Some Thoughts on the Posthuman Condition in the 'Ur-village'

Reading the Hindi Novel *Ādigrām upākhyān* by Kuṇāl Siṃh

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Abstract (English)

This article stems from the workshop *Pensieri nomadi, corpi in movimento. Exploring InFluxes and Cultures in Motion*, that took place in Torino on 16th October 2014 with the aim to activate interdisciplinary lines of research, that can useful in investigating and examining the globalized world we live in, as well as create a bridge between research in the academic flied and activism in the territory. The novel *Ādigrām upākhyān* (*The chronicles of Ādigram*) by Hindi writer Kuṇāl Siṃh has been food for thought for this paper, as it presents some features that can be analyzed as nomadic thinking and that deal with the posthuman condition in the context of the clash between State Government and local population in West Bengal. The aim of the paper is an illustration of some possible links between the discourses of posthumanism and postcolonialism in the literary context. I will discuss issues of knowledge, democracy, and hi/storytelling addressed in the novel, drawing on VC Seshadri, Shiv Visvanathan, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Donna Haraway, and Rosi Braidotti.

Abstract (Italiano)

Questo articolo nasce dal workshop *Pensieri nomadi, corpi in movimento. Exploring InFluxes and Cultures in Motion*, svoltosi a Torino il 16 ottobre 2014 con l'obiettivo di stimolare linee di ricerca interdisciplinare utili per una ricerca e un'analisi del mondo globalizzato in cui viviamo, e di creare un ponte tra la ricerca accademica e l'attivismo sul territorio. Il romanzo *Ādigrām upākhyān* (*Le cronache di Ādigram*) dello scrittore hindi Kuṇāl Siṃh ha dato lo spunto per le riflessioni di questo articolo, poiché presenta alcune caratteristiche che si possono analizzare come pensiero nomade e che trattano della condizione postumana nel contesto dello scontro fra governo statale e popolazione locale in Bengala Occidentale (India). Lo scopo dell'articolo è presentare alcune possibili congruenze tra il discorso postumanista e quello postcoloniale nel contesto letterario. Si discuteranno problemi di epistemologia, democrazia e narrazione di storia/e che affiorano dal romanzo, facendo riferimento a VC Seshadri, Shiv Visvanathan, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Donna Haraway e Rosi Braidotti.

1. *Ādigrām Upākhyān*

Kuṇāl Siṃh's short story *Ādigrām Upākhyān* (*The Chronicles of Ādigram*) was awarded by Bhārtīya Jñānpīṭh in 2009;[3] in 2010 he published a novel with the same title, which was awarded the prize for young writers by the Sāhitya Akadmī, anointing Kuṇāl Siṃh as a Hindi writer of the new generation recognized by the Hindi establishment. Ādigram is the name of a real village located in Dakshin

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[3] Born in Calcutta on February 22, 1980, Kuṇāl Siṃh hails from Kolkata and lives in Delhi, where he got his M.Phil. in Hindi from the Jawaharlal Nehru University. He started publishing poems at a very young age, and has worked as editor for some important literary journals such *Vāgarth.* His short story *Sanātan Bābu kā Dāṃpatya* (*Sanātan Bābu's Happy Married Life*) was awarded by Bhārtīya Jñānpīṭh and Kathā. In 2011, he was nominated best young Hindi writer by Bhārtīya Bhāṣā Pariṣad, New Delhi. His work has been translated into many Indian languages as well as into English and German. He is interested in cinema and is also a translator.

Dinajpur district in West Bengal, India, but in the novel it functions as the prototypical village, it is the 'Ur-village' – *ādi* (primal, original) + *grām* (village). This is how I am going to read its chronicle, as a story of the postcolonial subaltern subject in a posthuman perspective. I am not much interested in the literary quality of the text, somewhat flawed by too many passages that seem mere *exercices de style*; my focus in on the possibility of taking the novel as a starting point to trace possible links between the discourses of posthumanism and postcolonialism in the literary context. Ādigram can be read as the symbol of what is globally happening wherever farmers' lands are expropriated, and local population are displaced in the name of progress and development.

Ādigrām Upākhyān is a political novel, clearly written in connection to the case of Nandigram, 2007 (Sarkar and Chowdhury 2009). It has no linear story, but to summarize the main storyline, it tells how the Government of West Bengal –the elected Communist Party longest in office in the world– authorizes the expropriation of land to be allocated to a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), with a development plan including the arrival of multinationals. The local population, which has a history of participation in activities of the Maoist armed struggle, opposes the plan and organizes forms of resistance. The repression is violent and brutal, but it will fail to quell the revolt.

