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Tyrants, Villains, Belles and Saints: Stereotyped Portraits of Muslim Characters in Early Hindi Novels

*“He who had the quality of dharma on his side,
whether a Hindu or a Muslim, was superior.”*
Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, *Rājsingha*¹

SUMMARY: This paper seeks to look at the prose fiction and essays published in Hindi in North India in the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century from the viewpoint of contemporary religious controversies and communal developments. It suggests a closer look at a few representative Hindi texts by leading Hindi authors (Bharatendu Harishchandra, Devakinandan Khatri, Kishorilal Gosvami). These littérateurs made quite special efforts to point out the religious backgrounds of the fictional characters in their works and, thus, to create a general awareness about the roles of Hindus and Muslims, both in contemporary Indian society and in the historical perspective. Being rather assertive Hindus themselves, they not only pointed out certain negative sides of “the other” community but, also—as in the case of Gosvami—severely criticized the erstwhile Islamic rulers of India. Why was the task of portraying Muslims so crucial for Hindi literature, especially at the time of serious socio-political and religious turbulences? How does this interest go along with the identity-forming agenda of the epoch? What are the ways to structure and generalize the relevant attitudes

¹ Quoted in Kaviraj 1995: 187.

of the authors and to explain them from the point of view of the historical development of the post-Mutiny society in North India? These are some of the questions to be approached in this paper.

KEYWORDS: Colonial India, Hindi literature, Hindi novel, historical fiction, Indian nationalism, Hindu nationalism, Hindu-Muslim relationship, Bhāratendu Hariścandra, Devakīnandan Khatrī, Kiśorīlāl Gosvāmī.

The uneasy question of Hindu-Muslim relationship in India appeared at the epicenter of public attention in the 19th century. It is often suggested that although *per se* this sensitive relationship had existed in the Indian Subcontinent in all possible forms and contexts for many centuries (and there is enough evidence to prove that it was described in rather abstract terms well before the advance of the modern age), such theoretical notions as “religious identity” and “religious community” could only be articulated inside the Colonial situation after the creation of a modern public sphere (Bayly 1985; Talbot 1995²). By the mid-century, religion and language were perceived as crucial categories for self-identification: in North India (North-Western Provinces and Punjab), the notion of being a Hindu, a Muslim or a Sikh was becoming more powerful than the connections with one’s own locality or ethnic group. It is important to underline here that, similarly to the pre-modern situation, this time, too, the ramifications on “the self” inevitably included the “us-versus-them” discourse: as S. Talbot aptly puts it, “the reflexive impact of the Other’s presence molded the self-definition of both groups” (Talbot 1995: 694). Mutual suspicions became aggravated after the events of 1857–59: the problematic nature of this relationship revealed itself, among other things, in the fact that, indeed, neither group was willing to speak about itself independently without mentioning the opponents in a critical way—either comparing themselves with the antagonists, or accusing “the others” of plots and ill-intentions.

² “There is a general consensus that it is questionable whether a Hindu or Muslim identity existed prior to the 19th century in any meaningful sense” (Talbot 1995.: 693).

Yet, these several post-mutiny decades (between 1860 and 1910), with all the communal disagreements, are known as a starting point for Indian national binding and independent political development; it was the time when the idea of sovereign India was born. This period is also marked with important changes in colonial educational policy, in the culture of the elite, in everyday lifestyle, emergence of modernized aesthetic and existential values. Novel socio-cultural patterns that appeared on the surface after the post-Mutiny turbulences found immediate manifestation in printed literature and performing arts; by the beginning of the 20th century, in Northern India, these factors largely contributed to the development of powerful literary cultures in Hindi, Urdu and English.

The purpose of this article is to look at the budding Hindi prose published in the North-Western Provinces during the above-named decades in order to see how exactly it could contribute to the development of the Hindu-Muslim relationship. The strategy of self-description through the image of the neighboring community was very well-established, and it can be clearly detected in the works of major Hindi *littérateurs*. Although such outstanding literary figures as Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850–1885) and Devakinandan Khatri (1861–1917) will be discussed in this context, one should also like to suggest a closer look at “some types of fiction [...] that have remained opaque in literary historiography”, for lesser-known and underrated works might be very revealing when “creative impulse of the period” is investigated (Blackburn and Dalmia 2004: 21).

