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The Patronage of Literary Criticism Bhārtendu Hariścandra's Critical Remarks on Bhakti Poets in the Print Sphere of the 1870s–1880s

ABSTRACT: The present work is inspired by previous contributions to the development of the Hindi public and print spheres in the 19th century (Dalmia 1997; Orsini 2002; Stark 2007). It aims at extending and integrating previously elaborated presentations by focusing on the patronage provided by colonial institutions to the development of Hindi literary studies in the 1870s and 1880s. The study also considers the role played by Indian *sampradāys* in enacting the religious and intellectual processes underwriting the expansion of this field. By moving in this direction, the article mainly builds on the investigation of some biographies (*jīvnī*) of the North Indian devotional poets penned by Bhārtendu Hariścandra in the 1870s. Further, it explores the relationship between these biographies and the anthologies published in the mid-1870s by the Naval Kishor Press. The final section of the contribution provides an introductory analysis of the type of patronage extended to Hariścandra and his works by the Khadgavilas Press in the 1880s. The aim is to draw a comparison between the policies of some earlier private publishing enterprises and those pursued by the new, Hindu-oriented publishing enterprises.

KEYWORDS: Hindi print sphere, bhakti, literary criticism, Bhārtendu Hariścandra, Khadgavilas Press

Publishing of anthologies and critical studies in colonial times¹

Several recent contributions have investigated the rise of the print market in South Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries, a topic which has become relevant to all discourses on the development of the public spheres in contemporary, Indian regional languages. The advancement of the print market is deeply connected to the processes of political and religious patronage of literature, both in the colonial and post-colonial periods. Referring to the development of the regional public spheres in North India, Dalmia (1997), Ghosh (2006) and Orsini (2002; 2009; 2015) have highlighted the role played by print in defining the historical, literary and religious values incorporated in the Hindi public sphere in the last quarter of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. This direction has also been pursued by scholars who analysed the connection of print with gender and Dalit issues (Gupta 2016; 2018). A detailed work on the rise of the print market in North India is that of Stark (2007), who focused on the history of the Naval Kishor Press (Naval kiśor pres, hereafter NKP), a publishing house established in 1858 in the Urdu stronghold of Lucknow. By publishing printed texts in Arabic, Persian and Indian vernacular languages, the NKP created an “empire” based on the fast-growing book market in North India. Printing ancient Indian manuscripts was undoubtedly one of the main tasks of the publishing houses that emerged in the colonial period. Issuing these texts in print not only tapped commercial and cultural demand; it also responded to the bureaucratic and ideological ambitions of colonial institutions (Podlasiński 2021). It is also important to note that even traditional figures of authority in Indian society, such as the *mahārājas*, patronised and/or directly contributed to the writing and publishing of these texts. We know that since the earliest decades of the 19th century, publishing houses were involved in printing Sanskrit

¹ I would like to express my deep gratitude to the anonymous reviewers and to Maria Puri for their insightful comments on the present article. All mistakes are mine.

texts, such as the *Purāṇas* and the *Vedas*,² which also allowed them to be part of the regional and national network of relations (Galewicz 2019; 2020). In the second half of the 1860s, many local enterprises began publishing poetic compositions, booklets (Orsini 2015), hagiographies and anthologies of famous bhakti poets, with a preference for those who composed vernacular poetry in the early modern³ period.

Considering the above overview, the present study aims at investigating the publications in Khaṛī bolī Hindi containing critical notes and/or assessments concerning Sanskrit and vernacular bhakti poetry. The article entails the analysis of different kinds of publications and sheds light on their political, religious and personal patronage. The advent of many Hindi journals and literary magazines in the mid-1870s provided new opportunities for young writers who ventured into writing texts built on the devotional past. Indeed, the 19th century world of print was a “site for experimentation” where Hindi newspapers and literary magazines became open “containers” in which ancient and modern literary and historical issues were often

² The publishing history of the *Purāṇas* dates back to the 1840s, when Horace Hayman Wilson (1786–1860) was committed to the edition of the *Viṣṇu purāṇa* (1840). With reference to the publishing history of the *Vedas*, it is relevant to outline that, although the publishing of Vedic texts escalated only by the end of the 19th century along with the rise of regional and national identity movements, the earliest lithographed versions of texts such as the *R̥gvedasamhitā* and *Sāmavedasamhitā* were printed in the 1830s and 1840s. An outstanding role in the quest for printing the Vedas was played by the Presbyterian missionary Rev. John Stevenson, who edited and translated the *R̥gvedasamhitā*, titled *The Threefold Science*, published in Bombay in 1833, and the *Sāmavedasamhitā*, published in London in 1843 (Galewicz 2019: 140–141).

