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Bharatendu Harishchandra: Father Of Modern Hindi In Colonial India

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INTRODUCTION

Bharatendu Harishchandra was the first creator of modernity in Hindi literature. His original name was Harishchandra and he was later given the title “Bhartendu”. His tenure stands on the contract of that era. The beginning of modern times in Hindi literature is believed to be that of Bharatendu Harishchandra. Bharatendu, famous as the pioneer of the Indian Renaissance, portrayed the poverty, subjugation, inhuman exploitation of the rulers of the country as the goal of his literature. He used his talent towards establishing Hindi as a National language.

Bharatendu Harishchandra is said to be the father of Indian modern Hindi literature. Rich in versatility, Bharatenduji brought about fundamental and landmark changes in various fields of literature and gave a new direction to Hindi literature. He was the first creator of modernity in Hindi literature. During his birth and tenure, India was a slave to the British. He set the goal of poverty, subjugation, inhuman exploitation of rulers, in Hindi literature. In Hindi, he made valuable contributions in journalism, drama and poetry. In Hindi, the plays are believed to have started with Bharatendu Harishchandra.

Early Life, Family and Education of Bharatendu Harishchandra

Bharatendu Harishchandra, the father of modern Hindi literature, was born on September 9, 1850 into the Agarwal caste in Kashi. His father Babu Gopal Chandra was also a poet. His ancestors were landlords in Bengal. But his childhood was deprived of his parents’ love due to the death of his parents in childhood. Bharatenduji surprised everyone by composing poems at the age of five. He had a high knowledge of Hindi, English, Sanskrit, Parsi, Marathi, Gujarati etc. He received his higher education from Queen’s College, Benares and married at the age of 13. Bharatenduji was very generous by nature. He looted his money in the service of the country, providing financial assistance to Dalits, literary services and the poor. As a result he became indebted and died at the age of 35 due to this concern.

Literary work of Bharatendu Harishchandra

For his literary contribution to Hindi literature it is known as “Bharatendu Yuga” from 1857 to 1900. Mahakavi Bharatenduji was characterized by writing poems on divine devotion and ancient subjects as well as poems on new subjects like social reform, patriotism and country’s independence. His literary and innovative ideas attracted all the writers and intellectuals of the time and around him a group of writers full of national sentiments became a group of writers known as “Bharatendu Mandal”. Bharatenduji mainly composed Hindi plays, essays, poetry compositions and novels.

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The works written by him are as follows:

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Plays

‘Vaidika Himsa Na Bhavati’ (1873), ‘Satya Harishchandra’ (1876), ‘Bharat Durdasha’ (1875), ‘Niladevi’ (1881), ‘Andher Nagari’ (1881).

Poetry

‘Bhakta Savagya’, ‘Prem Malika’ (1872), ‘Prem Madhur’i (1875), ‘Prem Tarang’ (1877), ‘Prem Prakalpa’ (1883), ‘Prem Phulwari (1883), ‘Holi’ (1874), ‘Madhumukul’ (1881), ‘Raga Sangrah’ (1880), ‘Varsha Vinod’ (1880), ‘Vinay Prem Pachasa’ (1881), ‘Phulon Ka Guchchha’ (1882), ‘Chandravali’ (1876), ‘Krishnacharitra’ (1883), ‘Uttarardha Bhaktamal’ (1876-77).

Essay Collection

‘Bharatendu Granthavali’ (1885).

Translations

‘Harsha’s Ratnavali’, ‘Vishakhadatta’s Mudrarakshasa’, ‘Ramprasad Sen’s Vidyasundar’, ‘Karpuramanjari’, ‘Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice’ as ‘Durlabh Bandhu (Invaluable Friend)’.

Bharatendu Harishchandra’s prose style resolution

Before Bharatenduji there was no specific form of Hindi prose, there was no prescribed style of prose in Hindi. Bharatenduji took the middle path and presented the Hindustani dialect as the ideal language style of Hindi prose. His style was not full of Arabic-Persian words, or the thrust of Sanskrit words. He used a well-known style that proved to be perfectly suited to the development of Hindi prose literature. In terms of prose, it was a very important task of Bharatenduji to replace Braj Bhasa with a vertical dialect.

The emergence of different prose genres

Bharatenduji’s time was the time for the emergence of Hindi prose literature. He gave birth to various prose genres like drama, essays, stories and biographies in Hindi. He wrote for himself and also inspired others to write. His friends also supported him in the development of Hindi language. Many plays, essays, novels and stories were written during this period. The Hindi literature store was filled with various prose genres during this period. His friends and colleagues became a large community known as “Bharatendu-Mandal”. That is why Bharatenduji is called the originator of Hindi prose.

