers and a small number of educated devotees.¹⁰ However, this absence of broad consumption by a population that

¹⁰ There exists scant data on reception in this realm, but, if print-runs are any indication, the literary novel in Hindi did not have wide circulation in the marketplace. The literary historian Francesca Orsini, in her groundbreaking study of Hindi journals published from 1920-1940, includes figures on Hindi publications in Uttar Pradesh from 1915-1940. According to these figures, the average print-run for a work of fiction over this twenty-five-year period was approximately 1500 copies. In addition to this, the number of titles in fiction published in any given year over this 25-year period cited in her study remained between 105 and 283. It is possible to argue that the average print run for a literary novel over the course of the twentieth century remained constant at between 1000-2000 copies per edition, regardless of the publisher, author, or the work. Often editions remained in hardback and were intended as library editions, which were routinely given government grants for their acquisitions. However, more work needs

could not access the market was clearly less of a concern for writers throughout the nationalist and into the post-independence period movement, who were often imbued with a sense of patriotic responsibility, believing that they were producing their literary texts to add to the storehouse of national literature. This notion was underpinned by the late-eighteenth-century belief that modern nations were cultural spheres bounded by their languages, the most tangible sign of which was modern literature produced in them.

While persistently low literacy rates (particularly among women) and the oppressive poverty of the vast majority of the Hindi-speaking population mitigated against the consolidation of a market for literary novels in Hindi, another possible reason for their relative neglect in the critical realm is the status of Hindi relative to English in the subcontinent, and the role that this may have played in patterns of consumption among the educated elite. After the British enacted an education policy that placed an emphasis on the provision of English education in the middle of the nineteenth century, according to which English was made the medium of instruction at the tertiary level, the majority of those who were highly educated in Hindi were also

to be done on reception, as print-runs cannot tell us much about consumption, but rather only provide us with limited information about production. They give no indication of the process by which commercial enterprises such as publishers made or make decisions on the size of their print-runs, taking into account economies of scale and such things as the subsidizing of particular publications with more lucrative (often government) commercial contracts. In other words, the decision to publish 1000 copies of a novel, regardless of how many may sell and over what period of time, may be made as a part of a larger publishing schedule, which may take into account the existence of more commercially viable contracts. Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 71.

educated in English.¹¹ For this reason, as a commodity in the marketplace, literary fiction in Hindi and in the other vernacular languages has historically remained in competition with literary fiction in English in South Asia. Indeed, rather than abate after independence, English as *the* language of the marketplace in India, thanks to its global significance, became even more consolidated. While it has remained difficult to compare the readership for Hindi-language fiction with fiction in English over the twentieth century, it is possible to argue that the market for fiction in English has grown significantly since the 1990s, as evidenced by the advent of major global publishing houses around this time.¹² Arguably, the struggle Hindi writers faced attempting to reach an audience became more of a critical issue after the liberalization of the economy in 1990, when consumption came to be understood by many scholars and cultural critics as a much more important organizing principle when it came to the study of cultural artefacts producing in South Asia. This emphasis on consumption as essential to the study of cultural production is highlighted by the scholarly turn to commercial Hindi cinema after 1990, a previously much-maligned form of culture-commodity, by political scientists, literary scholars and cultural critics.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 384-452.

¹² The advent of international publishing houses such as Penguin (subsequently Penguin Random House) and HarperCollins in India from the 1980s, as well as the success of authors such as Chetan Bhagat bear this out. The influence of English in South Asia on the educated elite is increasingly evident in recent literary fiction in Hindi as well. For an example of this, see the volume of short stories by Divya Prakash Dubey, *Masālā cāy* [*Masala Chai*] (Dillī, Hind Yugma, 2014). Increasingly writers such as Dubey use the Roman script to write English words, where once they were conventionally transliterated into the Devanagari script. In Dubey's volume of short stories, of the eleven titles, seven are entirely in English written in the Roman script, while three are entirely in Devanagari, and one combines the two.

