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**“Helpless Indian:”
The Sacred Cow as the Symbol of Hindu-Muslim Unity
in a Late Nineteenth-Century Hindi Novel**

SUMMARY: In the colonial North India of the late 19th century, the cow emerged as a powerful symbol of imagining the nation. The present paper explores how the image of the sacred cow was reinterpreted in the new socio-political context and subsequently employed in the Hindi novel, the development of which coincided with massive campaigns for cow protection. To this end, I study one of the earliest Hindi novels, *Nissahāy hindū*, written by Rādhākṛṣṇadās in 1881 and published in 1890. The novel can be read as a documentary evidence of polemics surrounding the process of identity formation and circumstances attending it, as articulated in the Hindi vernacular during the last decades of the 19th century. The agitation for cow protection is the novel’s *leitmotif* revolving around the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity, framed in an original and unconventional way. It introduces the bold idea of a Muslim agitating for cow protection and sacrificing himself for the movement. The analysis of the novel, alongside Bhāratendu Hariścandra’s seminal speech of 1884, reveals growing concerns regarding the Hindu-Muslim-British relations at the time of momentous religious, social and economic changes.

KEYWORDS: Hindi novel, Rādhākṛṣṇadās, Bhāratendu Hariścandra, colonial North India, cow protection movement, nationalism, Hindu-Muslim relationship

Introduction

The article proposes to demonstrate how the concept of the sacred cow was employed in the changing socio-economic context of the colonial North India in the late 19th century.¹ As the literary texts of the time reveal deep engagement with the contemporary social issues and, in fact, contribute to the construction of the image of contemporary North Indian society, the paper focuses on an early Hindi novel concerned with the cow protection, namely *Nissahāy hindū* (“Helpless Hindu” or, as will be advocated in due course, “Helpless Indian”), by Rādhākṛṣṇadās (1865–1899). Originally written in 1881, a year before a coordinated cow protection movement, spurred on by the activities of Arya Samaj,² gained momentum in the Punjab, the very region which witnessed the anti-cow slaughter activism in the two earlier decades as well, the book did not appear in print, however, till 1890. According to the second preface, dated 1 February 1890 and written, like the first, by the author,³ *Nissahāy hindū* was published without bringing any changes to the original manuscript (Rādhākṛṣṇadās 1890b).

Interestingly, this very early attempt at a novel writing not only resorts to a number of dramatic features to draw the interest of the prospective reader, but also takes up a contentious contemporary issue and puts forward certain reformist postulates. The agitation for cow protection is the *leitmotif*, with the work introducing the bold idea of a Muslim zealously agitating for cow protection and sacrificing himself for the movement. However, in spite of the positive portrayal of its main Muslim protagonist and a strong appeal for the Hindu-Muslim unity, *Nissahāy hindū* is not devoid of contemporary, prevalent stereotypes showing

¹ Preliminary remarks on this subject have been presented at *Coffee Break Conference* in Leiden in 2016.

² Arya Samaj is a Hindu revival association founded in 1875, initially involved in such activities as the cow protection movement or promotion of Hindi language in Punjab. For more on its impact on Hindu-Muslim relations and aggravation of communal polarization, see Fischer-Tiné 2000.

³ The first edition of 1890 had two short authorial prefaces, pp. [2] and [3].

Muslims in an unfavourable light. This is in keeping with the view that “at least since the nineteenth century, certain cultural stereotypes of the Muslim were created” (Gupta 2008: 243) and circulated in North India, the same being much evoked in the Hindi prose fiction of the late 19th and the early 20th century (e.g., Dubyanskaya 2013, Chandra 1984). One of the substantial differences between *Nissahāy hindū* and similar works of the same period is, however, the connotation given to the term ‘Hindu’ tending here to include also the Muslims, a point of view corresponding with the authorial vision of the society constructed in the novel. In this respect, the vision seems to have been influenced by the views of Bhāratendu Hariścandra, a prominent Hindi writer of the time and a relative of the author.

