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**Research Master in Asian Studies**

# **Stories about Ageing**

*Untold Stories, Unheard Voices*

Solange Ariel Andrea Santarelli  
s1480944

*Supervisors:* Prof. Abhishek Avtans, Leiden University  
Prof. Francesca Orsini, SOAS, University of London

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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to critically analyse four Hindi short stories and to explain whether they can be considered examples of *literature about ageing*. The research questions that this thesis tries to answer are the following: Can the selected short stories be considered literature about ageing? If so, why and how this process of ageing is depicted in Hindi Literature? In order to answer these questions, the research of Mike Hepworth (2000) on *literature about ageing* in British Literature is used as theoretical framework. Indeed, the parameters given by Hepworth for recognising examples of *literature about ageing* can be used as general criteria for the analysis of literary texts worldwide. Differences and similarities between Hepworth's analysis and the description of ageing in selected Hindi short stories are taken into account for this critical analysis. According to the study of the four selected short stories, it is observed that one of the main focus of Hindi literature about ageing is the pursuit of denouncing elderly abuse, in all the form they are perpetrated. This work also suggests that *literature about ageing* is also present in Hindi Literature and it can be recognised as a literary theme on its own.

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## Introduction

Ageing refers to a stage of life during which every living creature becomes older. In sociological studies, the elders are generally divided in two groups: the young-old, namely the ones who are between sixty and sixty-nine years old; the old-old, or people who are seventy years and above<sup>1</sup>. The report *World Population Ageing* published in 2013 by the United Nation Secretariat states that the process of ageing of the world population has significantly increased since the mid-twentieth century<sup>2</sup>. The increase of the ageing process is the result of both a decrease of mortality and fertility rates worldwide<sup>3</sup>. In the World Population Ageing's report of 2015 it is stated that the number of elderly will grow worldwide from 901 million to 1.4 billion and by 2050 the elders population is expected to be double, reaching 2.1 billion people<sup>4</sup>. In addition to this, the number of elderly is expected to exceed the number of birth for the first time in 2047<sup>5</sup>. According to the Global AgeWatch Index 2015, people over sixty years old in India were 116.6 million in 2015, namely the 12.5% of the entire Indian population. However, the percentage of elderly people is expected to growth up to 19.4 % in 2050<sup>6</sup>.

With a rapid increase of aged population around the world, ageing has become a central issue in several fields, in order to find solutions for this global issue that has both social and economic consequences. This thesis will look into aspect of ageing and the concurrent issue depicted in the vernacular Hindi literature. Due to the centrality that the family has in the ageing process in India, it will be first taken into account how the family structure in India has recently changed and how this might have influenced the elderly. One of the pertinent issues in this context is elderly abuse. The thesis will look into instances of elderly abuses and their socio-economic context in the surveyed literature.

In this introduction we will firstly discuss the dynamics of family structure and its relationship with the elderly. Then the interrelated issues of elderly abuse will be discussed,

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<sup>1</sup>Rajan,Irudaya S., Mishra, U.S, Sarma,Sankara P., *India's elderly: burden or challenge?* Sage Publication, New Delhi,

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "*World population ageing 2013*", New York, 2013  
<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WorldPopulationAgeing2013.pdf>, accessed 25 July 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. xii.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "*World population ageing 2015*", New York, 2015, [http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2015\\_Report.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2015_Report.pdf), Accessed July 25, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> "*World population ageing 2013*", p. xii.

<sup>6</sup> "AgeWatch report card: India" Country Ageing Data, <http://www.helpage.org/global-agemwatch/population-ageing-data/country-ageing-data/?country=India> Accessed July 25, 2016.

together with the question why literature is so important in dealing with the theme of ageing. Thereafter, the research question of this thesis and other examples of what might be called literature of ageing worldwide will be presented. Further, the theoretical framework of this research, based on the work of Mike Hepworth *Stories of Ageing* will be examined. Finally, chapter wise outline of the thesis will be presented.

### **0.1 Ageing in contemporary India: the result of the change in the family structure and the case of elder abuses.**

Issues of ageing in contemporary India are strictly related to family structure. As Sarah Lamb emphasizes, “old age is essentially a family matter”<sup>7</sup> because Indian family is based on a multigenerational relation where several people of different age groups, usually up to four different ones, are living under the same roof.

In traditional setup, the children are expected to care for their parents when they become old. The daughter-in-law usually lives together with her husband’s parents and she is usually the one who takes care of her parents-in-law when they become older. As Patricia Uberoi explains in *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*, there are various family types in India. Although a bit simplistic in the analysis of Indian kinship, it is generally affirmed that “modernization/ industrialization/ urbanization/ development ... is everywhere accompanied by a change from joint to nuclear families”<sup>8</sup>. It is interesting to know that the daughter-in-law is not usually taking care directly of her own parents, but of her parents-in-law. As a matter of fact, only if the daughter is unmarried or divorced, then she can stay with her parents and look after them. In case parents have just daughters or an only female child, then they assist their parents during their ageing but just in some cases, whether the husband agrees or her parents are really ill. However, this usually happens when the daughter has a nuclear family and does not live with her parents-in-law. In fact, elderly couple that have only one or more daughters usually live alone and their daughter might come occasionally to give them assistance if they have not health problems. Indeed, working daughters who take care and financially help their parents might appear an important result of recent decades.

Lamb underlines three main causes for the break up of the joint family in contemporary India. First of all, women are more educated than before, they have a job outside the household and they marry late, all of which influences their unwillingness to live with and take care of their elderly

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<sup>7</sup> Lamb, Sarah “ Modern Families and Independent Living: Reflection on Contemporary Aging” in Dasgupta, Sanjukta and Lal, Malashri *The Indian Family in Transition: reading literary and cultural texts*, Sage Publications, New Delhi: 2007, p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> Uberoi, Patricia *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi: 1993, p.31.

parents-in-law. In fact, Lamb states that nowadays “daughters-in-law have more voice, authority and agency than their mothers-in-law did”<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, the change of women’s role in Indian society is influential for issues relating with ageing in contemporary India because it is always a woman who practically takes care everyday about the elderly member of her family. Furthermore, the responsibility of looking after old people in the family is on women who in the majority of the cases do not have any blood relation with the elderly. As it was explained before, a woman lives with her parents-in-law after marriage and it is likely that the wife, due to her status as an outsider in the family, considers care of the parents in law as a burden. However, we will see in the short stories that will be analysed in this thesis that also the son of the elders has an influential role in the life condition of the elderly parents. The second cause of the decline of joint family in contemporary India is that many elderly parents of the Indian elite classes have children who live in other cities or even abroad for professional reasons. Thirdly, the post-modernist Indian society has brought set of values that were not part of traditional setup, such as “individualism, materialism, consumerism, self-centredness, a freedom from traditional rules, gender and aged egalitarianism”<sup>10</sup>. As a result, nuclear families start to substitute joint families in the urban areas, people start living in small apartment instead of bigger houses with other family members and they have less time for taking care of the elderly members of their family. However, as we will see in the short stories of Premchand and Bhisham Sahni that were written much before the advent of globalisation and the real transformation of the Indian family structure, the responsibility of the deterioration of the elderly condition in India cannot be ascribed only to a set of values that were imported from outside India.

It is interesting to notice that several sociologists underline the same causes related to the difficulties of the caregiver to look after elderly member of the family, although their research refers to different societies. In fact, Sunanda Rabindranathan affirms that the role of caregiver in India might encounter more difficulties due to three reasons: an increase in life expectancy of the elderly; a decrease in the birth rate, so that there will be less young people to take care of their elderly; an increase of participation of women in the labour force<sup>11</sup>. However, it is important to mention that these reasons might be found in other societies as well and not just in the Indian case. Rabindranathan, while explaining which difficulties the caregiver might encounter in the Indian context, refers to a digest written by Nancy Beekman in 1991, who focus her attention on the role of

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid, p.84.

<sup>10</sup> Lamb, “ Modern Families and Independent Living: Reflection on Contemporary Aging”, p. 84.

<sup>11</sup> Rabindranathan, Sunanda, *The Elderly in Urban Indian Families: Conflict in Solidarity*. Delhi: B.R. Pub., 2006, p. 27.

caregiver in the United States<sup>12</sup>. It is likely that, as I will try to explain throughout this thesis, there are several aspects of the description of ageing that are same worldwide and others are highly influenced by their respective society.

One of the major problems that elderly people encounter is suffering of abuse by other members of the society, especially by their own family members. According to the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA)<sup>13</sup>, an elderly abuse is defined as “any form of mistreatment that results in harm or loss to an older person”<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, elder abuse can be of several types, such as physical, sexual, domestic, psychological, financial or any form of neglect. As stated in a national survey presented by HelpAge India in 2015, it has been shown that the 73% of the young Indian interviewed are aware of the existence of elderly abuse and they recognised five types of elderly abuses, here presented in descending order: “not being able to spend money as before; not having an active outdoor life; not being included in making important family decisions; not being given respect; being abused by family members”<sup>15</sup>. The main abusers identified by the respondent are from inside the family, mainly the daughter-in-law followed by the son of the abused elderly person. It is interesting to notice that “only the 24% of the youth perceived the son as an abuser, while 59% elders in the 2014 survey blamed the son”<sup>16</sup>. However, according to the Report on Elder Abuse in India of 2014, the 41% of the abused elders still do not report what they have suffered and the cause of this lack of denunciation for the 59% of elderly is because they do not want to report their family members<sup>17</sup>. The outcomes of research regarding elderly abuses in India can find representation in the short stories that will be critically analysed in this thesis. According to the literary examples that will be taken into account, it will be shown that literature is used as a vehicle for denouncing elderly abuses and the real life condition for elderly people. The study of elderly abuses’ discourse in Hindi literature provides us with a unique paradigm of looking at elderly abuses from the point of view of the elderly, which is lacking in the surveyed literature from other part of the world. The study would also inform the readers about the everyday occurrence of elderly abuse in Indian society towards which there is lack of awareness.

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<sup>12</sup> See <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED328826> , accessed 27 March 2016.

<sup>13</sup> The National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA) is an American no-profit organization that aims to prevent abuse or neglect towards elderly people and adults with disability.

<sup>14</sup> NCPEA, "What Is Elder Abuse?". <http://www.preventelderabuse.org/elderabuse/> Accessed July 25, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> “Elder abuse: the Indian youth speaks out”, in Publication- HelAge Research Report, HelpAge India, accessed July 25 2016, <https://www.helpageindia.org/images/pdf/elder-abuse-indian-youth15.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> “Elder abuse in India (2014)”, in Publication- HelAge Research Report, accessed 25 July 2016, <https://www.helpageindia.org/images/pdf/elderabuseindia14.pdf>



## 0.2 Aim of the thesis, methodology and research questions.

The aim of this thesis is to examine whether the selected short stories can be considered literature about ageing. Ageing is not generally considered a literary theme on its own and this thesis will demonstrate that literature about ageing exists in Hindi literature and with further research a comparative analysis with literature about ageing from other cultures can be carried out, demonstrating that ageing might be considered a literary theme on its own.

The short stories that have been selected for this thesis were written in different periods, and they have been chosen as representative cases of the description of ageing. They have in common the centrality of ageing in their narration and some aspects in the way ageing is described. Moreover, cases of elderly abuse are present in all of the selected short stories. There are other Hindi short stories and novels where the theme of old age is central. However, further study is needed in order to critically analyse those literary works and categorize them as examples of literature about ageing. The short stories that have been selected are the following: *Bhurhi kaki* by Premchand (1918); *Chief ki dawat* by Bhisham Sahni (1972); *Bauji aur bandar* by Suryabala (1992) and *Dadi aur remote* by Suryabala (2005). The order of analysis of these short stories will be chronological, to see whether the way in which writers describe old age has varied according to the period in which the short story was written.

This thesis is based especially on primary sources written in Hindi which are largely not translated in any other European language, with the exception of *Chief ki dawat* (translated by Sahni himself in English) and *Bauji aur Bandar* (translated by Pandey in German). Secondary sources will be used, namely scholarly works, journals and websites. The methods used in this thesis will be the one related to literary theory, mainly discourse analysis and narratology.

This research can be considered innovative because nobody has worked on ageing as a topic on its own in Hindi literature, a theme that can be found in several novels and short stories and still needs to be properly discovered. The only work on ageing in Hindi literature that has been carried out in the West is the one done by Pandey & Pandey (2012). It is a collection of short stories titled *Der Alte und die Affen* on the theme of ageing written by several Indian authors. As the Pandeyes explain, the aim of this work is to underline the difference between how the elderly were traditionally considered and their situation in contemporary India<sup>18</sup>. Due to several factors, such as the dissolution of the traditional family structure in India, caused by both economic and social mobility of the younger generation, the position of old people has drastically changed. Indeed, in some

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<sup>18</sup> "Home", accessed June 15, 2016, <http://www.pandey-pandey.de/index.php/en/>

cases the elderly are left alone while earlier their relatives would take care of them. As it was explained previously in this introduction, a greater number of elderly face what can be considered cases of abuse, both physically and psychologically, mainly committed by their family members.

Although in Indian literature the theme of ageing is not yet critically analysed as a theme in itself, in other literatures the theme of old age has been taken into consideration both from literary scholars as well as from gerontologists who underline the importance of literary accounts on this topic. According to Barbara Waxman, who has researched on literature of ageing both in Chilean and American literary works “literature becomes a tool to reveal the social condition of the elders”<sup>19</sup>. In addition to this, Waxman states that our attitude towards ageing derives from the perspective on ageing that the society, which we are part of, provides us. Moreover, she also argues that “writers either reinforce or challenge negative stereotypes of elders”<sup>20</sup>. Lisette Gebhardt has carried out an interesting research about ageing in Japanese Literature. She affirms that there are several studies focusing on the representation of ageing in Japanese literature of the pre-modern era<sup>21</sup>. However, “similar studies are lacking for modern and contemporary time in both Occidental and Japanese research”<sup>22</sup>.

It is important to highlight that the short stories that have been selected for this thesis have something in common that I have not found in literary examples of ageing from the West, namely the aim of giving voice to old people who are constantly facing abuses, overturning the socially accepted images of the elders as the one who is highly respected. These stories have the power to describe a reality that goes against the social belief of respecting the elders. It is interesting to notice that a similar representation of the elderly, more as a burden than revered family members, is also underlined by Lisette Gebhardt in her analysis of Contemporary Japanese Literature about Ageing.

The literary works selected for this thesis are not just fiction, but they reflect social issues of contemporary India that should not be hidden anymore, due to also centrality of the theme of ageing in our societies. On the other hand, gerontologists affirm that literature on ageing is able to depict the issue of ageing from several perspectives, both from the point of view of the one who is becoming older as well as from the one of the family members or anyone who deals with old people and their experience of ageing<sup>23</sup>. The British sociologist Mike Hepworth has critically analysed literary examples from English literature in order to examine how ageing is depicted, which issues

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<sup>19</sup> Waxman, Barbara, "Teaching Cross-Cultural Aging", *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education* 26, no. 1 (2005), p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>21</sup> Gebhardt, Lisette, “Age and Ageing in Contemporary Japanese Literature” p. 492 in Schad-Seifert, Annette, Harald Conrad, and Florian Coulmas. *Demographic Challenge: A Handbook About Japan*. Brill Academic Publishers, 2008

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Hepworth, Mike, *Stories of Ageing*, Open University Press, Buckingham, Philadelphia: 2000, p. 2

are taken into consideration and he underlines how literature is an important source of social knowledge.

This thesis will address the following research questions:

- Can the selected short stories be considered literature about ageing?
- If so, why and how this process of ageing is depicted in Hindi Literature?

In order to answer these questions, *Story of Ageing* by Mike Hepworth will be used as theoretical framework. As it was explained earlier, no research has been carried out so far regarding Hindi literature about ageing. Moreover, there are not scholarly works that tackle the issue of ageing in contemporary Hindi literature from a sociological perspective. As a consequence of this, it has been decided to use as a theoretical framework a study carried out on English literature to see whether the selected short stories fit in the categorization outlined by Hepworth. Indeed, I find the study of Hepworth suitable for being applied to other cases of literature about ageing in other culture, because he gives a structure that might be used for analysing literature about ageing in general. By answering to the research question, it will be taken into account differences and similarities between Hepworth's founding in the case of English literature about ageing and the characteristics of ageing find out through the critical analysis of the selected short stories.

### **0.3 *Stories of Ageing* by Mike Hepworth: a theoretical framework.**

Although Ageing is not consider a topic of its own in Hindi Literature, critical analyses of literary works on ageing in other literature worldwide have been carried out. For example, Mike Hepworth has researched on ageing as a literary theme in British novels and I have decided to take as theoretical framework his work on ageing in literature.

Mike Hepworth was a British sociologist who is considered a milestone in the development of gerontology. He was a Reader in sociology at the University of Aberdeen and he was a member of the British Society of Gerontology. Hepworth vastly published on the theme of ageing and thanks to the works published together with Mike Featherstone he demonstrated that ageing is not just a socio-psychological and biological phenomenon, but it is also part of a cultural and historical process<sup>24</sup>. Particularly, in his last works he focused on cultural representation of ageing, with special concern to literary representation of ageing in British novels. Although Hepworth focuses on English literature, it is interesting to find differences and similarities about how ageing is

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<sup>24</sup> See Bytheway, Bill and Johnson, Julia, " Mike Hepworth: an appreciation" in <http://www.britishgerontology.org/DB/gr-editions-2/generations-review/mike-hepworth-an-appreciation.html> , accessed 27 March, 2016.

described in literary works in different countries worldwide. Indeed, it might be possible to underline some features related to ageing that are globally common. In addition to this, this thesis deals with the topic of ageing in literature and it is given the possibility to make a comparative analysis on this subject.

