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Humor and Dalit trauma: life narratives from Hindi literature and stand-up comedy

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Abstract: Dalits' cultural production has received significant attention for its role in shaping the Indian cultural landscape (Browarczyk, Monika. 2013. The double curse—a Dalit woman autobiography in Hindi by Kausalya Baisantri. *Cracow Indological Studies* 15(2). 169–187, Browarczyk, Monika. 2021. WE are Dalit history: Hindi Dalit autobiographies and their engagements with India's past and present. *Cracow Indological Studies* 23(2). 1–39; Brueck, Laura. 2014. *Writing resistance. The rhetorical imagination of Hindi Dalit literature*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press (ebook edition); Wessler, Heinz W. 2019. From marginalisation to rediscovery of identity: Dalit and Adivasi voices in Hindi literature. *Studia Neophilologica* 92(2). 159–174). However, the function of humor and satire in articulating social assertions by Dalit authors when emphasizing the idea of individual and collective trauma remains underexplored. While some contributions investigated the role of comedy in the shows of a new generation of Dalit stand-up comedians (Shivaprasad, Madhavi. 2020. Humour and the margins: Stand-up comedy and caste in India. *IAFOR. Journal of Media, Communication & Film* 7(1). 23–42, 2022), little attention has been paid to the connections between stand-up comedy and other cultural areas that previously articulated claims of Dalit consciousness (*Dalit chetna*) in the Indian public sphere. This study investigates life narratives produced in Hindi autobiography and stand-up comedy, examining the extent to which humor and satire have been used by Dalit authors as empowering instruments to process trauma (Garrick, Jacqueline. 2006. The humor of trauma survivors: Its application in a therapeutic milieu. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 12 (1, 2): 171–172). It also traces key sociocultural shifts occurring in the narratives produced by Dalit authors in Hindi or Hinglish. The first section offers a critical analysis of *Murdahiya* (2010), a Hindi autobiography by Tulsi Ram, a prominent author and activist of Hindi Dalit literature. The second reflects on narratives by contemporary stand-up comedians with a focus on Manjeet Sarkar, a rising figure in alternative stand-up comedy.

Keywords: trauma; Dalit identity; autobiography; stand-up comedy

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1 Theoretical objectives: analyzing Dalit humor and trauma

According to an article recently published in the journal “The Print,” Hindi Dalit writers have rarely employed satire and humor to narrate trauma. Unlike what happened in the US, where African American writers produced¹ “sharp incisions cutting deep into ‘sensitive’ white privilege,” the history of Hindi satire seems to be marked by an elitarian inclination, and the majority of the canonized humorists and satirists did not belong to less represented groups and communities.² On the other hand, Dalit public figures were often the object of satirical, ironic and humorous caricatures made by upper caste writers to ridicule them (Sundar 2019).³ In this regard, the first theoretical objective of the paper is to examine to what extent this historical interpretation is well-founded while addressing the literary narratives produced by Hindi Dalit writers. The analysis examines the Dalit literary autobiographies (*atmakatha*-s in Hindi), texts that are not conventionally ‘funny’ but nonetheless may have employed humor and satire to portray incongruencies and suffering in everyday Dalit experience. The reflection primarily lies in the survey of the literary work of Tulsi Ram, author of *Murdaahiya* (2010) and other classics of Dalit literary production. The critical analysis of *Murdaahiya* works to answer the following questions: Were humor and satire adopted by this Dalit author? If the answer is affirmative, what were the functions and the rhetorical limits of these modes in the book? How was the relationship between oppressed and oppressors represented in the text? The reflection on this topic is set against the background of the previous secondary literature that, while emphasizing the role of Hindi autobiographies in the dynamics of self-assertion and activism by Dalit writers, has generally avoided the connection between this topic and the alleged adoption of humor in these texts. It is also grounded in conceptualizations about the conditions and limits under which less represented subjects and communities can express a humorous and satirical self

1 The term ‘Dalit’ is used to address the lowest social section of the caste system. This nomenclature is currently preferred by activists and writers belonging to these communities over other terms, such as ‘Scheduled Castes,’ currently adopted by Indian Constitution. Another common name used, especially during the 1920s and 1930s, to define these groups is *Harijan* (People of God) as introduced by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948).

2 The article *Hindi Dalit literature has a gaping hole – satire*, written by Rishabh Pratipaksh, was published on the online page of the journal ‘The Print,’ on 1 August 2021. URL at: <https://theprint.in/opinion/dalit-hindi-literature-has-a-gaping-hole-satire/707068/>.

3 As noted by Sundar in the book *No Laughing Matters: the Ambedkar’s Cartoons 1932–1956*, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), probably the most recognised intellectual and politician of the Dalits’ movement, was also one of the main targets of the satirical and humorous cartoons produced by Indian journals and magazines in the span of time which goes from the 1930s to the 1950s.

through literature. Knight, for example, argues that, if we look at the historical development of literary satire in Europe, this mode has generally been employed especially by authors with an elitarian “frame of mind” (Knight 2004: 6). Similarly, thinkers who support the Superiority Theory approach claim that the expression of humor is rigidly regulated and normalized by social mechanisms and conventions. These boundaries do not generally permit subaltern writers to use satire and humor to question the existing hierarchical order. On the contrary, they are usually “manipulated by the mainstream to vex and marginalise” them and the communities to which they belong (Zekavat 2017: 6). These theoretical perspectives reveal skepticism that less represented authors might use satire and humor for empowering motives. They are also echoed by the words of the Hindi writer and literary critic Kalicharan Snehi, according to whom the seeming absence of a specific trend of Hindi Dalit satire is due to the fact that, before being normalized, the acceptance of Dalit satire should pass through the deconstruction of the “oppressive social structure” that limits and harasses Dalit communities in South Asia.⁴ There are, however, also critical orientations that are more prone to investigate contexts and case studies that reveal opposing tendencies. Twark argues that “through laughter the marginalised can call the dominant into question and thereby assert their existence. By reproducing their identity in relation to the dominant culture and laughing at it, the marginalised act out their belonging to this group” (Twark 2007: 6). This process of “otherness” may also entail some psychological effects. As theorized by Garrick, humor becomes an important trigger strategy that, in some specific contexts, the “trauma survivors” (Garrick 2006: 171-172) and, I could add, subjects who have experienced ethnic and cultural discrimination, can adapt to deal with individual and collective trauma. This theory can also be considered in the context of studies which emphasize the “cathartic” (Dore 2022) value of humor in the management of stressful experiences (Declercq 2021: 2-3). The analysis of *Murdahiya* is, therefore, functional at verifying these opposing theoretical models against the background of Hindi Dalit literature.