Kishorilal Gosvami (1865–1932), an author of several dozen novels (not less than 65), one of the pioneers and champions of creative writing and publishing in the Hindi sphere, dedicated a substantial part of his efforts to the composition of historical novels (apart from numerous novels with definitions such as “social”, “mystical”, “detective”). Although he left an unusually vast heritage, his writing, translating and

(self-)publishing activities were not documented well enough; substantial research on this writer has not been carried out either³—all these factors make it rather difficult to know the full and final list of his prose texts. What makes Gosvami a very special figure is the fact that he was among those rare Hindi fiction writers of his time who dealt with Indian history, and that was in the period when the Hindu community was “craving” to know about its past: according to Tagore’s statement, there was an atmosphere of “hunger for history” in society (Kaviraj 1995: 107, 120). And yet, the prose published in Hindi is famous, first and foremost, for its descriptions of extraordinary and magical events or a non-historical, often unidentifiable past (e.g., the fictional worlds invented by Khatri); there were, of course, prominent texts depicting the realities of the present, but novels or plays reconstructing historical events appeared comparatively rarely. Moreover, the majority of “historical” texts written in Hindi before the 1910s might look somewhat secondary and repetitive if compared to historical prose fiction originally written in Bengali or Marathi. In other words, much in the same way as was happening with Hindi detective novels, Hindi historical fiction was solidly inspired by Bengali literature (the works of Bankimchandra, Rakhaldas Bandhyopadhyay, R. C. Dutt and others). Nowadays, Gosvami’s writings are much less known compared to those of Khatri: after all, the latter crafted an original “sub-genre of adventure” in Hindi prose (Orsini 2009: 198), whereas Gosvami’s creativity was much too dependent on popular historical or crime stories from Bengal. The question about the origins of his plots will not occupy any substantial part of this essay; what is really intriguing is whether

³ There are, of course, numerous books in Hindi specially dedicated to the history of prose “before Premchand” (1860–1910s), but even they provide rather limited data about Gosvami’s personality—see, for example, this thoroughly compiled volume by Kailashprakash (1961), and an *Encyclopedia of Hindi Novel* by Gopal Ray (1968). Francesca Orsini (Orsini 2004) has written about Gosvami as a detective writer; Sudhir Chandra (Chandra 2010) focused on his short novel *Indumatī*, which—he argues— is a Hindi reincarnation of “The Tempest”.

he was able, in his historical narratives, to go beyond the task of simply entertaining his readers and invest in the construction of certain images of the Hindu community both in the past and in the present.

There are at least eight novels which Gosvami loosely based on various events from India's past; four of them—*Lavaṅglatā* and *Hṛdayhāriṇī* (1890), *Gul-Bahār* (1902), *Mallikādevī vā Baṅgsarojinī* (1905)—have been chosen as premiere sources for this inquiry into the delicate communal relationship.⁴ The author hopes that the other works of Gosvami, historical or otherwise, will be included in future research in the area; the texts chosen for this essay are representative enough to verify if the images of the Muslims in them could, indeed, be interpreted as a contribution to the bigger Hindu “narrative of the self” (Kaviraj 1995: 109).

Before proceeding to a discussion of the sources, it is important to contextualize the concept of religious identity for this article. Firstly, it does need to be clarified why a piece of research on the period when a number of various new components of a person's self-identification were emerging should single out the communal one. Apart from the national identity (the sense of belonging to one vast political entity—Hindustān/Bhārat), linguistic, local, caste-related and professional identities were growing in importance: thus, is this truly so that India's political and social history of a few past centuries, as well as her intellectual and artistic expression, could be interpreted in a more successful way if such a category as *religious identity* were considered dominant over the others?⁵ Such an approach is increasingly being seen as optional, for there are, of course, various ways to speak about the socio-political history of colonial and post-colonial India. Individuals, small communities and nations are better depicted as clusters of

⁴ His other historical book are: *Tārā vā kṣatra-kul-kamalinī*, 1902; *Sultānā Raziya Begam vā raṅgmahal mē halāhal*, 1904; *Kanan-kusum vā Mastānī*, *Indumatī*, 1900.

⁵ For a brief description of “singular-”, “conflict-”, “historical-“ and “multiple-” identity approach see: Gottschalk 2000: 35–39.

identities. Thus, according to Peter Gottschalk, an American scholar of Indian social history, in an attempt to describe the society in terms of religious identity, scholars

“overlook the nature of any individual as a conglomerate of various identities and fail to see the interests around which these identities form. By emphasizing only religious identity, many scholars tend to rarify religions, removing them from the social milieu in which they develop. This environment involves economic, political, and other interests around which group identities form” (Gottschalk 2000: 22).

Gottschalk also points out that the communal interpretation of socio-political processes in India should not be given too much importance, as “a bifurcated vision of South Asia as socially divided between ‘Hindus’ and ‘Muslims’” may prevent researchers from seeing a number of “shared identities” (Gottschalk 2000: 18).