³ Here, the term early modern refers to the historical period from, approximately, the beginning of the 16th to the end of the 18th century. Such historical categorisation follows Pollock’s *Introduction* to the volume *Forms of Knowledge in Early-Modern Asia, Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet (1500–1800)* (2011: 1–16). Nonetheless, it is relevant to outline that the article also focuses on Hariścandra’s critical writings concerning literary authors, such as Jayadeva, who are not to be considered early modern authors since they lived well before the 16th century.

debated (Denault 2020: 261–262). Apart from journals, publishing houses played a significant role in bringing out texts containing critical assessments of early modern Indian poetry. From the 1860s to the mid-1880s, the NKP published numerous hagiographies, literary compositions and anthologies of North Indian devotional and courtly ornate poets (Stark 2007: 391–402). In the mid-1880s, the NKP became progressively overshadowed by new publishers. In particular, Bhārtendu Hariścandra’s studies and creative works were re-published by the Khadgavilas Press (Khadgavilās pres) (Siṃh 1986: 197–200), a private, Hindu-oriented enterprise founded in Patna in 1880. Against this articulated backdrop, this article focuses on Hariścandra’s (1850–1885)⁴ biographies of bhakti religious/literary poets published in the 1870s. It is worth investigating these minor works since, according to the Hindi literary critic Rām Vilās Śarmā, they contributed greatly to the spread of critical ideas on “classical” Indian poets (1953: 153). The article then briefly surveys NKP’s venture into publishing anthologies of Hindi bhakti poetry in the mid-1870s. This allows us to consider the link between literary criticism and patronage in the second half of the 19th century. Finally, given the often-neglected relevance of the Khadgavilas Press in the 19th century Hindi print market, the article analyses the contribution of this publishing house to the development of Hindi literary studies in the last quarter of the century. It also explores the differences between the Khadgavilas Press and the NKP.

The political and religious patronage of studies on bhakti authors in the 19th century

At the beginning of the 19th century, drafting and/or compiling and then printing anthologies and critical writings of and on early mod-

⁴ Hariścandra, whose life and thought have been extensively explored by Dalmia (1997), was one of the founders of contemporary Hindi/Khari boli language and literature. Furthermore, he was politically committed to British institutions no less than to Hindu associationism in the 19th century.

ern bhakti literature was greatly encouraged by different institutional actors. Since the 1810s, the general tendency on the part of colonial institutions was to consider the publishing of texts on bhakti literature as a compulsory “practical interest”.⁵ During this period, the printing of texts linked to early modern devotional literature was pursued by Christian missionary and educational centres such as Fort William College (FWC). Primarily committed to publishing local grammars, the FWC also played a significant role in carrying out critical studies on Hindi language and literature.⁶ Throughout the 19th century, and especially after the Indian mutiny of 1857, British institutions strengthened, but also monitored,⁷ the activities of the press and enterprises producing religious and literary texts. As explained by Stark, there were many reasons behind this decision. First, it established the prerogative of the Rāj to secure, through its patronage, the emergence and flourishing of native private actors whose business would match the political interests of colonial institutions. Secondly, it aimed at promoting the development of the cultural milieu needed for specific administrative projects. To give an example, the economic support granted to the NKP, especially in the 1860s and 1870s, was crucial in drafting and printing school

⁵ In the introduction to the *The Rāmāyana of Tulsidās*, Frederic Salmon Growse outlined the “the practical interest” in raising awareness in India about the moral and religious value of bhakti poetry and in particular of Tulsidās’s *Rāmcaritmānas* (Growse 1883: i).

⁶ A publication that impacted the next generations of Hindi literary critics was *Hindee and Hindostanee Selections: to Which are Prefixed the Rudiments of Hindustanee and Bruj Bhaka Grammar* (1827). In this work, the author, supported by local scholars, ventured the first classification of poets and works belonging to Hindi literature. The main bhakti poets whose compositions were included in the anthology were Tulsidās, Kabīr and *Sūrdās*, all of them so called devotional poets whose works were first published by the College and other missionary centres. The ideological value of this publication is seen in the moral tone which pervades Price’s work. Further, it is proven by the presence of epithets, such as that of “reformer” in reference to Kabīr’s poetry, which were deeply affected by Western historiographical and critical categories.