Before discussing the novel, I would like to touch briefly on few related issues which are relevant to our study, like some aspects of cow’s significance in India and its links with the agitation for cow protection. Although the agitation gained momentum only a year after *Nissahāy hindū* was published, the movement contributed considerably to the ongoing, parallel process, prompted by other factors as well, of forging group identities, i.e., redrawing boundaries in relation to the ‘other/s.’ For this reason, I look at the stereotypical portrayal of Muslim characters in the early Hindi novel and different connotation/s of the term ‘Hindu.’ From there I move on to examine the principal points of convergence between the postulates incorporated in *Nissahāy hindū* and opinions expressed in the 1884 public address of Bhāratendu Hariścandra, both understood as early, experimental explorations of the definition of a community in North Indian context. Finally, I analyse the novel.

The importance of the cow in India

For most of the Hindus, cow is an emotionally potent religious symbol and, consequently, the animal enjoys an exalted status in India. Scholars widely acknowledge the centrality of the notion of the cow

in the pan-Hindu culture, attested to, for example in the following statement recorded over a hundred years ago:

On the whole, it may be said that reverence for the cow and passionate resistance to its slaughter are the most powerful links which bind together the chaotic complex of beliefs which we designate by the name of Hinduism. (Crooke 1912: 279; cited in Korom 2000: 190)

This particular opinion, expressed in 1912, would have been probably influenced by the cow protection movement of the late 19th and the early 20th century which informs also the background of the novel. Though the reasons for the inviolable sanctity of the cow in India and the cow's long presence as a sacred symbol have been extensively studied, including textual analysis of Hindu scriptures and normative texts, the 'sacred-cow controversy' remains a matter of considerable academic interest (Korom 2000: 183–193) even today.

The importance given to the cow in India, especially a milk-giving cow, can be traced to a number of interconnected factors. For the purpose of this paper the most significant are: her symbolic value; the usefulness of her products; and the ritual uses to which she and her products are put. As for the cow's symbolism, she is a symbol of wealth and good fortune and is imagined in Hindu mythology as an equipped-with-marvellous-powers goddess called variously Kāmadhenu, Surabhi or Nandinī (Mani 1975: 379–381). Already the imagery of *R̥gveda* uses the metaphor of the cow, for example, as the symbol of light, which, in turn, is grounded in her role, i.e., as source of food, status and ritual potential (Jurewicz 2010: 99). The five products of the cow (*pañca-gavya*), i.e., milk, curds, clarified butter, urine and dung, are used commonly in Indian households and are associated with diverse ritual acts.

The agitation for cow protection in the colonial North India and its consequences

In the colonial North India, the cow, already a particularly sacred animal with a high connotative value, emerged as the symbol of the nation, symbol appealing to all, the educated and the uneducated, the orthodox and the reformist (Gupta 2008: 213, Yang 1980: 585–586). The message of cow protection and the techniques deployed to disseminate it in the public domain, aided greatly by the introduction of print,⁴ encouraged, on the one hand, a sense of group identity among the Hindus, and on the other, fostered among the Hindus a sense of difference and separateness from both the Muslims and the British (Yang 1980: 596). The Hindu-Muslim riots over the cow slaughter, characterised by anti-British overtones, proliferated in the late 19th century North India and “were basically caused by the power of symbolism” (Parel 1969: 191; cited in Copland 2005: 75). The cow protection movement, which started in earnest in the Punjab in 1882, was in its early phase a mostly urban phenomenon, probably indirectly linked to literacy and print culture, but after 1891, when it spread eastwards, entered the so-called later, rural phase (Freitag 1980: 606–621). There was a visible growth of the cow protection societies in North India between 1880 and 1920 and the visual images of the cow as the mother (*gau mātā*) were of great importance in the organisation as well as ideology of the movement. In widely disseminated pictures the cow became “a proto-nation, a space which embodies a Hindu cosmology” (Pinney 1997: 841), or, else, she was depicted while about to be slaughtered, thus juxtaposing an earlier age that had protected the cow with the present era which had failed to do so. The implication of the latter being: “it was the British, eaters of beef, who ruled in these evil times” (Robb 1986: 295) hence the present, unhappy state of affairs.