The second half of the survey adds another sociocultural layer to the investigation of the subject. It considers the development of new forms of performative humor and satire through the agency of a new generation of stand-up comedians belonging to Dalit groups. This development, that has been only partially analyzed in the past, is examined by exploring the possible continuities between the narratives found in Hindi autobiographical texts and those presented by performers during stand-up comedy shows. If, indeed, the aesthetics of stand-up comedy are epistemologically different from those of autobiographies, there are, nonetheless, two

4 Snehi’s critical reflection was quoted in the article ‘Hindi Dalit literature has a gaping hole – satire,’ published on the Indian journal *The Print* on 1 August 2021.

elements that prompt us towards transdisciplinary comparison. The first and most obvious reason for a comparison regards the relevance that, in both areas of Dalit cultural production, the experience and narration of trauma embodies for the Dalit narrators (Nayar 2008). Trauma is an “exemplary conceptual knot” (Luckhorst 2008: 14) that, in the experience of most Dalit artists, “has departed from its original disciplinary ground and crossed boundaries between various fields and discourses” (Schönfelder 2013: 27-28).

The representation of trauma by Dalit authors, whether in literary or performative contexts, functions as a cultural bridge connecting diverse expressive forms. Despite formal differences, autobiography and stand-up comedy may, on the hypothetical level, both articulate ideological claims by contemporary Dalit agents. There is also a second, less manifest but equally important reasoning that leads us to postulate some transdisciplinary connections between Dalit literature and stand-up comedy. It has been argued in secondary literature about the forms and sociocultural functions of autobiography that any “autobiographical text” is based on the exhibition of a certain “performative self” (Smith 1995: 19-20). So, even when autobiographical writings do not entail a physical embodiment, they generally imply a performative “pact” (Lejeune 1991: 3) between narrator and the imagined audience. We could, therefore, postulate that writers of literary autobiography, like performers, may construct their own narratives by staging a self that recounts the most salient twists and turns of life in front of an implied, but not necessarily visible, public. This view is, among others, supported by Smith, for whom “autobiographical occasions” are, essentially, “dynamic sites” where the subjectivity, by revealing itself, re-creates a “scene” where the narrator interacts with a selected and reconstructed audience (Smith 1995: 19–20).⁵ This reflection may regard any autobiographical text but, more particularly, this is culturally relevant in the context of Dalits’ production. Indeed, the performative value and aesthetics of the Hindi autobiographies is emphasized by studies focusing on the connection between this field and the historical construction of the *Dalit chetna* (Dalit consciousness) (Wessler 2019: 159). If we look at the relationship established by autobiography with certain forms of observational stand-up comedy, some epistemological differences between these areas seem, under certain circumstances, to be more elusive and opaque than imagined. Indeed, if, on the one hand, any

5 On the subject of self-performance in autobiographical writing, Eakin, who considers autobiography more as a “mode” than a proper literary genre, writes that it is an “ambiguous mode of self-assertion” (Eakin 1992: 88). The “scene,” writes Smith, “is at once a literal place, a location, but also a moment in history, a (sociopolitical) space in culture.” The audience “implies a community of people for whom certain kinds of truth and identity make sense” (Smith 1995: 19-20). For a selected bibliography on the concept of performativity and its relationship with the mode/genre of autobiography, see Marranca (1979); Smith (1995).

autobiography is also characterized by a ‘performative’ dimension, on the other hand many typologies of stand-up comedy, especially when the story tellers draw inspiration from their own lives, may reveal a self-reflective value. I can, then, argue that both cultural fields, in spite of their obvious differences, could produce narratives that fall into the umbrella term of Dalit “life narratives.” As noted by Malhotra and Lambert (2015), who studied the development of similar cultural expressions in the South Asian context, life narratives may reveal different natures and, far from being linked to a rigid and formalizing definition, may encompass narratives coming from a variety of other fields, written and otherwise (ibid: 19-20). The concept of life narrative is thus a dynamic and open concept, fitting the analysis of texts that, in spite of their differences, can equally be investigated to study forms of humorous and satirical representation/self-representation.

Some theoretical questions follow this approach, which paves the way for a transdisciplinary survey of the narratives produced by Dalits in different cultural fields. How and why comedy is used by ‘underground’ Indian comedians to reflect and process their own traumas? How is the relationship between oppressors and oppressed, that is at the core of many literary Dalits’ writings, re-articulated and re-assessed by comedians? The second part of the study is an attempt to answer these questions. It also reflects on the impact on Dalits’ narratives by new mediatic and digital spaces, which gave less represented voices of Indian comedy the opportunity to express themselves in spaces that, in the recent past, were not open to marginal voices. This section emphasizes the performances of stand-up comedians of Dalit roots, with a focus on the production of Manjeet Sarkar, a rising figure of Indian stand-up comedy. It also considers the possible effects that the reshaping of Dalit imagery produces within stand-up comedy on the ideological and socio-cultural revindications of Dalit activism. The investigation of Sarkar’s performances derives from notes taken during my participation in two shows led by the comedian in New Delhi, 2024 (7 and 8 September 2024). The shows were part of the national and international tour called *Untouchable: Laughing out Caste*, that Sarkar performed in 2023 and 2024. I have also conducted two open-ended interviews with this author on 8 September 2024 (New Delhi) and on 4 November 2024. Finally, I have extensively drawn inspiration from digital materials uploaded on YouTube by this and other performers of Dalit origin.