Editorial and Journalist

Bharatendu Harishchandra composed poems and edited several magazines. At the age of 18, he published a magazine called ‘Kavi Vachan Sudha’ which published the works of the great scholars of that time. After that, he came out with ‘Harishchandra Magazine’ in 1873 Harishchandra Patrika and ‘Bal Vodhini’ magazine for women’s education in 1874. Along with these, literary institutions were also created in parallel with them. Under this he established ‘Tadia Samaj’ for Vaishnava Bhakti Prachar and did commendable work in both the native language and literature. During the independence movement, Bharatendu Harishchandraji worked to serve the country in opposition to British rule and he became very popular too. Impressed by his popularity, the Scholars of Kashi gave him the title of ‘Bharatendu’ (Moon of India) in 1880 in recognition of his services as a writer, patron, and modernist.

Bharatendu Harishchandra’s place in Hindi literature

Bharatenduji has a very important place in modern Hindi literature. Bharatendu owned versatility. His contribution in all fields like poetry, story, drama, novel, essay etc. is unique. Bharatenduji came down in Hindi with the message of ‘Nava Jagran’. He did an important job in the holistic development of Hindi. Incorporating innovation and originality into emotions, languages and styles, he made them in line with modern times. He is considered to be one of the originators of modern Hindi. Hindi plays were also produced by him. Bharatenduji was a literary leader of his time. Many talented writers were born at that time. In the service of mother tongue, he dedicated not only his life but also the entire wealth. Due to these features, Bharatendu Harishchandra became a huge star of Hindi literature and his era became famous as the Bharatendu era.

Why isn’t Bharatendu Harishchandra one of the key Indian intellectuals and most brilliant and inventive writers of colonial India, already known within world literature? Why isn’t he – who wrote poems in praise of Raja Rajeswari (empress) Victoria and satirized the arrogance of local English officials– discussed in accounts of colonial and postcolonial literature? Is it because he does not fit the expected image and profile of the

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“peripheral” and Westernizing colonial intellectual— photographs depict him in fine Mughal-style dress and long curly hair, not the sober “suited and booted” attire of other Indian writers of the time? Because only a negligible part of his extensive production was in English? Because he excelled in drama and composed volumes of songs but did not write a novel? Because though his name became famous throughout India his works have not been translated into English? Because his confident cosmopolitanism was not of the anglicized kind? Implied in these questions is the point that current world literature approaches make even important authors, particularly from outside Europe, invisible if they don’t fit a certain set of parameters. Conversely, the position of this chapter takes is that if we approach world literature from a located, ground up perspective that attends to the local choices, complex dynamics, and longer histories of local multilingual literary cultures instead of privileging one aspect or one form as the “global,” we come up with more nuanced, layered, and infinitely more interesting accounts of the production, circulation, and reception of literature in the world (Orsini 2015). A figure like that of Bharatendu Harishchandra shows the strength and vitality of local intellectual traditions, sources of authority, and entrepreneurial culture at a time when, we are told, the world literary system, unified by empire and the international literary market, produced convergence and a “stunning amount of sameness” by diffusing cosmopolitan genres like the novel (Moretti 2006, 117).

Hailed as the “father of modern Hindi” language and literature, Bharatendu Harishchandra cuts a more complex figure. Growing up in the north Indian city of Banaras after the great Revolt of 1857 and with no sympathy for the Indian rebels, he combined early expressions of nationalism with loyalty to the British Crown. A modernizer who spent the last 15 years of his life tirelessly experimenting with print media, new literary genres, and modes of association, he was at the same time also a connoisseur of traditional poetry, music, and luxury items. An advocate and standardizer of modern Hindi, he nonetheless composed all his poetry in the earlier language of Brajbhasha and experimented with Urdu verse and macaronic English – Hindi satirical poems as well. Celebrated as the father of modern Hindi prose, he composed volumes and volumes of Brajbhasha poems and songs, so much so that the work most appreciated by his contemporaries was an anthology of Brajbhasha poets, Harishchandra (“Bharatendu,” the Moon of India, was an honorific title Hindi literati conferred upon him in his lifetime) is therefore a useful figure to reassess our understanding of the impact of colonialism upon literary ideas and practices, of literary modernity in a colonial context like that of India, and of how English centric accounts of colonial and postcolonial literature have made the other, more substantial, history of literature in Indian languages virtually invisible (Mufti 2015; Orsini 2015). Did British colonialism produce a complete epistemic and aesthetic rupture? Was English literature a “mask of conquest” (Viswanathan 1990) that indelibly shaped modern Indian literatures in its own image? Were Indian writers so “crushed by English poetry” (Chandra 1992) that they forgot earlier intellectual traditions and stopped writing in their languages (Devy 1985)? Did Indians internalize colonial views of India in their psyche (Nandy 1988)? Did India’s political subjection translate into a literary peripheralization? Harishchandra’s case helps address all these questions.