Ādigrām Upākhyān depicts the growth of the anti-land acquisition movement in a remote village in West Bengal. The mainstream historiography has argued that land acquisition policies and the subsequent resistance at Nandigram were an effect of neoliberal policies. Actually, the process of economic liberalization that began in the 1990s in India is linked to an accentuation of criminalization of politics, corruption, bureaucratization, and collapse of ideology. The crisis of the Bengali leftist parties becomes an example of the process through which politics has emptied out of any ideal meaning and has ended out being the *longa manus* of the major powers. The publicly projected image of the village projects it as a microcosmic peasant utopia, or as a unified 'village community'. Nevertheless, through the different stories that are narrated in the novel it clearly appears that anti-land acquisition movements are inherently polysemic phenomena that are home to a multitude of aspirations, ambitions and desires. Locally embedded social cleavages and identities are negotiated during the course of the anti-land acquisition movement. In fact, local interests, aspirations and desires are sharply divided along multiple social fault lines such as class, politics, and gender, within the movement itself: between poor, untouchable landless agricultural laborers and intermediate caste land owners/supervisors; between party political 'leaders' and 'followers'; between patrons and clients; and between men and women (Nielsen 2010; Nielsen and Waldrop 2014, 203-218).

Kuṇāl Siṃh takes inspiration from great storytelling lover and heir of the great Indian narrative tradition Phanishvarnath Renu's model of "choral novel" (Hansen 1981), composing a text where not only there is no linear story, but there is also no protagonist. The story is organized in chapters/sections, each having two titles, a stratagem that emphasizes a multiplicity of voices. Such a complexity is also exacerbated by numerous digressions. The novel, therefore, is not realist in style, but becomes a mosaic of stories and viewpoints, with a fragmentation of focalization points. The characters are farmers, small traders, thieves, children, men and women, and each of them becomes the starting point of a story through which new aspects of the described reality are revealed.

For example, the first character the reader is introduced to is Baghā, the old village thief who steals only at night and lives in the ruins of the *zamīndār*'s palace. His disciple and adoptive son,

Dakkhinā, becomes instead representative of the most modern forms of crime, and he will eventually join the special police forces – so that he can steal in broad daylight! Gulāb, Dakkhinā's partner/wife, is an illegal migrant from Bangladesh. She does not accept Dakkhinā's choice and will eventually leave him to join the Mātaṃginī Hāzrā Vāhinī, a group of female fighters opposing the police violence.

Another key figure is Harādhan. He is one of the few educated people in the region not only because he can read and write, but because he possesses three books. He is not married, as it is rumored that he is the son of a ghost. His murder by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI] area secretary will trigger violence in the region. The other local intellectual is Harādhan's friend Photographer, who publishes the local newspaper, *The third eye*. He suffers from night blindness but tries to keep it hidden; he also does not believe to his eyes and must perform compulsive rituals, ever coming back to check things.

Among the characters who are actively engaged in politics stands out Rāsbihārī Ghoṣ, the district deputy, a functionary of the CPI, the ruling party. Opposed to him is Raghunāth, who is engaged in politics in the form of armed struggle. People say that he got his training in Jharkhand, but subsequently quit the armed groups and got connected to an Adivasi tribe, becoming the community headman. When he visits the village once a year, he becomes the focus of attraction for all young people.

The village is a meeting place where things and ideas are exchanged: Fāṭākeṣṭo, who "knows everything about Mao Zedong, Saddam Hussein, George Bush, America and Vietnam," runs a tea kiosk near the highway, which is the place where people get together, discuss, comment, talk. Exchanges also occur between the different communities and through moving people: for example, Buddhadev, who loves music and poetry, marries a Santali woman, and subsequently emigrates to Kolkata, where he gets a job. When Ādigram is placed under siege, though, he and other workers hailing from Ādigram are laid off: they will get back the job only if they can present a certificate stating that they are not terrorists.

Children have a pivotal role in Ādigram's life. They act as a group but have complex individual stories that are told in digressions and come back over and over in the narration. For example, Belā is the invisible girl, being the daughter of parents who desired a male; Ḍhoḍhāī ran away from home because he is addicted to smoking bidis, and lives on trees; Saddām Husain started drinking when he was nine in order to get over the mourning of his mother.

Last, but not least, there are the creatures of the forest, liminal beings who are discriminated by the village society, but with whom they nevertheless maintain is a constant relation: the Santali community, the Kinnar group, and wild animals.

Ādigrām Upākhyān tells many stories, but one common feature on which I want to focus is the notion that the villagers' knowledge is different from the official one: in the eyes of the State, the corporation, the police, the media, whatever villagers say or think is not valid, not reliable, as they are backward people and cannot understand what is really important. The clash between Ādigram's population and the supporters of 'newness' is very much the clash of different ways of knowing the world. In the next sections I will discuss some epistemic issues connected to posthuman subalterns, and in the final section I will come back to the novel introducing an example of subaltern knowledge in a posthuman context.

2. Nomadic thinking and the posthuman condition

Nomadic thinking is the invention of ever new concepts and ideas. Deleuze and Guattari (1988) define it as the process of getting out of a 'territory' whose warp and woof represent identity and identification processed. Nomadic is not 'leaving', but rather 'not territorialize', it means to re-territorialize on the deterritorialized. The nomadic intellect does not migrate: it is a perpetual getting out without knowing where to go, within the vortex of a flat space-time. It is the experience of the in between, where rhyzomatic knowledge can be found. It is the exteriority with respect to the semiotic apparatuses of the state –nation, empire– "a power (*puissance*) against sovereignty, a machine against the apparatus" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 352). The nomadic subject, according to the anti-psychoanalytic teaching by Deleuze and Guattari, does not adher to herself, but it is a perpetual return of paradoxes, a structural failure of adherence to rules, roles, model imposed by the dominant majority.