2 Some methodological remarks

While addressing the concept of satire against the backdrop of previous studies, I refer to it in this article as an “interdiscursive mode” (Phiddian 2013: 44-45; Simpson 2003: 45) of communication where four elements are essential: “attack or aggression,

laughter or humor, play and judgement” (Zekavat 2017: 3). Another specific aesthetical trait of satire is that it generally tends to emulate, often in a distorted way, narratives and forms of other literary and extra-literary ambits, by showing an emulative and “amphibious” nature (Harder 2012: 65-66). The relationship between satire and humor is debated- There has been a tendency to deem satire as an articulation of humor (Berger 1997: 167) or, conversely, to regard humor as one of the distinctive forms and characteristics of satire (Twark 2007: 13–21). In the light of these opposing interpretations, while considering humor and satire as two different modes that can be intertwined, the present contribution interprets the former as a discursive mode whose main feature is to present an incongruity, namely a disjunction that “occurs in the text which causes a passage from the sense reconstructed thus far in the joke, to a second, opposed sense” (Attardo 1994: 107). On the basis of this assumption, humor does not necessarily entail a reflection on laughter. This is also proven by the fact that certain kinds of humor do not cause this response on the part of the audience. Furthermore, this paper investigates irony, which in our reading primarily implies a “dissonance between literal and intended meanings” and “depends on the exposure of some previously unconsidered or neglected truth or (even more directly) on the exposure of a moral flaw” (Dadlez 2011: 2).

The literary texts are in Hindi, while the language commonly used by a new generation of stand-up comedians is Hinglish.⁶ In spite of these differences, the article attempts to investigate diverse texts through the adoption of a one model, that is Simpson’s SMUT discourse analysis model. Theorized in 2000 (Simpson 2000), and partially revised in 2003, this model implies the presence of four elements which form any satirical narrative: “setting,” “method,” “uptake” and “target” (Simpson 2003: 70–72). If the “setting” refers to the cultural derivation of the satirical narrative, the “method” refers to the linguistic and semantic dimension. The “uptake” refers to the reception of the joke by the audience. Finally, the term “target” refers to the concrete or metaphorical objects of the satirical narrative. While focusing less on the concept of uptake, the article draws more inspiration from the analysis of the concepts of method, setting and target.

⁶ Hinglish is the label which is usually adopted to refer to a variant of Hindi which, on the lexical and syntactical level, mingles “in unexpected ways with Indian English.” This language is used widely in India in many Bollywood films and by most Indian newspapers, magazines and new media. It proves the “penetration” of English into Indian society and, according to some thinkers, it showcases the emergence of Hindi as a lingua franca which is “available to every social class, accessible for use by all in a rapidly changing India” (Vajpeyi 2012: 99).

3 Oppressed and oppressors: glimpses from Hindi Dalit literature

Murdahiya is usually considered of crucial importance for the development of Hindi Dalit literature, and, in a wider sense, for the history of Hindi contemporary literature. The publication of this book, however, does not stand in a *vacuum*, and some of its features derive from a tradition that crosses the boundaries of Hindi cultural production. Critical and historiographical studies on the history of Dalit literature in India tend to place the starting point of this literary tendency in the late 1960s, when, due to the influence exerted on Indian Dalits by the experience of the Black Panthers in the USA, authors writing in Marathi began to use poetry and literary autobiographies to develop a new critical awareness about the suffering of Dalit communities in India (Brueck 2014: 261–339). Equally important was the impact of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar on these writers, a Dalit intellectual, jurist and writer who chaired the Committee that drafted the first draft of the Indian Constitution. Apart from his engagement in a variety of political and sociocultural initiatives and activities, Ambedkar's adherence to Dalit program was proven by the writing of a few seminal historical treatises. These texts became, from the 1940s onwards, authentic ideological milestones for the further evolution of literature connected to Dalit identity. They were instrumental in defining a cultural and intellectual Dalit counter-public that impacted literary tendencies in Marathi and in other Indian literatures, in particular, the text *Annihilation of Caste* (1936). In Arundhati Roy's assessment, expressed in the introduction of this book's edition of 2014, *Annihilation of Caste* was a "piece of utopian thinking" (Ambedkar 2014), that defined an intellectual, ideological and political program where the narration of collective trauma and violence was crucial in the redefinition of empowerment strategies.

Marathi writers of the late 1960s drew inspiration from the historical narratives of this thinker and, using autobiographical writings as empowering instruments, they started to construct narratives that embodied concepts of cultural and collective Dalit trauma. They used them to denounce forms of caste oppression experienced by Indian Dalits which persisted even in postcolonial India. Besides the representation of traumatic experiences, these texts acted as the manifestation of a satirical, ironic and humorous register, embraced by questioning the existence of the hierarchy that placed them in a state of subalternity.⁷ The target of the satirical images produced by such writers generally were the social categories placed at the bottom of the Indian

⁷ The aforementioned newspaper article, entitled *Hindi Dalit literature has a gaping hole – satire*, written by Rishabh Pratipaksh, establishes, albeit in embryonic form, a connection between the type of satire used by Ambedkar and that found in Marathi literature.

caste system, often represented with the collective term of *Savarna* people.⁸ From the 1960s, both in literature and in a variety of performative contexts, the core of Dalit criticism was the concept of ritual purity (*shuddhi*) on which the caste system was erected.

This paved the way for the strategies that a new generation of Hindi writers and performers began using to raise awareness about Dalit status (Wessler 2019: 170). This is not the same as saying that Hindi writers, even before the 1960s, had not found other ways to witness the existence of historical and collective traumas experienced by them in Indian society. As Basu points out, a variety of non-autobiographical texts written by Dalit authors began to be produced in Hindi language from the 1950s onwards. These works, written largely by intellectuals who had converted to Buddhist thought, revealed early signs of a program to build Dalit identity by constructing an “alternative” historiography of Indian identity (Basu 2017: 48). These tendencies developed further in the 1990s, and, through the editorial promotion and encouragement offered by Ramanika Gupta and the progressive writer Rajendra Yadav, Hindi translations from Marathi texts began to be published in leading literary magazines of the time, particularly in the pages of *Hans* (Wessler 2019: 164).

In an intellectual context such as the Hindi cultural sphere, dominated by historiographical models that excluded from historical narratives the role played in India by the Dalits and other marginalized groups, literary autobiographies represented important tools to compensate for the absence of a shared historical identity. As had happened in other Indian languages, they became instruments to describe and narrate collective and individual traumas experienced by Dalits in diverse parts of North India. However, this advent of a Dalit stream of Hindi literature, notably in autobiography, soon fragmented into a variety of subjective responses and interpretations about the concept of trauma. Over time, the aspiration to represent a common and monolithic Dalit memory began to segment into a number of paths, not necessarily part of a unilateral vision, but which together formed a complex and polyphonic picture of the diversity of the traumas experienced by Hindi Dalit authors. One of the most important developments in this literature, in the second half of the 1990s, was the publication of texts attributable to women, such as Kausalya Baisantri, author of *Dohra Abhishap* (Baisantri 1999), and Sushila Takbhaure, author of *Shikanje ka dard* (The Pain of Living in Shackles, 2011), that have opened up new intersectional perspectives within the movement (Browarczyk 2013, 2021). In these texts they analyzed the “double marginalization” suffered by Dalit women in the larger Indian society as well as within their own community (Browarczyk 2021: 16–

⁸ As described in the *Rigveda*, people who belong to one of the four traditional groups (10.90), which include *Brahmana*-s (priests), *Kshatriya*-s (warriors), *Vaishya*-s (merchants) and *Shudra*-s (labourers), are referred to as *Savarna*.