Hepworth in his book *Stories of Ageing* tries to classify the different representations of ageing in modern British novels. In the first lines of his introduction, he gives a clear definition of what he means with *Stories of Ageing*:

By stories of ageing I mean full-length novels which are about ageing as experienced by a central character or a small group of characters such as a married couple or a family. Under this heading I also include stories where ageing may not be the main interest of the writer but which include significant reference to aspect of the ageing process or to older people.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, all the short stories selected for this thesis reflect the requirements described in the definition. With the term ageing, Hepworth refers to the later part of our lives, from fifty years old onwards.<sup>26</sup> Generally, Sociologists define elderly people those who are sixty and above. All the literary texts taken into account in this research thesis have as protagonists old people, whose exact age is not written. There is no a shared agreement about who may be considered old because, as Hepworth points out, the start of ageing “ is not universally fix for all times, but historically and culturally variable”<sup>27</sup>. In so doing, Hepworth clarifies that he prefers to use the term “ageing” rather than “old age” because it refers both to the biological and psychological process of becoming old, and the social aspects of this transformation. On the other hand, the term old age might refer just to one of the aspects aforementioned, but not combining the three of them.<sup>28</sup>

Hepworth underlines in his introduction that in the west ageing was described as a period of decline, but due to the increase of life expectancy we are to some extent forced to find positive readings of this stage of human life<sup>29</sup>. It is interesting to compare it with the vision of ageing in India, because it seems to be the opposite. In fact, it was traditionally considered as something positive, and nowadays it is seen as a negative condition. According to Ancient Hindu Philosophy, the life of a man is divided in four stages, or *ashrama*: *Brahmacharya*, when the person is a devote student who practices celibacy and acquires knowledge from a Guru; *Grihastha*, or household life when a man gets married, has children, and economically sustains his own family. The man in this stage of life is pious and takes care about his children’s education. Indeed, it is considered the most

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<sup>25</sup> Hepworth, Mike, *Stories of Ageing*, Open University, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Hepworth, *Stories of Aging*, 2000, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

important *ashrama* because the *grihastha* is responsible for other people as well, and influences their first stage of life. The third and the fourth stages are those related to ageing. The third *ashrama* is called *Vanaprastha* and it starts after the birth of grandchildren. In this stage a man starts his path towards an ascetic life, detaching himself from material goods and leaving the role of head of the household to his sons. It is a gradual phase of retirement that brings him towards *Sannyasa*, the last stage of a man's life. During this last phase, the man is completely detached from material life, leaving behind all his commodities and properties and his family as well. He roams around and his only concern is his relation with God, while people offer him food and water. This philosophy of life refers to the Ancient Period and in contemporary times it is not followed anymore by every common people. However, what is still remarkable in the modern era is that ageing is not traditionally related to something negative. Indeed, there are several reasons that I will analyse in this thesis that make ageing to be considered as something negative. As Hepworth reminds us, our thoughts about ageing are influenced by how senescence was considered in the past, although our consideration might have changed<sup>30</sup>.

Hepworth explains why fictions on ageing are important for gerontology. In fact, he states that literature can be used as a tool to analyse the theme of ageing from different perspectives. In other words, literature offers a complete overview of someone's senescence with the possibility to express freely every difficulty that both the old person and the caregiver encounter. Though the author's imagination, the reader is able to know issues related to ageing that are not always highlighted in gerontological research. Particularly in case of illness such as dementia, it is likely that the reader has a better understanding than the caregiver represented in the story, due to the several perspectives provided in fiction<sup>31</sup>. In addition to this, literature has the strength to spread messages and it might be considered a powerful tool for contrasting elder abuses. As Hepworth argues

“*Stories of Ageing* is an invitation to explore fiction as one source of ideas about the ageing process and their possible influence over our individual subjective experience of growing older in contemporary society”.<sup>32</sup>

Particularly, Hepworth uses symbolic interactionism as sociologist approach to ageing and he applies it to his literary analysis of selected novels. According to his definition, symbolic interactionism is “one of the branches of sociology that places an high value on the role of imagination in the development of the concept of the self”<sup>33</sup>. According to this theory, self is not

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<sup>30</sup> Hepworth, *Stories of Ageing*, 2000, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

something unchangeable but rather an inner untouchable part of us that is partly influenced by the contact with the external world. This theory helps him to understand the central role that symbols play both for human life as well as for the creation of the self<sup>34</sup>. In fact, people communicate with each other through a complex system of symbols and one of the main issues for elderly people is that they might be not able anymore to communicate throughout this symbolic language resulting in their marginalization within society.

As it was explained before, literature is an important resource for gerontologist because it also gives the opportunity to reflect upon ageing as a symbolic interaction<sup>35</sup>. As a symbolic interaction, literature about ageing is important to deeply understand the interaction between the self and the society during senescence. In order to clarify the different aspects of ageing portrayed in literature, Hepworth creates what he calls the five variations of *Stories of Ageing*<sup>36</sup>. It is interesting to notice that he describes them as variations rather than categories due to fact that he is conscious that it is an attempt to classify several novels according to two main principles: how central is ageing for the novel; how ageing is interpreted and described through an imaginative process such as literature<sup>37</sup>. According to Hepworth's classification, in the first variation one of the main character, or even the narrator, is an elderly. The elderly described is conscious of his state and within this group flashbacks about his or her past life are common. In fact, this first variation can be described as a "history of the self"<sup>38</sup>, where the main character revises all his or her life. According to Hepworth, this first variation is increasing in literature, giving to ageing a central role in the narration rather than a marginal one<sup>39</sup>. In the second variation a group of elderly characters has the central role. They usually gather in a place detached from their problematic lives, where they can discuss about ageing issues that they face everyday. It is interesting to note that in the majority of novels taken into account by Hepworth, the location where a group of elderly usually gather is an old age home. There a case of elders' gathering who are the protagonist of a Hindi novel that is not taken into account in these thesis due to question of space. Indeed, *Chaar darvesh*, a novel written by Hridayesh in 2011, has as main characters a group of elderly people who regularly meet outside on a small bridge of an Indian city in order to talk about their daily issues. Indeed, it is likely that the set of an old age home is not yet introduced in contemporary Hindi Literature, because the introduction of this kind of structure is relatively new in India and it is associated to Westernization and a loss of traditional values. In the third group, the attention is on

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<sup>34</sup>Hepworth, *Stories of Aging*, 2000, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

family interaction, particularly in the case of intergenerational relations among family members and how these interactions interfere with the aging process of one of the characters. Variation four is also focused on interpersonal exchanges but they are outside the family environment, in particular with friends or even strangers. In this last case, the social interactions between them might influence the development of both characters. Finally, variation five focuses more about the ageing process throughout a constant description of the elderly characters, without underlying the role that social interactions have in this process. In addition to this, ageing might not be the main theme of the narration but it is influential for the development of the story. In this section, an elderly character might be described stereotypically or he or she might be used just for narrative scopes<sup>40</sup>. A common point that Hepworth underlines for all the five variations is that “ stories of ageing always invite us to relate self to others ”<sup>41</sup>.

As was previously mentioned, Hepworth interprets ageing as an interaction between the body, the self and the society and not just as a set of chronological and biological factors<sup>42</sup>. Body is seen as a synonym of physic decline and Hepworth underlines that this is the common opinion of Western civilizations, leaving the possibility that ageing body might be considered differently in other cultures. During my literary analysis of the selected texts relating to ageing, I will try to understand whether the connection between body and physical decline during senescence is present in Indian culture as well. However, Hepworth clearly underlines that in his selection of novels there are few body parts that clearly express when a body is ageing: the face, the teeth and the eyes. In the literary analysis of the selected texts I would like to check whether the same body parts are used as an index of ageing or whether other ones are an indication of the passing of time.

There are also objects and abstract sensations that emerge in the texts analysed by Hepworth for describing the theme of ageing. As an example, an important object related to ageing is the mirror. In fact, the mirror helps elderly characters to imagine how others might see them<sup>43</sup> and it is considered a sort of scientific tool for finding the signs of ageing<sup>44</sup>. In addition to this, smell is a recurring feature in British novels on ageing, although it is related to the idea of physical decay and it is mostly an unpleasant one. It is interesting to notice that, according to Hepworth’s findings, smell is not just related to the elderly person himself or herself, but it also permeates the home where he or she lives. Consequently, people generally try to isolate the elderly because they carry what is considered to be the smell of illness or ageing in general. At the same time, relatives of

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<sup>40</sup> Hepworth, *Stories of Aging*, 2000, p.22.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

elderly people try to avoid visiting them in their home because the house is impregnated with this smell that disgusts them as well as scares them because they are aware that they will face the same issues when they will become old. During my analysis, I will try to check whether in contemporary Hindi literature on ageing there are also references to this smell related to illness as well as senescence in general. It is important to remember that self and body are different, although we often confuse the physical appearance with the expression of self. Indeed, an ageing body is not synonymous of an ageing self, although we generally make the mistake to judge old people on the basis of their physical appearance. In addition to this, our stereotypical judgements might influence the relationship between young and old people<sup>45</sup>.

Hepworth focuses his attention on both the interaction between self and others, and self and objects or places. When people of different generations interact among each other, it seems that age, as a conversational topic, is quite central in every conversation. Indeed, as Hepworth clearly underlines, due to the fact that the majority of fictions analysed propose scenes of face-to-face conversations between an elderly person and another character, it is most likely that those interactions shape the age consciousness both of the elderly as well as of his or her interlocutor<sup>46</sup>. A consideration of the meaning of ageing is central in case of love relations between young and old people. In fact, ageing might be the cause of break of love relationship, although at the beginning the difference of age between the two lovers might have added positivity as well as curiosity. In fact, generally speaking a love between a man and a woman, where the man is younger than her, is not always seen positively both in Western and in Indian societies. However, a love affair between an old man and a younger woman is seen as less negative. In both cases the theme of ageing is a conversational topic both between the partners as well as for people who are somehow related to them. Although Hepworth focuses his attention on love relationship with an age discrepancy, there is a Hindi novel that deals with the theme of love in old age. In *Samay sargam* (2008), a novel written by Krishna Sobti, there are evidences of a hidden love story between two elderly people. Indeed, love during senescence is seen as something difficult to believe because it is a feeling that we do not generally associate with the late part of our life. Furthermore, Hepworth emphasizes that “emotion (...) are a significant ingredient in stories of ageing”<sup>47</sup>. One common sentiment that is associated to ageing is loneliness, which expresses a lack of social contact between the ageing selves and others that consequently brings to an isolation of the elderly from the society who is a part of. However, as Hepworth reminds us, while loneliness might be experienced in any stage of our

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<sup>45</sup> Hepworth, *Stories of Aging*, 2000, p. 50.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 64.



lives, one of the central issues of ageing that caused this feel of loneliness is the death of people with whom the elderly were closely related<sup>48</sup>. Another feeling that is commonly associated with ageing is nostalgia, especially of their youth and of happy moments that are now part of the past. In addition to this, literature on ageing also portrays stereotypes that influence our opinions about elderly. For instance, we commonly compare elderly people to children, because adults need to take care about elderly as they take care about children and in case of dementia they might behave as children. However, in some cases elderly are treated as children because they might look physically fragile and other family members might take advantage of their vulnerability. It is interesting to notice that although in the West we consider time a linear process, we often consider elderly people as children. In this way, it is likely that our life might be seen as circular because the last stage of human life is directly related to the first one.

As it was said before, Hepworth analyses both the relation between self and others as well as self and objects. In my opinion, there are two main reasons why an elderly person creates a bond with inanimate things: objects are seen as carrier of memories of happy past events as well as of dear people who are not present anymore; on the other hand, objects are sometimes considered as substitutes, due to the state of solitude in which elderly are forced to live. As Hepworth clarifies, we are able to give also to objects symbolic meanings so that the relation between our self and them goes “beyond the boundaries of material body”<sup>49</sup>. Relations between objects and self can be clearly found as well in a Hindi short story that will be taken into account, namely *Dadi aur remote*. In fact, in this narration the main character is an elderly woman coming from a village who start living with her son and her family in the chaotic Mumbai since she was not able to look after herself anymore. Due to the fact that she has to spend all day long alone at home, her son decided to give her a television for filling up her days. However, the relation between the grandmother and the television becomes peculiar to such an extent that she is completely transformed.

In addition to objects, places have also a fundamental role in the relationship between elderly people and inanimate things. In fact, Hepworth states that “places provide the material and symbolic framework for the cultivation of personal selves”<sup>50</sup>. In other words, the closed association between elderly and place in which they live is an expression of emplacement, a social phenomenon that creates an indissoluble bound between the evolution of an elderly self and his or her surroundings. For example, home and other places particularly important to him or her are at the centre of elderly relations with place. In addition to this, places might be as well sites that others

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<sup>48</sup> Hepworth, *Stories of Aging*, 2000, p.68.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

associate with them but with which the elderly might disagree to be recognised with. In the analysis of the selected Hindi texts on ageing it will be demonstrated that in Hindi literature on ageing space has also a fundamental role and writers used it for underlining the isolation that elderly people suffer of. For example, the old mother of the protagonist of the short story *Chief ki dawat* is forced to stay in her small room while her son's boss is invited for dinner. According to Hepworth, home is the place of the expression of the self, where the self might be easily described due to the privacy of this place and this is the reason why it is so important for novelists who write on ageing. Moreover, Hepworth states that descriptions of houses of elderly people are characterised by details that highlight class and social distinctions. Due to the fact that caste and class distinctions in Indian society are central, I would like to find out whether in Hindi literature on ageing there is also a different description of ageing according to the elderly's class status.

Although Hepworth has carried out extensive research of ageing in literature, his work focuses more on a sociological representation of ageing, without carrying out a detailed literary analysis of the selected texts. However, in my literary analysis of Hindi novels and short stories related to ageing I will closely analyse their narrative structure trying to underline similarities among them. In addition to this, I will examine whether there are figures of speech, such as flashback, that are repeatedly used in these narratives, and why they are so frequently used.

#### **0.4 Chapter by chapter outline**

This research thesis is divided in four chapters and each of them will critically analyse one of the selected short stories. Every chapter will follow the same structure: a short introduction about the author (in the fourth chapter this part will be not present because the author of the short stories analysed in the third and fourth chapters is the same); the plot; a critical analysis of the short stories where the structure of the stories, the characters, presence of the parameters outlined by Hepworth and the choice of register and of words will be taken into account.

The first chapter will deal with the analysis of *Bhuri kaki*, a short story written by Premchand in 1918. I have chosen to analyse this short story first due to the year of publication and also due to the importance of the writer, who is considered one of the fathers of Modern Hindi Literature. The second chapter will focus on *Chief ki dawat*, a short story written by Bhisham Sahni in 1972. The third examines the short story *Bauji aur Bandar* (1992) by Suryabala, while the fourth chapter will discuss the short story *Dadi aur remote* (2005) written by the same author. At the end of this chapter, a closer comparison between the two selected short stories of Suryabala will be carried out, in order to see whether two different short stories written by the same author have more similarities

in the way in which old age is described. Finally, in the conclusion the research question will be answered and it will be demonstrated how the selected short stories fit into Hepworth's classification of literature about ageing.

## Chapter One

Premchand (pen name of Dhanpat Rai Srivastava) is an Indian author who was born on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1880 in Lamahi, a place near Varanasi. He received his education in a madarsa in Lalpur, where he learnt Urdu and Persian. He lost his parents when he was still a child and he was forced to marry when he was just fifteen years old. He started writing in Urdu under the name of Nawab Rai, till the time when in 1910 his short story collection *Soz-e-Watan* (Dirge of the Nation) was banned by the British because it was considered seditious. He was a teacher and in 1921 he decided to quit his job and he joined Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement and focus on his writing career. He was elected as the first President of the Progressive Writer Association in 1936. In the same year he died in Varanasi.

He published vastly, both short stories (250) and novels (16). He introduced realism in Hindi literature, dealing in his literary works with social issues. Due to his influential role in Hindi literature, he is considered one of the fathers of modern Hindi prose.

### **1.1 *Burhi kaki*: the plot.**

*Burhi kaki* (the old aunt) is a short story written by Premchand in 1918. The narration is set in a village where the old aunt is living with her nephew Buddhirām and his family. She is a widow and her children died when they were young. The old lady has given away all her property to her nephew, and although this property creates annually a sufficient income, she does not get enough food and amenities. The time in which the short story is set is during the engagement party of Buddhirām's son, Sukhirām. Delicious food is been prepared at home for the occasion, such as *puri* and *tarkari*<sup>51</sup>. From her small room, the old aunt can smell all these delicacies, but nobody is bringing her any food. The narration is a crescendo and the readers experience vividly the wait for food by the old aunt. At first, she starts to be obsessed by the need of food that she cannot control anymore her wish of receiving some of the delicious food that is been prepared. She arrives to the point of imagining the *puri* and to think constantly about food. She decides to go out of her room and sits in front of the cooking cauldron. When Rupā saw the old aunt sitting in front of the cooking cauldron, she rebukes her and she forces her to go back to her room and wait until all the guests have eaten. She is not angry with Rupā, she is sad because she has been impatient and she should have known that first the food has to be served to the guests and later to the family members.

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<sup>51</sup> A *puri* is a kind of deep fried Indian bread; a *pakvān* is a kind of puri filled with lentils; a *tarkārī* is a vegetable curry.

However, the time is passing and it seems to her that her wait is far too long. She impatiently waits for Rupā's call and starts imagining in which order she will eat the food that has been prepared. She goes to the courtyard where a group of guests are sitting. She wants to understand whether they are still eating and she slowly goes behind them so that they cannot see her. However, they soon realise about her presence and they start shouting that an unknown old lady is approaching them and trying to touch some food. They are afraid that this old lady might pollute their food. None of the guests knows about her identity except for her relatives and Buddhiram immediately reaches the courtyard and he violently gets hold of her hands and he drags her into her room. As a consequence of her behaviour, Buddhirām and his wife decides not to give her food for that day.