However, in spite of these very real obstacles, an impressive number of dedicated writers made a substantial contribution to the production of fiction in the longer form after the death of Premchand in 1936. These writers were spread throughout the Hindi-speaking region of north India, both in larger metropolitan centers and smaller provincial cities, from the modern-day states of Rajasthan and the Punjab in the west to West Bengal in the east, and from Uttarakhand in the north to Madhya Pradesh in the middle of the country. While novelists and their works may have received significantly less critical attention, as well as struggled to find a market for their literary fiction throughout much of the twentieth century, it was certainly not the case that this genre remained neglected by litterateurs relative to other genres in Hindi, or in comparison with other languages in South Asia.¹³

The emphasis on consumption as a mark of cultural significance in the study of textual practice in South Asia is further highlighted by the recent academic turn to the study of the emergence of popular or pulp fiction in Hindi over the course of the twentieth century.¹⁴ Here popular or pulp fiction meant purely

¹³ For a survey of 83 of the most prominent Hindi novelists of the twentieth century see, Bhagvatisharan Mishra, *Hindī ke carcit upanyāskār* [*Notable Hindi Novelists*] (Delhi: Rajpal, 2010). For a survey of some of the most important novels produced from 1940 until 2000, see Gopal Ray, *Hindi upanyās kā itihās* [*A History of the Hindi Novel*] (Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2013 [2002]); Bhishma Sahni, et al (eds), *Ādhunik Hindī upanyās 1* [*The Modern Hindi Novel 1*] (Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2010 [1976]); and Namvar Singh (ed.), *Ādhunik Hindī upanyās 2* [*The Modern Hindi Novel 2*] (Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2010).

¹⁴ See, for example, Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), 198–225. The notion of consumption as a determination in the study of cultural production is, of course, most evident in the scholarly turn to commercial Hindi cinema from the final decade of the twentieth century.

instrumentalist texts written with the purpose of providing entertainment for the sake of economic profit. The novels of the Banaras writer Devkinandan Khatri (1861-1913) and his sons from the late nineteenth century, as well as crime fiction of writers such as Ved Prakash Sharma (1955-2017) and Surendra Mohan Pathak (b. 1940) from the middle of the 1960s, are increasingly invoked to demonstrate that a readership in Hindi did emerge, at least for this particular form of instrumentalized fiction. The crime fiction of Sharma and Pathak, often inspired by American crime fiction writing and printed on extremely cheap paper at presses in Meerut, was for many years a staple offering at the ubiquitous A.H. Wheeler bookstalls on railway platforms throughout the country. This fiction was clearly designed to be consumed and then immediately discarded by travelers among others. However, its very existence suggested a domain of consumption beyond the world of an elite market for literary texts where Hindi and English competed for a readership. It is not clear precisely how large the readership for this form of fiction was, although it was clearly larger than the readership for literary novels.¹⁵

It is possible to argue that this asymmetry in terms of the market for consumption as well as critical evaluation between English-language novel literature produced in India and literary novels in Hindi, which is underpinned by and in turn underpins the notion that English is *the* language of the global

¹⁵ It is often repeated that Khatri's novels were so popular that people were motivated to learn Hindi. As Francesca Orsini notes, this probably meant that people learned to read the Devanagari script. While this notion appears more of a marketing strategy than a verifiable fact, as is evident from the fact that it appears on recent editions of these texts, nevertheless it is a possibility. However, participation in the marketplace for the exchange of literary texts also necessitates a certain level of education, leisure, and the means to acquire texts. It would perhaps have only been those already literate in the Perso-Arabic script who would have been in this position. *Ibid.*, 198.

literary marketplace, has remained a significant contributing factor to the relative neglect of literary novels in Hindi in the domain of academic production. In the realm of English-language literary criticism in India, this asymmetry is occasionally interpreted in terms of aesthetic shortcomings when it comes to literary novels in Hindi and the struggle to establish a viable market. Literary critics writing in English in India have often written about the novel more broadly and its adoption in the subcontinent during the colonial period. This includes the history of the spread of English education in colonial India in the 19th century, the consumption by the English-educated elites of English novels imported from English, and then their subsequent efforts to write original fiction in English and then the vernacular languages, beginning with Bengali and then spreading to Tamil, Marathi and Hindi.¹⁶ A particular ambivalence towards the novel in Hindi is apparent in this criticism. This ambivalence emerges in articulations surrounding the notion that for some reason, the novel failed to take root in this language.¹⁷ In many ways, such articulations underscore the sense that Hindi and English language fiction were positioned in competition with one another, and that English fiction held a commanding sway when it came to the marketplace. The literary scholar Meenakshi Mukherjee even went as far as to suggest that at the

¹⁶ For a more comprehensive history of this, see Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Meenakshi Mukherjee (ed.), *Early Novels in India* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002). The US-based scholar Priya Joshi has also provided a brief history of the novel in India in Franco Moretti's edited volumes on the novel published by Princeton University Press: Priya Joshi, "India, 1850-1900," in Franco Moretti (ed.), *The Novel Vol I: History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 495-508.