⁴ For more on the North Indian print culture and commercial publishing, see Orsini 2009.

The term ‘Hindu’ and the Muslims in the Hindi literature of the late 19th century

Rādhākṛṣṇadās’s *Nissahāy hindū* is usually viewed as one of the earliest attempts at novel writing in Hindi, preserving thus a distinctly polemical flavour of the public domain print culture. Though the work was published in 1890, it was written much earlier, in 1881,⁵ when its author was just 16 years old.⁶ The title page of *Nissahāy hindū* mentions Bhāratendu Hariścandra, a Hindi writer, editor and prominent public figure of the 19th century Banaras, as the person who had inspired Rādhākṛṣṇadās to write the book. Bhāratendu’s name is acknowledged also in the two authorial prefaces, besides the dedication and the novel itself (Rādhākṛṣṇadās 1890a, 1890b, 1890c, 1890: 82). Gopāl Rāy, a scholar of Hindi literature, specifically draws attention to this piece of information suggesting that the author could have been advised by Bhāratendu Hariścandra on how to write the novel (Rāy 2009: 44), starting with the main theme and its framing, and ending on the choice of specific linguistic idiom. Rādhākṛṣṇadās was, in fact, a first cousin of Bhāratendu Hariścandra and had grown up with him. Another Hindi literature scholar, Vasudha Dalmia, calls Rādhākṛṣṇadās one of the most important members of Bhāratendu’s circle and his devoted follower (Dalmia 2005: 141, 221). Undoubtedly Rādhākṛṣṇadās was much influenced by his elder, famous cousin and, as I argue further on, *Nissahāy hindū* mirrors to a great extent Bhāratendu’s viewpoint and may be seen as a literary exposition of his views. Hence, for the purpose of this study, I first analyse the public address delivered by Bhāratendu Hariścandra

⁵ It is suggested by the date—27/11/81—given under a favourable comment concerning *Nissahāy hindū* signed by Vyās Rāmsaṅkar Śarmā included on the last two pages of the book (Śarmā 1881) and advocated by Gopāl Rāy. The second edition of the novel appeared in 1940 in Lakhnaū (Rāy 1968: 36–37, 343; Rāy 2009: 23, 44).

⁶ The author mentions his age by way of introduction in the first preface to the book (“Nivedan,” undated), while in the second (also titled “Nivedan”), dated 1 February 1890, he acknowledges that due to various reasons, the work was published after a long time but without alterations (Rādhākṛṣṇadās 1890a, 1890b).

in November 1884 in Ballia, then only do I look at the novel, the very title of which may be understood best only when considered through the lens of Bhāratendu’s speech.

The text of the speech, “Bhāratvarṣ kī unnati kaise ho saktī hai?”⁷ or “How can India progress,” says Dalmia (2005: 42), “was to continue to invite comment (...) for it was obviously considered a central statement” of Bhāratendu. Scholars like R. S. McGregor and Dalmia begin their discussions of Bhāratendu’s views on society, politics and language by referencing this very address (Dalmia 2005: 21–27, McGregor 1991: 94–100). Although the text alludes to several important issues, the most relevant for the present study are, firstly, Bhāratendu’s proposition concerning the need to reform the religion, and secondly, his idea of national identity, which meant “working together in the interest of the country” and “taking a stand on the relationship of Hindus (...) with the Muslims of the country” as Dalmia puts it (Dalmia 2005: 22). Bhāratendu articulates the need to reform certain aspects of religion, since *dharma* (in Hindi: *dharm*, used here, according to Dalmia, in the modern sense of ‘religion’) “is the root of all progress”⁸ and, thus, must be reformed first so that other reforms might follow (Dalmia 2005: 25). In Bhāratendu’s view, this can be achieved by carefully separating the intermixed religious and social codes, and by correcting and changing social conduct according to the needs of time and place (Hariścandra 1953: 900, Dalmia 2005: 25). One finds traces of this concept in *Nissahāy hindū* as well. As far as the question of national identity and unity is concerned, in his speech, Bhāratendu addresses conjointly people of different Hindu sects as well as the Jains and the Muslims asking them to forget their mutual enmities and unite as now is not the time to fight. To highlight the urgency, he employs the metaphor of a burning house (Hariścandra 1953: 901) indicating

⁷ Bhāratendu was invited to address the gathering during a local festival; the text of the speech was published the same year in his journal, *Navoditā Hariścandracandrikā* (Dalmia 2005: 21). An exaggerated admiration for progress is expressed in the writings of Bhāratendu and his contemporaries (McGregor 1991: 96).