32). These books, while partially following the tendencies of previous literature, also reconfigured the separation between the categories of the ‘oppressed’ and the ‘oppressors,’ with women writers representing forms of cultural trauma that also entailed a gendered value.

4 Forms and social directions of trauma in Tulsi Ram’s work

Tulsi Ram’s literary production, therefore, was not the expression of an isolated phenomenon, and its aesthetic features should be contextualized in the frame of literary and sociocultural tendencies that, anticipated by authors writing in other languages, such as Marathi, found their way into Hindi literature from the 1990s. *Murdahiya*, considered by prior critics as one of the few examples of Dalit satire in the Hindi language, stands at the center of Tulsi Ram’s literary production, and clearly connects his work to contemporaneous tendencies of Hindi literature. It recounts the life of Tulsi Ram from childhood to adolescence. As a Dalit belonging to the *Chamar* community,⁹ the narrator is primarily engaged in the representation of the characteristics of his own clan, particularly regarding social and cultural dynamics happening in the rural area of the village of Dharampur, in the district of Azamgarh (in Uttar Pradesh).

Much of the narrative depicts the events occurring in this community over a period of time from the 1940s to the 1960s. The regionalist (*anchalik*) dimension of the narration is, therefore, particularly marked in the book, which describes in detail religious aspects and social habits occurring in this region of North India.¹⁰ The narration centers on the representation of the *Chamar* clan, often associated with the highly ‘impure’ job of leather tanner, long positioned at the center of sensitive debates in the landscape of North India from the colonial period (Gupta 2014: 687). It is worth noting that the label *Chamar* is currently considered a derogatory term by many members and non-members of this clan (ibid.: 662). The narrator, perhaps

9 The concept of community is translated in the text with two words. The first is *biradari*, which literally means ‘brotherhood’; the second, more common word in this and other books is *jati*, a word which can be variously translated as ‘clan,’ ‘caste,’ ‘community’ and, in some specific contexts, as ‘nation.’

10 The regionalist trend of Hindi literature rose, according to previous historiographical and critical interpretations, during the mid-1950s, through the agency of writers, such as Phanishwar Nath “Renu,” author of *Maila Anchal* (The Dirt Border, 1954), that engaged in the writing of stories of marginalisation about the events and socio-cultural dynamics happening in villages and second-tier cities of North India, with a focus on the current Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (Hansen 1990: 17–31).

inspired by a habit common to elders in the community (Ciotti 2006: 899–916), decides to return to this contested nomenclature. He re-asserts it so as to describe the status of this community in a historical context, the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, that was essential for the reconfiguration of the Dalit identity in North India. The term Dalit is also common in the book and is embraced by most Dalit activists and cultural programs. In spite of the sociocultural, affective and ideological closeness of the narrator to the clan described, the tone is unapologetic from the outset, and the writer's narration emphasizes two kinds of parallel suffering and trauma that reveal different dimensions and social directions. The narration of the first kind of trauma is in continuity with the satirical and caustic tone of Marathi literature, where figures external to the *Chamar* community are represented as people who are authoritarian, casteist and oppressors of the Dalits. These figures are often the object of the narrator's humorous and satirical remarks. They acquire a deep symbolic meaning in the construction of the ties established by the narrator with the 'external world.' They encompass figures associated with roles of power in the political, religious and administrative institutions, be they teachers, Brahmins living in the village of the narrator, etc. All of them are figures belonging to the upper castes of Indian society. Whilst reflecting on these traumas much emphasis is placed on the casteist value of the discrimination that the narrator, like other Dalit people, suffered in the environments that implied relations between Dalit and non-Dalit people. In such contexts, hierarchical differences became more explicit.

The second typology of trauma does not derive from contact with non-Dalits, but concerns habits and aspects of the intimate and 'secret'¹¹ life of the community to which the narrator belongs. The narrator seems, from this perspective, to embody the aesthetics of 'double marginalization' that, as noted with Kausalya Baisantri, was adopted also in other literary works of Dalit literature. This trope was formulated by Tulsi Ram with a personal tone. While, in Kausalya Baisantri, this aesthetics also subsumes a feminist and gendered value, these dimensions are less prominent in Tulsi Ram's work. Despite this, also the narrator of *Murdahiya* indulges in the description of traumatic facts and events within his clan. Some of these events are more relevant from a symbolic view and define processes and discriminatory practices that affect and strike the narrator throughout his life. In general, a status of partial exclusion during childhood stemmed, in his own view, from erroneous beliefs (*andha-vishvas*) surrounding the chickenpox he suffered when as a child. The narrator, indeed, lost vision in his right eye due to the effects of this disease, that happened in his *gamv* (village) when he was an infant and which determined his marginalized status as an

11 As explored later, much emphasis is placed by the narrator on the representation of those which he considers to be the secrets (*rahasya*-s) surrounding the life of the Dalit clan to which he belongs. The secrets are at the centre of some of the main humorous and satirical representations of the book.

impure (*ashudh*), rejected (*bahishkrit*), and insulted (*apmaanit*) member of his community (Ram 2010: 533). The literary motif of the chickenpox disease represents an important and founding reason for the traumas experienced by the narrator for the rest of his life. Much emphasis is also placed on the recurring famines taking place in the local *Dalit basti* (Dalit settlement), which created new socio-cultural hierarchies, divisions, and subsequently, also new traumas in this social group.