None of the family member is taking care of the old aunt properly, except Larli, her nephew's youngest daughter. After having seen how her parents have behaved with the old aunt, she decides to hide some of her *puri* in her wooden basket for the dolls. She decides to wait for the right moment to go to her old aunt, when everybody is sleeping. While Larli is trying to reach her old aunt, the elderly woman is impatiently waiting for someone to come. She cannot sleep and she remembers everything that was done to her. While reflecting on what has happened, the old aunt hears a familiar voice. It is Larli, who is telling her that she has brought some *puri*. The old aunt immediately asks her whether her mother has given them to her. She explains that this was her portion and after the old aunt has devoured them, she asks Larli to go and ask to Rupa for her portion, so that she can eat more. However, Larli explains to her that she is afraid of being beaten if she goes and wakes her mother up. The old aunt then asks her nephew to take her to the place where the guests were eating. Larli did not expect what will happen next: the old aunt collects every single pieces of leftover food spread on the ground and eats them with great gusto. Meanwhile Rupa wakes up and remains speechless in front of this scene. She realizes that an elderly member of her family is forced to search food among the left over because she and the rest of the family were too busy with the engagement party that they forgot to bring her some food. Rupa desperately asks forgiveness to God, explaining that during the entire day she has to run around on the wishes of the guests, and she has fed hundreds of guests all in the name and pride of hers, but she could not provide sufficient meal to this old aunt, even though she has eaten a lot through the property inherited from her. After this solemn moment of remorse and guilt, Rupa goes to the kitchen store room and she bring her a plate full of food for the old aunt. While giving the plate to the old aunt, Rupa asks her forgiveness, telling her that she has understood her mistake and she has asked forgiveness also to God. The old aunt simply takes the plate and starts eating and Rupā is immensely happy about it.

## 1.2 *Burhi kaki*: critical analysis.

The main characters of this short story are the old aunt, her nephew Buddhiram, his wife Rupa and their daughter Larli. All the characters are presented with their first name, except for the old aunt who is called *bhūr̥hī kākī* (old aunt) throughout the entire narration. The nephew is taking care of his old aunt because there is nobody else who can take care of her<sup>52</sup>. It is the only short story among the ones selected that deals with an example of extended family.

Her nephew's wife, Rupā, is introduced as *ardhaṅginī srīmatī*<sup>53</sup> (literally, the one who sits at one's side, namely a wife). She is also called *ammā* (colloquial form of the word mother) by her daughter Larli<sup>54</sup> and by the old aunt, when she asks her nephew whether the purī she has brought her are the portion that her mother should have given her for dinner<sup>55</sup>. The name of the nephew is Buddhirām and he is introduced by the narrator with the term *pandit*<sup>56</sup>, an honorific title for a *brāhmaṇ*, indicating that the protagonist is a Hindu. The narrator soon characterizes Buddhirām and his wife, affirming that he is a virtuous man<sup>57</sup> but he is attached to money<sup>58</sup>, while she has a strong nature but she is a devout believer<sup>59</sup>.

It is most likely that the choice of the names for the characters is not casual and carries some meaning. The name Buddhiram contains the word *buddhi* that means reflection, mind, underlining a connotation of this character, namely the fact that he is a reflective person and it is not impulsive as his wife. As an example, the narrator underlines the fact that Buddhiram sometimes regrets his misbehaviour towards his aunt, giving the idea that he overthinks about past situations<sup>60</sup>. However, this reflective aspect is not a positive one because Buddhiram just thinks without taking any concrete action.

In addition to this, the name Buddhiram might refer to his caste. As it was previously explained, the term *buddhi* means intellect and it is a term that is closely related with the brahman caste, which generally refers to the protectors of knowledge and religion. An other meaningful name is the one of the younger daughter of Buddhirām, *Larli*, a name that means darling, adorable. In fact, she

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<sup>52</sup> "Ab ek bhatīje ke sivāy aur koī na thā", *Būr̥hī kākī*, p.1

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.2.

<sup>54</sup> "Jab viśvās ho gayā ki ammā so rah he", Ibid, p.8.

<sup>55</sup> "kyā tumhārī ammā ne dī haī?" Ibid, p.11.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> "Buddhirām svabhāv ke sajjan the" Ibid, p.1.

<sup>58</sup> "Kintu usī sameh tak jab tak ki unke koṣ par koī āc na āye.", Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> "Rupā svabhāv se tivr thī sahī, par īsvar se ḍartī thī", Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> "Buddhirām ko kabhī-kabhī apne atyācār kā khed hotā thā", Ibid.

is the only one who cares about the old aunt, and shares with her also her food. Moreover, the name *Larli* is also a general nickname given to any young girl for expressing affection.

The narrator underlines that the old aunt is more scared and worried about her nephew's behaviour rather than her nephew's wife. Furthermore, the old aunt affirms that she is scared also by the guests, after she has been shouted at by them while she was trying to take some food<sup>61</sup>. However, in other instances it is clear that *bhurhi kaki* is also scared of her nephew's wife. When from her small room the old aunt starts smelling the delicious food that is been prepared for Sukhirām's engagement ceremony, she understands that nobody will come today for giving her food. Indeed, she starts asking herself when she might have the chance to taste the delicious *puri*<sup>62</sup> that Rupa has prepared and the only thought of missing this opportunity prevents her to cry. However, the old aunt remembers herself about Rupa and her possible negative behaviour towards her and this prevents her from crying<sup>63</sup>. Indeed, the reason why the old aunt is scared by Rupa is clarified in several instances, when Rupa mistreats her. As an example, when the elderly woman is found by Rupa in front of the cooking cauldron waiting for her food, she affirms that she cannot have the food before the other because she is not a deity that can obtain whatever she likes and she should finish her prayer first, before having her portion<sup>64</sup>. It is interesting to notice that the old aunt's reaction to this mistreatment is a recurrent reaction in the story we have analysed in these thesis. In fact, "the old aunt did not raise her head, she did not cry or either talk. Silently she slowly walked to her small room"<sup>65</sup>. The silence is here a synonym of her incapability of reacting to the misbehaviour of her nephew's wife and at the same time it is the result of an abuse. However, when she is waiting for somebody to come and bring her the dinner, the reader comes to know that she is aware that Rupa has abused her in front of the guests while she was in front of the cooking cauldron<sup>66</sup>.

It is the only short story, among the ones analysed, where the narrator clearly denounces cases of elderly abuse affirming that it is hard to define who is responsible for it. This is one of the key elements of the narration because it shows the centrality of elderly abuse in Hindi stories about ageing. All the properties of the old aunt are under the name of her nephew. Although with these properties he has an annual income of around two hundred rupee, the old aunt does not receive sufficient food. After having described the situation, the narrator affirms that is not easy to determine whether it is the fault of the nephew or of the nephew's wife if the old aunt lives in such

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<sup>61</sup> "... Parantu mehmānō ke bhay se roṭī na thī.", Ibid, p.9.

<sup>62</sup> "Jab roṭiyā ke hī lāle pare haī, tab aise bhāgya kahā ki bharpeṭ pūriyā milē?", Ibid, p.4.

<sup>63</sup> "...Parantu Rupā ke bhay se unhōne phir mōn dhāraṅ kar liyā", *Būṛhī kākī*, p.4.

<sup>64</sup> "Tum koī devī nahī ho ki cāhe kisī ke mūh me pānī na jāye parantu tumhārī puja pahle ho jāy.", Ibid, p.5.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Unhī pūriyō ke lie Rupā ne sabke sāmne gāliyā dī. Ibid, p.9.

a condition<sup>67</sup>. It is clearly states that the two main perpetrators of the elderly abuses, namely Buddhiram and his wife Rupa, recognise their faults in their misbehaviour towards the old aunt, although this does not influence their conducts<sup>68</sup>. Moreover, it is the only narration where the elderly character is aware of suffering abuse.

As it was already pointed out before, the voice of the narrator is not always objective and it unveils a negative judgement towards certain characters. For example, the narrator affirms that there is a natural enmity between old people and children, that it is even emphasized when the children's parents show their anger towards the elderly. The narrator here states her personal opinion about the topic of intergenerational communication and affirms that children's disrespect towards their grandparents is influenced by their parent's behaviour towards them<sup>69</sup>. In other words, children learn from their parents how to behave and if they see their parents misbehave with their grandparents, they feel authorized to behave badly with the elderly members of the family. The grandchildren abuse her, they hurt her or they throw water on her. In case the old aunt tries to react to her grandchildren's misbehaviours, then their mother intervenes. The narrator here again makes a personal comment about the old aunt's reactions. Indeed, *burhi kaki* seldom reacts with sharp words towards her grandchildren, most of the time she starts crying without answering them back. However, the narrator affirms that to be reactive would have been a better answer to their misbehaviour instead of crying<sup>70</sup>. As it was said before, elder abuse is vastly present in this short story. As an example, in the case in which somebody is sitting outside and the old aunt approach him/her asking for food and complaining about the situation, Buddhirām would have been really angry and he would have scold her badly<sup>71</sup>. Indeed, the prohibition for the old aunt to complaint and asking for food can be recognised as a case of elder abuse. The narrator describes this instance through two metaphors: it is written that the old aunt will start to sing her own *raga*<sup>72</sup>, in the sense that she will start complaining to anyone nearby. Her search for attention is compared to a *raga*, a kind of melody of classic Indian music. However, the word *raga* here is not used in its positive connotation but similarly to the figurative meaning of the word litany. In this context the word *raga* represents the telling of a series of complaints. Moreover, whenever she is caught by her nephew

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<sup>67</sup> "Ismē unke bhatīje paṇḍit Buddhirām kā aparādh thā athvā unkī ardhāginī sṛīmatī Rupā kā, iskā nirṇya karnā sahaḥ nahī.", Ibid., p.2.

<sup>68</sup> "Buddhirām ko kabhī-kabhī apne atyācār ka khed hotā thā", Ibid.; "Hāy! Kitnī nirday hū maī ", *Būṛhī kākī*, p. 11.

<sup>69</sup> "Laṛkō ko buḍḍhō se svabhāvik vidveṣ hotā hī hē aur phir māta-pitā ka yah rang dekhte to buṛhī kākī ko aur bhī satāyā karte.", Ibid, p.2.

<sup>70</sup> "... Yadyapi upadrav śanti kā yah upāy rone se kahī adhik upayukt thā.", Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> "Yahā tak ki yadi dvār par koī bhalā ādmī baiṭhā hotā aur buṛhī kākī us samay apnā rāg alāpne lagti to vah āg ho jāte aur ghar mē ākar zor se ḍāṭte.", Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> "Yahā tak ki yadi dvār par koī bhalā ādmī baiṭhā hotā aur buṛhī kākī us samay apnā **rāga** alāpne lagti ...", Ibid.



while complaining to any stranger about her situation, he will become like a fire<sup>73</sup>, in the sense he will be very angry with her. Another powerful metaphor describes how the old aunt is in need for food during the engagement ceremony and also underlines how careless are her relatives towards her basic needs. Indeed, when the old aunt decides to go out from her *koṭhrī* (small room) in search of food and she reaches the cooking cauldron where the delicious food for the party was prepared, the perseverance of the old aunt during her search of food and her decision to sit in front of the cauldron is compared to the one of a stray dog<sup>74</sup>.

It is interesting to notice that the search of food by the old aunt is a topic that recurs throughout the entire narration. It is likely that Premchand wants to underline the common thought that the old aunt, as both an elderly woman as well as a widow, is expected to have absolved all human desires, hunger included. Indeed, in India it is traditionally believed that a widow, especially if she is elderly, should not have the desire anymore to eat any particular kind of food that is usually prepared for special occasions. In addition to this, it is commonly thought that elderly women do not need to eat great portion of food and not even regularly. This common belief is in contrast with the description of *burhi kaki*, who constantly ask for food. However, there are other examples of elderly widows who go against this false myth, such as the case of Patira Ji, and old widow who is a character in Deepa Mehta's film *Water*. In fact, Patira Ji's fondest memory is of her eating sweets at her marriage when she was just a child.

Not all Buddhiram's children behave badly with their old aunt. Larli, Buddhirām's youngest daughter cares about her and she even shares her food with her. The good relationship between the old aunt and her nephew is one of the most significant elements of the story because it shows a positive bond between a grandparent and a grandchild. They are intimate friends and the secrecy of their relationship is expressed by a cautious choice of the terminology that the narrator used for describing their meetings. Words such as *rakṣāgār* (secure place) or *śaraṇ* (shelter), *prem* (love) and *sahānubhūti* (sympathy)<sup>75</sup> positively express their relationship and gives the idea to the readers that *būṛhī kākī* feels secure just with her nephew's daughter. It is the only short story among the ones selected that represents a positive relationship between an elderly person and a young relative.

The comparison between children and elderly people, a characteristic highlighted in Hepworth's analysis, is also present in *burhi kaki*. For example, the narration open with a symbolic phrase that reflects a concept that also Hepworth underlines in his analysis, namely the comparison

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<sup>73</sup> “... to vah **āg ho jāte** aur ghar me ākar zor se dāṭte”, Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> “Yahā āne unhe utnā hī dhairya huā jitnā bhūkhe kutte ko khāne vale ke sammukh baiṭhne par hotā he” *Būṛhī kākī*, p.4.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p.3.

between elderly people and children. Indeed, old age is described here as a second childhood<sup>76</sup>. Also in the ending phrase of the short story, when the old aunt receives food from Rupā, after she has felt bad because of her behaviour with the old aunt, the elderly woman accepts the food without hesitation, as children do when they receive sweets, forgetting all that has happen earlier<sup>77</sup>.

At the beginning of the story, it is stated that her senses, her eyes, her hand and her foot are not in good shape. Only her taste is active and her only way for attracting attention towards herself is to cry<sup>78</sup>. As it was explained in the introduction, Hepworth identifies three body parts that are often described in British literature of ageing, as index of the ageing body, namely the teeth, the eyes and the hand. With the exception of the teeth, also Premchand underlines the importance of hand and eyes, together with the feet, as a sign of an ageing body. Her crying is described as peculiar, because it is a crying sound coming from her throat. It is likely that her crying tries to communicate all her pain and it is not just a way for attracting her family's attention. Her crying might be compared to a desperate voice. Moreover, the narrator underlines that it is known that she cries because she wants food<sup>79</sup>. In addition to this, if she is crying because of her grandchildren's abuses, nobody cares about it, because everybody connects her crying with her need to get food.

The old aunt's room in her nephew's house is not called *kamrā* by the narrator, but he uses a specific term, namely *koṭhrī*, that reminds to the reader to a narrow place more similar to a prison cell, a place in the house that is not usually used for sleeping but more as a storage. It is interesting to notice that this term is present in all the selected short stories for describing the space allocated to every elderly character of each short story. It is likely that this word is used for giving the idea to the readers of the difficulties that elderly might encounter also in familiar environment such as their home.

As Hepworth underlines in his analysis of British Literature about ageing, a common sentiment related to ageing in loneliness. In this short story there is a quick reference to loneliness when the old aunt, while impatiently waiting for someone to come and bring her food, underlines that even Lārlī did not come<sup>80</sup>. In this case loneliness is not connected with the loss of a dear one, as Hepworth states in his work, but it is related with a sense of neglect. Indeed, the old aunt has a strong relationship with her nephew's daughter Lārlī and she feels betrayed also by her.

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<sup>76</sup> “Bhuṛhāpā bahudhā bacpan kā punrāgman huā kartā haī .”, Ibid, p.1.

<sup>77</sup> Bhole-bhole baccō kī bhāti, jo miṭhaiyā pākār mār aur tirkār sab bhūl jāte haī, budhī kākī beṭhī huī khānā khā rahī thī. Ibid, p.11.

<sup>78</sup> “Būṛhī kākī mē jihvā-svād ke sivā aur koī ceṣṭā šeṣ na thī aur na apne kaṣṭō kī or ākarṣit karne ka rone ke atirikt dusrā koī saharā hī. Samst indriyā, netr, hath aur pēr javāb de cuke the.”, Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> “Parantu yah bāt prasiddh thī ki vah keval khāne ke lie roti haī”, *Būṛhī kākī*, p.2.

<sup>80</sup> “Lārlī beṭī bhī nahī āī”, Ibid p.4.

According to the five variations of stories about ageing identified by Hepworth, the short story *Būṛhī kākī* can be classified in group three, where family interaction are central. The relationship between the elderly character and her relatives interferes with the aging process of the character because it is due to the behaviours of Buddhirām and his wife that the old aunt has a hard life. In addition to this, in this short story is also central the relationship between the old aunt and her young nephew, because she is the only one who helps her.

The narrator is omniscient and heterodiegetic, because she is not a character in the story. The narrator uses the third person plural for referring to the old aunt as a form of respect. It is interesting to notice that the third person plural is used just when the narrator refers to the old aunt and not with the other adult characters of the story. Moreover, the nephew's wife refers to the old aunt with *tum* (informal you) without using the respect form. However, this is the only short story among the one selected where it is clear that also the wife of the elderly's closest male relative does not use the respect form.

The narrator of this short story is an overt narrator, because as it was explained earlier, her point of view in several parts of the story is made known and the narration becomes subjective. It is likely that also the decision to give more respect to the elderly character express what the narrator thinks about the other adult characters of the story as well as the intention of the narrator to bring respect to the elderly. There are some passages of the story where the third person narration becomes a first person narration. It is likely that the external narrator gives the possibility to the readers to listen to the internal monologue of the characters, particularly the one of the old aunt. As an example, when the old aunt start imagining the food that Rupa is making for her son's engagement ceremony, she asks herself why she cannot sit in front of the cauldron as well<sup>81</sup>. However, there is also a passage where the narration is in first person because the readers are listening to Lārī's thoughts when she is planning to give to her old aunt her portion of food<sup>82</sup>. This text has a multifocalisation<sup>83</sup>. In fact, the point of view through which the narrator describes the story varies, creating the possibility for the reader to easily read the story from several perspectives. As an example, after having described the desire of the old aunt to receive some food and her decision to sit in front of the cooking cauldron and wait there until she gets something to eat, the narrator focuses her attention on Rupa and describes how much she is under pressure for managing her son's engagement ceremony and the dining facilities for the guests. It is likely that the narrator gives the readers a premise to the following scene, when Rupa misbehaves with her old aunt and

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<sup>81</sup> "Kyō na calkar kaṛhāh se sāmne hī baiṭhū.", *Būṛhī kākī*, p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> "Būṛhī kākī merī bāt sunte hī uṭh baiṭhengī.", "muje khūb pyār karengī!", Ibid, p.8.