Gottschalk’s informative research on a mixed rural community in Bihar, conducted at the end of the 20th century, is solidly based on fieldwork, collections of oral narratives, interviews and personal encounters; needless to say, these sources provide much more realistic data than any work of fiction. However, since the reference materials for this paper are inescapably rooted in the field of creative literature and criticism, we are dealing here with the realm of belief: the images of the communities are *constructed* in prose, not *reflected* in it. Novels, being products of imagination, are not telling us how exactly the communal relationships functioned in the 19th century India, but are revealing how people wanted (or did not want) them to be. In this context, one is tempted to develop the observation of Timothy Brennan (“the rise of modern nation-state”, he argues, is “inseparable from the forms and subjects of imaginative literature”) that not only such fundamental “imaginary constructs” like *nation* “depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions”; relatively smaller concepts such as *religious community* also exist and develop in a virtual space, and here, too, “imaginative literature plays a decisive role” (Brennan 1990: 49). There were clusters of identities forming in society during the post-Mutiny decades; communal life in Benares, Allahabad, Patna, Delhi and elsewhere in the North of

India was multi-layered and ambivalent; but it is fiction and its creators themselves that highlighted a few identities as crucial, bringing together *religion, language and nation*.

Harishchandra, Khatri, Gosvami and many other founders of modern Hindi literature were not only big enthusiasts of the developing Hindi culture, but they were also responsible representatives of their community: as will be shown later, they were ready to speak on behalf of the Hindu civilization and establish the progressive nature of the values that were associated with their religion. The general feeling of insecurity made Hindi-speaking intellectuals, who were conscious of such serious contemporary challenges as westernization and the political growth of the Muslim community, look for various defense strategies. One of the frontlines of this “battle” for identity was situated within the field of languages.

The divide between Devanāgarī-based Hindi and Persian-script-based Urdu, so evident by the middle of the century, was taken by many as an inevitable and even necessary measure; moreover, these languages promptly developed strong communal associations. It is symptomatic how the estrangement between the speakers of Khari Boli Hindi and the Urdu circles was commented upon by a prominent littérateur and enthusiast of philological studies, Babu Shivprasad of Benares. In his *Hindi Selections* (1867)—a compilation of texts published for the needs of the Military Department of the Government of India for “junior civil servants and military officers” who were preparing for a test in the Hindustani language—he states the following:

The Pandits think the more genuine Sanskrit words, howsoever obsolete or ununderstood, they bring in, the more credit they will gain, and so the Maulavis think for the Persian words. They both, instead of bridging over the gulf, are widening it. The tendency is to create two distinct new languages, the one under the name of Hindi, the other under the name of Urdu (Śivprasād 1867: XIII).

This disapproving remark of Shivprasad leaves no doubt that for him and his contemporaries the growing bonds between Hindi and the Hindus, and Urdu and the Muslims were all too clear, and

he finds it important enough to share his concerns with the readers of his compilation. At the same time, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, one of the most prominent voices of the Muslim enlightenment, famously called Urdu “the language of the gentry and Hindi that of the vulgar” (quoted in Dalmia 1999: 208): it gave a start to a public exchange of bitter comments. Thus, Bharatendu Harishchandra issued a symmetrical statement, calling Urdu “the language of dancing girls and prostitutes” (*ibid.*). But there were other, rather measured and rational arguments coming from Bharatendu, when he also emphasized the ideas of national unity through *cross-communal binding* and celebrated *shared identities*.

Bhāratvars kī unnati kaise ho saktī hai?, or *How Can India Progress?* (Bharatendu Hariścandra 1953: 595–603) is a singularly important text by Bharatendu Harishchandra; in fact, it is his public address which was delivered in Balia in 1884 and published in *Hariścandra Candrikā* in December of the same year. In it, Harishchandra formulates a very clear appeal to his compatriots: to join in the emerging movement towards progress in India, which requires development and improvement “in every component of life” (Bhāratendu Hariścandra: 599)—in religion and in domestic work, in manners and lifestyle, in power of body and mind, in social life; self-development is prescribed for young and old, women and men, rich and poor. In a more general way, this address “lays forth Harishchandra’s concern with the political and social issues of the times, with the creation of informed public opinion and the constituents of Hindu/Indian national identity. Language, literature, religion, territorial allegiance were all aspects of being Hindu” (Dalmia 199: 28). He does not propose any programme to deal with each and every issue but suggests key areas for improvement: “Religion (*dharm*) is the root of all the progress. Therefore, it is important to first of all bring progress into religion” (Bhāratendu Hariścandra 1953: 600).

Although Harishchandra speaks about and addresses the Hindu community a lot, impressive parts of his speech are directed at the Muslims. He sounds quite critical about this community in general, hinting at their somewhat hostile attitudes and lack of cooperation:

Since our Muslim brothers have made Hindustan their home, they should not think low about Hindus. They should treat Hindus like brothers and not do anything that could hurt them. If there is fire in the house, the younger and elder sisters-in-law should forget their enmity, go and extinguish this fire (*ibid.*: 601).