⁸ “sab unnatiyō kā mūl dharm hai” (Hariścandra 1953: 900).

that he “does indeed see India as the common home of all her communities” (McGregor 1991: 100). He then addresses the Muslims of the country, with the speech, couched in a very direct and easily understood idiom, testifying to the clear presence of “tensions and hostilities between the two rapidly splitting communities” (Dalmia 2005: 46):

It is appropriate also for the Muslim brothers, since they have settled in Hindustan, that they should stop looking down at the Hindus. They should treat Hindus just like brothers and not do anything that could hurt them.⁹

Dalmia points out that there are three different usages of the term ‘Hindu’ in Bhāratendu’s writings (Dalmia 2005: 26–27, 426–427). In the context of the economic progress of the country or economic nationalism, the term, as used also in the Ballia address, espouses the wide, nationalist sense (Hariścandra 1953: 26, 48): “Whoever lives in Hindustān, whatever his caste or appearance, is a Hindu.”¹⁰ Therefore, as Bhāratendu continues with his speech, it is this Hindu who is to be helped irrespective of his religious denomination (*ibid.*: 902). Thus, as another Hindi literature scholar, Sudhir Chandra, aptly comments: “By means of a conscious semantic enlargement of the connotation of the term ‘Hindu,’ attempt was made to include even Muslims within the appellation” (Chandra 1984: 11). Although the expression *bhāratīya*, denoting Indian, was not yet in vogue, as Dalmia reminds us in her study, nevertheless Bhāratendu could have employed here, instead of the word ‘Hindu,’ an adjective *hindustānī*, used elsewhere in the speech, leading one to believe that his recourse to ‘Hindu’ was a premeditated, conscious attempt at coining new usage for the term (Dalmia 2005: 47).

⁹ “musalmān bhāiyō ko bhī ucit hai ki is hindustān mē bas kar ve log hinduō ko nīcā samajhnā chor dē. thīk bhāiyō kī bhāti hinduō se bartāv karē. aisī bāt jo hinduō kā jī dukhāne vālī ho na karē” (Hariścandra 1953: 902).

¹⁰ “jo hindustān mē rahe cāhe kisī jāti, kisī rang kā kyō na ho vah hindū hai” (*ibid.*).

The term ‘Hindu’ is, in Bhāratendu’s writings, principally an open cultural-political category, and seemingly, all inclusive, but, as Dalmia points out, there are instances, which limit its scope. For example, it is also used in a narrower sense, along with other terms denoting religious denomination (*ibid.*: 426–427), like in the aforementioned paragraph addressing the Muslims. As far as its capacity for meaningful communication is concerned, Chandra observes two opposing tendencies among Hindi writers (themselves Hindu) of the period under discussion:

The synonymization of Hindu and Indian was thus a circular process in which the same point was reached through movement in opposite directions. Harishchandra used the term Hindu and insisted that he meant it to include all Indians. Pratap Narain Misra, on the other hand, argued that Hindus constituted the real India; the underlying assumption being that Indians meant Hindus. (...) The equation of Indians with Hindus was to become, in course of time, an integral component of the psychological make-up of the Hindus. At the same time, the awareness that non-Hindus got left out in the course of this usage was to become progressively feeble, eventually operating largely at the unconscious level. (Chandra 1984: 12)

Apart from this terminological inconsistency there are also other visible contradictions in the writings of Bhāratendu and his contemporaries. Chandra carefully ponders the ambivalence of the prevailing attitude towards the Muslims (Chandra 1984: 9–15). On the one hand, he mentions Bhāratendu as one of the few Hindi authors who could “clearly see the correlation between Hindu-Muslim unity and the country’s destiny.” But, on the other hand, he says, “these very writers were also capable of inveighing against the Muslims” (*ibid.*: 10). For instance, the writings of Bhāratendu Hariścandra, including his translation of fragments from the Qur’an, biographical sketches of the Prophet Muhammad and other Islamic personages, a long commemorative poem mentioning with great reverence Muslim Vaishnava saints, and a critical review