<sup>83</sup> Nieragden, G. "Focalization and Narration: Theoretical and Terminological Refinements." *Poetics Today* 23, no. 4 (2002): 692.

give the possibility to justify her, if the reader decides to accept it and takes her side. In another occasion, the predominant voice that is represented by the narrator is the one of the old aunt, so that the readers might read the story from several perspectives. Moreover, the narrator describes the feast as an external narrator who is describing what is happening there as well as from the old aunt's point of view, who cannot attend the event and has to stay in her room, waiting for her food.

## Chapter Two

Bhisham Sahni was a Hindi writer who was born on 8 August 1915 in Rawalpindi, a city of present day Pakistan. He was a prolific writer not only of novels and short stories, but also plays. He participated in the struggle for India's independence, during which he was a member of Indian National Congress. He worked with the Relief Committee during the communal riots taking place in Rawalpindi in March 1947. Sahni moved to India after Partition and in 1948 he started working for the Indian People's Theatre Association in Mumbai, an organization with which his elder brother, Balraj Sahni, was already collaborating. Between 1975 and 1985, he was General Secretary of All India progressive Writers Association. During his prolific career, he was also English lecturer at Delhi College (current Zakir Husain College, University of Delhi) as well as a translator from Russian into Hindi for the Foreign Language Publishing House in Moscow. His magnum opus *Tamas* (Darkness) won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1975. He wrote also more than hundred short stories and among them *Chief ki dawat* (a feast for the boss) is commonly considered a masterpiece. Bhisham Sahni passed away in Delhi in 2003.

### **2.1 *Chief ki dawat* : the plot.**

*Chief ki dawat* (a feast for the boss) is a short story written by Bhisham Sahni in the '50s and translated into English in 1972. The main characters of this short story are Shamnath, his old mother, his wife and his boss. The plot is centered on an evening when Shamnath's American boss is about to visit his house for dinner. Shamnath has invited his boss and other guests for dinner hoping for a promotion. Shamnath and his wife are preparing everything for the boss's coming, when they realize that they have not taken into consideration the presence of Shamnath's mother in the house. She is an old lady and they are afraid that she will spoil the evening and its possible result. Shamnath and his wife consult each other about what would be the best solution for what they consider a problem, namely the presence of Shamnath's mother in the house while the boss is there. Shamnath's wife suggests to her husband to bring his mother to the neighbours for a night, but he is unwilling to do so. According to Shamnath, it is a better idea to tell his mother to eat before the usual dinnertime and to ask her to stay in her room for the entire evening. However, his wife reminds him that his mother's room is next to the living room and the boss might hear her snoring while they are eating.

The solution to this problem is found by Shamnath when he explains to his mother that he will receive his guest in the drawing room and in the meantime she should in the veranda. When he

moves in the veranda with the guests, then she will have to go to the drawing room through the bathroom, without being seen. But Shamnath has not taken unforeseen difficulties into consideration, such as the case in which the boss might decide to have a look in the veranda before Shamnath has planned to bring him there. In order to avoid any unpredicted situations, he decides to check how his mother seats on the chair in the veranda and what she wears for the occasion in case the American boss would have reached the veranda before it was planned to. In addition to this, he suggests his mother to reply to his boss in the case in which he asks something from her.

She is really anxious about the possibility to encounter her son's American boss, but unfortunately her worries do not prevent her from falling asleep in the veranda. Everything proceeds smoothly, till the time when Shamnath brings his guests in the veranda and he sees his mother snoring loudly while sitting on the chair. Both anger and embarrassment start pervading Shamnath. When his mother woke up, she was completely shocked by the guests' presence in the veranda. She clumsily greets his son's boss while Shamnath excuses his mother's behaviour, explaining that she comes from a village where she has lived for her entire life. The American boss starts to be curious about the origin of Shamnath's mother and he asks him whether she knows songs or dances of the folk traditions. Not wanting to let the boss disappointed, Shamnath asks to his mother to entertain him with a folk song. Although she is not good in singing, she is forced by his son to sing for his boss. After this embarrassing moment for the old lady, who is just trying to please her son, the conversation turns to handcrafted products, in particular about *phulkari*, a Punjabi embroidery. With enthusiasm Shamnath promises to his boss that his mother can make a *phulkari* for him despite his mother's poor health and eyesight due to old age. After this promise, everybody move towards the dining room, except for the mother who is left alone in the veranda where she starts crying.

At the end of the party Shamnath knocks at his mother's door. He is happy about how everything went and he wants to share with her his satisfaction. However, she feels scared by his knocking, thinking that she has done something wrong again. She tells him she wants to go to Haridwar, where she can finally leave everything behind and die in peace. Shamnath's first worry is about who will make the *phulkari* for the boss. She tries to explain to him her inability to accomplish this task, due to her bad eyesight and because she is feeling really weak. But as soon as Shamnath reminds her that it would help him get promoted, she accepts to do as he says.

## **2.2 Chief ki dawat : critical analysis .**

There are four main characters in the story: the owner of the house Shamnath, his wife, his old mother and Shamnath's American boss. Throughout the narration, every character is not called by

name, except for Shāmnāth, who is referred with his first name. Shāmnāth's wife is regarded as *dharmapatnī* (legally wed wife), *patnī* (wife), *śrīmatī* (Mrs.) or *grahiṇī* (housewife). Furthermore, the old lady is referred with the term *mā* (mother), common term for addressing a mother. Just in an occasion, when Shāmnāth is happy about how the evening has gone about, he refers to her with the term *ammī*, a colloquial and affectionate version of the term mother<sup>84</sup>. The old mother is never referred with the term *Dadi* (grandmother) as in the case of the short story *Dadi aur remote* by Suryabalala. No reference to grandchildren are made in this short story and this is the reason why she is not called grandmother by the narrator. The narrator of this short story is external and omniscient. *Chief ki dawat*, as in the case previously analysed of *Būṛhī kākī*, has multifocalisation. Particularly, the narrator uses two points of views in order to describe the events, namely the one of the son and the one of the mother. As David Lodge reminds us, the focalization has a fundamental role in the story, because “it fundamentally affects the way readers will respond, emotionally and morally, to the fictional character and their actions”<sup>85</sup>. As in the case of *Bhūṛhī kākī*, in *Chief kī dāwat* the old character's son refers to his parent with *tum* (informal you) instead of *āp* (respectful you). It could be understood as a sign of disrespect towards his elderly mother, more than a hint of closeness between the son and his mother.

The beginning of the story describes the prevailing anxiety in the house regarding the upcoming dinner. The narrator quickly describes two of the main characters, namely Shāmnāth and his wife, and how they are preparing for this event. Shāmnāth's wife is wearing a gown, she has make up on and her hairs are tied up<sup>86</sup>. Shāmnāth is chain smoking and he is holding in his hands a “to do list”<sup>87</sup>. He soon realizes that they did not take into consideration what to do with his mother during the boss' presence in the house. She is defined as *aṛcan* (an obstacle, a difficulty) and it is clear that Shāmnāth does not want his mother to be in the house during the dinner. It is interesting to notice that he realizes about this problem while he was hiding things under the bed or behind the wardrobe, as if his mother is also something to be stowed away. Shāmnāth presents his doubts to his wife. However, the narrator underlines the fact that he asks her in English what to do with his mother, suggesting that he is using a language that his mother could not comprehend. The old woman comes from a village, where she has lived for her entire life, and it is most likely that she

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<sup>84</sup> “Ao ammī! Tumne to āj rang lā diyā!... sahib tumse itnā khuś huā ki kyā kahū. Ao ammī! Ammī!” *Chief kī dāwat*, Bhisham Sahni, p.12.

<sup>85</sup> Lodge, David. *The Art of Fiction*. New York: Viking, 1992: 26.

<sup>86</sup> “Patnī dressing gown pahne, uljhe hue bālō kā jūrā banāe mūh par phelī huī surkhī aur powder ko male...”. *Chief kī dāwat*, p.1.

<sup>87</sup> “Aur Mister Śāmnāth cigarette par cigarette phūkte hue cīzō kī phehrist hāth mē thāme, ek kamre se dusre kamre mē ā-jā rahe the.” Ibid.

cannot understand English. In addition to this, the details given by the narrator suggests that Shamnath is aware that he should not think of his mother in those terms. It can also mean that Shamnath does not want his mother to take part in this decision. Also in another occasion, when his mother is in her room for wearing a white *kamiz* as her son asked her to do, he starts again talking in English to his wife about something that his mother does not need to understand. The narrator introduces this dialogue between the two spouses referring to the mother as *jhamela* (difficulty, trouble)<sup>88</sup>. In addition to this, while Shamnath is trying to find a solution for what to do with mother's presence while guests will be at their place, he defines this dilemma as a *samasya* (problem) to be solved<sup>89</sup>. The narrator clearly underlines that Shamnath is afraid of the possibility of any guests to meet his mother and he is stressed and angry at the only thought of this inconvenience<sup>90</sup>.

Shamnath's wife thinks that a solution might be to send her to her friend's house, where she can stay also for the night<sup>91</sup>. The verb used here is *bhej do* (send!), an informal imperative form of the verb *bhejna denā* (to send away). The use of the compound verb *dena* (to give) underlines the fact that the benefit of this action is towards the receiver (in this case the mother). However, it also underlines the fact that the mother's will is not taken into consideration, because she will be sent to her friend's house, no matter if she would like it or not. Nevertheless, Shamnath is against his wife's idea, because he does not like the *buṛhiyā* (old woman) who lives nearby and he does not want his mother to interact with her. He decides that the best solution would be to tell his mother to eat her meal and quickly return to her room, where she will stay for the rest of the evening. It is interesting to notice that the room is defined as a *koṭhrī* (a small room), a term present in every selected short stories for describing the rooms of the elderly characters. Furthermore, the term *koṭhrī* also means cell of a prison, suggesting a comparison between the old lady and a prisoner, because they both spend part of their life in a small spaces without having the freedom to move.

Nevertheless, the wife makes an observation that instils doubts in Shamnath's mind. The mother's room is close by the room where the guests will eat and in case the mother will fall asleep and start snoring, then they might hear it. Without thinking of the consequences of his thoughts for his mother, Shamnath suggests to lock her door from outside<sup>92</sup>, so she will be not able to go out. In addition to this, he proposes also as an alternative solution to ask his mother to stay awake in her

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<sup>88</sup> Yah mā kā jhamelā hī rahegā, unhōne phir angrezī mē apnī srī se kahā ...”, *Chief kī dāvat*, p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> “Samasyā kā hal dhuḍhane kā thā”, *Ibid*, p.3.

<sup>90</sup> “kṣobh aur krodh mē vah jhūnjhalāne lage”. *Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>91</sup> “Inhē pichvaṛe inkī sahelī ke ghar bhej do, rāt-bhar beśak vahī rahē.” *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> “Maī bāhar se tālā lagā dūngā”, *Ibid*, p.3



small room without the possibility to go out till the time the guests will leave<sup>93</sup>. The kind of solution proposed by Shamnāah can be clearly defined as elderly abuse, because he does not take into account the rights of his elderly mother to move and sleep whenever she likes. Moreover, he orders and not asks her mother to quickly eat her meal because of the guests' arrival<sup>94</sup>. Indeed, for asking her mother to follow his instructions, the writer uses an imperative form made with the infinitive (*kha lena*), describing a command that does not need to be done immediately but in the near future.

The reader comes to know that she is a practicing Hindu when she explains to her son that she will not eat anything cooked in a kitchen where fish and meat were cooked. Her comment implies that she is not considered important enough in this house and her son and his wife do not respect her practices. In addition to this, when the old mother explains to her son that she will not eat, he does not appear worried at all about her mother skipping a meal. Indeed, he is just thinking about the forthcoming dinner with his boss<sup>95</sup>. Again in this sentence the writer decides to use the imperative form made with the infinitive verb. The imperative form is constantly used by the son while he is giving instructions to her mother about what she has to do when the guests will arrive.

The writer's choice of using the imperative mood when the son is talking to his mother underlines the mother's impossibility to express him what does she thinks about his commands. She is forced to follow his rules. As an example, the imperative mood is used also further in their conversation, when the son explains her that he and his guests will stay first in the living room so she will have to stay in the veranda in the meantime, while she has to move in her room through the bathroom when they will decide to go in the veranda<sup>96</sup>.

In the short stories we have taken into account, it seems that it is common trend for elderly people to react passively to psychologically abusive relationships. For example, in *Chief ki dawat* the old mother does not react to her son's misbehaviour towards her. Instead of responding to him, she simply looks speechless at him<sup>97</sup>, before agreeing with his commands. In another instance, when his son affirms that she should not wear her wooden sandal while the guests are present, she remains silent<sup>98</sup>. The readers might infer that she likes her sandals, while her son threatens her telling her that one day he will throw them<sup>99</sup>. In addition to this, when her son is asking her what she will wear

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<sup>93</sup> "Yā mā ko kah detā hū ki andar jā kar soē nahī, baiṭhī rahē, aur kyā?" *Chief kī dāvat*, p.3.

<sup>94</sup> Mā, āj tum khānā jaldī khā lenā", Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> "Jaise bhī ho, apne kām se jaldī nibaṭ lenā", Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> "Aur mā, ham log pehle baiṭhak mē baiṭhenge. Utñī der tum yahā barāmde mē **baiṭhnā**. Phir jab ham yahā ā jāē, to tum gusalkhāne ke rāste baiṭhak mē **calī jānā**", Ibid, p.4.

<sup>97</sup> "Mā avāk beṭe kā cehrā dekhne lagī ", Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> "Mā cup rahī ", Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> "Kisī din tumhārī yah kharāū uṭhā kar māī bāhar phenk dūngā" Ibid.

she answers him that she will wear what he will tell her to wear<sup>100</sup>. It is likely that her passive reaction might exemplify her awareness of being dependent on her son, perhaps because she is an old widow and her son is taking care of her in his house. It is most likely that the role of fiction in this case is to highlight the socially expected patterns of behaviour, namely the son's duty to take care about the elderly, and at the same time it underlines how inhuman the caregivers in the family can be towards them.

Throughout the text there are several examples of what can be defined as the ridicule of the old, a process of humiliation that is a sign of elderly abuse. This is one of the most significant elements of the story because it clearly shows what is considered to be a case of elderly abuse. The elderly mother's derision is done by different characters, all with the result of unconsciously embarrassing her. The main actor of this humiliation is her son when, for example, he asks her not to fall asleep immediately, because she snores loudly enough to be heard by the guests during such an important dinner<sup>101</sup>. The narrator underlines that the mother feels embarrassed of what her son has just said, reporting that she answers her son's accusation with an ashamed voice (*lajjit-si āvāz me*). It is interesting to notice that the same word *lajjit* (ashamed) it is used when the narrator reminds that the biggest worry for Shāmnāth is that he will feel ashamed in case his boss will meet his mother by chance<sup>102</sup>. Shāmnāth ridicules his mother because he checks what the mother has to wear and how she has to seat on the chair in the veranda. He also asks her to wear bracelets but when she reminds him that she has sold all her jewellery for financing his education, this infuriates him. He holds what she has said against her, affirming that he can easily give back to her the money she has spent for his education, as if he does not recognise the sacrifices she has done for him, namely to sell her jewellery for assuring him a proper education. By reading that the old mother is asking forgiveness for what she has said, the reader is a witness of an abuse, because the old lady is feeling guilty of not having jewellery to wear for an event in which she is not even invited. In another occasion, when the narrator describes to the readers Shāmnāth's first reaction after discovering his mother sleeping in the veranda, the narrator clearly explains that Shāmnāth at first has thought about rudely waking up his mother and push her in her room, but he immediately realises that he cannot do it because of the guest's presence<sup>103</sup>. This is an example of the literary power of highlighting forms of elderly abuses, because literature is able to express several points of views and also the thoughts of every

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<sup>100</sup> “Jo kaho, pehen lū”, *Chief kī dāvat*, p.5.

<sup>101</sup> “Aur mā āj jldī so nahī jānā. Tumhāre kharāṭō kī āvāz dūr tak jāī he”, *Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>102</sup> “Śāmnāth ko cimtā thi ki agar chief kā sāksāt mā se ho gayā, to kahī laggit nahī hona paḍe”, *Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>103</sup> “Jī cāhā ki mā ko dhakkā de kar uṭhā dē, aur unhē koṭhrī mē dhakel dē, magar aisa karnā sambhav na thā, chief aur mehmān khare the”, *Ibid*, p.7

character that would have remained silent in real life (as in the example previously made about Shāmnāth and his first reaction towards his mother).

Both in *Būrhī kākī* and in *Chief ki dawat* there are signs that the abuse perpetrated on the elderly characters is not only psychological, but physical as well. However, in the case of Premchand's short story, the physical abuse of the nephew towards his old aunt is clearly described by the narrator. He catches her hands and he drags her into her room, without caring about the guests' presence<sup>104</sup>. On the other hand, in *Chief ki dawat* the son restrains himself to shove his mother to her room only due to the guest's presence.