Nomadic subjectivity is post-identitarian and non-linear (Braidotti 1994). The nomadic subject is never based on the individual but it is always relational, it is embodied and situated and is able to think any difference starting from sexual difference. The nomadic subject is in a constantly reprocessing relation to her origins: this is one of the reasons why nomadic persons are excellent narrators and storytellers. In Braidotti's formulation (2005), nomadic thinking abandons classical dichotomies in favour of a plural thinking towards future. The nomadic subject is not inside or outside, but inhabits a dynamic process 'in becoming' within a complex relational system. Nomadic space is not a relative global, but an absolute local. This view shakes the anthropocentrism that is embedded in much philosophical and biological thinking.

The topic of the posthuman has been debated for at least two decades, with reference to the great technological revolution and the advent of bio-genetic, bio-technologies, neuro-sciences, the success psycho-cognitive sciences and cybernetic. Here again, there is a sort of binary regarding the positions on the issue: either an exalted acceptance of the new reality, or a radical criticism of it. I take the expression "the posthuman condition" from Pepperell's ground-breaking book (1995), that proposed a posthuman manifesto claiming the end of a human-centric universe. This implies the end of humanism, according to which humans enjoy superiority and uniqueness compared to other living beings, and an arrogant human infallibility is postulated, ignoring the exploitation of the environment, of animals and plants, as well as the exploitation of humans on other human beings. The term 'posthuman' has been variously defined (Hayles 1999; Gray and Mentor 1995; Wolfe 2010; Latour 1993), but it generally describes a condition or a perspective that radically challenge the very notion of 'human', calling for a redefinition of this concept involving various disciplines and theoretical orientations, with implications for the social, cultural, political, economic, and material sphere. The notion of 'posthuman' has many articulations, but it focuses on the absence of essential differences between humans and machines, more generally on cybernetic mechanism and biologic organism. The posthuman rethinking of notions of 'individual' and 'human' takes the lead from the consideration of how subjectivities, bodies, agencies and cognition modify as they are connected to technologies and communication webs. This decenters, destabilizes, complicates the categories of human and individual. In this paper, though, I don't want to discuss posthumanism in the Haraway cyborg style (1991), meaning to be 'after' our embodiment. I embrace posthumanist theory in the sense Braidotti proposes it (2013), countering phantasies of disembodiment and autonomy inherited

by humanism. This theory overturns the notion of a stable, independent, 'uniquely human' human self, in the hope to create the conditions for the emergence of less violent social and political relations. The posthuman becoming is a process of redefinition of the sense of connection to a shared worlds and the environment – be it urban, social, psychic, ecologic or planetary.

3. Which posthumanism for subalterns?

Spivak emphasized how the legitimation of the colonial project was based on some assertions regarding indigenous populations postulating that they were "not graduated into humanhood" (1991: 229). These people were more or less 'animals', but definitely 'not human.' This explains very well the fact that groups, communities and populations that have been emarginated resist the idea of abandoning a notion of full humanistic subjectivity, with all the benefits that this implies. Even more so, as they should do it in the very historical moment when they are "ready for graduation". Many theorists and critics of the contemporary society, though, have pointed out that becoming posthuman is not a matter of choice: this is something that has already happened, in a particularly evident way in science, technology, and medicine. Haraway (1991, 151- 55) has been one of the vocal philosophers about the fact that the present time is an irremediably posthuman time, when borders between animal and human, organism and machine, physical and non-physical have collapsed, creating a triple hybridity. This creates a context where the solution may lie not in claiming that 'we are not animals', but rather that 'we are all animals'.

Tribal communities living on forest products and populations living on farming are directly affected by the scientific researches supported by a post/transhumanist agenda: bio-technology and genetically modified seeds have direct repercussions on their life, as they are affecting the environment and killing bio-diversity, so that farmers cannot reproduce seeds as they have done for centuries, but they must buy them from transnational companies like Monsanto. Instead of solving core issues like local population's rights over forests, forest produce, people's rights over land and resources, and the trader-contractor-politician nexus, the Indian central and regional governments have signed hundreds of memoranda of understanding with foreign and domestic companies for exploitation of minerals without the consent of the local people. The Government of India too is in the globalization process: in the name of globalization resources around which millions of people live –such as water, forests, and land (*jal, jaṅgal, jamīn*)– are expropriated and given to corporate houses, creating poverty and misery in the villages. At the core of the clash between the governments and the Maoists lies the question of ownership of *jal, jaṅgal,* and *jamīn* of the tribal local population, who used to be the owners of the mineral-rich region, and the model of development which the governments – State as well as the Union – are thrusting upon them. The message, meaning and politics of the resistance movement cannot easily be subsumed under unequivocal shorthand labels such as anti-industry, anti-globalization and/or anti-development.