(though not signed with Bhāratendu's name)¹¹ of a school text book that “painted in lurid colours the oppression and misdeeds of the Muslim rulers,” show “a willingness to search in the past for precedents and symbols of Hindu-Muslim unity” (*ibid.*: 9). At the same time however, some of his poems reveal a deeply felt sense of hurt evoked by the mention of Muslim rulers and follow a common pattern of remembering Muslim rule as a centuries long period of oppression (*ibid.*: 10–11). In this regard, the British, viewed ambivalently¹² as well, are acclaimed in one of such poems as having replaced the Muslim rulers (*ibid.*: 10) but acting like them in many ways. In view of the above, limiting the discussion of identity issues voiced in Hindi literature of the time to the stereotypical portrayal of Muslim community and Hindu-Muslim animosity would be an oversimplification. The same should be rather perceived against a larger socio-political background of Hindu-Muslim-British relations. As Chandra observes, the attitude towards the Muslims was to a certain extent influenced by the attitude towards the British rule (*ibid.*: 14). Significant are therefore all references in the analysed novel to the many different aspects of British colonial rule. Moreover, these very inconsistencies and contradictory remarks in the writings of Bhāratendu and his contemporaries attest to the ongoing process of identity construction in North India and, thus, the texts can be read as a documentary evidence of polemics surrounding this process and circumstances attending it.

Coming back to the text of the public address, in the sentences immediately following those referred to above, Bhāratendu Hariścandra explicates further on how India can progress in the economic terms:

¹¹ The review was signed “An Orthodox Hindoo of Kasi.” For more, see also Dalmia 2005: 185, 330–332.

¹² McGregor provides an insightful analysis of Bhāratendu's ambivalent reaction to the Western presence in India (McGregor 1991).

Do everything to increase native craftsmanship, so that your wealth stays in your own country. Note that just as the Ganges flows in a thousand streams into the ocean, so your wealth flows in a thousand ways to England, France, Germany and America.¹³

In this respect, Bhāratendu formulates the necessity for the expression of Indian unity and, as McGregor notes, the importance of this utterance “is emphasized by its position at the end” of the seminal and much reported speech (McGregor 1991: 100).

Nissahāy hindū: From cow protection to Hindu-Muslim unity

Nissahāy hindū by Rādhākṛṣṇadās presents highly original approach to the theme of Indian unity as it propagates the idea of Hindu-Muslim cooperation. Given the propensity for negative portrayal of Muslims in Hindi novel in general, as observed and criticised also by some Indian journalists writing at the turn of the 19th century (Rāy 2009: 79–83),¹⁴ the novel in focus clearly stands out in terms of its subject matter and the portrayal of a Muslim character. Furthermore, it is the demand for cow protection that allows for the cooperation of a Hindu and a Muslim. It does not mean however that the novel is devoid of stereotypes derogatory to Muslims. In fact, it includes two minor stereotypical remarks about the Muslim community provided by the narrator (Rādhākṛṣṇadās 1890: 43, 47) and evokes misdeeds of Muslim rulers and the harsh tenets of Islam in a speech delivered by the main, non-Muslim protagonist (*ibid.*: 21–22). Nonetheless, Rāy in his history of Hindi novel highlights the novelty of this work revolving around the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity (Rāy 2009: 44–48). But before

¹³ “kāriṅgarī jisse tumhāre yahā̃ baṛhe tumhārā rupayā tumhāre hī deś mẽ rahe vah karo. dekhā jaise hazār dhārā hokar gaṅgā samudr mẽ milī hai vaise hī tumhārī lakṣmī hazār tarah se iṅlaiṅd, frānsīs, jarmanī, amerikā ko jāī hai” (Hariścandra 1953: 902). Here I follow the English translation by Dalmia (2005: 26).