For a long time the “colonial encounter” and what was termed the “Indian Renaissance” were defined by studies of Bengal or, more precisely, Calcutta. We pictured colonial intellectuals as babus, suited and booted in public and donning dhotis and sacred threads at home, equally at home in the English classics (and often also Latin and Greek) as well as Sanskrit texts even as they forged modern literature and the press in Bengali (see Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Inauguration of the Modern Indian Novel). Other regions and language areas were viewed as variations on Bengal, a little more radical here, a little belated there. An early wave of scholarship indeed emphasized the similarities of response among Indian writers and intellectuals to colonial interventions in and discourses on language, literature, society, religion, history, and progress (Chandra 1992). A later array of regional studies instead has highlighted the importance of regional contexts and paid attention to both continuities and ruptures, for example in terms of the relative strength and vitality of local intellectual traditions, sources of authority, and entrepreneurial cultures (Pritchett 1994; Dalmia 1997; Naregal 2001; Orsini 2002; Blackburn 2003; Pinto 2007; Ebeling 2010). In brief, where strong local intellectual and literary traditions existed – as in cities like Banaras or Lucknow – the “English culture” of colonial modernity left a more limited imprint and failed to dislodge existing tastes and practices. Moreover, rather than the direct influence of British and European ideas and tastes, we instead see a more “horizontal” process of lateral exchange and assimilation from other Indian language spheres, particularly Bengali but also, in the case of musical theater, Urdu (McGregor 1972; Hansen 2004; Soneji 2017). So Harishchandra looked to Bengal for inspiration in establishing a new “national theater,” and for all his fulminations against Urdu commercial theater (Parsi theater) he shared several of its features, like songs and comedy interludes.

Importantly, while world literature approaches so far have focused on the novel to argue for processes of centrifugal diffusion from Europe to the rest of the world and the production of literary “sameness” (Moretti 2006, 117) – and Benedict Anderson famously took the novel and the newspaper as the media through which national communities could be imagined (Anderson 2006) – the case of Harishchandra shows that other genres, like allegorical poetry and drama or the satirical skit, were locally more important for imagining the nation and negotiating the relationship between local/national and “Western” ideals.

In short, instead of a wholesale “assimilation” of Indian literature into “universal” Western literary models (Mufti 2015), what Harishchandra’s oeuvre and trajectory allow us to see is the gap that colonialism introduced between ideas and discourses about language and literature on the one hand, and tastes and practices on the other hand. Colonial modernity introduced new platforms, tastes, and practices, to be sure, like newspaper and journal reading or theater going, and the essay and novelistic fiction, but when new ideas called for the rejection of old tastes as decadent and harmful, the result was not in fact a wholesale rejection but more often a coexistence of contradictory tastes or a new hybridity. Finally, “paracolonial” (Newell 2001) developments like the boom in commercial theater called Parsi theater show that not all that was innovative and influential, and that circulated nationally and transnationally, was a product of colonialism (Hansen 1998; Braginsky and Suvorova 2008). Commercial theater also highlights different “significant geographies” from the current center – periphery one that dominates colonial and world literary accounts of literary developments in the colonies (Laachir, Marzagora, and Orsini 2018).