⁷ To give an example, the Vernacular Press Act, passed in 1878, aimed at preventing vernacular press from expressing open criticisms of British policies.

textbooks (Stark 2007: 225–256). Collaboration between private and public sectors continued even after the decline of the NKP at the end of the 1880s, when new publishing houses such as the Khadgavilas Press kept publishing educational works under commission (Simh 1986: 77–81, 289–290). The returns, catalogues and reports on publications issued and registered in several provinces of British India, and in particular in the North Western Provinces (nowadays Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand), are a good source of information on the patronage activity carried out by the British institutions (Darnton 2002: 245–246). Matthew Kempson, the director of public instruction in the 1870s, emphasised that one of the main goals of the British Rāj was to increase the publication of vernacular texts, and especially those that could be used for educational and administrative purposes. Among the texts considered to be of great relevance for achieving these goals, Kempson listed biographies. Actually, Kempson lamented the absence of good quality biographies. Indeed, as he stated on one occasion: “The works under this heading are religious”. Moreover, he pointed out that such texts should not be called biographies but might be entered “in another part of the statement” (Kempson 1877: 82).

If we consider Hindi literary production in those years, this assessment may sound a bit surprising and harsh. Indeed, when Kempson was drafting his reports, a widely acclaimed Hindi literary author such as Hariścandra was writing his biographical sketches of Jayadeva⁸ and Sūrdās,⁹ two devotional poets who composed respectively in Sanskrit and Brajhasha. Kempson, probably aware of Hariścandra’s literary and extra-literary fame and activities, did not mention these works. This, by itself, is not surprising; in his reports on the vernacular publications, Kempson generally focused

⁸ Jayadeva was a 12th-century poet known especially for *Gītagovinda*, a Sanskrit poem whose main theme focuses on Kṛṣṇa’s love for Rādhā, foremost among Gopīs (milkmaids).

⁹ Sūrdās was a 16th-century poet composing mainly in the Brajhasha language; he was best known for his Kṛṣṇaite works or the *Sūrsāgar* (Ocean of Poems), a collection of stories based on the childhood of this deity.

more on books proper than on stand-alone articles appearing in local Indian periodicals. Nonetheless, it is striking that in the same period in which reputable Hindi writers were trying to mould their “modern” fashioned biographies of past authors, British administrators presented a negative assessment of the majority of local biographical writings. Furthermore, it is remarkable that Kempson considered biographies written in local languages as still deeply affected by hagiographical style. This is even more astounding considering that at the beginning of the 1870s British sponsored publishing houses brought out a large number of the early modern bhakti hagiographies.¹⁰

What were the functions that the printing of these texts played in Indian society? A shared assumption is that through the publication process, bhakti-related works could reach a wider, if not, mass audience which up to that day had ignored the content of these texts. This observation has been, for instance, expressed recently by Orsini in a study focused on booklets published at the beginning of the 20th century by Belvedere Press (established in 1876 in Allahabad). From this perspective, these texts were consciously devised by the editors to address and inform a “general public” (Orsini 2015: 441)

¹⁰ To give some examples, an Urdu version of Nabhādās’s *Bhaktamāl*, authored by the Rāmānandī scholar Tulsīrām, was printed for the first time in a local press in Lahore in 1854. It was reprinted, in an enlarged form, by the NKP in 1871 and 1873 (Hare 2011: 181; Stark 2007: 401–402). During the same years, the NKP published the *Bhaktakalpadrum* (Wishing Tree of Devotees, 1870), a Hindi version of the *Bhaktamāl* composed by Rājā Pratāp Siṃh of Sindhua, in Bihar. Finally in 1883 the NKP embarked on the publication of the *Bhaktamāl saṅgī*, an edition of Nabhādās’ *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, a commentary by Priyādās (*ibid.*). Other classical hagiographic works with a deep religious and socio-cultural value for the *Vallabhā sampradāy*, such as the *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vartā* (The story of 84 Vaiṣṇavas), were printed by the NKP in 1883–1884 (Stark 2007: 394). Remarkably, even contemporary versions of the Vallabhā’s hagiographies were published by the NKP in the 1880s (*ibid.*: 395). Also in the 1880s, Khadgavilas Press continued NKP’s work in publishing religious and hagiographical texts. Apart from the publication of most of Hariścandra’s literary essays, it re-printed the *Uttardhābhaktamāl* (1892), usually deemed as the most relevant contemporary re-writing of Nabhādās’s *Bhaktamāl* (Siṃh 1986: 286).

which had previously been fragmented into different reader cohorts depending on religious and sectarian affiliation, place of residence (e.g. urban or rural), gender, etc.