¹⁴ The articles refer especially to early historical novels in Hindi.

discussing the uniqueness of *Nissahāy hindū*, let us consider its title in reference to Bhāratendu's aforementioned usage of the term 'Hindu.'

The title of *Nissahāy hindū* could be a subject to misinterpretation were the term 'Hindu' to be interpreted merely as it is understood today, i.e., in terms of religious denomination. For instance, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* provides two meanings for the word 'Hindu,' 1. 'an Indian,' in the historical usage, and 2. 'a Hindu,' in the prevailing usage (McGregor 1999: 1071). In view of this, the title of the book could indeed be rendered as "Helpless Hindu." However, Rādhākṛṣṇadās seems to be referencing in his title the idiom used by Bhāratendu and for this reason, it would be more correct to translate it as "Helpless Indian," which in turn resonates with the message of the novel.

The main protagonists of *Nissahāy hindū* are a 20-year-old Hindu merchant, Madanmohan, and, introduced somewhat later in the book, a learned Muslim (*maulvī*), Abdul Aziz. Madanmohan is an active member of a society for India's welfare (*bhārathitaiṣiṇī sabhā*).¹⁵ At one of the meetings, he gives a speech and in its last point talks about the need for cow protection. In his opinion, Muslims started slaughtering cows when they realised that the government is not concerned with the issue; the matter is not regulated by law and, what's more, there is no unanimity of opinion on the subject (Rādhākṛṣṇadās 1890: 28). Abdul Aziz, also present at the meeting, agrees with Madanmohan's main arguments. Moreover, declaring himself to be for the cow protection, he exposes himself to ridicule or, in the light of ensuing events, even to danger from the members of his own community when he says:

There is no doubt that Muslims have done poor Hindus a great wrong, which I consider totally inappropriate. I am truly with the Hindus because of the wrongs they must suffer at present. Although in the noble Qur'an the killing of cows is forbidden, a lot of wicked Muslims

¹⁵ As different associations and clubs proliferated in North India from the 1870s onwards, this very society may have had its historical prototype as well. For more on public activities and associations founded by Bhāratendu, see Dalmia (2005: 136–137).

keep on doing it in order to distress the Hindus. I solemnly swear that I side with you on this matter.¹⁶

Apart from the fact that a part of this passage referring to the alleged behaviour of the Muslims towards the Hindus seems notably exaggerated, interesting is the response to it. The president of the society for India’s welfare addresses Abdul Aziz as his friend and reflects in his speech on his words. While commenting on the government taking no action and ignoring petitions for cow protection, he evokes the meaningful symbol of the cow as the mother of the Hindus (*gau mātā*), clearly intending to shame and embarrass the present Hindus:

It is a matter of shame for our Hindu brothers that their revered mother has fallen into this state with them just looking on! Shame, indeed, that so many Muslims take offence at this abomination while Hindus do not even notice it.¹⁷

Worth noting is the exaggeration included in the words “so many Muslims” in the second sentence and the wide sweeping generalisation about the alleged indifference of Hindus towards the lack of cow protection measures. In this connection one can only speculate as to what was the reason for introducing the character of Abdul Aziz into the novel and what function was his presence to fulfil. Was this strategy merely a by-product of the writer’s young age and naivety or was it rather meant to embarrass those Hindus who have remained unconcerned regarding

¹⁶ “ismē kuch śak nahī ki musalmānō ne bicāre hinduō par barā barā zulm kiyā hai jisko ki māī sarāsar be jā samajhtā hū (...). māī sacce jī se hinduō kā śarīk hū kyōki is vaqt sarāsar hinduō par zulm ho rahā hai. bāvajūde ki go kuśī qurān śarīf mē manā hai tāham bahut se badmās musalmānō ne hinduō ke jī dukhāne ke liye ise jāri rakkhā [*sic*] hai. māī qasam khākar kahtā hū ki māī is bāre mē āp ke sāth hū” (Rādhākṛṣṇadās 1890: 30).