Merchant Prince and Colonial Intellectual

Recovering the historical complexity of Harishchandra’s background, position, and life choices is the first step to an appreciation of the gap between a colonial writer’s ideas and activism and his tastes and practices. The most comprehensive and illuminating guide to Harishchandra’s life, oeuvre, milieu, and politics has been Dalmia (1997). She traces the history of his family, merchants-cum-moneylenders who had moved to Bengal with the Mughal prince Shah Shuja’ when he was appointed governor of Bengal in the mid seventeenth century, and later acted as compradors for the East India Company (EIC) before being sidelined by the company after the battle of Plassey in 1757. That was when Harishchandra’s great grandfather moved to Banaras, which in the second half of the eighteenth century was becoming a rich commercial transshipment port and provincial administrative center under the East India Company. Beside the wealthy merchant families, other important actors in the city included the maharaja, who had risen from a middling caste of provincial revenue farmers within the late Mughal polity of Awadh (Oudh) and with the growing support and control of the EIC, the heterogeneous communities of Banaras pandits who had long been patronized for their Sanskrit learning by various princely patrons, and the British (Cohn 1986). Dalmia thus does not frame the “colonial encounter” simplistically as a binary relationship between colonial masters, Orientalists, and missionaries on the one hand, and Indian intellectuals, informants, or native rulers on the other hand – whether one calls that relationship a “negotiation,” “transaction,” or “dialogue,” an expression of domination or hegemony. By drawing a social map of Banaras in which the maharaja, the pandits, and the merchants each had their own source of authority and sphere of influence, she is able to show how each of them negotiated their positions in the new colonial set-up, how they moved in the new spaces of social interaction and intervention provided by the press, schools, and public associations, and how their idioms were shaped by these encounters “in interaction and ultimately in resistance to the British” (Dalmia 1997, 64). Crucial to Harishchandra’s authority was not just his role as a public intellectual, journal editor, and member or founder of several literary as well as religious associations in the city and the province, but also his “traditional” status as the scion of a leading merchant family who were important religious patrons within the Krishna-bhakti followers of Vallabhacharya in the city. This combined authority gave Harishchandra privileged access to both the maharaja and British officials – he was honorary magistrate between 1870 and 1874 before his satire incurred official displeasure – as well as easy membership among the town’s elite. His position also gave him access to ample funds to finance not just his expensive tastes and many individuals, but also his printing and photographic activities. Orphaned on both sides from a young age and brought up by an unsympathetic stepmother and estate administrator, when chided by the maharaja for squandering the family wealth Harishchandra is said to have replied: “Wealth ate my forefathers, now I am going to eat it” (quoted in Dalmia 1997, 128).

Formal colonial education formed only a small part of his upbringing. Educated early at home in Hindi, Urdu, and English, he was enrolled for a few years in the elite Wards’ school (for children of estates that had come under British tutelage or Court of Wards) and later at Queen’s College, the premier English school in Banaras. But, his Hindi biographer tells us, eating pañ (betel leaf) was forbidden in the college and Harishchandra

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could not curb his habit, so he dropped out after only two years. His father Giridhar Das had been an accomplished and prolific Brajbhasha poet, and Harishchandra followed in his footsteps. With his poetics training, he excelled particularly in the common poetic pastime of *samasya* -*pu* -*rti* or extempore composition, in which one had to compose a poem to “complete” (*pu* -*rti*) a set poetic “problem” (*samasya*). At the same time, he studied Sanskrit and read the Orientalist publications coming out of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. Already at a young age, Harishchandra was therefore at the center of a vast web of contacts— some more scholarly, like Rajendralal Mitra in Calcutta and Kavi Shyamaldas in Ajmer – others more literary, like Badrinarayan Chaudhri “Premghan,” Balkrishna Bhatt, Pratapnarayan Misra, Lala Srinivas Das, and Radhacharan Goswami, who would collectively become known as the “Bharatendu Circle.” He began editing first the journal *Kavivachansudha*. The nectar of the poets’ words, 1868) and then the more miscellaneous *Harishchandra Magazine* or *Haris*’*chandra chandrika* (1873), and encouraged his friends to start their own Hindi journals. He developed a partnership with several printers and publishers and saw to it that even his songs and poems appeared in print. In fact, his publications – journals, plays, essays, antiquarian and religious works, poems and song collections, etc. – span the whole range of the “genres introduced” and “genres reproduced” that together fueled the boom of Hindi and Urdu print culture in North India in the 1870s and 1880s (Orsini 2004, 2009; Stark 2007). In those two decades he also traveled to Allahabad and to nearby Ballia to deliver public speeches on Hindi, and in 1882 he submitted a long statement in favor of Hindi to the Hunter Education Commission that was trying to decide what should be the language of primary education in the province. He also undertook pilgrimages with his family and with the maharaja, and wrote about these and other journeys, initiating the travelogue genre in Hindi (Dalmia 1997).

At the same time, Harishchandra was active in the courtly and public rituals and festive life of Banaras, and took enthusiastic part in the annual river festival of *Burhva Mangal* and large scale *Ramlila* performance, for which he is said to have written the dialogues. In the absence of professional theater companies in Banaras and the region, he not only wrote plays but also occasionally acted in amateur theatricals (Hansen 1989). He was, as customary, married young to the daughter of another merchant family, but also had an intense relationship with two courtesans, one of whom, a Bengali child widow called *Mallika*, became a partner in his literary writings and wrote a novel under his name (Dalmia 2004). One photograph shows her sitting on his lap, their eyes interlocked.