3.1. Cognitive justice

Posthumanist critique need not be thought of as an import from 'the West:' at least one indigenous articulation of criticism to humanism can be found, for example, in the criticism to modern science and the politics of knowledge proposed in the past century by Dr. Chetput Venkatasubban (CV) Seshadri (1930 – 1995), who claimed that there is no special place for man in the universe and no

special epoch for man in the universe. A chemical engineer, he got his PhD from Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh, USA), was Professor and Head of the Chemical Engineering Department of Indian Institute of Technology in Kanpur, and was the founding director of the Shri AMM Murugappa Chettiar Research Centre. Seshadri denounced that the modern scientific method is not value-free: "many concepts that are accepted as absolutely self-evident once stated or as arising out of a 'scientific method' are really based on very deep-seated cultural roots that need not necessarily be universal; consequently they become very difficult to stream into the consciousness of the practicing engineer who does not share the tradition" (Seshadri 1982, 5). The 'scientific method' has its roots in the Judaic-Christian Weltanschauung, based on an anthropocentric vision of the world (Seshadri and Visvanathan 2002). In order to investigate alternative epistemologies Seshadri founded the PPST (Patriotic & People Oriented Science and Technology) Foundation, an institution that, despite the infelicitous name, turned out to be an active epistemic workshop, where scientists and intellectuals would meet semi-literate farmers and craftspersons in informal, lively and inspiring conferences.

Seshadri equated modernity to colonialism and stated that it required alternatives, as science and technology fail to explore the tacit epistemology underlying their life worlds, obfuscating its historical and cultural roots. Modern science aligned itself with colonialism, providing justification for imperialism and expansionism into Africa and Asia. European colonial powers claimed a monopoly in knowledge in order to retain their claimed superiority. They imposed their own epistemological paradigm as universal discarding any alternative epistemology: any other 'third world' forms of acquisition or accumulation of knowledge, such as Indian scientific and technological traditions, were labelled as worthless, obsolete, magical, to be eliminated.

Seshadri's critique of thermodynamics exposed its economic root, the fact that it links energy to its utilization, becoming the only criterion in order to prioritize resources. This creates a gap between "an industrial high calorie regime" and "biomass society", leaving second rate science for a second rate society. In fact, in mainstream taxonomies of energy, biomass is categorized as residual, low in the list of 'efficient energy' such as nuclear, oil, hydroelectric power, or even wind energy, and biomass is reduced to the language of scarcity and crisis, as a way of life of societies outside the pale of industrialism.

The best example for this is the forest. Forest was used for multifarious purposes, wood was used both as domestic and industrial fuel (melting metals, molasses production). The so-called 'tribal' communities got food, fuel, medicines, and fodder. Yet, starting with colonial timber exploitation to contemporary paper industry, the forest becomes a reservoir for paper industry that, according to 'modern' energetic considerations, promotes the only efficient use of it, as raw material for paper and cellulose industry. Local population loses the right to access the forest in order to get forest products. Forest policies in colonial India started this process long time ago and today, in the name of development, forests are being converted into on-crop cultivations of fast growing eucalyptus (Gadgil and Guha 1992).

The idea of progress and development in its linear form is completely disadvantageous to tribal populations, "violence is the value of science" (Seshadri 1974, 3). Thus, 'backward' farmers and tribals from the 'third world' not only must face the violence of national states and translnational corporations, but the very logic of modern science. Seshadri identifies the "biomass society" as a radical critique to science and technology: Chipko and anti-dam or anti land-grab movements can

succeed only if the laws of energy are written anew. It is clear nowadays that nuclear, oil, the green revolution and/or modern medicine are not sustainable solutions for the earth. Together with techno-futurist sceneries, also the local and the traditional become sites of innovation.

The resistance and victory of biomass societies to an "industrial high calorie regime" is exemplified in Seshadri's view by the Vietnam War. This analogy is recurrent in *Ādigrām upākhyān* as well, where not only the Vietnam-like guerilla organized by the population is described, but also the last chapter (*Ye daaġ daaġ ujālā.../ Amār nām tomār nām Viyatnām Viatnām* [This stained tainted light.../My name your name Vietnam Vietnam]) focuses on the state response to it that takes place in Ādigrām. When Harādhan Maṇḍal is shot by the secretary of the local CPI cell (the governing party), this creates the *casus belli*: slowly the opposition gets overt and a demonstration is organized, but the ruling party reacts with a violent repression and the adoption of the military strategies that were used by the USA army in Vietnam. The major difference is that in this case there is no declared military conflict, nor two armies facing each other, but the local population is attacked by a coalition of the forces of the global capitalism and the nation- state. To use Seshadri's vocabulary, the State – that in the case of West Bengal is a leftist government– has no problems with electricity and industrialization plans, but cannot accept the biomass, insofar it is composed by a composite and complex mix of ordinary people that cannot be collectively organized and standardized by trainers, educators, masters and other agents of the hegemonic culture.