Tulsi Ram's intellectual position reveals, therefore, a multi-layered social critique that, while emphasizing that relations of oppression with non-Dalit people, also stresses other forms of oppression and trauma internal to his community. In this narration there are also specific places of memory that take on a double socio-cultural meaning. On the one hand, they manifest the individual and collective will by the narrator to pursue a social emancipation. On the other hand, they showcase social tensions and hierarchical dynamics that are implicit to the socio-cultural context described in the narration. The spaces related to the school experience, for example, occupy a great part of the narration. They define a symbolic watershed between the first two chapters of the autobiography, that recounts the story of Tulsi Ram's family, and the second part, where, progressively, the narrator develops a more critical attitude towards society. The narrative choice of focusing so much attention on these 'liminal' places between childhood and adolescence may stem from the narrator's personal experience. They, at the same time, reformulate a memory *topos* that, as argued by Ciotti in a groundbreaking study on the status of this group in the second and third-tier cities of Uttar Pradesh, is part of a model of personal identity construction that is shared by many of the *Chamar* living in this state. "Education," writes Ciotti, "is used as an idiom to express social divisions brought about by processes of social mobility." (Ciotti 2006: 911).

There is also another important space that embodies a deep and doubly symbolic and socio-cultural value in the book. The term *Murdahiya* refers to the ritual place of the cremation ground, another liminal space of great relevance to Indian culture, particularly the Hindu community. It is the site where the ashes of human beings and those of animals are gathered and it is strictly connected to the Indian idea of spiritual liberation (*mukti*). At the same time, however, it is a place that, for its connection to the idea of death, is also considered impure and a source of contamination. In Foucauldian terms, it could be deemed as an "heterotopic" liminal ground, where, through the description of the relations established by children of the Dalit community who play in this field, all the social tensions are exposed (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986: 22–27).¹² In addition, the cremation ground has another value as the place where some social tensions and divisions are, for a moment, overcome.

12 In Foucault's words, "The cemetery is certainly a place unlike other cultural spaces. It is a space that is, however, connected with all the sites of the city-state or society or village, since each

5 Self-deprecatory humor as a means to investigate identity

Ignorance was my inborn heritage. I do not know how many people were born between me and the first human being who was my biological ancestor, but none of them were literate. Menander, who came to India from Greece about 2300 years ago, said that, generally, Indians do not have knowledge of script, and they cannot read and write. His contemporaries did not react, but modern scholars criticized Menander a lot. The *truth* (emphasis is mine) is that, even today, millions of Indian people fall into Menander's description. The result of this centuries-old illiteracy was that the burden of false beliefs due to ignorance was never removed from the head of my ancestors. (Ram 2010: 88)¹³

This statement opens the autobiographical account. It expresses, in an ironic manner, a reflection by the narrator on his cultural background, which he considers to be characterized by the 'inborn heritage' (*janmjaat virasaat*) of 'ignorance' (*murkhata*). This opening reflection also sets the tone for the bitter and ironic mood that permeates the entire work. It could be argued that the narrator adopts a typology of observational humor, i.e. a humor that revolves around the narration of socio-cultural aspects, facts and social figures that are not produced by the narrative distortion and alteration of the reality. On the contrary, they are grounded in the analytic observation and narration of aspects that derive from the daily life of the writer during childhood and adolescence. The objective of these ironic remarks is, at a first level of analysis, to produce a personal criticism of the causes of the majority of the traumas connected to the inner and secret life of his community. The ironic twists function primarily to express a satirical intent, which is present in many passages in which the narrator reflects upon his own community and/or upon his own familiar background:

Thus, our family, reunited in this joint form, besides being extremely large, was essentially a museum in which you could find any sort of thing: ghosts, Gods, and Goddesses, prosperity and poverty, good omens, bad omens, honour and disrespect, justice and injustice, truth and untruth, jealousy and hatred, happiness and sorrows. Only one thing was lacking: literacy. (Ram 2010: 533).

individual, each family has relatives in the cemetery." (Foucault and Miskoviec 1986: 26). It should be noted that the historical and socio-cultural context referred to by Foucault is not Indian and, for this reason, it sheds light on diverse ritual practices, for example, cremation is the most diffused practice in India. Nevertheless, even in the context of this autobiography, the spaces related to death seem to embody a double meaning, and the cremation ground is depicted as a liminal space, where the caste hierarchies of the society described by Tulsi Ram are both exposed and contested.

¹³ All the translations, unless differently stated, are by the author.

The first two chapters of the autobiography are of passages in which, besides the presence of an observational tone, it is possible to detect the presence of self-deprecatory satire. This kind of satire, as noted by others, has a long history in North Indian literary productions (Kaviraj 2000: 381-382). The intellectual source of this tone could, therefore, be the example provided by Bengali and Hindi writers of the 19th and 20th centuries. However, and this is a much more plausible reasoning in this theoretical context, this narrative style seems to be present in the strategies of self-representation that are commonly used in social interactions with external figures by *Chamar* people who had access to the Indian reservation system (Ciotti 2006: 901).

Besides the social and ideological value of the criticism that Tulsi Ram seems to move, through such self-deprecatory remarks, to socio-cultural aspects related to this life within the Dalit community, there are other, more profound, psychological explanations. One of these motivations could derive from the desire of the narrator to distance himself from aspects of his background that, in hindsight, he intends to condemn on the basis of the clan consciousness (*chetna*) that he acquired over the years by means of literacy and education. From this perspective, some satirical remarks by the narrator function to propose to the reader a performative self that, being conscious and critical of past identity, is able to be ironic about it. It could be also argued that, as often done in other cultural contexts by subjects narrating individual and collective traumas (Galinsky et al. 2013: 2020–2029), the use of apparently derogatory terms is justified by the objective of self re-asserting, with an empowering scope, labels projected upon Dalit people by non-Dalits. By re-asserting them, the writer seems, at the same time, to re-affirm and contest them. The process towards rediscovery and self-assertion by the narrator is not always stable, however. The narration, similarly, is not always linear and a variety of tensions seem to disrupt the story in a few symbolic places.

The position of the narrator is, therefore, constantly renegotiated through the same act of narration, where much emphasis is placed on unresolved mysteries, events, legends and habits that the narrator is not able - or he does not want - to crack. Irony and humor, that, according to Garrick, are important psychological instruments to process the selves in search of “survival” (Garrick 2006: 171-172), are essential in the narration to mediate between two opposing psychological instincts and tendencies. On the one hand the narrator intends to rediscover and crack the mysteries of his life/identity. This, for example, is evident in the dramatic passages of the book in which the narrator allusively suggests the real reasons behind the murder of his grandfather, who, according to some other people of his villages, had been killed by a monstrous creature, which was most likely an excuse to cover the truth:

The mystery of this murder remains a complicated puzzle. The logical fact would probably be that Dadaji had enmity with other people in the village, and one of these persons murdered him, and created this psychological excuse of the porcupine ghost. (Ram 2010: 88)

At the same time, however, it is possible to note tension in the rediscovery of realities (*haqiqat*) which are never complete, but often allusively suggested to the reader. In the tension between the maintenance of a secret and the rediscovery of the truth behind traumatic events, which could make them even more traumatic than they are, humor and satire are, therefore, employed in the text as two essential survival instruments of dynamic investigation and survival of the narrating self.