¹⁷ Harish Trivedi, "The Progress of Hindi, Part 2: Hindi and the Nation," in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 958-1022.

beginning of the twenty-first century even well-established writers in vernacular languages could no longer resist the pull of these market forces, and were switching to English to produce their fiction. This, she remarked, stood in stark contrast with nineteenth-century writers, such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894), who began writing in English but switched to Bengali apparently in order to reach a wider audience.¹⁸

Given the fact that Hindi fiction in India is now most often conceptualized as a commodity that is aimed at a subordinate elite, in contrast with English-language fiction, which is understood to be global in its reach, is it possible to argue that literary novels in Hindi may, in some identifiably consistent manner, present a unique perspective on life and historical, economic and cultural shifts *because* they are written in a vernacular language? There has been some debate between literary critics and writers precisely around this idea, that vernacular literary texts somehow present a more authentic representation of social reality in India as it is lived and experienced by those outside of the miniscule English-educated elite classes. This extends to questions surrounding whether the language a writer ‘chooses’ (English or a vernacular) makes a difference when it comes to narrative and representational concerns.¹⁹ The problem with this, however, is that literary

¹⁸ Meenakshi Mukherjee, “Epic and Novel in India,” in Franco Moretti (ed.), *The Novel, Vol I, op. cit.*, 627.

¹⁹ The notion of choice when it comes to self-expression in India and language is a vexed one. Some may argue that there are those for whom there is not choice at all. In other words, they possess the capacity to express themselves in conventionalized literary forms in a single ‘language’ (i.e., English or a vernacular). There is also the argument put forth that literary texts written in English flatten out cultural complexities that can only be rendered in vernacular languages. Around the beginning of the twenty-first century the literary critic Meenakshi Mukherjee and the Indo-Anglian writer,

writers come from such diverse linguistic and social backgrounds, as well as geographical and cultural realms, and, with the advent of Dalit writers from the 1990s onwards, economic circumstances, which comes to be reflected in their literary texts in so many ways, that debates have intensified over whether all of their efforts can or should be gathered under the sign of a single language.²⁰

What is clear from this brief overview of the production and critical reception of the literary novel in Hindi is that there has been a remarkable and sustained history of literary activity in this particular genre, even if these texts have remained more or less neglected in the critical sphere, both in India and in the Anglo-American academy.²¹ It is very much in the spirit of filling this lacuna that Ghirardi has produced her study of twelve literary novels in Hindi published over the final decade of the twentieth century, to determine whether they can be said to have been written in a postmodernist mode, and

Vikram Chandra engaged in just such a debate around language and literary representation in South Asia. For more on this, see Meenakshi Mukherjee, “The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English”, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 48 (Nov. 27, 1993), pp. 2607-2611. For Chandra’s acerbic response to Mukherjee, see Vikram Chandra, “The Cult of Authenticity”, in *Boston Review*, February 1, 2000. <http://bostonreview.net/vikram-chandra-the-cult-of-authenticity> (Last Accessed: 12/30/2020).

²⁰ A good example of this would be the argument that Dalit literary efforts should not be included in the canon of Hindi literature and that Dalit aesthetics are distinctly different to the aesthetics of caste-Hindus writing in Hindi. Another good example of this tension is the emergence of modern prose writing in registers such as Kumaoni in Uttarakhand. While Kumaoni is written in the Devanagari script, it is quite distinct from Modern Standard Hindi.