Harishchandra died at the young age of 35 in 1885 and was immediately mourned, canonized, and intensely anthologized in the Hindi world, though the Orientalist George A. Grierson, in his *Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindostan* (1889), the first history of Hindi literature, oddly remembers him more as a Brajbhasha poet than as a dramatist and editor. Subsequent Hindi scholarship emphasized his anti-colonial nationalism and slid over his effusive expressions of loyalty (*rajbhakti*), espousal of a historical consciousness in which Muslims had been tyrannical oppressors, conservative views on the lower classes (and partly on women), and the moral “blemish” of his liaison with *Mallika* (Brajratnadas [1953] 1962). Ramvilas Sharma first addressed Harishchandra’s silence on 1857 ([1953] 1999), while Dalmia has provided a balanced historical assessment.

Assimilated to Universal Norms? Harishchandra on Language, Literature, and Community

One crucial intervention of Orientalism, Aamir Mufti has argued, was that it established and applied a “plane of equivalence, a set of categorical grids and networks” that sought to render legible and assimilated “as literature a vast and heterogeneous range of practices of writing from across the world and across millennia” (2015, 11). In his pronouncements on language and community, wide-ranging antiquarian interest in philology and archaeology, focus on drama, experiments with a range of new prose genres in print, and practice of translation, Harishchandra seems to fit this process of equivalence and assimilation.

To begin with language, it is in the context of the new ideas of language-script- community continuum – Hindi in Nagari script as the language of Hindus, and Hindustani or Urdu in Arabo-Persian script as the language developed by Muslims – that we need to understand Harishchandra’s public pronouncements on language. He advocated the need to use Hindi as “one’s own language” (*nij bha* -*s.a*) and the public language of the province in his 1877 speech of *Hindi ki unnati par vyakhyan* (*Hindi* -*ki* -*unnati par vya* -*khya* -*n*, Speech on the progress of Hindi), though he expressed it in Brajbhasha verse. This new definition of language-script-community had been elaborated by the Orientalist teacher and scholar J.B. Gilchrist when tasked to prepare teaching materials for EIC trainees in the Orientalist laboratory of Fort William College in Calcutta. It was there that a new definition and classification of the north Indian vernacular, a new standard language (based on the variety

called Khari Boli), and new models of prose were first laid out. Gilchrist called this form of the vernacular Hindustani (Hindoostani), and drawing upon current registers he divided it between the highly Persianized Court style, the middle style of educated men or Hindustani proper – both written in Perso-Arabic script – and the rustic style or Hindavi (Hinduwee, also called Bhakha/Bhasha or “language”) written in Nagari script, which he called “the exclusive property of the Hindoos alone” ([1796] 1970, 4). At one stroke, differences in vocabulary, register, and writing were folded into new language entities, in which language and community came to be neatly aligned and tightly knit. Hindi now “belonged” to the Hindus and was written in Nagari script, whereas Hindustani (or to use the other term that became common in the nineteenth century, Urdu) written in the Perso-Arabic script “belonged” or had been “developed” by Muslims. Undergirded by the sharply polarized Orientalist-colonial view of Indian history with its Hindu–Aryan golden age, dark middle ages of “Muslim invasion,” tyranny, and oppression, and the new hope and possibilities of the pax Britannica, this notion of language and community was to take deep roots in Indian as well as colonial discourse in the nineteenth century. As patriotic and nationalist ideas grew and took shape, the crucial role of Persian as an intellectual and literary language and the widespread multilingualism became signs of decadence, deracination, and weakness. As a result of this colonial language policy, a struggle arose for official language recognition in government schools, courts of law, and public offices, and supporters of Hindi and Urdu became sharply polarized in opposed camps, offering competing arguments and genealogies and trading abrasive accusations. It is in this context that we need to read Harishchandra’s 1882 memorandum to the Hunter commission for education, in which he voiced strong support for Hindi by using the argument of Hindu majority and abused Urdu by calling it “the language of dancing girls and prostitutes” (cited in Dalmia 1997, 208) he had already composed a mockelegy for Urdu, entitled Urdu ka syapa, in 1874. But, as Dalmia notes, Harishchandra accompanied this public projection of standard, Khari Boli Hindi as the language of the province and the potential national language with a constant attention to the local varieties of the spoken vernacular (Purbi, Kannauji, Brajhasha, Khari Boli) and to variations in language use, between language spoken at home, the written language, and the language of poetry. He actually acknowledged that few spoke Khari Boli Hindi at home and that he had himself tried many times to write poetry in Khari Boli but had found it impossible. So while Harishchandra saw the creation of a standard language for public interaction and writing as a desirable goal, he admitted that no such standard had been established for Hindi yet. His own writing practice was all but monovocal and was in fact extremely eclectic.