6 The external targets of humor and satire

Irony and satire, however, are not directed solely at the narrator's community, but often at figures external to the *Chamar* community who perform leading, administrative roles in the rural society depicted. Thus, it is possible to detect two different kinds of humor and satire corresponding to the two typologies of trauma. One of the main targets of the narrator is, for example, Amika Pande, who is one of the most relevant high caste figures of the narration. The presence of this figure is crucial for the development of the story. He, indeed, was the person to whom the family of the narrator, not unlike all the other families of the village, asked astrological guidance for predetermining important dates and events for new generations. Amika Pande is at first glance a "mysterious" figure. He, indeed, was credited by other people as performing miracles (*chamatkar*) and owning supernatural powers, based on the power provided by him in a sacred calendar. Later, however, he is described by the narrator, in satirical style, as a sort of pretender:

The secret of his knowledge was that he had a booklet of one foot long and half its width, that he called '*Patra*' (sacred calendar). He used to keep it carefully tied in a red cloth and did not let anyone touch it, not even his family members. Therefore, this object remained extremely mysterious. There was a belief among the Dalits of the village that Pande's sacred calendar had been sent down by Lord Brahma directly from the Kingdom of Heaven. Amika Pande could also predict the days of lunar eclipse and solar eclipse. Obviously, the eclipses used to occur on the foreseen day, and all the Dalits considered it to be a miracle made by Pande. To tell the time, Amika Pande used to open a random page of the *Patra*, and, closing his eyes, he used to move his index finger here and there on it. Then, stopping at a given point, he used to foresee the time as per the day marked under his finger. Witnessing all of this, there was a belief among Dalits that both the *Veda-s* and the *Purana-s* would be hidden in that calendar. The harsh truth of all these miracles was that this mysterious calendar was, simply, a common Hindu calendar, printed every year in Varanasi. (Ram 2010: 584)

It is worth noting that almost all satirical narratives in autobiography are constructed by the narrator through the elaboration of three phases. The first, which in Simpson's terminology could be considered the "setup" phase, is characterized by the introduction of the satirized subjects of the autobiography (Simpson 2003: 73). During this phase the narrator introduces the moral characterization of his figures and place what Simpson would define as the "setting" of the satirical contexts. The setup phase is often followed by the appearance of a 'secret.' This is no coincidence: the term *rahasya* produces an ironic twist in the text. In fact, the secrets surrounding the community are associated in the text with exaggerated images of habits and behavior of the characters. The method of "saturating" (Simpson 2003: 87) figures is present in the book, for example, in the section with Amika Pande.

Similar narrative trajectories are followed in other parts of the autobiography, for example, with the *yogin*-s and *sannyasin*-s described in the books. Such humorous representations usually play a dramatic role in the book, and are connected to the display of traumatic events. On some occasions, however, the book showcases a less tragic tone and similar figures embody more positive values. Indeed, Jogi Baba is described as a mysterious and funny figure whose presence in the village briefly helped the Dalits "to feel great relief in laughing and shattering poverty." (Ram 2010: 979). The presence of these characters epitomizes the duplicity of certain places of memory in the book, such as the cremation ground, where the ideas of death, poverty and marginalization are matched and symbolically sublimated by the feelings of playfulness of Dalit children playing in this place. Apart from this and a few other examples, however, the discovery of the secrets surrounding the life of the protagonist is produced by the achievement of a hard, new truth associated with the phase of "resolution" of the incongruity produced by the previous use of the term *rahasya*. It is worth noting that this narrative structure, formed by the sequence 'truth-secret-discovery of a new truth,' is also used by the narrator to reveal contradictions and to crack secrets of the clan. What functions do these satirical and ironic strategies embody? The first answer is that, despite the tendency by the author to partially cover ironic and satirical narratives in the book, these are used to counter and to stigmatize his oppressors. Similarly, satirical strategies concerning the abuses brought forward by *Savarna* social groups seem to have been inherited in part by Ambedkarite thought. However, satire addresses not only non-Dalit figures, which seems to be a strategy of the author to counter the trauma which occurred in his own clan. A trauma that is not yet completely overcome, but which needs constant re-negotiation.

In these cases, ironic strategies seem to be used by the narrator to produce a cathartic recognition and better knowledge of his own cultural identity. The use of memory and narration in recounting past events needs these satirical and ironical twists and incongruities to de-construct aspects of the society that, otherwise, could not be investigated. The instruments of humor and satire are also two strategies to fill

personal search of meaning and re-construct the individual and collective identity of the narrator.

7 Beyond the literary image of the victim: life narratives from stand-up comedy

Contemporary stand-up comedy enables Dalit performers to construct jokes and gags explicitly designed to engage audiences while addressing caste-based trauma (Shivaprasad 2020: 23-42). The stories of these authors, currently narrated in underground clubs present in different major Indian cities, reveal the cues of that post-modernist and heterogeneous identity that now characterizes the status of Dalits living in Indian mega-cities (Shah 2007: 109-116). This “counter-public” points to a situation that differs from the one which allowed the emergence of autobiography as a tool of empowerment by Hindi Dalit literature in the 1990s. In our view, the main difference lies in the fact that the process of socio-cultural and political “rediscovering” (Wessler 2019: 170) of the Indian Dalit identity, which officially began in the 1960s with the experience of the Dalit Panthers, has reached a point where the Dalit movement has become a highly politicized and ‘recognized’ counter-body of the Indian political sphere. This recognition has been primarily articulated through the engagement of Dalit associationism and is proven by the increasing number of Dalit voices engaged in different areas of the Indian public sphere, from proscenium theatre to the more recent form of the *Nukkad Natak* (Street Theatre) (Prakash 2019: 1–52). NGOs have played a major role in the re-definition of the role played by Dalits in the Indian cultural sphere and promoted the participation of many authors in a variety of initiatives, often sponsored by the administrative bodies. This sociological shift is showcased by the tendencies of 2000s Dalit literature where, as claimed by Wessler, “the metropolis – Delhi in particular provides a space where middle-class Dalits can enjoy a certain degree of anonymity and engaged in forms of interaction that go ‘beyond caste’”. Here “middle-class urban identities” “are developing new forms of narrative, relinquishing the social realism of the predecessors” (Wessler 2019: 170). These processes, that obviously contributed to the rise of Dalit empowering programs, on the other, according to other critics, contributed to that process of “fetishization” and “commodification” of the popular art that, as recently noted by Picerni (2025: 263–280), is producing in many global contexts a depauperization of the most vital and critical spaces of resistance.