Even though social mobility of Muslims is much less restricted by rules (unlike Hindus, they do not have complicated food rules, they do not have castes, they don't have any prohibition on foreign travel), they were not able to improve their condition at all:

Many keep on thinking that the states of Delhi and Lucknow still exist. Friends! Those days are gone. Now it's time to forget the old things! Don't spoil your minors right from the childhood by teaching them to read the *mašnavīs* of Mir Hasan⁶ and *Indar Sabhā*⁷... Don't even allow them to touch such books, give them a good education, give them profession, don't rely on pensions and subsidies. Send them abroad, give them the habit of hard work from early years (Bhāratendu Hariścandra 1953: 601–602).

Harishchandra repeats his appeals for the unity of people and communities several times throughout his text:

Whoever lives in Hindustan, disregarding the caste and appearance, is Hindu. Support Hindus. Panjabi, Madrasi, Marathi, Bengali, Muslim, Jain, others—all take each other by hand. Do things that would improve your own skills, act so that your money stays inside your own county (Bhāratendu Hariścandra 1953: 602).

In this context he, while using the term “Hindu”, departs from

⁶ Mīr Ḥasan (1727–1786), a famous Mughal poet, author of one of the most popular *mašnavī* poems in Urdu, *Siḥr ul-bayān*, *Magic of Discourse*, see: Pritchett 2003: 897–898.

⁷ *Indra's Assembly*, another *mašnavī*, by Sayyid Āgha Ḥasan Amānat (1815–1858), much favored by nawab Vājīd ‘Alī Shāh of Lucknow. It was presented in a form of colourful musical performance by specially trained boys and became one of the symbols of the decadent nawabi culture of Awadh (Pritchett 2003: 897–898).

the community-related meaning and brings it very close to “nation”: “the many modes of describing the self, characteristic of the period, were here being subsumed under Hindu” (Dalmia 1999: 26).

This ideology of national unity presupposes, of course, the leadership of the Hindu community in passage towards the progress. The writer saw “the renaissance of Hindustan” through “the devout and hard-working” Hindu middle classes, but it could only be achieved “though brotherhood with Muslims” (Bayly 2012: 216). If Hindus need to rationalize their life and introduce better educational values, Muslims, as one can see from Harishchandra’s descriptions, are unable to see the reality of the changed historical conditions: the Mughal and nawabi cultures are not there anymore. There is a decadent atmosphere of idleness and emotional exaltation among the educated elites; many are tempted to live on the account of rich patrons and do not know what honest work is.

Having observed the strategy of issuing generalized statements about the otherised community in the Balia address, one discovers it in various contemporary works of fiction. Devakinandan Khatri, the author of *Candrakāntā* and its sequels, probably the most successful books ever written in Hindi, carries the task of “labelling” the Hindus and the Muslims much further. This is a tale of mysterious adventures set in some historically unidentifiable period with very clear Hindu designation. The main characters belong to “several independent Hindu kingdoms over which seems to fall neither a British nor a Muslim shadow”—Vijaygarh, Naugarh and Cunārgarh (Trivedi 2003: 1005–1006). As in typical *dāstāns*, there are no connections with modernity in plot or descriptions. And yet, Khatri’s narration successfully mirrors current communal stereotypes. The main elements that actually make Khatri’s creations a very exciting reading,—the *ayyārs* and the *ṭilism*⁸—come from the Persian Muslim tradition of the *dāstāns*.

⁸ *Ayyārs*, sometimes spelled as *aiyārs*, are skillful tricksters and accomplished spies, who can be credited for the largest part of the action in Khatri’s novels; *ṭilism*, in Arabic and Persian traditions, is a closed magical world, separate from “normal” reality, which acts like a trap: once in it, a person may not ever be out unless guided by a wise patron or a book.

It became very popular in India in the Middle Ages; then, by the end of the 19th century, some of the most acclaimed compilations were effectively transferred from the oral form into the written text and published in Urdu and Hindi.⁹ Many agree on the fact that Khatri actually created a modern Hindi/Hindu alternative for the *dāstāns* in a much more compact and modernized form.¹⁰

Even in this fairy-tale-like Hindu universe revolving around the charming princess Chandrakanta, one still comes across a few minor Muslim characters. There are two *ayyārs*, positioned in the “camp” of the first antagonist in the novel, young Krur Singh: Ahmad Khan and Nazim Ali. Although these two are, indeed, the enemies of the main party, they are often shown as skillful, but rather unsuccessful tricksters with unstable minds; their cowardice, greed and stupidity generate many comic situations—this novel would have certainly lost a lot of its charm, had not these hapless *ayyārs* been a part of many adventures. The really dangerous side of their personality emerges from their communal ambitions: the reason these two want to help Chief minister’s son Krur Singh in his plot to kill the present raja and marry Chandrakanta is that he promises them to become a pro-Muslim ruler after the usurpation of the throne (Khatrī 1993: 12). There are two more *ayyārs* in the novel, who are introduced a little later: Zalim Khan and Afat Khan are portrayed as ruthless rogues without any scope for redemption or improvement.¹¹ Noticeably, all of the Muslim *ayyārs*, unlike most Hindu antagonists, get killed by the end of the story.