The frontispiece of his journal Harishchandra’s Magazine, “containing articles on literary, scientific, political and religious subjects; antiquities, reviews, dramas, history, novels, poetical selections, gossip, humour and wit” (no. 1, vol. 1, 1873, in Haris Chandra 2002, n.p.), gives a good idea of his ambitions and how he embraced the redefinition of literature as both timely and useful. The journal, Dalmia has noted, is full of aborted pieces (“to be continued”) – travelogues, novels, dramas, translations – for which Bharatendu was trying to set up new models in Hindi. As for the colonial obsession with his history, in line with Orientalist interests, though sometimes opposing their views, Bharatendu wrote antiquarian articles on copperplate and other inscriptions; genealogies of Rajput lineages (Udaipur, Mewar, Bundi, Kashmir); and summary histories of Muslim rulers and of the Marathas. He also penned historical notes on the chronology of the Ramayana and on particular locations in Banaras, all accompanied by scriptural quotations. Blending Orientalist and Indian scholarly traditions and interests, he also wrote a history of his own Agrawal caste; biographies with astrological charts for Indian and Western figures such as the emperor Ashoka, the philosopher Shankara, the Sanskrit poet Jayadeva, Socrates, Napoleon III, the tsar, and the colonial governors Lord Mayo and Lord Lawrence; and erudite articles on the Indian months laden with quotations from Sanskrit texts. He even attempted a chronology of world events starting from the creation of the world in 1,972,947,101 bce (Sharma 1989, 771). He noted wryly,

When you reflect on matters of old you cannot find out about them with precision in one go. The more you consult new books, the more new things emerge. With respect to this knowledge there are two opinions among intelligent people these days. The first is the opinion of those who, without proper reflection, follow the ways of old-fashioned English scholars and write according to them; the second is that of those who do not insist stubbornly on anything but accept the new findings as they emerge. The second opinion is the robust and correct one, but it suits the first lot to stand out as Antiquarian [in English in the text]. You only need to spout a couple of received ideas to become an Antiquarian.

Harishchandra was also a key figure in the development of new ideas of national community and national religion. Scholars have singled out and analyzed his 1884 speech “How Can India Progress?” for its articulation
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of ideas of economic progress, reform, tradition, and national unity (Pandey 1990; Chandra 1992; Dalmia 1997, 21 – 27). Characteristically for the period, its address was also ambiguous: while the call was explicitly to Hindus, he defined Hindu as Indian – “whoever lives in Hindustan, whatever their color or caste, is a Hindu. Help a Hindu. Bengali, Maratha, Madrasi, Vedic, Jain, Brahmo, or Muslim, take them by the hand” (Sharma 1989, 1012, translation mine).

New and Old Genres

In Hindi Bharatendu is now remembered mostly for his plays. Drama was indeed central both to his experiments as a writer and to his reflections on literature and reform. With an impeccable ancient Indian pedigree and familiar conventions yet flexible and able to arouse a range of emotions and carry new political and social meanings, able to speak directly to a large audience, drama seemed indeed the ideal genre for the needs of the moment (see *Modern Drama*). And so from the age of 18 Bharatendu experimented with writing different kinds of drama, first by translating into Hindi already familiar titles from Bengali, Brajbhasha, and Sanskrit, and later writing original skits, farces, and composite plays. In his late essay *Natak* (Naṭak, Drama, 1883) he advocated blending Sanskrit and European models and named the erotic, comic, spectacle, but also social reform and patriotism as the goals of theater. His recurrent use of satire and allegory are particularly noteworthy and suggest that these – rather than fiction and the novel – were the primary vehicles of nationalism for Harishchandra and his Hindi contemporaries, and therefore deserve some attention. Within a world literature perspective, satire and allegory present a problem because their specific address, double-speak, and intense intertextuality make them both opaque and difficult to translate to readers elsewhere. While extremely worldly in orientation, they do not tend to circulate. In fact, as scholarship on *Punch* magazines in Asia and the Middle East has shown, they are better explained in terms of glocalization, as local appropriations and transformations (Appadurai 1996; Harder and Mittler 2013).