The peak of humiliation is reached when the mother accidentally meets her son's boss. Shamnath arrives first in the veranda, when he saw what should not have happen: his mother is sitting on the chair in the veranda with her feet on the chair, snoring and her *dupatta* is slipped off her head, showing her partially bald head. At this vision, some Indian wives of Shamnath's colleagues start laughing and Shamnath's boss feel sorry for her, saying "poor dear"<sup>105</sup>. The narrator underlines several times the role that Shamnath, his mother and the wives' guests play in the description of the encounter between Shamnath's mother and the boss: Shamnath is angry with his mother who might ruin his well-planned dinner; the mother is scared by all those people and does not know how she has to behave according to his son's will; the Indian wives' guests inappropriately laugh every time the old mother does something embarrassing for Shamnath. It is likely that the Indian wives' guests represent what Shamnath is afraid of, namely to be derided for his mother's behaviour. In addition to this, they are also representative of society's perspective, because they make fun of an issue regarding how to deal with an elderly person, just because this instance is not happening in their family environment. It is likely that Shamnath cares about appearance and the possible perspective of the society, and this might be the reason why he has decided not to let her mother go to her friend's house. Indeed, it would have been taken as if he is not able to take care of her on his own. In addition to this, Shamnath expresses his fear of being judged by the society when his mother asks him to let her go to Haridvar, one of seven holiest places for Hindu believers. It seems that going to the holy Haridvar is her only escape from the abusive treatment meted out to her. Shamnath immediately becomes angry with her, telling her "you want to defame me, till the point that everybody will say that I am a son who cannot look after his own mother"<sup>106</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> "... Unhone būrhī kākī ke donō hāth pakre aur ghasītte hue lākar unhē andherī koṭhrī mē dhamm se paṭak diyā", *Būrhī kākī*, p.7.

<sup>105</sup> "Mā ko dekhte hī desī aphaṣarō kī kuch striyā hans dī ki itne mē chief ne dhīre se kahā-poor dear!", *Chief kī dāvat*, p.7.

<sup>106</sup> "Tum mujhe badnām karnā cāhtī ho, tāki duniyā kahe ki beṭā mā ko apne pās nahī rakh saktā", *Ibid*, p.13.

Shamnath is described as distressed when his mother is not even able to properly greet his boss<sup>107</sup>, because she is petrified in this embarrassing situation. Moreover, when his mother, after the failed *namaste* does not even know which hand she has to give to the boss for shaking their hands, Shamnath becomes even more angry. In this case, the narrator uses a metaphor for describing Shamnath's anger, explaining that he has a burning feeling inside his heart<sup>108</sup>.

On the other hand, the India guests' wives starts laughing aloud when they saw Shamnath's mother awkwardness while trying to greet the American boss. The same happens when the boss asks her how is she and the old mother is so embarrassed that she is not able to answer<sup>109</sup>. They laugh also when the old woman is forced to sing a village song for pleasing her son's boss<sup>110</sup>, although she is not a good singer and she repeatedly tells her son not to ask her to sing.

The reader comes to know what does the mother really feel and think about this situation through the eyes of the narrator. The old woman is described as already worried about the possibility for her to meet his son's boss. She does not know what he may ask her and more importantly she does not know how to reply. It is clear that she is scared about foreigner because she does not speak English and she is also generally scared because she has been banished by her son from the dinner event and she knows that she is not allowed to entertain the guests. Her inner desire is to go to her friend's house and stay there during the party time. However, she does not know how she could possibly subvert her son's order<sup>111</sup>. When she woke up in the veranda, with everybody around her and looking at her, she first felt confused and afraid to have said something wrong while she was sleeping.

The narrator describes the old mother's uneasiness in front of the boss and all the other guests first from a physical point of view and he also concludes with a physical result of her difficulties. In fact, when she tries to stand up from the chair in the veranda, her feet start shaking and her fingers were shivering<sup>112</sup>. It is interesting to notice that the same verb *kāpnā* (to shiver) is used when Shamnath knocks at her door at the end of the party and she goes towards the door and her hands are shaking because she is afraid of having done something wrong again<sup>113</sup>. At the end of the scene, when all the guests go inside towards the dining room, following the boss and leaving alone in the veranda the old mother, she walks to her room. As soon as she is sitting in her room, she starts crying, as a

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<sup>107</sup> “Śāmnāth is par bhī khinn ho uṭhe”, *Chief kī dāvat*, p.8.

<sup>108</sup> “Śāmnāth dil hī dil mē jal uṭhe”, *Ibid*, p.8.

<sup>109</sup> “Ek bār phir kakhahā uṭha”, *Ibid*, p.9.

<sup>110</sup> “Desī striyā khilkhilā ke hans uṭhī”, *Ibid*, p.10.

<sup>111</sup> “Magar bethe ke hukm ko kaise ṭāl saktī thī”, *Ibid*, p.6.

<sup>112</sup> “Unke pāv larḱharāne lage aur hāthō kī ungliyā thar-thar kāpne lagī”, *Ibid*, p.8.

<sup>113</sup> “Mā uṭhī aur kāpte hāthō se darvāzā khol diyā”, *Ibid*, p.12.

result of the situation she has undergone<sup>114</sup>. In this descriptive scene of the encounter between the old mother and the boss, the narrator alternates psychological and physical representation of her uneasiness. As an example, when the American boss says *namaste* to her, she is hesitant and shy while hearing his greeting<sup>115</sup>. When the boss asks her how she was, she starts whispering something unintelligible<sup>116</sup>.

Her son pretends to innocently ask her why she is still awake at this time<sup>117</sup>, because the readers know that her presence in the veranda was part of what he has planned.

At the core of the encounter between the old mother and the boss, when Shamnath explains him that his mother comes from a village, the reader might understand another process to which the old mother has to undergo, namely her commodification. It is likely that the old mother is treated as an object rather than as a living being. She is forced to sing just for the boss' pleasure and she is forced to sew a *phulkari* for him, although her eyesight is not so good anymore. "Where is my eyesight now, son! What will old eyes be able to see?"<sup>118</sup>, this is what the old mother has told to her son, who carelessly pretend not to listen to her and instead he promises his boss that his mother will be delighted to make a *phulkari* for him. In addition to this, when Shamnath's mother tells him that she wants to go to Haridwar where she want to wait for her death in peace instead of staying at his place, he cares only about who will then do the *phulkari* for his boss, as if she is a tool useful to Shamnath only for making the traditional embroidery<sup>119</sup>.

According to the classification made by Hepworth in *Stories of ageing*, it is most likely that the short story *Chief ki dawat* can be classified in group three, where the family interaction between the elderly character and other members of the family is central. In this case, the relationship that has the central role in the narration is the one between the elderly mother and her son. In addition to this, the central role that this event cover in the narration is clear from the title, that simply refers to the event organised for the American boss (*Chief ki dawat*: a feast for the boss). It is interesting to notice that *Chief ki dawat* is the only short stories, among the ones that are analysed in this thesis, in which the title does not make any clear reference to the presence of an elderly character and her central role in the narration.

No clear references to the body parts underlined by Hepworth as symbols of ageing are present in *Chief ki dawat*. Nevertheless, few references are made relating to the old mother's

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<sup>114</sup> "Magar koṭhrī mē baiṭhne kī der thī ki ākhō mē chal-chal ānsū bahne lage", *Chief kī dāvat*, p.11.

<sup>115</sup> "Mā ne jhijhakte hue", *Ibid*, p.8.

<sup>116</sup> "Mā kuch baḍabaṛā", *Ibid*.

<sup>117</sup> "Mā, tum jāke so jāo, tum kyō itnī der tak jāg rahī thī?", *Ibid*.

<sup>118</sup> "Ab merī nazar kahā hai, beṭā! būṛhī ākhē kyā dekhengī?", *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>119</sup> "Tum calī jāogī, to phulkārī kaun banāegā?", *Ibid*, p. 13.

physical condition. The readers get to know that she was previously ill and as a consequence of this illness she cannot breath properly anymore and this is the reason why she snores so loudly<sup>120</sup>. In different parts of the text it is repeated the adverbial phrase *dhire se* (slowly), while the old mother is walking towards her room or standing up from the chair in the veranda<sup>121</sup>. It is likely that the narrator wants to highlight that she is old and she cannot walk properly anymore. When she is wearing the white *salwar kameez*, as requested by her son, the narrator gives some indication of her body: she is thin, she has a blurred vision and there are parts of her head where she is loosing her hair<sup>122</sup>. In addition to this, in the last line of the short story there is a reference to her shaking legs<sup>123</sup>, an other hint of her uncertain physical health. No references to objects with which the old character has a particular relation are made. The only object that the old mother spends the time with is the *mala*<sup>124</sup> (rosary beads).

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<sup>120</sup> “Kyā karū, beṭā, mere bas kī bāt nahī hai. Jab se bīmārī se uṭhī hū, nāk se sās nahī le saktī”, *Chief kī dāvat*, p. 4.

<sup>121</sup> “Aur dhīre se kursī par ā kar baiṭ gā”, *Ibid*, p. 4; “Mā dhīre se uṭhī...” *Ibid*. p.5;” Mā dhīre se kursī par se uṭhī...” *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>122</sup> “Choṭā-sā sūkhā śrīr, dhūndhalī ākhē keval sir ke ādhe jhāre hue bāl palle kī oṭ me chip pāe the”, *Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>123</sup> “Tinak laṅkharāte hue apne kamre kī or ghūm gae”, *Ibid*, p.14.

<sup>124</sup> “Mā mālā sanbhālī...”, *Ibid*, p.4.

## Chapter Three

Suryabala is a Hindi writer who was born in Varanasi in 1944. She was educated in Varanasi and moved to Mumbai later. Suryabala began writing Hindi fictions during her days in Varanasi, but she came into limelight after moving to Mumbai. Her first short story was published in the magazine *Saarika* in 1972.<sup>125</sup> Her first novel *Mere sandhi patra* was published firstly as a twelve part series in the Hindi magazine *Dharmayug*.<sup>126</sup> She has written several novels and short stories and many of her writings have been adapted for the television.

### **3.1 *Bauji aur Bandar*: the plot.**

*Bauji aur bandar* (the father and the monkeys) is a short story by Suryabala that was published in 1992 as part of her collection *Grihapradesh* (home province). The characters present in this story are an old grandfather, his son Lalit, his son's wife and grandchildren Śanu and Śonak. This is the story of an elderly man who returns to his son's house and this is a matter of concern for his daughter-in-law. The old man has always lived in his village on his own and he comes to stay at his son's house for some time. Since the daughter-in-law is not happy with the old man's presence in the house, she discusses with her husband about the father-in-law's stay in the house. She convinces her father-in-law to go back to the village to look after his ancestral land.

After sometimes the family moves to a new house in a different city. Meanwhile, a group of stray monkeys start playing havoc in the garden of the house. When all the attempts to get rid of them prove futile, the daughter-in-law thinks to assign the task of scaring away the monkeys to her father-in-law. When the father-in-law returns to the house after a few months, he is entrusted by the daughter-in-law with dealing with the menacing monkeys. But the father-in-law is also scared by them and tries in vain to hide his failure to drive them away. In order to do so, he starts behaving in the way the daughter-in-law wants him to be, but without any success. As a consequence, he starts spending time outside the home at the temple. This makes the daughter-in-law even angrier and finally through the children she conveys to him that he should go back to the village because he has failed to deal with the monkeys. The father-in-law reacts to this silently and avoids any conflict with the daughter-in-law. When Lalit comes to know that his father is spending time with low-class vegetable farmers in their fields instead of going to the temple, he also becomes angry and prohibits him to go there.

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<sup>125</sup> "Dr. Suryabala Lal." : Home. Accessed May 16, 2016. <http://www.druryabala.com/p/about.html> .

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

When Lalit announces to his family that he has been given an opportunity to go for a site visit for two weeks, the daughter-in-law rejoices at the thought of the good time they will have there. The daughter-in-law conjures up the idea of letting the father-in-law take care of the house alone, while the entire family is away. The father-in-law is initially apprehensive but eventually concedes to their demand. He assures them that he usually lives alone in the village and they need not to worry about his well being while they are away. However, the family's site visit did not turn out the way it was expected and Lalit is forced to spend even less time with his family in order to serve his boss.

The daughter-in-law starts thinking about their return home and worries about the condition of the house because she thinks that the father-in-law is good for nothing. When the family eventually returns to the house, the daughter-in-law is surprised to find the father-in-law sitting in the courtyard feeding a whole group of small and big monkeys with chickpeas, while explaining to the maidservant that monkeys are the incarnation of Lord Hanuman.

### **3.2 *Bauji aur Bandar* : critical analysis.**

Suryabala divides this short story into four parts: the first part describes the period between the moment in which the father-in-law leaves for his village till the moment in which he comes back. The narration begins with the news that the father-in-law is coming back to the village. However, after few sentences the story goes back to his previous visit. Indeed, the news of his return creates a flashback in the daughter-in-law's mind when she suggested him to return to his village to look after the ancestral land. The second part is about the father-in-law's return at his son's house and the dynamics of his relationship with the daughter-in-law and the grandchildren. The third part underlines the moment in which Lalit tells his father about his decision to go for the site visit together with the family, leaving him alone at home; the fourth part is about this site visit and how it turned out. This section ends with the scene of the family's return to home. Each part is clearly divided in the text by a graphic sign in the narration. In the first section the central character is that of the daughter-in-law and the author focuses on how her outlook towards her father-in-law has changed since his first visit. The narrator is internal and is represented by the character of the daughter-in-law. Indeed, the narration is in first-person, suggesting to the reader that the narrator is part of the story itself. Although it is not completely clear from the beginning that the narrator is the daughter-in-law, there are some hints that reveal its identity. First of all, at the beginning of the story, the narrator refers to the father-in-law using a third person plural, indicating that he is older



than the narrator and she or he is using polite language for him<sup>127</sup>. In the beginning, the narrator reveals that she or he has created a stratagem for sending back the father-in-law to his village, advising him to take care of the ancestral land. The father-in-law is the character that reveals the identity of the narrator because when he is talking with his son Lalit he affirms that he has a wise daughter-in-law who has suggested him to keep an eye on his lands<sup>128</sup>. However, when the narrator speaks about Lalit, she does not refer to him as her husband, but she always calls him with his first name. This shows us the urban trend of new generation women of calling their husbands by their first name. It is worth mentioning here that traditionally Indian women are not supposed to utter their husband's name during conversation. In this first section the daughter-in-law talks with her husband and in that occasion she speaks both in direct speech as a character, as well as in indirect speech as the narrator.

The climax of this first section is the discussion between Lalit and his wife, after he has sent back his father to the village. After coming back, Lalit talks to his wife and clearly expresses the fact that he is aware of his father's wish to stay with them. However, instead of being *pitrbhakt* (to have filial devotion) he knows that he behaves as *patnībhakt* (obedient to his wife)<sup>129</sup>. In other words, Lalit decides to send back his father to the village because he does not want to go against his wife's wishes. The author here wants to point out the dilemma that a son might face when he has to deal with both his wife and his parents' expectations. In order to avoid any conflict with his wife, he has to send his father away. Although he has sent his father back to the village, he informs his wife that his father will be back soon. However, she is not happy with his home coming, affirming that his presence in their house creates a difficult situation where life is troublesome (*jīnā harām*)<sup>130</sup>. After this assertion, the conversation is transformed into a clear argument, where we see that the daughter-in-law describes the father-in-law as a burden while Lalit defends his father's presence in the house but he does not give it much importance. It seems that Lalit takes the decision to invite again his father in his house as a form of filial duty towards his father. In the Indian society, taking care of ones own ageing parents is a social duty that every adult child should follow. However, Lalit does not overtly show any form of regret for his mistreatment towards his father. Indeed, he is depicted as a weak character in comparison with the daughter-in-law's representation, who is described as the commandeering person of the house. Nevertheless, the only powerful reaction that Lalit has towards his wife is at the end of their argument. Although she has given reasons why she does not want him in their house, Lalit clearly states that he has taken his decision and it cannot be

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<sup>127</sup> “Bāūjī phir ā rahe haī. Unhē phir se baccō kī bahut yād ā rahī he.”, *Bāūjī aur Bandar*, p. 36.

<sup>128</sup> “bahū sayānī he.”, *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

changed. Nevertheless, the daughter-in-law accepts the idea of the return of the father-in-law just because she can use him for some works inside the house. She contemplates several household tasks for her father-in-law although after Lalit's promotion the family already has a gardener and a maid who does errands and cleans the house, which leaves nothing for the father-in-law to do in the house. Nevertheless, at the arrival of the monkeys in the house, the daughter-in-law decides that she can assign him the task to drive away the monkeys from the garden.

It is interesting to see that the name of the daughter-in-law is not mentioned in the text. Also the name of the grandfather is not mentioned and he is referred just with the term *bauji* (father). *Bauji* is a common calling name for fathers in the Hindi-speaking regions of India. It is likely that the decision of omitting the exact names of the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law is a conscious decision of the author. In fact, those two characters represent one the victim of elderly abuse and the other one the main oppressor in the family. It can be understood that the reason why those two names are omitted, is because the readers might be able to connect those two characters with real people in their lives. In this way, readers are able to reflect on the experiences of elderly abuse that is discussed in the story and connect them with reality.

The second section starts with the arrival of the father-in-law. This section starts with Śanu and Śonak, the two grandchildren, who give to their grandfather a walking stick. It is interesting to notice that this object commonly related with ageing has been transformed for other purposes. In fact, the daughter-in-law has kept this stick for him in order to drive away the menacing monkeys from the garden. When his grandchildren ask him whether he knows what it is and what it is used for, he replies to them that it is a stick and it can be useful for keeping away the stray dogs when he goes for a walk. The conversation between the mother and their children is not present in the text, although it is clear that the children knew about her plan. In the case of this stick, Suryabala has not created the kind of relation that Hepworth affirms that it might be between object and elderly people.

The father-in-law has brought some presents for his grandchildren: a picture of Lord Hanuman, a Hindu deity who is half human and half monkey, and an elephant made of black cloth. The children do not care about his gifts<sup>131</sup>, and they ask him whether he has a photograph of Amitabh Bachchan<sup>132</sup> instead. It is the first time in the text where a generational clash has been underlined. It is clear that the father-in-law regards religion as an important value that needs to be taught to the new generation. On the other hand, the new generation, exemplified by his

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<sup>131</sup> “bacce donō cīzē lāparvāhī se uchālte hue kehte haī”. In this frase the term *lāparvāhī se* (without care) indicates that they are not interested in their grandfather's gifts. *Bauji aur bandar*, p. 40.