⁹ For more details about the publication-history of longest recorded *dāstān* (46 volumes)—*Dāstān-e Amīr Ḥamzah*—see Pritchett 1991: 21–23.

¹⁰ On Khatri’s literary achievements, see this fascinating research by Francesca Orsini (Orsini 2009: 198–225), especially pp. 204–223, on Indianization and modernization; see, also: Yādav 1986: 7–9.

¹¹ Here I quote Arthur Dudley’s article on the novel: “Zālim means ‘oppressor’ and Āfat means ‘disaster’... Zālim Khān and Āfat Khān have pretensions to being *aiyārs* but [senior *aiyār*] Tej Singh tells Zālim that ‘Your father [and] grandfather may have been *aiyārs* but you are all crooks and dacoits’” (Dudley 2007: 16).

And, finally, one finds enough indications which make us realize that the world of *Candrakāntā* is, actually, inhabited quite a lot by Muslims: there are no detailed descriptions but we do notice unnamed town dwellers or soldiers, who are discussed *en masse*. The general feeling about them is that one can never fully trust their loyalty to the Hindu rulers: hence, Virendra Singh, the main protagonist, fears that these people are “the weak point” in his army (Khatrī: 36).

To sum it up, the community in general is depicted by Khatri with suspicion, but the real enemies of the Hindus are only a few active Muslims—militants and villains. The author’s attitude may be an embarrassing phenomenon to deal with for modern Western scholars: his position is called “Islamophobic”, he is seen as the creator of “anti-Muslim rhetoric” (Dudney 2007: 17–18). But, in fact, Khatri’s ideas might not look too extravagant in the context of his epoch if one interpreted them as not simply an old-fashioned technique of marking the characters with a stamp of bad qualities and appointing them enemies, but, rather, as an entirely speculative plan to retrospectively purify the “ancient” universe of the Hindus by placing evil outside of it. It is another question that all fantasies about the past have a good potential to mold the present and can suggest the normative ways of behavior to many.

In this way, the past, be it entirely fictional or historically traceable, seems a suitable temporality for the search for an ideal Hindu community: the reasons of historical misfortunes appear clearer from a distance, modern tensions, once projected to the past, are more easily soothed. History, according to Sudipta Kaviraj, “gave an explanation of the experience, of subjection, and, also, a rational ground for hope” (Kaviraj 1995: 109).

At this juncture, let us proceed further and see how Kishorilal Goswami, in many of whose novels an anti-Muslim and anti-British position is articulated very clearly, managed to bring variety into his portraits of various Muslim character types. As mentioned above, Goswami was a prolific Hindi novelist, one of the first to address Indian history in fiction. He has novels dedicated to 13th century India’s political history (*Sultānā Raziya Begam, Mallikādevī*), the history of Bengal during

and after the rule of nawab Siraj ud-Daulah (*Lavaṅglatā*, *Hṛdayhāriṇī*, *Gul-Bahār*), the Rajputs during the Delhi Sultanate and the Great Mughals (*Indumatī*, *Tārā vā kṣatra-kul-kamalini*), and the Marathas in the 18th century (*Kanan-kusum vā Mastānī*). Each of the texts describes dramatic episodes from the Indian past, which inevitably include political or military clashes between Hindu and Muslim leaders, and, in some cases, the intervention of a third power (the Mughals or the British). At this juncture, one may argue that it is not so much due to the taste and awareness of the author that these significant events were used by him as a background: he was following the choice already made by the emerging educated class, who characterized Gosvami's readership. The heroic stunts of the Marathas and the Rajputs, the grandeur, cruelty and lustfulness of the Mughals, the crucial power shifts in 18th century Bengal,—these historical topics were truly *en vogue* in journalism, history writing, and, of course, fiction all over India. War and love in the relationship of Hindu kingdoms and the Mughals, as well as the individual romantic images of the Rajput men and women were, of course, extraordinarily advertised by Colonel James Tod, and, later in the 19th century, popularized even more by Bankimchandra in his *Rājśingha* (1882). The beginning of the 20th century was marked by the ascendancy of Marathi history writing—M. G. Ranade's *The Rise of the Maratha Power* and the “‘Shivaji’-novels” of Harinarayan Apte gained instantaneous success everywhere. However, when we think about the most obvious artistic inspirations for Gosvami's historical novels, many of which, undoubtedly, originate from Bengali and Marathi literature, there is an important factor to consider.