> You and I, we have all seen the demonstration in Kolkata, when over one million people filled the roads against America's attack to Vietnam, they say it was the most participated protest march in the world. You remember clearly, posters had the writing "Amar nām tomar nām Vietnām Vietnām". Today again this sort of demonstrations have appeared and can be seen in Kolkata, but Ādigrām has taken the place of Vietnām. (184)

The notion of biomass is not only confined to a discourse about the environment and Nature, but it requests to discuss and reinvent the very basis of science, citizenship, and society, all grounded on a covert recognition of human superiority in the universe – a claim that much research on biology has proven false, insofar many animal communities are far superior in some features to the human ones (Haraway 2008). Biomass politics goes beyond the ideas of freedom and equality, it is beyond the discourse of Enlightment and French revolution, of the Communist Manifesto or human rights: it focuses on the feelings that bond humans and nature. Seshadri contrasts the triangle 'liberté egalité fraternité', that constitutes the fundamental basis of modern politics, to another triangle: 'pollution, waste, obsolescence.' This triad recognizes the interrelation among many different complex systems, and takes into account the cyclic nature of processes that is otherwise ignored. Scientific and technological knowledge are synonymous just for 'Western' science and knowledge: for example, the World Bank K4D (Knowledge for development) program is based on the assumption that "basic components of the knowledge economy are readily available, why not appropriate them for growth and innovation" and it aims to "the development of country plans that integrate ICTs into the educational system." (World Bank 2008, cover) This is apparently a very benign statement, yet the World Bank seem to "have created newer and alternative mechanisms (that are not so direct and interventionist like before rather more subtle and indirect) that allow it to sustain its prior status-

quo (i.e. continue to be the dominant actor in its relationship with Global South12) only to advance its agenda of creating a global neoliberal order" (Surma 2011, 4-5).

In this vision development may happen only if people have access/right to information. Knowledge acquisition in this formulation presupposes that knowledge is separated by the knower, that whatever is situated in the knower has simply no value: the knower has no knowledge at all. In fact, other sources of knowledge are at best considered as 'ethno-science' –which is very telling about the racist assumption that anything connected to white/European is the norm, is not ethnically connoted– pre-scientific, which means primitive, savage, superstitious. They are no knowledge at all, as whatever they know – agriculture, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, theoretical sciences, husbandry, weaving, water reservoirs, soil conservation techniques– is not recognized as a form of scientific and technological knowledge, as it is not created in the laboratory, which is the center, the place where invention occurs. In this view, any other place – the village, the city, the slum, civil society – is the periphery, a marginal region where only innovation and diffusion can happen, but no invention.

Counterposed to this view, there is the "carnival" of non-mainstream knowledge (Visvanathan 1997), that admits the existence of different forms of knowledge and problem-solving ability for common people, recognizing the innovative world of invention by commoners. This is a know-how reservoir that has been passed on generation by generation, implying a radically democratic knowledge system, that Visvanathan calles "cognitive justice." Instead of referring to standard cartographies of power and innovation forms of knowledge based on the notion of complexity,

> "represent new forms of power sharing and problem-solving that go beyond the limits of voice and resistance" [reframing] "the axiomatics of knowledge based on hospitality, community, non-violence, humility and a multiple idea of time, where the citizen as trustee and inventor visualizes and creates a new self reflexive idea of democracy around actual communities of practice" (Visvanathan 2009).

3.2 Obsolescence, belatedness and repetition

In the previous sections I highlighted how the issue of hegemonic or subaltern forms of knowledge is crucial. Particularly in the trans-human discourse (Moravec 1988) the 'subaltern,' who has no access to the advanced technological hegemonic knowledge, is more than ever the 'Other' of the 'posthuman.' Population that have access to every technology are necessarily hegemonic, while those who have little or no access to it – the poor in terms both of money and access to technology– are the subordinated, who are doomed to be dominated by those who control money, technology, and power. Even if we embrace a progressive vision and grant that today's (non-human) subaltern will be tomorrow's human, they will remain pre-posthuman: the anachronistic effort of people who have not been considered and treated as humans to get humanism is desperately out-of-date. Their pre-posthuman subaltern agency relegates them into the sphere of otherness. Therefore the subalterns' destiny seem to be constantly obsolete and late: even if they get partial access to technology, their control on it remains scarce. They appear to be the disposable waste of society, their knowledge being what Foucault would define a "subjugated knowledge" (1980, 82).

Actually, the notion of 'belatedness' was an integrant feature of colonial historiography (Chakrabarty 2000). Apparently, though, the curse of being late has been cancelled from 'shining

India' thanks to the technological turn, the introduction of neoliberal capitalism and globalization (Chakrabarty 2011). India is no more a 'backward' country, it has become 'contemporary'. Industrial globalization, consumerism, and urbanization have brought about 'the new'. Therefore belatedness has been confined to subaltern, to the 'biomass society.' The problem is that in a system structured on relations of 'before' and 'after', if something happens that looks like something else, what comes 'after' appears as 'belated'. This introduces the issue of difference, repetition, and change (in the sense of the rise of something really new). According to Deleuze (1971), new and repetition are not opposed. It is through repetition that newness comes into the world, through defacement and displacement (moving, removal, replacement, relocation, transfer): things really change not when A transforms itself into B, but when, while A remains exactly the same with regard to its actual properties, it imperceptibly "totally changes."