<sup>132</sup> Amitabh Bachchan is a famous Bollywood actor.

grandchildren, are fascinated by Bollywood stars such as Amitabh Bachchan, instead of deities such as Lord Hanuman and stuffed toys. In addition to this, Śonak reminds his grandfather that the naughtiness of these monkeys is related with Hanuman, because these monkeys come from the area of the Hanuman temple<sup>133</sup>.

It is interesting to notice that the gifts brought by the father-in-law reveal something more about him. It is clear that he is a Hindu religious person and perhaps a Hanuman devotee. Therefore, we also realize that *Bauji* has lived in the village for many years and he is fond of gardening and farming. He has also brought some seeds to be planted in the garden. However, the grandchildren remind him that their father got a promotion and now they have a gardener. They told him that his duty is just to drive away the monkeys and nothing else<sup>134</sup>. It is likely that the grandchildren do not consider gardening as a task worthy of doing. They cannot understand why their grandfather wants to do it. It is interesting to notice that although they use respect form such as in the polite imperative form *rakhiē* (please leave it!), the way in which they talk to him is not respectful. It seems that they can decide what their grandfather can or cannot do, without giving him freedom to do what he likes. A sense of control by others in the house over *Bauji*'s actions and movements is clearly evident throughout the text.

There is a characteristic related to ageing that this section of the short story clearly depicts, namely persistence. Although it is a feature that Hepworth does not take deeply into consideration, it is a trait that sustains the similarities between children and old people. In this case, although both the grandchildren and the daughter-in-law told him that they have a gardener now and he does not have to do it on his own, he does not listen to them, hoping that nobody will stop him from doing it. However, while he is gardening, once he cut his hand with a bush scissor. Immediately after this incident, the children inform their mother about it and she goes towards him to see what is happening. However, he takes a towel and put it on his finger and he goes inside in his room. It is interesting to notice that she describes his actions as similar to the way children would have reacted<sup>135</sup>. This shows the general pattern of belittling the elderly by the younger generation. In addition, the children instead of being compassionate towards him, they start making fun of him. The value of respect towards the elderly is completely forgotten here, and it seems that they treat him as well like a child. Few lines after, the father-in-law is again compared to a child. A few days after the incident, the monkeys arrive again in their garden and the children start screaming as soon

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<sup>133</sup> “Śaunak cirhāte hue kahtā he –jānte aī, sāre ke sāre bandar na, pīpalvāle Hanumān mandīr ke ahāte se hī āte haī. Sārī khurāphāt unhī Hanumānjī he.”, *Bauji aur bandar*, p.40.

<sup>134</sup> “bacce dekhte hī phir chakte lagte haī, “ vāpas rakhiē, vāpas. Kuch nahī bonā-sonā hē ab. Āpko patā nahī? Papa kā promotion ho gayā hē. Ab hamāre yahā māli ātā hē. Āpko ab sirf bandar bhagāne haī – aur kuch nahī, samjhe?” Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> “mujhe dekhte hī dhotī ke chore se unglī ka jakhm chupāe sahme **bacce kī tarah** sarpaṭ apne kamre kī taraf bhāge”, Ibid, p.41.

as they saw them, telling to their grandfather to take the stick and go outside for driving away the monkeys<sup>136</sup>. In this occasion, the narrator describes the father-in-law's reaction as being obedient like a child when his mother reminds him that it is the time to do what she has asked him.<sup>137</sup> However, the success of driving away the monkeys from their house does not last for long and after five days they were again in the garden. On this occasion, the daughter-in-law became angry with *Bauji* telling him that he is behaving like a child, because he is looking at the monkeys behind the windows, instead of driving them away<sup>138</sup>.

The narrator is aware that her children clearly understand the situation and are able to comprehend that their grandfather is scared by their mother and her possible reactions<sup>139</sup>. Furthermore, the children were once complaining about how the garden has been destroyed by the monkeys and they remind her that she has explained that the duty of their grandfather was to drive away the monkeys but he is just scared of them<sup>140</sup>. However, instead of replying to them what she really thinks about him and his presence in the house, she holds herself back. Nevertheless, later *Bauji* is being made aware of her unhappiness regarding him<sup>141</sup>.

It is interesting to notice that in the second section of the story the character of *Bauji* evolves. If in the first section *Bauji* is unconscious of the fact that his daughter-in-law does not like him and she cannot stand his presence in her house, in the second section he understands her real feelings and he tries to obey her every instruction<sup>142</sup> and he shows to his grandchildren that he is following them. However, he begins to be afraid of her and he tries to avoid her. In my opinion, this is the sign that the relation between the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law is deteriorating. In fact, the daughter-in-law first feels an aversion towards her father-in-law but from now onwards the sign of elderly abuse are clear. As an example, she affirms that she is satisfied when her children told him that he is a coward<sup>143</sup>. He becomes almost invisible in the house, there are not even arguments between them anymore. It is interesting to notice that the narrator uses the metaphor of a barricade between them for describing the situation,<sup>144</sup> as if a wall divides them. Another example of elderly abuse can be found in the word used by the narrator when she describes how she gives

<sup>136</sup> "Bandar aē, Bandar aē, bāūjī. Calie, chaṛī lekar bandar bhagāe", *Bauji aur bandar*, p.42.

<sup>137</sup> "Ājyākārī bacce kī tarah", *Ibid*.

<sup>138</sup> "Āp bhī baccō kī tarah khiṛkī se taka- jhākī karte maze le rahe haī", *Ibid*, p. 43.

<sup>139</sup> "Bhī choṭe sahī, par itnī akl to thī hī...", *Ibid*, p. 43.

<sup>140</sup> "Bagīcā kitnā kharāb ho gayā na! Tum to kahtī thī, bāūjī bandarō ko bhagā diyā karenge, lekin to khud hī kitnā darte haī", *Ibid*.

<sup>141</sup> "...Par mammī kī ubāl khāī mukhmudarā aur kuch gāv vāpas jāne jaisī nak bāūjī tak pahuncāī unḥōne zarur", *Ibid*.

<sup>142</sup> "In sari hidāyatō par idhar zarurat se zyādā amal kiyā jāne lagā", *Ibid*, p.44.

<sup>143</sup> "Is ālam me sabse zyada āntarik santuṣṭī tabhī miltī, jab bacce bāūjī ko "darpok" kahakar ci ṛhāte hote", *Ibid*, p. 44.

<sup>144</sup> "Lekin ab to jaise pūrī kilebandī", *Ibid*.

the food to him. It is likely that he is not eating together with them<sup>145</sup> and the verb used for describing the action of giving food to the father-in-law is the word *dālnā* that literally means to put down. It is interesting to notice that this verb is usually used when you give food to an animal, not to a person.

At this point the relation with the daughter-in-law is irreparably damaged, and the connection with his grandchildren also starts deteriorating. This is one of the key significant elements of the story because it shows how children may be influenced by their parents regarding their relationship with their grandparents. One day while doing their homework, the children asked their grandfather whether he will be going back to the village soon. Astonished, the old man asks why and he receives a harsh answer that really upsets him: “because you are not able to drive away the monkeys, you are afraid of them.”<sup>146</sup> The father-in-law realizes everything now. Not only the daughter-in-law does not want him, but his grandchildren also think that he is in their house only to drive away the monkeys. The father-in-law explains to them that the monkeys are the incarnation of Lord Hanuman. However, his grandchildren, instead of listening to his talk, start laughing. Their reaction is completely unexpected for the father-in-law and “the children with their laughs declare the end”<sup>147</sup> of their relation with him. Nevertheless, *Bauji* tries hard to rebuild his relationship with them. At first, the narrator with another metaphor describes *Bauji* as his grandchildren’s shadow.<sup>148</sup> However, the narrator clearly describes the change of feeling of the grandchildren for their grandfather. They are now grown up and they are bothered by his continuous presence. Then, the grandfather tries to talk with the children when his daughter-in-law is not around. Finally, as a desperate attempt, the old man tells his biggest worry to his grandchildren, namely the impossibility to see them again when he will be back to his village<sup>149</sup>. However, the children do not understand the importance of that message and they carelessly agree with him, keep on doing their homework. As a consequence, *Bauji* stops every interaction with his family members and starts going out to the temple. However, the maid tells to the daughter-in-law that he is not actually going to the temple but spending time talking with the vegetable sellers. When asked about this, he keeps silent.<sup>150</sup> This is also the only time when Lalit takes a position against his father. In fact, he imposes him to go just to the temple and not waste his time with useless talking. This instance also brings out the underplay of caste and class hierarchies which are disturbed by *Bauji*’s talking to law caste

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<sup>145</sup> “ Vah khud bhī cupcāp khā lete aur khisak jāte”, *Bauji aur bandar*, p. 45.

<sup>146</sup> “Kyōki āp to bandarō ko bhagā hī nahī pāte, unse darte hāi.”, Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> “Lekin baccō ne khilkhilākar pāri samāpti kī ghoṣṇā kar dī.”, ibid.

<sup>148</sup> “Baccō ke pīche-pīche sāe-se ḍolte.”, ibid.

<sup>149</sup> “Agar māi gāv calā to fir tum logō ko kahā dekh pāūgā”, ibid.

<sup>150</sup> “ Bas, nahī batāte”, Ibid, p.46.

vegetable sellers (*kunjar*)<sup>151</sup>. The father-in-law does not have the strength for any discussion with his family anymore and passively accepts every decision about him, even if they will compromise his freedom.<sup>152</sup> In addition, the father-in-law is no longer participating in driving away the monkeys and it seems that he is left out.

The third section deals with the family's site visit, thereby leaving *Bauji* alone in the house. It is interesting to notice that at the beginning of this part, the narrator expresses her only concern, namely whether there will be somebody who will look after the house. In addition to this, she expresses her relief in thinking that they do not have to pay somebody for this task, because the father-in-law will remain at home. In a way, the daughter-in-law thinks just about how the father-in-law might be useful in different situations, not about his worries about staying at home alone. Again, the narrator compares the father-in-law to a child who is scared to be left alone at home<sup>153</sup>. Moreover, the narrator reports a part of the conversation between Lalit and his father, where *Bauji* tells to his son that if they will be away for more than a month, than he prefers to go back to his village. However, Lalit, who is clearly manipulated by his wife<sup>154</sup>, lied to him, telling him that they will be away for about a week, no more. Moreover, he did not worry about the food because the servant will stay at home with him. In addition to this, Lalit imposes to his father to stay all the time in the house, without going out. This position under marks the exploitative relationship between *Bauji* and his son's family, where he is always expected to be useful in order to stay with them.

The fourth and last section of this story begins with a direct discourse of the father-in-law that tries to reassure his family that he can look after himself. We also become aware that *Bauji* has grown used to being left alone and he has some medical problem as well. While on the vacation, the daughter-in-law misses home and she is worried about how the father-in-law is managing alone there. However, she is not worried about him, but she is thinking about how is the house kept. Although it seems that she is worried about his well being, she is more concerned about the case of taking care about the burden of taking care of an elderly person who might be in a worse condition than earlier. The daughter-in-law starts feeling all the kind of emotion that the father-in-law feels in her house: boredom, loneliness and depression. However, she is not realizing that and she does not feel any compassion towards the situation in which his father-in-law is. Indeed, these sensations bring her to think about her house, but not about how her father-in-law is surviving there.

The sense of freedom that the daughter-in-law feels when she is informed that they can go back home is in complete contrast with what she encounters in front of her when the gates of the

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p.46.

<sup>152</sup> “Mān gae bāūjī, binā hīl-hujjat”, *Bauji aur bandar*, p.46.

<sup>153</sup> “Sunkar andar-andar thoṛe sahme-se dīkhe choṛe bacce kī tarah”, Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>154</sup> “Lekin māīne ākh māī- ab ek jarā kām āyā cōkīdārī kā to usse bhī katnī kāṭ rahe hāī”, Ibid.

house are opened: several monkeys are peacefully around the house and the father-in-law is feeding them chickpeas on the veranda. The short story ends with this cliff-hanger, because the reader does not know what will happen next. Particularly, the last phrase is a statement of the father-in-law who affirms that monkeys are incarnation of Lord Hanuman<sup>155</sup>. This ending is open to several interpretations. On one hand, he has accomplished in his own way the task given by the daughter-in-law, namely the duty of making the monkeys not harmful towards his family and their property. On the other hand, it explains that *Bauji* is driven by religion in his decision of feeding the monkeys and becoming friendly with them. In fact, he considers monkeys as incarnation of the Lord Hanuman and that is the reason why he respects them. Since he starts respecting them and to let them stay where they like, they are peacefully staying in *Bauji*'s veranda.

The title *Bauji aur bandar* can be analysed from different perspectives, the one of *Bauji* himself and the one of the daughter-in-law and her family more widely. If we look at the title from *Bauji*'s point of view, it exemplifies the only bond that *Bauji* was able to create in his son's house, namely with the monkeys. In this way, the title underlines the only positive occurrence that happen to *Bauji* during his stay in his son's house. *Bauji* creates a symbolic relationship with the monkeys because he does not receive any kind of positive attention from his relatives. However, if we consider the title from the daughter-in-law's point of view, both *Bauji* and the monkeys represent the main problems for her and her family. *Bauji* is seen as a burden and, at the same time, the monkeys are also seen as an important issue to resolve because they create nuisance in their garden.

Using the five variations of *Stories of Ageing* created by Hepworth in order to classify the Hindi short stories that have been selected for this thesis, *Bauji aur Bandar* might belong to the third group, i.e. those narratives where their main focus is on interaction between elderly and their family members. Indeed, the entire short story deals with the relations between the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law as well as between the father-in-law and his grandchildren. In addition to this, there are others family ties that have been taken into account, particularly the one between the daughter-in-law and her husband as well as the father-in-law and his son, although these are secondary in this story. Moreover, there is another bond that is not directly examined but might be inferred from the text. It is how the grandchildren behave with their grandfather, which is largely influenced by her mother's behaviour towards the elderly.

Suryabala's style in this short story is to use many idiomatic expressions. For example, she writes an idiomatic expression about old age that is particular of Hindi language, namely the

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<sup>155</sup> "Bandar Hanumānījī ke avatār hote hāī", *Bauji aur bandar*, p.49.

comparison between an old human being with a ripe fruit.<sup>156</sup> In fact, when a fruit is ripe that means that it will fall soon from the tree, causing the end of its life. Indeed, the ripeness of a fruit is the end of the journey for his life. After a fruit is ripe, it starts its decline because the ripeness for a fruit is just a step before the fruit start rotting. In addition to this, Lalit describes his father's body as an old machine. According to his state of health, he is not anymore in good shape and as an old machine it is likely that every mechanism may deteriorate at any time.<sup>157</sup> Suryabala does not focus her attention particularly on the ageing body, unlike the English novels Hepworth analyses. For example, the narrator describes the body of the father-in-law as old and loose<sup>158</sup>. However, no clear references to body parts are made, and we come to know about *Bauji*'s ill health only in the last section. There are rather references to the use of hair oil, clothes, peculiar way of living by the old father and revulsion towards them by the daughter-in-law that establish the lack of harmony in their relationship. In addition, there is just one reference to the smell of ageing body that is repeated in several parts of the text. Nevertheless, the reference is not related to a smell of the ageing body per se but to the hair oil that the father-in-law uses. The daughter-in-law underlines the fact that the smell is so strong as if there is a mill for the production of mustard oil in his room.<sup>159</sup> Suryabala often uses sarcasm in her narrative, to the point that she is able to let the reader laughs about situation that in the reality expresses the tragic condition of an old person in his own family. Moreover, she is able to express several points of view, giving the possibility to the reader to grasp the story from different perspective.

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<sup>156</sup> “Ab to pakā- pakāyā pal hū”, Ibid, p.36.

<sup>157</sup> “Varnā yah to māī bhī khūb acchī tarah jāntā hū ki ab ke gae, itne ghise kal-purjevālī deh liye kahā phir vāpas ānevāle hai”, *Bauji aur bandar*, p.37.

<sup>158</sup> “Būṛa-dillā śharīr”, Ibid, p.46.

<sup>159</sup> “Are, pūre kamre mē hī til, sarsō ke tel kī bās eśī basī rehtī hai jēse kolhū yahī kamre me hī caltā rahā ho”, Ibid, p.37.



## Chapter Four

### **4.1 *Dadi aur remote: the plot.***

*Dadi aur remote* (Grandmother and the remote control) is a short story written by Suryabala and published in 2005 in the book *Manush Gandh*. The characters present in the story are the grandmother, her son, his wife and their two children. Secondary characters present in the short story are a cook named Jangbahādur and a neighbour. The story is about an elderly woman who was made to leave her home in the village and join her family in the city. She is ageing and the villagers write a letter to her son to bring her with him in the city. The entire narration is about her experience in her son's house. She stays alone all day at home because her son works in an office, her daughter-in-law teaches in a school and her grandchildren go to school. She spends her days watching television in her room. The core of the story is about the relationship between the *Dadi* and the TV. She has never had a television before, and at first she is amazed by what she defines a *cōkhūṭī peṭī* (squared box). However, after two-three weeks the grandmother starts feeling detached from it. The novelty of the TV starts being less interesting and she starts searching for her village in those images, underlining the fact that she misses her village life. TV images shown are sometimes violent, and the *Dadi* has never seen shootings, dead bodies and other kinds of violence. The first time she sees these images on TV she is shocked and faints. After this incident, her son decides that if she is scared of the TV than it might be better to take it out from her room. However, *Dadi* knows that TV is her only companion in the house and therefore she is afraid that her son will put the television away from her room. Images of violence are interchanged with images of festival and traditional costumes that remind her of her village. She wants to share with her family her feelings towards those TV shows, but they soon get annoyed by her questions and enquires. The daughter-in-law seeks advice from her neighbour regarding *Dadi* and she suggests her to show the grandmother a morning programme in which a *Guru* (Hindu religious teacher) gives sermons. *Dadi's* attention is immediately captured by this programme, following the *Guru* in his prayers, chants and listening carefully to his lectures. However, one day the programme stops abruptly before the end of the *Guru's* talk, leaving the old lady confused and speechless. This makes her worried about the *Guru* and she spends the remaining part of the day restless, thinking about this abrupt ending.