The majority of historical texts written by Bankimchandra rely on big and small events from Bengal's past (with *Rājśingha* as a spectacular exception); Rakhaldas Bandhyopadhyay, too, reportedly based his novels “on the hazily glorious period in Bengali history”; it was only R.C. Dutt who wrote “two celebrated historical novels somewhat in the Bankim mold”, which, yet, bore no connection with his native land (namely *Rājput Jīvan Saṅkhyā* and *Mahārāṣṭra Jīvan Prabhāt*; Kaviraj 1995: 186). Gosvami, therefore, was not writing history from his

“local” perspective (his personal connections were in Bihar, Benares and Vrindavan) but was following already existing examples, where places such as Murshidabad, Delhi and Maharashtra represented the idea of India’s great past.

The novels in focus here depict two periods in the history of Bengal: the plot of *Mallikādevī vā Baṅsarajinī* (*Mallikadevi, the Lotus of Bengal*, 1905) develops in the late 13th century, when the province was ruled by a self-appointed Turkish Sultan Tugral Khan. Earlier it was under the rule of the powerful Sultan Balban of Delhi, but Tugral Khan declared his independence. The main protagonists of the story are, of course, Hindus: the raja of Bhagalpur Mahendra Singh, his son Narendra, chief councilor Yagunath Singh, his daughter Malati, and Mallika, the Minister’s daughter. All of them, in different ways, take part in a plot against villainous Tugral Khan. There is also a person called Raghunath Singh, the raja’s brother; he wants power and makes efforts to bond with the Sultan. One part of his dishonest plans involves women: charming Malati and Mallika (both of them love Narendra Singh) are captured and sent to the Sultan’s palace to join his harem. They manage to outsmart Tugral Khan and escape but their role is not over. Malati turns herself into a spy inside the Sultan’s camp, pretending to be a young Turkish officer, Farhad. Her masquerade is so successful that the Sultan trusts Farhad-Malati and offers the young man his only daughter, amazingly beautiful and soft-hearted Shirin, in marriage. After a number of intrigues and clever political and military operations, Tugral Khan is defeated and killed; Malati, for her exceptional courage, receives the title “The Lotus of Bengal”; she and her friend Mallika both become prince Narendra’s wives. As for Shirin, her wonderful qualities are rewarded, too: she becomes the wife of Burgha Khan, the son of Balban and the new, fair ruler of Lakhnnavati (Gosvami 1917).

Hṛdayhāriṇī vā ādarśramaṇī (*Hridayharini, an Ideal Dame*), together with *Lavaṅglatā vā ādarśbālā* (*Lavanglata, an Ideal Maiden*) are two of the earliest works of Gosvami, both published in the *Hindustān* magazine in 1890. The central historically verifiable figure in both texts is nawab Siraj ud-Daulah, who is portrayed as a real

arch-villain: characterless and corrupt, he was, nevertheless, instrumental in converting his subjects to Islam. Incensed by his atrocities, a group of responsible and noble citizens, including rajas of Krishnanagar and Rangpur and a courtier Mir Jafar, seek military support from the East India Company. But, before any help comes, Siraj ud-Daulah starts a campaign against the small rebellious states. Prince of Rangpur, Narendra Singh, leaves his palace along with other family members: saving his life, he flees to Murshidabad in disguise on a mission to gather information on political affairs from the most trusted circle of the nawab. His diplomatic efforts help to discredit Siraj ud-Daulah and some of his influential family members in the eyes of the citizens and the British; several trusted courtiers together with the French allies betray him, which results in the nawab's army being defeated in the battle of Plassey.

In the first of these novels, the story revolves around Narendra Singh himself and a destitute (but noble) girl Kusum, whom he meets in Murshidabad. Their relationship is brutally interrupted by nawab's brother-in-law, a young libertine Sayyid Ahmad, who captures the girl and tries to win her heart. While virtuous Kusum, or Hridayharini (as she is the one who literally "steals (people's) hearts"), is doing her best to keep her suitor away, Narendra pursues his plan to get inside the nawabi palace and save his beloved. At the same time he becomes successful in his political games: we learn that it was no one else but prince Narendra whose strong actions helped the British to dislodge Siraj ud-Daulah. The rulers of Rangpur and Krishnanagar are restored in their states; finally, it is time for Narendra and Kusum to get married.