Along with the development of new narrative forms to express socio-cultural and political engagement, many Dalit intellectuals have begun to use new media to address forms of activism. This aesthetic hybridization of narrative forms, triggered

by the exploration of the possibilities offered by the web, began in the 2010s (Thakur 2019). However, it was after the recent COVID-19 pandemic that satire and humor started being ideologically handled by Dalit activists with the aim of voicing political and socio-cultural programs.¹⁴

If, as these hints seem to show, access to social media by activists and/or organizations connected to the Dalit identity currently constitutes an important tool for activism and empowerment, it should not be forgotten that, even on these platforms, there are various obstacles for netizens associated with the Dalit sociocultural identity. A first issue concerns the economic constraints that prevent many citizens belonging to Dalit communities from accessing social media. Indeed, the definition of a 'Dalit counter-public' on social media is more closely linked to the demands of Dalits entitled to the reservation system who have joined the growing Dalit middle class. Secondly, it should be noted that TikTok, which was an important means of expression for the younger generations of Dalits, has been banned in India since 2020 (Sajlan 2021: 94–96). In this changed historical and socio-cultural context, life stories narrated by these authors, which obviously vary on the basis of the different backgrounds of the authors, deal with the dynamics of the discrimination suffered by performers in universities, in public and private offices and, in a broader sense, socio-cultural contexts which are different from the rural contexts portrayed by Tulsi Ram and other Indian autobiographers. Despite this important paradigm change in the representation of trauma, it is worth noting that in many performances Dalit stand-up comedians bring forward motives also shared by Dalit autobiography. One of these, for example, regards the idea of adopting self-narratives to criticize casteism in the Indian context. Another objective regards the idea, currently also promoted by some associations, to use stories about discrimination to produce trajectories of empowerment of discriminated subjects in India.

These ideas, for example, are relevant for the shows recently performed in various Indian venues by Manjeet Sarkar, author of 'Untouchable: Laughing Out Caste' tour. Sarkar comes from a family of refugees who left Bangladesh in the 1970s and migrated to Bastar, a rural area on the border between the states of Orissa and Chhattisgarh. More recently, after gaining access to the reservation system and studying at university, the performer decided to move to Bangalore, where he also started doing stand-up. This autobiographical account is given by the stand-up comedian in his public interviews and shows, where he also often refers to some of

¹⁴ Jain and Shivaprasad, for instance, in their article on 'Anti-caste Memes as an Archive of Resistance' (2022), highlight the socio-cultural role played in 2019 and 2020 by a series of Facebook and Instagram pages managed by Dalit activists. Emphasis is placed on the role of these pages in opening up a critical discussion on the objectives and principles of the Indian Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens (CAA-NRC).

the symbolism and values shared and promoted by Dalit associationism in India.¹⁵ A common thematic ground, for example, is the adherence of Sarkar and other Dalit stand-up comedians to '*Jai Bhim*,' one of the most common slogans used by the followers of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar.

However, during the private meetings I had with him, when asked if it was fair to call him a 'Dalit stand-up comedian,' he claimed that today, almost six years after his debut as a comedian, he finds the label partially limiting in defining his identity as a performer and artist. The tendency to dissociate this label from his own identity as a comedian is to some extent new, especially with regards to the ideas Sarkar has expressed in interviews published on YouTube and in magazines. Today, he seems to have partially re-articulated his artistic and intellectual linkage to Dalit's sociocultural movement, while still stressing the relevance in his comedy shows of narratives drawn from his socio-cultural roots. In 2023, for example, in the interview *DA ChatRoom | Ep 29 | Manjeet Sarkar On His India Tour And Addressing Casteism Through Comedy*, he was keen to point out that the inspiration for his art primarily came from the discrimination he faced during the years he spent as a Dalit in school and college. More recently, in an interview published in January 2025 (Sarkar 2025b), the comedian remarked that he only came to know the word Dalit when he left Bastar for Mumbai. Indeed, he revealed that the terms more commonly used to define him in Bastar, where the empowering campaigns of Dalit movement are almost unknown to the majority of people, were *Chandal* and the less derogatory term *Namashudra*.¹⁶

The role of stand-up comedy as a crucial socio-cultural instrument for activism was also partially rejected by Sarkar during the interview conducted in November 2024. Indeed, he emphasized that, although "caste is everywhere" in his comedy shows, nowadays jokes related specifically to caste cover only around half of the show. Also, he overtly stated that he did not like the kind of 'ideologised' audiences that used to attend his shows. Nowadays, the connection established by Sarkar to Dalit cultural movement is double-edged. If, on the one hand, this artist tends to avoid any kind of explicit engagement in the activist side of the movement, on the other hand he seems to embody and stand for a larger audience of middle-class Dalit and non-Dalit people, the aesthetical and socio-cultural traits of Dalit consciousness. Nonetheless, as the comedian notes in his interviews and shows, the relevance of the concept of trauma remains at the center, or represents the intellectual background, of his shows. It is also at the center of many of the humorous self narratives that are commonly used by Sarkar in his shows. This, for

¹⁵ See, for example, the interview released on 3 May 2023, called *DA ChatRoom | Ep 29 | Manjeet Sarkar On His India Tour And Addressing Casteism Through Comedy*.

¹⁶ The *Chandal*-s or *Namashudra*-s belong to a Dalit community from eastern and western Bengal. During the 1970s, many people belonging to this community left Bangladesh for India.

example, appears quite clearly in the video, uploaded on YouTube, named ‘CASTE | MANJEET SARKAR | STAND UP COMEDY,’ (Sarkar 2025a) where the comedian describes, in a humorous way, the importance of school education as an instrument to avoid child labor in the years he spent in Chattisgarh during the childhood and adolescence.