As Asha Achuthan (2015,47) aptly noticed, "(p)redominant critiques of science in India that continue to have valence today [...] (h)ave articulated the empirical subaltern as seat of resistance to technology, retaining, in this move, the commitment to the 'human' of liberalism that they also purport to critique. Such a subaltern is also seen as having cultural continuities, in whatever inchoate fashion, with an anterior difference – an immutable past. When such a 'subaltern-as-resistant' is purported to offer crisis to western science, as the hybridity framework suggests, resistance is asked to carry the referent of revolution, without fulfilling the promise of inversion of the dialectic that revolution, to merit the name, must carry. I would suggest that, in such a case, resistance remains the Kuhnian anomaly, without converting to crisis." It is crucial therefore to investigate belatedness and repetition under a new perspective, in order to interrogate failures, waste, gaps that inevitably remain in the translation, in the retelling of A into B.

3.3. Common sense, nonsense, and resistance to epistemic violence

Before introducing the final section that introduces a literary example of the issues so far discussed, I will now turn to the double epigraph put at the beginning of *Ādigrām upākhyān.* The first is a Hindi quote from Hindi poet Nāgārjun:[4] *Āo rānī ham ḍhoeṃge pālkī /yahī huī hai rāy Javāharlāl kī* (Come, queen, we will carry the palanquin/ this is what Javāharlāl set!). This poem is a satirical comment on the extravagant welcome thrown by prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, for Queen Elizabeth during her 1961 visit to India (the full text of the poem is available online: Nāgārjun 2015). The political meaning of this quotation, hinting to the contemporary forms of neocolonialism, is clear enough.

The second epigraph –in English– quotes Alice's walrus, giving a false reference to *Alice in Wonderland* when it is actually a quote from *Through the Looking-Glass.* What has this to do with a whole discourse about the insurrection of subjugated knowledge and recycling ideas? I think this is a perfect frame for the "resurgence of biomass". Interestingly enough, also Deleuze (1996; 2005) plays with Alice. He follows her in her constant change in shape and size, in her chaotic encounters with strange and unexpected creatures. Alice often proves uncertain, she is constantly questioning, somehow resisting to the events, and getting carried by the overturning of things and of their

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[4] Born Vaidyanāth Miśra (1911 – 1998), he wrote extensively in Hindi and Maithili , and was renowned as the 'people's poet'. A revolutionary inspired by the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, he was an activist in the struggles of the poor and landless peasantry and was a leader in anti-system movements in North India (Consolaro 2011, 155-158).

meaning. Moving and transforming continuously, Alice learns to live within the paradoxes, she learns to ask questions swapping subject and object, cause and effect, and looking for new meaning to words and phrases. Deleuze likes Alice because she is nomadic. Her uncertainty is not just made of doubt, but of attempts. In Deleuze's reading, Alice with her constant changes goes beyond common sense, against the habit to assign a fixed identity to things. Common sense is generally based on the binary depth/height. Alice/Deleuze proposes a third path, that is the thought of surface, of nonsense, paradox, folly, dream. The folly connected to this logic of meaning is a process of self-change that leads to learning how to inhabit nonsense. This is what allows to re-think our world, to appreciate non-hegemonic forms of knowledge that can help us find meaning again.

4. Story-telling, history-telling

In the final section I come back to *Ādigrām upākhyān*, focusing on two passages showing how knowledge (non-hegemonic as well as hegemonic) is disseminated through storytelling. I will introduce much plot summary and some translated passages, that are meant to be read having in mind the previous discussion. In the novel two characters are introduced as story-tellers, and they are actually the ones who put together fragments of knowledge that help the villagers to get awareness of their past and their present situation. Gyanendra Pandey uses the term "fragment" to term the kind of historical sources that are often neglected by mainstream historians. Mainstream – nationalist– historiography depends on the state archives and elite documents. The recovery of subaltern speech is a struggle where the "access to the authentic voice and history of subordinated and marginalized groups" is circumscribed by the imbrication of popular forms, oral histories, and memories by "the language of the dominant and the privileged" (Pandey 2005: 62) This discussion calls for an interrogation of "the historical construction of the totalities we work with, the contradictions that survive within [fragments], the possibilities they appear to fulfill, and the possibilities they suppress at the same time" (Pandey 2005, 67).

The first passage I want to introduce is told by Parimlendu Dā, the village story-teller, who constantly repeats 'stories' about Ādigrām's 'history'. In the chapter titled *Which Babarnama mentions Adigram? The hot fragrance of rice reached the old man* (60-70), children insist to listen once more to the story of Rānī Rāsmaṇī.

Rānī Rāsmaṇī (commonly called Rani Rashmoni, 1793—1861) is a historical figure (Dakshineswar 2015). Born into a poor farming family, she is said to have been exceptionally beautiful, and she was married into a wealthy *zamīndār* family when she was eleven years old. After her husband's death she took charge of the *zamīndārī*, proving herself a natural leader. Being very pious from childhood, she founded the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, Kolkata, appointing Śrī Rāmkṛṣṇa Paramahaṃs as the priest of the temple. She remained closely associated to him, leading an extremely religious and austere life, as a widow was supposed to do in Bengali Hindu society of the time. Her daring performance and confrontations with the British made her a legendary figure whose story became household tale in her time.