The second novel involves the same historical figures but describes the circumstances of 1757, before and after the Battle of Plassey, with more details (multiple political agreements, betrayals and, finally, the last days of Siraj ud-Daulah). Too often, though, the style of Gosvami's narration reminds one of a history textbook, as he simply gives accounts of events; at the same time his personal attitude is always incorporated in the text—we read about "naive" but "greedy" Amir Chand (Omichund), one of the trustees of the "English deal-makers", who "played their

devilish games” with him and betrayed him (Gosvāmī 1915b: 2–3, 27), “treacherous and hungry for power” Mir Jafar (Gosvāmī 1915b: 97) or “greedy” Robert Clive (Gosvāmī 1915b: 2). But this historical paraphernalia is a background for another romance: this time Siraj ud-Daulah himself (after having, at the age of 22, married “hundreds of wives”), falls in love with Narendra’s sister. The story repeats itself: the young maiden is abducted, locked in a luxurious palace named “The Diamond Lake”, later on to be saved by her fiancée Madanmohan, who sneaked into the palace disguised as a woman.

As is typical for Gosvami, the central antagonist in many of his novels is a Muslim ruler or a representative of power—a prince, a nawab, a military chieftain or a courtier, such as Tugral Khan in *Baṅsarojinī*; the princes Salavat and Dara Shukoh in *Tārā*, nawab Siraj ud-Daulah and his son-in-law Sayyid Ahmed in *Hṛdayhāriṇī*, *Lavaṅglatā*, etc. They are typically portrayed as clever but evil people; they love comfort, food and wine but also may behave bravely in battles. Their soft spot is their consuming lust for women: they lose their head once they come across a young beauty, in person or in a picture, and immediately try to get her into their harem, using the services of spies and dacoits. Needless to say that many of their victims are daughters of Hindu nobles.

In this way, when Tugral Khan gets several new young ladies in his harem, he shows exaggeratedly licentious behavior:

Tugral: Praise the God! Praise the God! You are an amazing beauty, girl, and have a very agreeable character! I am so very pleased with you. Soon the day will come when you will be famous as Moti Begam. You will have the highest status among my wives!

Sarla (burning with rage inside): This will be very kind of you.

Tugral: What is this? Why have your friends turned their faces away from me? Mighty God! What incomparable beauty and charm! (He moves towards the girls). Oh, you are Mallika and you are Sushila! By God’s grace, one should inspect this angle, too!

The villain wanted to come closer but Sarlā stood up between him and the other girls... (Gosvāmī 1917, 2: 12).

Apart from general historical facts, taken most probably from English books on Indian history (Gosvami always mentions unreliability of the Mughal and other Muslim-oriented chronicles), there are no details in Gosvami's narrations which could be interpreted as historically correct or anyhow connected with the described period. His characters differ in their personal qualities, but not so much in looks or clothes. Perhaps, speech is the only striking feature which is introduced to add to the portrait of a Muslim character. Gosvami takes a lot of pains to make Tugral Khan (who was a Turkish-origin officer), Siraj ud-Daula, Sayyid Ahmad and others sound different from the *śuddh-hindī* speakers: creating their speech, he generously uses Arabic and Persian exclamations (*Balhamdalillāh, Afsos, sad afsos!* etc.) and a lot of "foreign" words. Tugral's manner of expression does resemble Urdu but seems rather artificial. In order to make Malati sound convincing in her role of Farhad, Gosvami demonstrates rather Persianised Urdu, again and again strengthening the connection between the ornate style of speech and the Muslim community (*Peštar huzūr ke us mašvire mẽ śarīk hoũ... bād mẽ śāhzādī śirīn kī khidmat mẽ hāzir hoũgā! / Let me first take part in the consultation with you, Master... after which I will present myself to the service of princess Śirīn – Gosvāmī 1917: 2, 22*).

Gosvami's writing reveals that for him all the Muslims characters who have political power are generally enemies (with some exceptions, though). Hence, when Mallika appears in front of Sultan, disguised as Farhad, the readers know nothing about the character's real identity and loyalty. This unnamed noble courtier was already shown before, when he helped the prince and assisted the ladies in their escape from the harem. At this point the reader is supposed to be rather confused, and the author knows the reason for it:

What is happening? Is this Farhad really a Muslim (*yavan*)? Then, if he is a Muslim, this means he has betrayed his master Tugral and helped Narendra Singh, who is a Hindu!!! No need to hurry, Readers! Keep on watching and see what happens at the end! (Gosvāmī 1915b: 18).

Apparently, the idea of a genuine Muslim helping a Hindu out of his goodwill seems unbelievable.