¹⁷ “hamāre hindū bhāiyō ke liye yah barī hī lajjā kī bāt hai ki un logō ke sāmne unki param pūjanīyā mā kī yah daśā ho! dhikkār hai ki bahut se musalmān is anīyā se cīrhē aur hinduō ko kuch bhī is par dhyān na ho” (*ibid.*: 31).

the plight of the sacred cow? Whatever the reason, the intervention seems remarkable.

Abdul Aziz adds later in the course of the novel that according to the holy Qur'an, "The one who kills a bullock, cuts a tree, sells a man or drinks alcohol, shall never be saved."¹⁸ I would argue that the alleged reference to the Qur'an is an invention of the novel's writer, Rādhākṛṣṇadās, without any support in the scripture. Making the same point, though this time through different reasoning, Abdul Aziz asks the superintendent of police where in the religion of the Muslims has it been ordered to kill cows. His interlocutor answers evasively that had this not been written, then why would their ancestors choose to do it? (*ibid.*: 72–73). The superintendent belongs to a group of Muslims who strongly disapprove of Abdul Aziz's support for the Hindus. Incidentally, he considers Hindus to be in any case inferior, for in his opinion, "Hindus are, after all, the slaves of our slaves."¹⁹ The confrontation between such Muslim fundamentalists²⁰ and the more open-minded protagonists brings the novel to a dramatic close.

As Abdul Aziz demonstrates exceptional commitment and dedication to the cause, he is elected the president of the society for cow protection (*Gohitaiṣiṇī* or *Gohitkārīṇī sabhā*). He plans to raise funds in order to establish an enclosure to keep cows safe and launch a petition calling for cow protection, however, he remains a bit sceptical about the efficacy of the latter as "certainly the government will oppose" such a motion.²¹ Furthermore, he expresses his readiness to sacrifice himself for the sake of the cows and Madanmohan follows the suit (*ibid.*: 47–49).

There are a number of instances in *Nissahāy hindū* where an attempt is made to demystify the importance of the sacred cow to

¹⁸ "yānī bail mārne vāle vṛkṣ kātne vāle maṇuṣya becne vāle aur madirā pān karne vāle kī nijāt kabhī na hogī" (*ibid.*: 86).

¹⁹ "hindū to ham logō ke ḡulāmō ke ḡulām hai" (*ibid.*: 71).

²⁰ Referring to this group as fanatical, Rāy underlines the fact that its leader, *hājī atāullāh*, is noble-born (Rāy 2009: 46–47).

²¹ "yaqīn hai ki gavernment zarūr khilāf karegi" (*ibid.*: 48).

the Indian society (*ibid.*: 31–32, 78–80, 89), which also mirrors polemics of the time. Both main characters claim that the importance of the cow is connected, above all, with the usefulness of her products and has nothing to do with religion. For instance, milk, clarified butter and curds are essential to almost every household and cow dung is used as fuel in cooking. It is worth noticing that some of the arguments, especially those rationalising the subject, are provided by Abdul Aziz (*ibid.*: 89). Yet, the references are made also to the authority of shastras which, according to Madanmohan, state that there is nothing more precious than the cow. Moreover, Madanmohan mentions the story of Krishna grazing the cattle and evokes the use of cow urine and cow dung in the process of purifying oneself after a religious transgression (*ibid.*: 79–80).

During the meeting of the society for India’s welfare Madanmohan accuses Brahmans of seeing everything through the prism of religion (*dharm*). According to him religion and religious outlook should extend only so far as they do not cause harm. Otherwise, they become the opposite of religion, i.e., *adharm* (*ibid.*: 19).

The ending of *Nissahāy hindū* is very dramatic, just as suggested by the subtitle found on the opening page, “a tragic novel” (*ek viyogānt upanyās*). The house of the Muslim protagonist, Abdul Aziz, is attacked by his opponents, and Madanmohan and Abdul Aziz, encouraged and, in fact, assisted by their wives, put up a fight against them. Abdul Aziz, his wife and Madanmohan die. Madanmohan manages to deliver a speech before his death. His wife, the only survivor, considers committing sati but as the practice is forbidden and, moreover, because she hasn’t obtained permission for the act from the relatives, she decides to commit suicide instead.²² Before doing so she asks God to bestow success on the mission for which her husband had sacrificed his life (*ibid.*: 114–120).