*Dadi* skips watching TV for a few days, but she returns to it to get out of her loneliness. Slowly, she becomes more passive to what it is shown on the TV and stop pestering the family members with her question. She stops reacting to all the violence shown on the TV and she keeps herself confined in her room. This change in her behaviour is appreciated by the family members

since she is no longer troubling them. *Dadi* also stops giving her usual advise and suggestions to her son and other members of the family.

The turning point in the story takes place when a 28 years old young man is murdered near the family apartments' block. When the grandson informs *Dadi* of this gruesome news, then the *Dadi* reacts to this very nonchalantly. In fact, she affirms that she has already witnessed this happening in yesterday's TV show.

#### 4.2 *Dadi aur remote: critical analysis.*

The short story *Dadi aur remote* deals with the daily routine of an old lady forced to move to her son's house in the city. The main focus of this story is her relationship with the television, her only fulltime companion in the house. The story is not divided in parts as *Suryabala* did in *Bauji aur bandar*. Indeed, the entire story deals with the same theme and the setting does not change during the entire narration. From the beginning of the story it is clear that the *Dadi* is unwilling to leave her village and start living in the city. In fact, the use of the passive form *le āī gāī* (she was brought) underlines that she is not active in this action and she finds herself there against her will<sup>160</sup>. In addition, few sentences further, the gerund form of the verb *lānā* (to bring) is used, underlining again that the grandmother has a passive role in the decision of coming to the city.

We come to know that the family lives in a skyscraper on the seventh floor. The narrator compares the grandmother to an old mynah<sup>161</sup> and her son's apartment to a hanging cage<sup>162</sup>. The narrator is not the grandmother, but she describes the building where *Dadi* lives from her point of view. Indeed, she looks out of the window and she is scared of the height,<sup>163</sup> and while looking up she compares the other apartments to boxes that are hanging from the sky. The first detail that the grandmother notices while looking outside is her inability to look at the sky properly from the city apartment. From this we can infer that in the village she could look at the sky and see the constellations while here in the city her view is obstructed by many high buildings. *Dadi* continuously finds differences between her past life in the village and her present life in the city. In

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<sup>160</sup> "Gāv se dādī le āī gāī", *Dadi aur remote*, p.1.

<sup>161</sup> *Mynah* is a bird typical of South Asia and its main characteristic is to reproduce sounds similar to human voice. According to folkloric tradition, the mynah is symbol of undying love as well as symbol of peace. The representation of the mynah as loyal to her love is depicted in one of folk tales entitled "the parrot and the mynah". The parrot and the mynah are central also in Hindi-Urdu literature. In the qissa's genre of Urdu-Hindi traditional literature, the mynah and the parrot are second narrators which tell the readers moral stories regarding human's values. It is likely that *Suryabala* compares the *Dadi* with the mynah in order to make references to the folk stories' tradition and the characteristics that are represented by the mynah in these narrations.

<sup>162</sup> "Lākar, ūcī imāratō vāle śahar ke sātvē māle par pijre kī būrī mēnāsī laṭkā- dī gāī", *Dadi aur remote*, p.1.

<sup>163</sup> "jhāī āe", *Ibid.*

fact, it can be inferred that she is used to a quiet life in the village, where she was probably living alone. However, the narrator describes, through *Dadi*'s point of view, the morning as a war ready to begin.<sup>164</sup> In addition to this, the narrator describes the morning also as an earthquake, underlining that, according to *Dadi*'s point of view, the mornings are frenzied and traumatic for her.<sup>165</sup> The narrator clearly explains what the grandmother means with the term upcoming war:

“it is early in the morning and everybody is in a hurry. All the family members open and close doors. Shoes, slippers, combing, ironing, everything is done very quickly. And with their bags swinging around, they leave”.<sup>166</sup>

It is interesting to notice that the term used by the narrator for describing the office bag or the school bag is *baksiyā* (boxes). Although the narrator is not the grandmother, she uses terms that refer to *Dadi*'s way of speaking. In fact, every object that is squared is described as a box. For example, the narrator defines, through the *Dadi*'s point of view, the apartments in the skyscrapers as *dabba* (box). In the same way, the television is described as a *cōkhūfī pefī* (squared box). In addition to this, the narrator uses the language that characterizes a grandmother who is coming from a village. For example, the word morning is written *saberā* instead of *saverā*. Indeed, the substitution of the letter *va* with the letter *ba* in Hindi underlines the fact that the speaker comes from a rural area. The same happens with the word TV, where the semi-vowel *va* is replaced with the labial *ba* (TB instead of TV). Moreover, the addition of the vowel *i* in front of the word *skul* (iskul: school) underlines the difficulty for someone from the countryside to pronounce properly words starting with a double consonants as well as words with a foreign origin.

It is likely that the narrator is external to the story but the focalization is internal. In fact, this is the case of what Genette defines as internal focaliser, where although the narrator is not part of the story, he uses the point of view of one of the character, in this case the one of the grandmother, while describing the story. This is the reason why she sometimes uses *dadi*'s rural language for the narration and describes the television and its programme from her point of view. The narrator in the text can be defined as extradiegetic and omniscient. She is extradiegetic because she is not part of the narration. In fact, the narration is in third person. She is omniscient because she knows about events that happen after or before the narrative time.

None of the characters are named in the story and the narrator uses the generic term of father, mother, children and grandmother for referring to them. In fact, *Dadi*'s son is referred as

<sup>164</sup> “Aur sabera? jaise jang chīfī ho kahī ” *Dadi aur remote*, *ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>165</sup> “Subah phir vahī bhūcālā”, *Ibid.*, p.4

<sup>166</sup> “Bhor huī nahī ki bhāgam-bhāg. Aṛāk-phaṛāk khulte, band hote darvāze. Jūte-cappal, kanghī, istrī, aphṛā-taphṛī. Aur apne-apne taile, baksiyā laṭkāe sab darvāze se bāhar”, *Ibid.* p. 2.

*baccō ke pitā* (children's father) and his wife is called *baccō kī mā* (children's mother). In addition to this, the daughter-in-law throughout the text is referred with the term *mālkin* that means female owner. It is likely that with the term *mālkin* Suryabala wants to underline who the grandmother thinks is the real head of the house, the one who has the power of decision-making. It is most likely that Suryabala has consciously decided not to specify the name of her characters in order to let her readers identify with the story. The daughter-in-law is not central in the narration like the one described in *Bauji aur bandar*. In fact, in the short story previously analysed, the daughter-in-law is a homodiegetic narrator, because she is both the narrator as well as one of the main character of the story. On the other hand, in *Dadi aur remote* the *Dadi* is the only character that is central to the narration and the daughter-in-law is a minor character. It is likely that the short story *Bauji aur Bandar* has a double focalizer in the story. The story is narrated through the point of view of the daughter-in-law mainly, as well as from the point of view of the grandfather in certain passages. On the other hand, the focalizer of *Dadi aur remote* is the grandmother and we might infer what the daughter-in-law thinks about the *Dadi* just in a passage of the story. When the *Dadi* wants to tell to her family about the injustice she sees on the television, the daughter-in-law is irritated by her questions and snatches the remote control from her. She threatens the grandmother telling her that if she is not able to understand that what is shown in the television it is not real<sup>167</sup>, then why is she watching it. The narrator clarifies what the daughter-in-law thinks about the idea of letting the grandmother watch the television. In fact, she explains that they have created an expedient in order to get rid of a problem, namely the idea to engage her with watching TV in order to spend her time in their house. However, if she is scared by what she sees on the television, then their expedient creates an unexpected problem and it is not a solution anymore<sup>168</sup>. It is understood that her presence in the house is considered as a problem itself.

It is interesting to notice the difference in how the son is depicted in the two stories. In *Bauji aur bandar* the son Lalit is not a domineering character, and the daughter-in-law subordinates him. As a consequence, although he feels pity for his father, he does not interfere with the inappropriate behaviour of his wife towards his father for the sake of a peace in the house. By contrast, in the short story *Dadi aur remote* all the other character except the *Dadi* are not central to the narration. Nevertheless, *Dadi's* son is quite blunt with his mother, even though he has a sense of duty towards her. In fact, there are several references about duty towards elderly parents in the letter that the son received from the villagers. For example, they ask him to fulfil his filial duty by taking care of his

<sup>167</sup> "Bacce hans parte lekin baccō kī mā jhūjhalā kar *remote* chīn letī jab samjhatī nahī to dekhnā kāhe kā", *Dadi aur remote*, p. 8-9.

<sup>168</sup> "Jān churāne kī garaj se kiyā upāya, jān kī jahamat ban gayā" Ibid.

own responsibility towards his mother, and bring her to the city<sup>169</sup>. In addition, the villagers remind *Dadi*'s son that if he will take care of his old and weary mother, he will be blessed for his after life<sup>170</sup>. It is interesting to notice that, according to what the villagers are suggesting to *Dadi*'s son, it is clear that they are a Hindu family. In addition to this the villagers used a common saying that can be literally translated, as “after we consign to you the one you had entrusted to us we will be able to bathe in the Ganges”<sup>171</sup>, that mean relieving them from the worries regarding *Dadi*.

In the way in which the content of the letter is presented, it is clear that the grandmother blames her villager companions who have decided to send this letter to her son. In fact, the narrator introduces the content of the letter with the image of this old lady thinking about herself in the city and start cursing all the villagers and her relatives. Indeed, she feels betrayed by them, because they decide to abandon her while she is ageing and they think that she is a burden out of their responsibility<sup>172</sup>. In the letter there is a clear reference to the ageing body of the *Dadi*. It is written that “she has become old and her body is like a ripened fruit ready to fall from the tree”<sup>173</sup>. It is interesting to notice that the same metaphor of the ageing body as a ripened fruit is made in *Bauji aur bandar*. However, it seems that Lalit's father is aware of his ageing body and the consequence of this ageing process. On the other hand, there are no signs of *Dadi*'s awareness about her ageing body. Once again, in this story there are not many clear references about a particular part of the body that is ageing. For example, at the beginning of the story the readers come to know that she is shaking and swaying while walking<sup>174</sup>. We come to know also something about her voice, described as rough and trembling when she tries to sing<sup>175</sup>.

According to the text, it seems that it is the daughter-in-law who takes care of the grandmother's daily needs. In fact, before leaving the house for work, the daughter-in-law gives instruction to the cook to prepare daily food for her and ensure that the door is safely locked<sup>176</sup>. She also explains to the grandmother that she does not have to open the door if somebody is ringing the bell in their absence<sup>177</sup>.

<sup>169</sup> “Apnī jamīvārī sābhālo”, *Dadi aur remote*, ibid., 2.

<sup>170</sup> “To āp jāngarpōruṣ thakī apnī buṛhī mātā kī sevā karke-ihalok, parlok sudhārī aur ham bhī thātī āpko supurd kar Gangā nahāe”, ibid., p.3.

<sup>171</sup> “Aur ham bhī āpkī thātī āpko supurd kar Gangā nahāe”, ibid.

<sup>172</sup> “Dādī sāre gāv ke ṭolepaṭṭīdārō-parao aur nāte-sīdh-lapeṭ ke sīdham- ko kosnā śurū kar detī jinhōne binā lag “saher” ke ṭhikāne par cīṭhṭhī tān dī thī ki ...”, ibid., p.2 .

<sup>173</sup> “...Umīr aur buṛhāyā sarīr ab pūrī tarah pak ke cu paṛne ko he lekin māntī phir bhī nahī”, ibid.

<sup>174</sup> “Hiltī, ḍultī, ṭhagṭī, ṭhagāṭī”, ibid., p.1.

<sup>175</sup> “...khurkhurī āvāz aur thartharāte gale se”, ibid., p.7.

<sup>176</sup> “Darvāzā bheṛṭī mālkin, har roz bāhar nikalte hue jangbahādur se vahī ek hidāyat duharāṭī ki vah dādī ke lie rotīyā, dāl aur sabzī mez par dhāk kar, darvāzā pūrī cauksī se band kartā jāe”, ibid., p.2.

<sup>177</sup> “Dādī ko bhī yahī samjhāyā jātā ki koī kitnī bhī ghanṭī māre, kholnā nahī har”, ibid.

The room given to *Dadi* in their house was already decided before her arrival<sup>178</sup>. In both Suryabala's short stories it is clear that the elderly characters are not the owner of the house where the narration is taking place. On the contrary, there is no clear reference in *Chief ki dāwat* to whether the old lady is the owner of the house or she lives in her son's house due her old age. *Chief ki dāwat*'s old protagonist is living in a small room, suggesting that this was the only room available for her when her family decided that she could not live alone anymore.

The term used by the narrator in *Dadi aur remote* for referring to the room is *kothrī*, namely a small room or storage. The same word *kothrī* is present in all the short stories previously analysed. In this small room there is just the space for a window with a curtain, a small table, a bed and the TV<sup>179</sup>. It is interesting to notice that the moment in which the *Dadi* takes possession of this small room is described as if the grandmother is a non-living thing, an idol that deserves a proper ceremony when it is brought to the temple. The narrator uses the verb *sthāpit karna*, that literally means to establish, to erect, to place<sup>180</sup>. In addition to this, the narrator ironically used the term *sthāpnāparv*<sup>181</sup>, that literally indicates the particular moment in which an idol is placed in a temple and the celebration around it. Suryabala makes use of those terms in a sarchastic way typical of her style, because during such a solemn moment, such as the establishment of the *Dadi* in the room, a button get pressed and the TV comes to life. The contrast between a sacred moment reminded by the use of the verb *sthāpit karnā* and the accidental pressing of the remote control's button makes this entire scene hilarious. Another moment of the narration where Suryabala makes a strong contrast between what is actually happening and what the narrator is comparing to, is when *Dadi* sees images on the television for the first time. In order to describe her surprise, the narrator makes an analogy between her astonishment in front of a switched on television and she while seeing gods, demi-God and mythological figures, strengthening the irony behind it.

When for the first time the *Dadi* holds the remote control of the television she is referred to as if she is behaving like a child<sup>182</sup>. Furthermore, when her son threatens her by saying that he will take out the TV from her room if she is so scared from what she might watch on it, the narrator describes that her worries for the probable loss of her daily companion like children distaste for studies<sup>183</sup>. As we have previously seen, the idea of comparison between children and elderly as done by Hepworth, suggests universality for this reference in literature of ageing.

<sup>178</sup> “Intazām pahle se thā”, *Dadi aur remote*, p.3.

<sup>179</sup> “Ek kone-sutharā cāṭā-mē unkī koṭhrī. Pardē dhākī khiṛkī, tipāī, jag. ... Aur to aur unkī khāṭ ke ain sāmne ek choṭā TV” Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> “In sabke bīc pūrī nigrānī ke sāth dādī ko sthāpit kar diyā gayā”, Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> “Is sthāpnāparv ke bīc”, Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> “Baccō kī tarah remote”, Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> “Jaise paṛhāī ke nām se baccō kā”, ibid, p.6.

During the entire narration, the *Dadi* undergoes to a process of complete exclusion to any interaction with the other family members and seclusion in her room watching TV, a process that brings her to the situation where she is not able to tell the difference between the reality and the unreality shown on the TV. This is one of the key elements of the story because it shows the process of *Dadi*'s alienation from the reality and from any kind of relationship with her family members. At the beginning, *Dadi* tries to interact with them as they return home, but they do not show interest. After several unsuccessful attempts, she then decides to go back to her room and press the button of the remote control<sup>184</sup>. The second step of her transformation is when she tries to interact with her family, telling them about what she has seen during the day on the TV. She wants to share with them all the injustices she has seen on the TV<sup>185</sup> but she soon understands that they get bored by her behaviour. The third step is achieved when she does not feel the need anymore to tell them about what she has seen on TV. It is most likely that she knows that her family considers her a burden. Indeed, it seems that they are relieved by her new behaviour. The narrator clearly expresses the positive feeling that all the family members feel since the *Dadi* has decided to not interact with them anymore. The house, a term here used for referring to all the family members, is described as satisfied and astonished by her new behaviour<sup>186</sup>. The consequence of her alienation are clear when her grandson decides to tell her about a murder happened on a Sunday afternoon in front of their apartment block. After the news, she explains that yesterday she already known about the incident because she has seen it on the TV<sup>187</sup>. Nonchalantly, without understanding that what she has just said might result absurd, she asks to her grandson to check whether the cook Jangbahādur has already prepared her thee.

The grandchildren constantly make fun of their *Dadi* in the narrative, underlining the difficult interaction between different generations. For example, after seeing the reaction of the *Dadi* when she saw TV for the first time, the children tell to their father to bring also some videogames, so that their grandmother can spend time more easily when alone. In another occasion, when *Dadi* unexpectedly watches violence and gun fight on TV, she fainted. Angrily she said that she wants to watch the gods and not this kind of violence, and she wants to take the violence button out of her remote control. When she innocently asks why the gods today are not present in the TV, her grandchildren tell her that they are not coming because of her presence<sup>188</sup>. However, while these

<sup>184</sup> “Āpas mè thoṛī bātcīt karte phir – apne samay par āte- apne kām mè maśgūl ho jāte. Dādī unke āspās kahī na kahī baiṭhne- apne uṭhne, calnephirne kī kośīś kart rahtī. Phir thak kar apnī koṭhrī mè ākar remote kā button dabā detī.”, *Dadi aur remote*, p.4.