I grew up in a village where ninety-five per cent of people were Dalit and five per cent were upper caste, because you need oppressors too. How do you play the cycle then? It's important! (...) So I went to school because I had to avoid child labour, I went child labour but it is was something that I did not enjoy so much. I was like: school is a good escape from child labour. When mummy said: ‘Did you work today?’ ‘I am working!’¹⁷

In Hindi literature, Dalit theatre and with other Dalit stand-up comedians the representation of Dalits traumas is explicitly placed at the center of the narration. On the contrary, in Sarkar's show the narration of trauma occupies a more peripheral position. However, at the deeper analysis, this element is still present in the performances, but it is ‘disguised’ under other forms, that make it possible to re-define the relationship between oppressed and oppressors. This relaboration works through the adoption of two strategies. The first aspect, confirmed by the author himself during our interview on 8 September 2024, regards the tendency to go beyond the idea of considering Dalit subjects merely as victims of high-caste subjects. However, for the performer, overcoming this notion does not mean escaping or ignoring the discrimination experienced by Dalits in India. Rather, it implies the possibility of considering Dalit authors as free and independent agents of their own socio-cultural and political demands. One of the techniques used to subvert the idea that Dalits can only be victims and not agents of their own destiny implies the use of a satirical paradox portraying the ‘high’ classes as politically and socially under-represented in the country.

In one of the jokes, for example, explaining the reason for which he prefers to be preceded in his shows by a *Savarna* stand-up comedian, he declares, with a satirical tone, that “they [the Dalits] are not presented enough in this country” (expression used during the show on 8 September 2024). This joke clearly criticizes the casteist character of the Indian public sphere, in which most intellectuals, performers and artists still belong to high-caste groups. The casteist and elitarian character of stand-up comedy represents another important theoretical point for the artist, who, both in the interview conducted in November 2024 and in public speeches, has stressed the enormous difficulties normally faced by most Dalit authors to get accepted and be

¹⁷ This sentence has been extracted from the show uploaded on YouTube by the artist. The expression “Did you work today? “I am working!” is the translation of the Hindi words: ‘*Kyaa tum aaj kaam kiya?*’ ‘*Main parhai kar raha hun!*’ The first half of the joke was in English. URL at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUtLT881cF8>.

involved in the clubs where stand-up comedy shows are held. Another, quite innovative way of re-framing the relationship between Dalits and *Savarna* social groups consists of the narration of anecdotes, inspired by the life of the artist, suggesting the idea that casteism involves not only the marginalization of people from clans on the margins of Indian society. Casteism is interpreted by the stand-up comedian as a matrix of major psychological suffering that even high-caste people, especially Brahmins, must face daily to maintain an ideal of purity. In this kind of observational humor, the author draws inspiration especially from his relationships with “Brahman friends.”

The comedian’s satirical repertoire on this theme focuses on the religious, emotional as well as family restrictions to which *Savarna* people are subjected. He also targets the neuroses that, in the comedian’s view, these types of restrictions produce in the lives of upper caste people. Apart from these kinds of jokes, in his shows Sarkar reflects on the personal traumatic experiences connected to socio-cultural discrimination. For example, a joke told during the show I attended recounts the moment when one of the author’s ‘high-caste’ friends introduced him to his parents. The stand-up comedian notes that, at first glance, the parents could not imagine the artist’s surname being associated with low-caste origins. In fact, the surname *Sarkar* is quite common in West Bengal and Bangladesh, and is shared by both Dalit and non-Dalit communities. However, when his parents ask him about his *jati*, his friend answers for him by saying “*Sarkar Orissa ka Rajput hai!*” (Mummy, he is a Rajput from Orissa!) If the representation of trauma in a metropolitan context tends to subvert the separation between oppressed and oppressors which seems to be envisaged in Hindi autobiographies, in his description of the discriminations taking place in Bastar during his childhood, the performer seems to embrace a more bitter, dark humor. The comic effects produced by these jokes are two-fold. On the one hand, the representation of this dimension becomes an instrument through which the performer, by adopting an observational lens, analyses the political and socio-cultural abuses Dalits are subjected to. Another, more innovative aspect regards the tendency to saturate the pictures concerning this context by emphasizing clichés and biases concerning Dalit communities with the desire to deconstruct them.

8 Conclusions

This article has demonstrated that, notwithstanding the aesthetic, socio-cultural and historical differences between autobiography and stand-up, both fields recognize

humor and satire as important tools for narrating the self, and articulating claims for cultural, political and aesthetic space for marginalized voices, such as the Dalit community. At the same time, the increasing visibility of humor and satire – especially in stand-up comedy – is not without ambiguity. While casteism and social marginalization are now addressed by broader audiences, the partial liberalization of Dalit issues risks generating new forms of stereotyping. When humor circulates without explicit activist engagement, it may reproduce clichés about Dalits from non-urban or non-middle-class backgrounds, without access to the reservation system, thus diluting the critical value of Dalit claims. Outside the exclusive field of stand-up comedy, Dalits from other performative fields and/or engaged in literature are, with a few notable exceptions, still very far from using satire and humor as overt tools of mobilization. This reluctance is partly due to the legal risks associated with satirical expression, but also to aesthetic and psychological considerations, including concerns that humor may trivialize trauma or contribute to the commodification of Dalit socio-political demands. In conclusion, the article suggests that, in coming years, authors from less represented and/or marginalized sections of society may increasingly adopt more hybridized aesthetical forms of humor to voice their socio-cultural claims. However, this development remains closely linked to the growth of a broader critical consciousness and carries the risk that Dalit demands may be absorbed into mass-oriented cultural models that undermine their activist potential.

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Bionote

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Fabio Mangraviti earned a PhD in “Civilizations of Asia and Africa” at Sapienza University, Rome, in 2021. Currently, as a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Italian Institute of Oriental Studies (ISO) at Sapienza University, he has been awarded the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions 2023 fellowship, within the framework of the Horizon Europe funding program. His award-winning project, named FISM (“Fighting with a Smile: Satirical and Humourist Voices of Resilience from Hindi Speaking Subaltern Subjects and Communities”) takes an interdisciplinary approach to investigate the different functions of satire and humor in the contemporary Hindi literary and extra-literary spheres.