Parimlendu Dā's version of this her/story as well as his other narratives of Ādigrām's past emphasize that the social structure of the region contained significant caste, class and gender divisions, but people in the region still united to resist the colonial state when threatened, such as against the colonial power. His construction of Rānī Rāsmaṇī is chronologically set in the second half

of the 18th century, but the *zamīndār* she is married to is Bābar, whose palace was in Ādigrām – the Muġal king Bābur actually lived in the 15th-16th century. Interestingly enough, the description of the arrival of the revenue agents of the East India Company has striking resemblance to the depiction of the arrival of multinational corporation agents: two white men, the third one is an interpreter who knows local dialects and English. They announce the villagers of Ādigrām that their land has become property of the East India Company, and that they have to pay land revenue to the Company. Local people react and one day the corpses of both white men are found in the forest of Ādigrām. This is the very first murder to happen in the history of Ādigrām.

> … and it was not of one single person, but of two, both white officers. People came to see from far away. The corpse's skin had become stiffen like trees. People could not decide whether the corpses had to be burn like Hindus of buried like Muslims. Hindus were not willing to accept that cremation might be the last rite for mlecchas, and on the other side, Muslims too were not ready to give some ground in their cemeteries. For the first time in the whole region two corpses were abandoned to wild animals. For the first time wild animals tasted human blood. (63-64)

The British reaction is extremely violent: the army is sent to fight weaponless peasant who have family and children, therefore it is a one-sided battle. Farmers not only become peasants even on their own land, but before sowing the crops – rice, or else opium or indigo – they must now get permission from the Company. To make things worse, enters famine: even if people are starving the Company does not concede any reduction in the land revenue.

Rānī Rāsmaṇī maintains the characteristic of extreme beauty, but in Parimlendu Dā's story she also possesses the features of the *sūfī* Divine love: her sight causes in any man an unquenchable passion and, like in the famous poem *Padmāvat*, he sets out for a journey of renunciation to the self, a quest for a mystical fusion with the object of his love (de Bruijn 2012). Parimlendu Dā continues his story introducing another famine, that hit Bengal when Rānī Rāsmaṇī was eighteen.

> Parimlendu Dā tells that on one side in this region there was the terrible Bengal famine, and on the other side there was the inhuman despotism of the East India Company agents who raised the agrarian tax. With the time, the spark of rebellion started to ignite within those who survived the famine. They united and started organizing sporadic attacks. Corpses of the Company's agents were found sometimes in ponds, sometimes in the forest. Later on in Adigram there was the murder of two other English collectors. In history books this rebellion is called the "Cuāṛ rebellion". The British were unable to crush this rebellion. Even the children of the area had become expert archers. There were secret meeting in the jungle and plans were made about the next actions. For the first time in history slogans like "I'll give my life, but not my land!" resounded.
>
> But what kind of history is Parimlendu Dā talking about? Is there any mention of the "Cuāṛ movement" or slogans like "I'll give my life, but not my land!" in the book prescribed in the school syllabus? Even the master who came from Kolkata to teach history doesn't know anything … and what about the event of October 27th? The children insisted that Parimlendu Dā tell once again the story about October 27th. (67)

As Parimlendu Dā's story goes, on October 27th 1770, a dark new moon night – the same date in 2007 marks the outbreak of violence between Nandigram and the adjoining CPI(M) stronghold–some agents of the Company left Nalhati Bazar in the middle of the night on oxcarts loaded with cereals, unsuspecting what was expecting them. A women fighting battalion confronts the cart procession, led by a naked Rānī Rāsmaṇī depicted as an incarnation of the *śakti* itself. The cart drivers are frozen and the guardian *lāṭhī* soldier literally dissolves in love, undergoing *fanāʾ* –"passing away" or "annihilation" – that is generally meant of the self, but here becomes a complete destruction of his body. In the meantime, the women unload the cereals from the oxcarts and disappear as suddenly as they had come.

This story starts a discussion among the children, who compare the education they are receiving at school to the knowledge of the local history that comes out of Parimlendu Dā's narration.

> So, this Rānī Rāsmaṇī, how could she marry Bābar the *zamīndār*? They say that Bābar was as black as a black night, he had a protuberant belly, one eye was made of stone, he could not hear from one ear, he walked with a limp, and his body constantly smelled like acrid sweat. Could it be that that just for these reasons he was the only one who could marry Rānī Rāsmaṇī?
> "Well, he must have had an excellent education in Kolkata, na?"
> "Of course!" said Saddām in his drunkenness.
> "Then why the history teacher knows nothing about Rānī Rāsmaṇī?"
> "Well, Rānī Rāsmaṇī is from Adigram, the education in Kolkata must be different" ponders Harigopāl.
> "Whachyoumean? Is history taught on different books in different places?", says Bāblū. He has never liked the subject 'history'. He always fails.
> "No, Harigopāl is wrong. One and only history is taught in every place. And Rānī Rāsmaṇī's story in nowhere to be found in the history book that is in use in our school!" Fatikcandra thought out.
> "Who knows, maybe that book is one of those used in Kolkata, and has been accidentally adopted in our school".
> "Who knows, maybe Parimlendu Dā is a liar!"
> "Who knows, maybe he tells the truth, maybe there was actually a Rānī Rāsmaṇī and nobody told us. This is the reason why we think that what Parimlendu Dā tells is a lie". (70)