As in other colonial contexts, satire was directed both at practices deemed corrupt as well as directed at the self. In *Sabai jati gopal ki* (Sabai jāṭi gopāl ki, Every caste belongs to Krishna, 1873) the joke is on Brahmins’ granting opportunistically high caste status through fake etymologies to anyone ready to pay – “Hindu shastras/scriptures are a grocer’s shop and syllables are the wishful filling tree, you can pull out every caste as excellent but you’ll have to give payment (daks.in. a) on the sly.” But can this really work? Can, for example, low-caste Chamars become Brahmins? “Of course, Chamars are Brahmins, there’s no doubt about it. They originate from the skin of God and carry no punishment. Skin or leather (charma) means shield, that’s why they block punishment. Chamar is made of three syllables – ‘cha’ stands for the four Vedas (chārom. ved), ‘ma’ for Mahaḥbhaḥrata and ‘ra’ for Raḥmaḥyan. a, those who read all three are called Chamars ...” (Sharma 1989, 542, translation mine). In *Andher nagari* (Andher nagari, The city of darkness, 1881), the play most performed in modern times, a proverb (“In the city of darkness the king is ruined, everything costs the same”) gets literalized in a farce in which every item in the bazaar costs exactly the same – hence value has lost meaning – and the king is a fool who also takes everything literally and cannot distinguish between right and wrong. But in the first act of *Premjogini* (The yogini of love, 1874), the object of satire is a young rich merchant who has just returned in the early morning from a night of revelries – though his name is Ramchandra the resemblance with Harishchandra himself is unmistakable. And in the fifth act of the political allegory *Bharat durdasha* (Bhaḥrat durdasā, The sad state of India, 1876), a group of Indians from various regions meet to discuss how to avert the impending attack of the Foe of India (bhaḥrat durdaiva). The scene resembles closely the format of the public meeting, with a Chairman and motions raised and seconded. But the suggestions are all preposterous and comical, the comic element heightened by the play of regional accents. So the Poet suggests that they paint a screen so as to confuse the enemy, the Editor that they fire cannonballs of speeches, and the two Native Gentlemen from the United Provinces are afraid of incurring official displeasure. Nothing concrete gets proposed or decided before Disloyalty, dressed like a policeman and speaking broken Hindi, comes and arrests everyone (“No, no, you are all here against the government [sarkaḥr], I arrest you,” Sharma 1989, 468, translation mine), at the same time making a dig at the treatment Bharatendu himself had suffered (“it’s the government policy. What had the journal *Kavivacansudha* said against the government? Yet why were we sent to arrest it? There is nothing I can do,” *ibid.*).

Compared to the stilted, artificial, or tentative tone of much of Hindi writing in this period, Harishchandra’s strength “lay in the use of the spoken voice, in the mastery of its rhythms and turns. This was what made for the force and liveliness of his drama” (Dalmia 1997, 287 – 288). But what is truly astonishing in this and other plays is Bharatendu’s pointed and yet freewheeling use of language – of the whole range of possibilities and

registers of Hindi and other languages – both drawing upon and multiplying the existing multilingualism. As already mentioned, most of the songs and verses in Bharatendu’s plays and speeches are in Brajbhasha. But in Bharat durdasha the repertoire is even wider. The play opens with a Brajbhasha song pitying the sad state of India – “Come and weep together brothers of India! Hay hay the sad state of India is not to be seen– where once great heroes trod now only sorrow dwells. But the song is in the lively and popular Maharashtrian lavani genre and in fast tempo. Next Bharat comes (with his clothes in tatters, half a crown on his head, leaning on a stick, according to the stage directions) and delivers a soliloquy and then a pitiful song – “No one takes me by the hand” – before a terrifying voice shakes him, a frightful monster is coming to devour him, and “God is in heaven and the Empress is beyond the seven seas, what will happen to me?,” Sharma 1989, 461). He faints and will remain lying on stage for the rest of the play, while a carousel of allegorical characters comes in and delivers songs and speeches. Shamelessness comes in to taunt Bharat wrapped in a short sari with her head uncovered, the Foe of India comes dressed as “half Christian and half Muslim,” Laziness, a fat man who yawns all the time, speaks of opium and doing nothing and sings an Urdu ghazal with the end-rhyme “it’s not good” : “In this world to flap your arms and legs about – it’s not good. Better die but to get up and go – it’s not good. Lie in bed lump-like the whole time, to create havoc like a monkey – it’s not good” (Sharma 1989, 464). Madira, Wine, first gives her own lineage as the darling of the gods, worshiped by the four main religions, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian, as soma, bi-*rā* chman, sharab un tahura (the wine of paradise), and baptismal wine, and then sings a song in dhamar tal like a courtesan – “Drink wine, crazy youth goes by, without wine, believe me, the world has no meaning.” Darkness is both literal – the lack of electric lights – and metaphorical, ignorance and illusion (Sharma 1989, 466), and so on. Song genre, language register, allusions, and costume combine to create composite characters and charge abstract ideas with affective meaning. Of this stuff nationalism is made in this period. Always pleasurable, as when rogues from the underworld of Ghaibi talk and sing in the second act of Premjogini – or the Bengali pronounces the unvoiced sibilant “s” as an unvoiced fricative “sh,” at times the multilingual play borders on the nonsensical, as when in the fourth act of the play Maharashtrian Brahmins from Banaras discuss how to issue a judgment and eat their fill upon getting an invitation. Banaras was full of Maharashtrian Brahmins, and Hindi speakers like Bharatendu must have been used to hearing them speak, but for those not used to Marathi the effect is purely comical. Leafing through Harishchandra’s Magazine, one is as likely to encounter Sanskrit as Hindi, Brajbhasha, or occasionally English, and literary experiments could also go both ways, as with the Sanskrit *lavani* songs (February 1874, in Haris Chandra 2002, 134 – 135) or the Indian English poem “Self-Introduction,” in which the anglicized India laments with the sahib that he is disrespected and fleeced by the sahib’s peons:

*I introduce myself to you Sir I am Poora gentilman;
Take my salám, give me chair,
Honour me very much if you can.
I’m born in a noble family, noble Parent I have too
I get a chair in Lat Sab Darbár, my Number is ninety-two.
I have a lot of land here Sir! in Ghazipur And Gorakphoor
Parwanas of Delhi Sháhás my forefathers Left Hozúr ...
In the Institute one I very much Spoke about the marriage Bill
I gave also many good chanda’s and Ready to give it still
Shamla, Chapkan, Topí, Mozá, Ghar.i Chhar.i, Roomál and Boot;
Gár.i, ghor.á, all in order never I Walk on empty foot ...
When I go Sir! molákát ko, these chaprásis Trouble me much;
How can I give daily Inám, ever they ask Me I say such,
Some time they give me gardaniya And tell bahar niklo tum
Dená na lená muft ke áye yah hain Bar.e Darbari ki dum ...
(May 1874, in Haris Chandra 2002, 214 – 215)*

For theater, Bharatendu looked toward Bengal, where a “national theater” was indeed being formed and serious playwrights wrote for the real stage, but in Banaras his serious ambition and irresistible linguistic flair mostly found expression only in print. Apart from amateur groups, there just was not the momentum and audience for public theater. This is not to say that a public theater did not exist elsewhere. In the colonial port cities of Bombay and Calcutta, commercial theater (called Parsi theater because it was started by Parsi entrepreneurs in 1850s) was undertaking its own successful experimentation with Indian and European elements, mixing Indian song styles, stories from the Urdu-Persian and Sanskrit repertoires and adaptations from Shakespeare, © 2022 JLLS and the Authors - Published by JLLS.

and the stage conventions of Victorian melodrama. In a bid to broaden its appeal and outreach, Parsi companies had switched from Gujarati to the more widely accessible Hindustani/Urdu. While Bharatendu was critical of Parsi theater and famously walked out of an Urdu song-and-dance performance of *Shakuntala* (S'akuntala) by a touring Parsi company in Banaras, his own plays do not appear so different from Parsi ones, particularly in their extensive use of songs, occasional melodramatic and pathetic moments, use of comedy and farce, and even patriotic accents. It is therefore better to consider Bharatendu as working in parallel with Parsi theater than as completely separate from and against it.

Finally, as already mentioned, songs and poems on love, devotion, the season, and particular events constitute a very substantial part of Bharatendu's oeuvre and of his daily practice. Harishchandra, like other elite men of his time, was trained in music and singing by leading courtesans; according to an early biographer, he composed as many as 1500 songs, and his collected works include more than 10 printed song collections. The same holds true for other poets and literati of his day – and of course of the famous last king of Oudh, Wajid Ali Shah. Indeed, the nineteenth century could well be called the century of songs rather than of prose, so ubiquitous and popular songs and songbooks were in both Hindi and Urdu, a regular part musical performances, community and family rituals, a form of pastime and part of parallel male and female sociability, included within plays or printed separately as songbooks. While prose developed new standards and carried concerns of useful knowledge and community progress, songs disregarded boundaries of script and language and reproduced a rich repertoire of shared genres and feelings. Modern writers like Harishchandra practiced both, and in doing so exceeded the limits of colonial knowledge and reformed taste. Wildly popular and influential with their contemporaries, towering figures in the development of their literatures, these authors show us how much is lost in a world literature that is content with distant readings and “global” circulation, and how much is gained by asking what the theoretical import of the empirical unevenness is.

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