However, there are always Muslim characters in Gosvami's texts who are portrayed with a lot of compassion and kindness, if not with admiration. There is a certain pattern behind such characters, too: they would typically be deprived of any power, by birth or by circumstances,—a fair-hearted ruler, orphaned children, abused wives or wronged concubines. Thus, in *Mallikādevī*, a different Muslim is represented by Shirin, Tugral's daughter. It is exactly because of her that the Sultan's own personality is not totally irredeemable: while seeing her or thinking of her, he for a while becomes a different, soft and caring man. Shirin is everything an ideal noble girl could be, she could have even been born a Hindu princess—it is not in vain that she and Malati (as Farhad) develop true friendship. To give Shirin a “realistic” touch, so that she fits the pattern of a typical high-class Muslim girl, the author highlights some extra fragility and paleness in her and makes her a rare connoisseur of Persian language and poetry.

Remarkable examples of such types one finds in Gosvami's *Gul-Bahār*, a novel which, again, is based on the history of Bengal during the advance of the British (after the Battle of Plassey), but exploits it from a rather different perspective. This time the protagonist—a kind family-oriented nawab, Mir Qasim—is facing the ruthlessness of the East India Company's army, led by the cunning Robert Clive. All the thoughts of Mir Qasim revolve around one problem: “How to free Bengal from the *firangis*?” (Gosvāmī 1916: 7). He builds his own army in Munger, but, because of the betrayal of his courtiers, there is no chance he could withstand the siege of Clive's army. Mir Qasim's beloved wife died 14 years before, and now his children, 16-year-old twins Gul and Bahar, are the only family to care for. But in attempts to secretly escape from Munger, the siblings and their father get separated from each other; by the end of the novel, all of them fall victims to this war. Gosvami leads the story to an unpredictably mystical finale: the pure-hearted, radiantly beautiful, spiritually-gifted boy and girl create a rare miracle after their death. At night, disturbed citizens see streams of light coming

from their tomb, a sweet song and sounds of veena, Gul's favorite instrument, reach the walls of the fallen Munger. Clive himself is unable to sleep and goes to the cemetery to find out what makes the Hindus and Muslims in his army so restless. There, illusory images of Gul and Bahar in paradise are revealed to him: he sees them in glory, adorned with flower garlands, and *paris* serve them food and refreshments (Gosvāmī 1915b: 40). On the next day Clive receives a letter from which he learns that his own son and daughter are dead.

Although only selected Hindi sources from between 1860 and 1910 have been reviewed here, the examples from them suggest that the authors based their judgments on public stereotypes rather than on immediate observations of life. On the whole, they created a rather unflattering general image of the Muslim community, but it should not be mistaken for a realistic portrait, as even individual representations of this image lack details and consistency. The religious identity was presented as a combination of a few characteristics (name, style of speech, few highly generalized traits of character and lifestyle choices), most of which are actually not connected with beliefs or religious practices. Symptomatically, strictly religious sides of life (beliefs, rituals, places of worship and so on) are hardly mentioned in any of the discussed texts, suggesting that the division between Hindus and Muslims was, at this stage, seen as a social problem: the antagonism of religious dogmas and major lifestyle differences, as well as many important common identities, which undoubtedly existed, were not yet included in the literary discourse. It took many more decades before the Hindu-Muslim relationship could be represented in literature in a much more realistic way.

One notices certain patterns behind the fictional descriptions of the Muslim characters: the negative features of the Muslims in the novels of Khatri and Gosvami are constructed around the idea of aggressiveness and power. An exemplary fictional villain or tyrant seems to be capable of three types of aggressive behavior: military (war-like activities), religious (violent spread of Islam), and sexual (he is not simply lustful but active in his pursue of sexual objects). The idea of expansion of power through control over the politics and conversion was developed

by both Khatri and Gosvami. The latter also added this rather spectacular sexual angle to his portrayals, which made the images perhaps more repulsive, but also, in some ways, captivating. Even Harishchandra's remarks imply that there was a strong conviction among general public that the Muslim elites have the benefit of idle life and are emotionally spoiled by the cult of love poetry and music—the factors that distract this community from positively contributing to society.

Likewise, the images of the Muslim characters who are “allowed” in society, which is being constructed in these novels (truly, “a creation of dreams”—Kaviraj 1995: 114), are totally harmless—these are spiritual people, who themselves often become the victims of someone's crimes.

In all the cases analyzed above, the collective Muslim portrait is juxtaposed with a counter-portrait of the Hindus, often painted with exaggeratedly radiant colors, equally unrealistic (although, it is obvious that there are villains among the Hindus and “saints” among the Muslims, too; exactly as in the early novels of Bankimchandra, one sees “an almost mechanical symmetry of virtues and vices of both sides”—Sarkar 1996: 187). The ultimate function of this technique was, possibly, to facilitate communal binding, find more reasons for national pride, see hope for the future, rather than to humiliate the neighboring community or seek moral compensation for the reign over India in the past.

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