In the chapter *Give me red, comrade!- The old man carried on the story with a gun, Harādhan was killed* (137-154) another storyteller gives an unsettling turn to the very process of disseminating stories, showing how narrating the world is not a neutral act. Thanks to his mastership in storytelling villagers get awareness of the process through which wars take place and armed conflicts are started and managed. But in a subtle way the coincidence of fiction and reality shows how the storyteller himself is part of the power game he is explaining. This character is a stranger who arrived in Ādigrām on a very inauspicious day, during a solar eclipse. He introduces himself as no *sādhū-mahātmā*, but a pure *kissāgo*, a storyteller who is not "in search of devotees, but listeners". In the magic ambience that he creates the enthralled audience would see the story become true. And this is what literally happens during an anarchical performance of his creative talent while telling a story titled "Give me your blood, I'll give you freedom". This is a story about modern warfare, technology, power, and subaltern people.

It tells about a scientist who had developed an elixir that could made people sick and disabled for generations. He works for a king, who makes him spray it into the surrounding kingdoms provoking a total ethnic cleansing, so that he can take over. After years of continuous war, when he thinks it is time to perform an *aśvamedha* rite and put an end to the armed conquest of the world, he reads in the press about another country possessing an elixir as deadly as his own. The king tries to get hold of the scientist, suspecting that he had given the formula to the enemy, but he is nowhere to be found. He then declares in a press conference that the construction of lethal weapons only leads to the destruction of the world, therefore an agreement must be reached among all countries that possess lethal weapons. He also announces the "third world war," the last and definitive war to Kalinga, the only place that refuses to recognize his supremacy. All media will be allowed to cover the war, and a whole set of merchandising products will be made available: Mission Kalinga T-shirts, video games, stickers, etcetera. The only problem is that Kalinga is a remote and peaceful country, where people are friendly and confident of other people, and have no army or weapon. The General in charge to start the war finally kill some civilians, and sends an SMS to the king announcing that the war has begun on time. By killing civilians, though, the General has antagonized the entire population, that organizes guerilla groups. The sophisticated and technological army is useless against them, therefore a new strategy has to be developed: the king is tired of war, not of winning! Enters media warfare: the king allies with multinational corporations to create SEZ, controls culture and information, and falsifies documents in order to forge a false truth. When the king of Kalinga watches on TV the false news of his own surrender, he dies on the spot. The final act – or the first one of the terrible war that is going to be waged on the village– is the manipulation of knowledge through the infiltration of agents of the hegemonic culture. These are two brothers-storytellers, Alhā and Ūdal, who go to Kalinga disseminating wonderful stories that enchant the whole population – one should point out that the epic of Alhākhaṇḍ , extremely popular in Northern India, "was appropriated and chanted by some Dalit minstrels who reinterpreted it, not as a tale of Rajput but of Dalit chivalry" (Gupta 2010: 323). On repeating Alhā and Ūdal's story about a horrific war in which a man died in a village that could be Ādigrām, the great storyteller invites Harādhan on the stage, taking him as an example of those villagers. The storyteller describes the war with great mastery, to the point that when the first shooting occurs in the story Harādhan shouts, falls to the floor in a pool of blood and while the storyteller is portraying the first death in the war, he actually dies.

The next day *The third eye* publishes a photo showing the local CPI secretary pointing the gun at Harādhan's chest, with blood on the ground. Harādhan was the gentlest man in the village, he was single, devoted only to his work: just like the General in the Kalinga story, the murderer had chosen the easiest target in order to start a war. If Photographer had not interfered with his picture and newspaper the media would even have been able to deny that somebody called Harādhan Maṇḍal had ever lived in the village!

Conclusion

The passages introduced in the previous section show how the clash between subaltern local populations and hegemonic political and economical powers reflects also an epistemological divide, that can be understood within the frame of the postcolonial and posthumanistic discourses. In this article I have read Kuṇāl Siṃh's Hindi novel *Ādigrām upākhyān* as a story of the postcolonial subaltern

subject in a posthuman perspective. Ādigram is the symbol of what is globally happening wherever farmers' lands are expropriated, and local population are displaced in the name of progress and development. I have presented some passages of the novel that illustrate issues of knowledge, democracy, and storytelling. I have discussed some aspects of posthumanist theories emphasizing the presence of an Indian posthumanistic thinking in the thought of V.C. Seshadri. I have connected it to Chakrabarty, Visvanathan, Deleuze, Guattari, Haraway and Braidotti, in order to highlight possible links between the discourses of posthumanism and postcolonialism.

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