<sup>185</sup> “Har choṭebare ko bulā kar- phūltī sāsō ke bīc ākhō dekhe “anyāy” kī duhāī dene lagtī”, *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>188</sup> “Baccō ne ṭhahākā lagāyā –āp jo ā gaī. Sāre bhagvān bhāg khare hue”, *Ibid.*, p.5.

elderly abuses might be clear for the reader, they are not evident to the grandmother<sup>189</sup>. Furthermore, the narrator underlines that from the moment in which the *Dadi* starts telling to the other family members about what she sees on the TV, all of them ironically calls her “television information bureau”<sup>190</sup>. It is interesting to notice that the way in which *Dadi*’s son reacts when he realises that she fainted after having seen violence on the TV might be compared with the reaction of Lalit in *Bauji aur bandar* when he discovers that his father instead of going to the temple is spending time talking with some vegetable sellers. In fact, he threatens her telling her that he will take out the TV from her room if she is not able to control her emotion towards something fictional. Her son affirms that she has just to bathe, eat, drink, pray and if these actions are still not enough for her than she can silently count the beads of her *mala*<sup>191</sup>. In the same way, when Lalit discovers that his father is not going to the temple, he orders him to go just to the temple if he goes out<sup>192</sup>. It is interesting to notice that Lalit allows his father to go out of the house, while in *Dadi aur remote* the *Dadi* is not allowed to go anywhere. It is likely that the different settings of these two short stories and the different gender of the two elderly people taken into account might have brought to different decisions. In fact, the short stories *Dadi aur remote* is set in an apartment in a skyscraper, while the short story *Bauji aur Bandar* is set in a bungalow with a garden. It is likely that for an elderly lady living in a village it might be dangerous to go out in an unknown big city. As it was previously reminded, *Dadi*’s son explains her that instead of watching TV she should count the beads of her *mala*. It is interesting to notice that this object also recurs in *Chief ki dawat*<sup>193</sup>. The difference between the references to the same object, namely the *mala*, in two different short stories is that in *Dadi aur remote* the son suggests his mother to pray and count the seeds of the *mala* instead of watching the TV, if she is scared by the broadcasted programme<sup>194</sup>, while in *Chief ki dawat* the old mother uses the *mala* without any suggestion from her son.

In addition to this, there is a similar reaction of both *Dadi* and Lalit’s father to the mistreatments that these two elderly characters suffer at the hand of their relatives. Indeed, in both cases there is a passive reaction by the elderly characters. When *Dadi*’s son gets angry with her because he is worried about her possible reactions towards what she is watching in the TV during their absence, this is the only moment in which she clearly feels her impossibility to talk directly with her middle-aged son. She asks herself how she can reply to her middle-age son and she arrives to the conclusion that there is no other option than silence and patiently wait for a decision whether

<sup>189</sup> “Dādī baccō kī udandatā aur maskharī kā burā nahī māntī”, Ibid., p.10.

<sup>190</sup> *Dadi aur remote*, p. 12.

<sup>191</sup> “... nahānādhonā-, khānāpīnā-, pūjāpāṭh-, itnā kāphī nahī kyā? bākī samay cupcāp mālā jape, bas”, Ibid., p.5.

<sup>192</sup> “Bas mandir se ghar, ghar se mandir”, *Bauji aur bandar*, Suryabala, Lal, p. 46.

<sup>193</sup> “Mā mālā sanbhālī”, *Chief ki dawat*, Bhisham Sahni, p. 4.

<sup>194</sup> “Bākī samay cupcāp mālā japē, bas”, Ibid, p. 5.



the TV will be taken out<sup>195</sup>. On the other hand, Lalit's father agrees with him, without any objection, as if it was correct what his son was saying<sup>196</sup>.

During the entire narration, *Dadi* builds a peculiar relationship with the TV, as we can infer when she defines the TV as her compatriot with whom she spends time with<sup>197</sup>. This is one of the most significant elements of the story because it shows how an elderly character might build a special relationship with an object due to a lack of consideration by his or her family members. Hepworth underlines the importance of examining the bonds between elderly people and inanimate objects, which are seen by the elderly as carriers of memories of past events. In addition to this, inanimate things are also seen as substitutes of human relationships, due to the solitude and to the state of neglect to which elderly people are sometimes exposed.

It is likely that Hepworth's interpretation of the relation between the elderly and objects might be applied also in the case of *Dadi* and her relationship with the TV. Indeed, the TV for *Dadi* carries past memories when, for example, she is excited to see the TV programmes celebrating *savan* festival. In that occasion, images of young women traditionally dressed swinging on swings and singing folk songs remind *Dadi* of her life in the village when she was young. On the other hand, the TV is also presented as a substitute of human relationships for *Dadi*'s life in the city. The old lady is neglected by her family and she does not have anybody to spend her time with, except for the TV. This is the reason why the narrator chooses to define the TV as *Dadi*'s *sāthī* (friends). However, the TV, described from *Dadi*'s point of view, appears as a new object, something that might be considered magical, enchanted and scary depending on what it shows.

The title of this short story might be explained through the analysis of the relationship between *Dadi* and the TV. As in the case of *Bauji aur Bandar*, the title of this short story can be analysed from two different points of view, the one of *Dadi* and the one of the rest of the family. If we consider *Dadi*'s point of view, the remote control represents the only tool for communicating with her friend in the house, namely the TV. In this case, the title *Dadi aur remote* expresses the only friendship that *Dadi* was able to create inside her son's house. Indeed, the short story describes the evolution of the relation between the *Dadi* and the TV. On the other hand, if the title is analysed from the point of view of the rest of the family, *Dadi aur remote* clearly expresses the only solution that has been found by them for keeping *Dadi* engaged in that house.

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<sup>195</sup>“Lekin adheṛ hue beṭe ke sāmne kahē to kaise? Cupcāp sās roke, apne lie kie gae phaisle kā intazār kartī rahī”, *Dadi aur remote*, p. 6.

<sup>196</sup>“Mān gae bāūjī, binā hīl-hujjar ke. Jaise bilkul ṭhik kah rahe hō, nahī jāenge kal se.”, *Bauji aur bandar*, p.46.

<sup>197</sup>“Samay kāṭne kā sāthī”, *Dadi aur remote*, p. 6.

It is not easy to classify this short story according to the five variations underlined by Hepworth in *Stories of Ageing*. While the short story *Bauji aur bandar* is clearly part of the third group because Suryabala here focuses her attention on family interactions, in the case of *Dadi aur remote* not much attention has been given to the theme of family relationships during old age. It is likely that *Dadi aur remote* might be considered as part of group four, which deals with interpersonal exchanges outside the family environment. Although Hepworth considers as part of this group relationships between the elderly person and another person external to the family unit, connections between the elderly person and objects or animal might be added to this group. In the case of *Dadi aur remote*, the relationship between *Dadi* and the TV is central to the story.

Throughout the text, Suryabala uses several metaphors for describing *Dadi* and her relationship with the TV. For example, when *Dadi* sees for the first time live television and the power that the remote confers her, the remote control is ironically compared to Aladdin's magic lamp<sup>198</sup>. Indeed, the remote control allows her to satisfy her wishes because she is able to change channels if she does not like the broadcasted programme. In another occasion, when *Dadi* is casually watching a programme where violent images are shown, she describes the easiness with which people kill each other as if they are playing with marbles<sup>199</sup>. Another metaphor is used when the *Dadi* is worried about the fact that her son can take out the TV from her room. She describes her possible daily life without the TV as if she will be embedded between the two buildings without the possibility to look outside, as if the building is her shroud<sup>200</sup>.

As it was briefly explained before, Suryabala sometimes uses a language that is typical of the countryside, in order to better represent *Dadi*'s way of speaking. For example, the substitution of the sibilant consonant *śa* with the sibilant consonant *sa* as in the word *saher* instead of *śaher* (city) express the decision of the author to emphasize how the main character speaks. In other words as well there is this substitution of the sibilant *śa* with the sibilant *sa*: *khushāl* instead of *khuśhāl* (lovely)<sup>201</sup>; *ālīsān* instead of *ālīśān* (beautiful)<sup>202</sup>. In addition to this, sometimes different words are used, as in the case of the villagers' letter where the word *jamīvārī* is used at the place of the word *jimnevārī* (both mean responsibility). In *Dadi aur remote* there are more descriptive scene than in *Bauji aur bandar*. In particular, every programme seen on the TV is deeply described from the *Dadi*'s perspective.

<sup>198</sup>“ Jaise Allādīn kā cirāg hath lag gayā ho.”, *Dadi aur remote*, p. 4.

<sup>199</sup> “Golī to log yō mār dete jaise kance khel rahe hō”, *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>200</sup> “Dinbhar? Lede- ke vahī ek khiṛkī jiske bagal vālī building kī kaphphan sī sapāt dīvāl ke sivākuch dikhtā h nahī. Lagtā hāī jaise ūncī dīvāl ke bīc cin dī gaī hō”, *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

## Conclusion

This thesis has analysed how ageing is depicted in Hindi literature and whether the selected short stories can be considered as examples of literature about ageing. The first research question that this thesis has tried to answer is whether the selected short stories can be considered literature about ageing and the reason behind this choice. In order to answer to this research questions, the analysis done by Mike Hepworth referring to literary works about ageing in British Literature has been taken into account. Moreover, Hepworth has created a system for categorising what can be considered to be *Stories of Ageing*. This thesis takes his analysis as a theoretical framework with the aim to examine whether the selected short stories respect Hepworth's parameters. Additionally, this thesis will try to look whether there are characteristics that might be considered peculiar of Indian culture for describing the ageing process.

This thesis has demonstrated that the selected short stories can be considered literary works about ageing because they respect the criteria given by Hepworth for classifying stories about ageing and they deal with many themes underlined in Hepworth's analysis. According to Hepworth's categorisation, *Bhuri kaki*, *Chief ki dawat* and *Bauji aur Bandar* can be classified in group three, because the core of the narration is family interaction. However, *Dadi aur remote* is an example of group four, where the relation between the 'elderly character' and 'something or someone external' to the family unit (in this case represented by the TV) is central to the narration. Three out of four short stories have references to the elder protagonist in their titles. *Chief ki dawat* is the only short story that has a title that does not immediately refer to the elderly character, but rather to the central event of the narration. Indeed, in this last case the reader cannot immediately understand the centrality of the elderly character while reading the title.

The elderly characters who are represented in these short stories are three women and a man, representing the fact that abuse towards elderly people are not dictated by gender. However, in a patriarchal society, such as India, elderly women are doubly disadvantaged, first because of their gender as a female and their subservient position in the family structure (they are not usually the head of the family), and secondly because they are marginalized within their family environment due to their age.

Overall, the selected short stories refer to family dynamics that influence the way in which the elderly character is ageing. All the elderly characters live with their son's family, except for *Bhuri kaki*, where the old aunt lives with her nephew's family because all her children have passed away. Although it is not clearly stated in any of the selected literary works (with the exception of *Bhuri kaki*), all the elderly characters are widowed. Their status as widowed indicates that they are

not economically independent and socially secured, two reasons that can explain why abuses towards them are easily perpetrated and the common unawareness regarding them within the society.

All of them (except for the old mother in *Chief ki dawat*) have grandchildren. The relationship between the elderly characters and their grandchildren is another central topic that influences the ageing process of the elderly, also underlined by Hepworth. *Bauji aur Bandar* and *Dadi aur remote* present the relationship between the elderly and the grandchildren, who often deride their grandparents, as difficult one. In *Bauji aur bandar* the old father tries to connect with his grandchildren without any success due to the fact that they are influenced by their mother, who sees her father-in-law just as a burden. The influence that parents have on their children in the relationship between them and their grandparents is also underlined in *Bhuri kaki*, where the grandchildren arrive to the point of physically misbehaving with their old aunt. However, Premchand also highlights the positive relationship between elderly people and their grandchildren, as in the case of Larli and the old aunt.

All the elderly characters except for *Bhuri kaki* are people who spent their entire life in a village and then move to their sons' house in the city. Only the father in *Bauji aur bandar* has consciously decided to move to his son's house because he wants to stay closer to his son and his grandchildren. All the other elderly characters did not have the choice to independently decide where to spend their ageing life. Moreover, in all the selected short stories it is clear that there is a social compulsion behind the decision to take care about the elderly relatives and it is not a spontaneous act.

Hepworth refers to specific body parts (hands, teeth, eyes) that clearly express the sign of an ageing body in British literature about ageing. In the selected Hindi short stories, there are references to the ageing body of the elderly characters, although they are not always so focused as the one underlines by Hepworth. While Premchand makes references to ageing hands, eyes and feet, Sahni does not specifically refer to any body parts in particular, but he touches on the fragile physical condition of the old mother, referring several times to her slow gait, to her shaking legs, her partial bald head and to her breathing problems, which cause her to snore loudly. Also Suryabala does not refer to any particular body part in both of her selected short stories. In fact, in *Bauji aur Bandar* she generically described the father's body as old and loose like a worn out machine. In *Dadi aur remote* there are just few references to her swaying gait and to her trembling voice. References to voice are made also in *Bhuri kaki*, particularly to her peculiar kind of weeping. Suryabala uses in both her short stories an idiomatic expression, peculiar to Hindi language, that compares an old body to a ripe fruit.

No references of the smell of a decaying body are made in the selected short stories, a topic that, on the contrary, is recurring in the literary works analysed by Hepworth. However, Suryabala in the short story *Bauji aur bandar* refers to the smell of the old father's hair oil, that is an unpleasant one for the daughter-in-law. It is likely that the writer refers here to the common practice among North Indian elderly people to put a mustard oil in the hair and the smell of this oil is then related to the smell of ageing.

Hepworth underlines in his analysis the importance of relationship between elderly characters and objects, as carrier of memories as well as substitute of human relations in the elderly's solitary life. In the selected short stories there are no objects that are able to connect the elderly characters with happy past events but there are objects and/or animals that help the elderly to overcome their solitude. Particularly, in *Dadi aur remote* the television has a central role in the narration as an influential object that is able to transform the grandmother. Similarly, although Hepworth does not specifically talk about animals, the monkeys of *Bauji aur bandar* have a similar role in the story. In fact, the relationship that is created at the end of the narration between the grandfather and the monkeys has filled the emptiness and loneliness in the old man's life.

The relation between elderly and the space where they live as a representation of emplacement, as underlined by Hepworth, is present in all the selected short stories. Indeed, in all the literary works that have been analysed in this thesis, the room assigned to the elderly in their children's house is defined as a *kothri*, a term that refers to a small room that it is not usually used as sleeping room but rather as a storage. Moreover, the term *kothri* also means a prison cell, reinforcing the idea of how these elderly characters are treated by their relatives.

The second research question that this thesis has tried to answer is why and how ageing is depicted in Hindi literature. Indeed, there is a theme that is common to all the selected Hindi short stories and to which Hepworth does not particularly focus on his analysis, namely elderly abuse. It is likely that all the literary works taken into account in this thesis seek to denounce cases of elderly abuses. And they describe them from different characters' perspectives, so as to enable the reader with varying outlooks on the issues of ageing in Indian context. Moreover, there is something that appears to be peculiar to Hindi stories about ageing and that it was not underlined in Hepworth's analysis of stories about ageing in British Literature, namely the moral emphasis given to the texts about ageing. Indeed, these are texts that have the power to acquaint the readers with the theme of elderly abuse so that each reader can reflect on that and he or she might be able to interpret the message of denunciation behind it.

In addition to this, the reader gets to know from all the short stories analysed in this thesis that the primary care givers are the main perpetrators of abuses towards their elderly family

members. As it was explained in the introduction, surveys carried out by *HelpAge India* state that in Contemporary India the son and the daughter in law are identified as main perpetrators of elderly abuse within the family environment. However, it is likely that the perpetrator in the form of the daughter in law is representative of a patriarchal mind set. Indeed, she cannot misbehave with her elderly in laws if the head of the family, namely her husband, does not encourage her to do so. It is not my intention to justify the daughter in law's behaviour towards the elderly members of her family, but I just want to underline that she is part of a patriarchal family structure and she is not aloof from behaviours with which entails. As we can read in all the examined short stories, the daughter in law is depicted as the one who misbehaves the most with the elderly members of the family. However, the son aggressively intervenes in dire situations and in all the other cases he silently support her wife's misconduct towards his parents.

In addition to this, looking at *Bhurhi kaki* we come to know that elderly abuse has been long present in Indian society. After having analysed Premchand's short story, I came to the conclusion that it is wrong to affirm that elderly were traditionally highly considered and due to social changes influenced by external factors, such as globalization, the position of the elderly has drastically changed. While external factors (e.g. the decision of young generation to move abroad or in other part of the country far away from their family for studying or working) might have been crucial for the deterioration of the traditional Indian family structure, the same cannot be said in the case of elderly abuse. It is most likely that elderly abuse was present since long in India society as well as other societies in general, and different forces such as modernisation, globalisation and individualism might have aggravated it to some extent. Although the change of the Indian family structure, from an extended to a nuclear family, might be considered one of the causes of the deterioration of the elderly's life conditions, elderly abuse cannot be identified as the main consequence of this current change.

In addition to this, it is important to notice that in all the selected short stories there is a contrast between what the society requires from the expected caregiver and the character's individual personality and behaviour. In fact, the son has to take care about his elderly parents considering that this is a social duty, although this might go against him. It is likely that the Indian society represented in the selected short stories does not give the possibility to the son to decide for himself what is better to do, whether to follow the social obligation to look after his ageing parents or to be selfish and just think about his own good. Consequently, elderly abuse might be seen as a predictable result of an imposed cohabitation among different generations. However, it is important to remember that trace of psychological abuse are also present in British Literature about ageing, where the elderly do not usually lives with his or her children. Indeed, I think that every human

being is responsible for his or her own actions and it might be simplistic to blame the rules dictated by the society.

As a conclusion, in this thesis I have tried to demonstrate that it is possible to speak about ageing as a literary theme in Hindi literature and that these short stories are just an example of several Hindi literary works that deal with this theme and that hopefully, with further research, will be analysed from the perspective of ageing. Furthermore, I have also tried to highlight the similarities among literary works about ageing produced in different cultures, hoping that further studies will compare the literary theme of ageing more broadly, in order to find differences and similarities in the way ageing is depicted worldwide.

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