²¹ One notable recent exception is the English-language study of the figure of the revolutionary in mid-twentieth century Hindi novels by Nikhil Govind, *Between Love and Freedom: The Revolutionary in the Hindi Novel* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014).

what this may tell us about this cultural and literary sphere. In her study, Ghirardi argues that postmodernism, characterized by a growing disillusionment with established institutions and social structures, as well as a sense that the received historical narrative is but one interpretation of past events, became a greater influence on the Hindi literary sphere after economic policies were adopted in the early 1990s to liberalize India's economy and open its markets in an unprecedented manner to global corporations and trade. Ghirardi argues that the transformed economic conditions contributed to a transformation of the literary sphere, whereby authors began to produce narratives that were imbued with characteristics of postmodernism in a more self-conscious manner. After dispelling initial concerns over whether or not literary postmodernism may be said to be an appropriate mode of literary production for this particular cultural/linguistic domain, Ghirardi demonstrates how a diverse range of novelists, located throughout the Hindi-speaking states, produced a variety of novels that could be said to be predominantly postmodern in their tenor and sensibility. In undertaking this project, presumably for an audience interested in world literature, Ghirardi draws our attention to the asymmetries that underpin this particular sphere of academic focus, mediated as it is by English as the language *par excellence* of academic production, and the US as the center of this form of production. If there is a single constant, however, it may be said to be the idea that the literary novel remains a powerful medium through which to reflect on the challenges that face social groups, in particular, social groups with the means and leisure to engage in literary self-expression, situated in different locations throughout the globe. In other words, irrespective of whether or not a conventional literary text can be determined to be fundamentally realist or not, whether it self-reflexively questions the very idea of the individual as the sole creator of literary prose or sublimates this urge for transparency, certain

compulsions continue to underpin this particular form of cultural activity and its study.

In spite of the significant diversity present in the texts (including the backgrounds of their authors) that Ghirardi has chosen, a feature which she argues is in fact marks them as necessarily postmodern, one thing strikes the reader in her methodical study. In their own distinct manner, all of these literary novels could all be said to be meditations on the very concept of identity, and the double-bind of authenticity that appears to infuse so much of life in the age of late-capitalism. That is to say, that the struggle for authenticity and what it means to possess an authentic cultural identity, or inhabit an authentic subjectivity, appears to be fraught with a particular tension, and that this could be said to lie at the heart of a number of literary novels produced Hindi on the cusp of the new millennium. This tension has been identified as the paradox that inheres in the very quest for authenticity and its mediation.²² Whether this phenomenon can be said to have resulted from the economic changes that came into effect from the beginning of the 1990s is harder to posit. However, each of the novels Ghirardi examines can clearly be said to be concerned with this particular late-twentieth-century phenomenon in their own unique manner, as they struggle with the very idea of producing a literary novel in Hindi in what is conventionally understood to be a more globalized world.

Ghirardi's decision to focus on the 1990s, as well as her desire to consider literary novels that may evince traces of postmodernism, ultimately draw our attention to other particularly entrenched hermeneutic practices that continue to inform the construction of the subject in the domain of formal

²² For more on this, see Julia Straub (ed.), *Paradoxes of Authenticity: Studies on a Critical Concept* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 9-29.

academic enquiry. These practices are foregrounded even more boldly in Ghirardi's study precisely because she is concerned with the phenomenon of postmodernism, a phenomenon that is characterized as representing an attempt to destabilize established narratives about the world and historical progress, categories such as 'East' and 'West', boundaries between supposedly discrete cultural domains, and even boundaries between conceptualized languages and notions of a stable identity that can be articulated. In many ways, her study underscores the persistence of the very boundaries that postmodernism is often said to be determined to sweep away. While it may be possible to argue that these boundaries have been re-affirmed by a more intense form of global consumer capitalism that is also capable of appropriating historical/cultural difference for the sake of commodifying them, nevertheless, it suggests that postmodernism contains within itself this inherent tension. The fact that writers in India, producing their literary novels in Hindi, may be read through the lens of postmodernism is a powerful example of the tension which remains unresolvable as to where the boundaries between particular spheres of human activity lie, and who is authorized to imagine/critique them. Indeed, Ghirardi's study demonstrates the fundamental aporia that confronts those who study South Asia, in particular (but not limited to) those who inhabit area studies programs in the Anglo-American academy. That is to say, that the subject must be constructed in a manner which, while it is acknowledged to be dynamic, must remain essentially distinct and, importantly, kept at a distance. This aporia lies at the heart of the area studies paradigm. Its very existence is predicated on a subject whose boundaries are understood to be in constant flux, but cannot be allowed to collapse altogether.

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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. Proper names, place names, and words of common use, like Hindi or caste-system related terms, are written according to the Anglophone usage.

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