²² As the result of agitation for social reforms, an anti-*sati* law was passed by the British in 1829–1930.

Conclusion

In the assessment of the book, found in his history of the Hindi novel (Rāy 2009: 44–49, 56–57), Rāy highlights the poignant delineating of the intra-communal amity introduced here under the pretext of anti-cow slaughter as the central subject matter. He refers to *Nissahāy hindū* as a remarkable example of Hindu-Muslim unity and points out that it was not until Premchand forty years later that the motif of friendship between the Hindus and the Muslims, represented here by the main protagonists and their wives, came to reappear in Hindi prose fiction (*ibid.*: 44–45). According to Rāy, the characters of Madanmohan and Abdul Aziz as well as the depiction of their sacrifice are quite credible (*ibid.*: 47). However, the portrayal of Abdul Aziz is, in fact, largely devoid of specific characteristics of his religious identity. This is similar to other early Hindi novels where a religious denomination of a character is generally presented merely as a combination of a few characteristics such as the name or the style of speech, “most of which are actually not connected with beliefs or religious practices,” the fact observed by Tatiana Dubyanskaya (2013: 283).

As already mentioned, Rādhākṛṣṇadās was still very young at the time of writing the novel. Yet, a year prior to that, he wrote a drama advocating social reform (Rāy 2009: 44). Regarding his possible naivety, his age was comparable to that of Bhāratendu Hariścandra who, in his late teens, was already taking part in many cultural, intellectual and literary activities. As McGregor comments: “The intellectual climate in which Hariścandra grew up was clearly very stimulating to him.” By the age of eighteen he has already “made a translation from a Bengali drama, worked on the beginnings of a translation of a Sanskrit drama, and been instrumental in the foundation of a local school” (McGregor 1991: 92). Possibly much of this could apply also to his younger cousin, Rādhākṛṣṇadās.

From a contemporary perspective, combining the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity with the motif of cow protection may appear astounding. It seems, however, that the use of such a symbol was indeed possible in

1881 as exemplified by *Nissahāy hindū*. The same applies to the connotation of the term ‘Hindu’ incorporated in the title of the novel. While such a play on words was conceivable for Bhāratendu and his contemporaries, the same would probably be far more difficult to implement today. The title of *Nissahāy hindū* and the expression used by Bhāratendu that it is the Hindu, i.e., Indian, who is to be helped, irrespective of his religious denomination (Hariścandra 1953: 902), evoke plausibly. Yet, as McGregor writes in reference to Bhāratendu’s speech: “This non-communal inclination of Hariścandra’s thought does not of course preclude his seeing Hinduism or Hindu identity as a prime determinant of the character of modern Indian life” (McGregor 1991: 100). On the other hand, as observed by Chandra, for the process of forging group identities that was underway in the late 19th century, “there was no intrinsic contradiction between the emerging national consciousness and continuing communal identities” (Chandra 1984: 15). In this context it is interesting, for example, that Madanmohan, the protagonist of *Nissahāy hindū*, in his aforementioned speech delivered at the meeting of the society for India’s welfare, first addresses Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas separately, one group after the other, convincing each one of them, through differently tailored reasonings, that they all should contribute actively to the welfare of India through unity and common programme (Rādhākṛṣṇadās 1890: 15–16).

As for the modern perspective, influenced by a series of historical events, including the cow protection movement, it tends to render the complex and fairly nuanced picture in much too stark dichotomies, posing the issue of “retrospective assessments of Hindu-Muslim relations in many perceptible ways” (Yang 1980: 576–577). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the image of the sacred cow has been probably the most effective symbol²³ in the process of identity formation in North India. Moreover, as recent decades have shown, the cow remains a recurring subject in political agitation in India; however, unlike the unifying

²³ There have been other propositions as well, like that of Gangadhar Bal Tilak, to evoke the symbolic appeal of Shivaji.

function it played in *Nissahāy hindū*, evoking the cow nowadays is rather meant to mark divisions along the lines of faith.

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