This view, however, especially if we consider the dynamics which characterized the circulation of the devotional texts since the early modern period, must take into consideration a possible and reasonable criticism. Indeed, it is evident that before and in parallel with the expansion of the print sphere, there were other channels through which the hagiographical texts produced within Indian religious communities could be transferred to a general public which, *in nuce*, pre-existed the rise of popular demand for a print market.¹¹ Nevertheless, the two perspectives could be deemed, at least partially, as complementary. Indeed, it must be considered that print probably not only favoured the dissemination of knowledge about past devotional texts; at the same time, perhaps even more than other pre-existing channels, it propelled the construction of the new “normative” (Orsini 2002: 173) way of thinking about the texts and literary authors that formed the canon of the bhakti religious and literary past. It is not clear whether Indian *sampradāys* also patronised the publication of hagiographic books by these local enterprises: it is very hard to find an answer given the scarcity of sources on the relationship between main publishing enterprises and these communities. Nevertheless, it is possible to trace some of the effects of these publications on the ‘life’ of the *sampradāys*. According to W. Pinch, publishing hagiographies was functional for creating “a doctrinal self-consciousness among literate Ramanandis” (1996: 54). From this perspective, the publication of Tulsīrām’s work,

¹¹ It has been noted by Hare that, given the huge number of manuscripts of hagiographical texts such as the *Bhaktamāl*, it is reasonable to think that, even before the advent of print, this text had a wide distribution across North India (Hare 2011: 151–155). Further, it must be considered that the diffusion of bhakti texts was also favoured through their oral transmission which shows the “life” of these works (Lutgendorf 1991).

along with the printing of Bhagavān Prasād's¹² commentaries on *Bhaktamāl*, set the ideal doctrinal framework for the start of the disputes among Rāmānandīs in the 20th century. Moreover, as seen in the activities of the Christian missionaries, print and the coeval encoding of local Indian languages was often intended to be an ideological resource for religious proselytism and, more deeply, for the transmission of epistemological views and categories to be applied to the analysis of Indian socio-cultural reality (Milanetti 2002: 466–499; 2003: 84–87). It must be considered that recent studies reveal that attempts by missionaries to produce conversion through printing proved to be a local and not so significant strategy (Galewicz 2020: 125, 238–239; Numark 2021). Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that the relevance of print as an ideological means was understood, by imitating Christian missionaries, also by Indian communities. Indeed, the activities, aimed at reassessing Vaiṣṇava tradition through the publication or even the re-writing of the early modern hagiographical texts, were also functional in projecting specific sectarian values on the rising Hindu religious identity (Dalmia-Lüderitz 1992). From this perspective, groups such as the Rāmānandīs and the Vallabhāites benefited from the publication of old hagiographies. Moreover, the presence of some para-textual elements suggests that the printing strategies formulated by publishing houses could have been influenced by the symbolisms and values promulgated in this period by distinct *sampradāys*. For example, Hare envisages that the presence of a picture of Ram surrounded by his disciples in an 1874 reprint of Tulsīrām's work showed his connection to the *Rām Rasik* community (Hare 2011: 176).¹³ This should not be surprising; recently, P. Agrawal highlighted this community's impact on some

¹² Bhagavān Prasād was the main Rāmānandī commentator of the *Bhaktamāl*. As recently outlined by V. Pinch (2003), his thoughts had a great influence on George Abraham Grierson, an Irish administrator and scholar of North Indian languages and literature.

¹³ Hare outlines that, while the 1876 edition of the Sakharam Bhikashet Khanu Press (*Sakhārām bhikaṣeṭ khānū pres*) was characterised by such sectarian elements, the 1878 edition was totally devoid of these ingredients (Hare 2011: 176).

aesthetic and historiographical trends of Hindi literary criticism in the 20th century (2010). It is legitimate to think that the origins of this influence are older and date back to the 19th century. However, in many other cases, the publications simply addressed the more general and non-sectarian audience of Hindu devotees.¹⁴

Going back to Kempson's words, we should not derive from them any criticism of the possible connection between local publishing houses and religious communities. After all, although British Rāj officials were often suspicious about their activities, on many occasions, and especially after the mutiny of 1857, they gave grants to the religious communities that had shown loyalty to the colonial institutions (Srivastava 1991: 45). From this perspective, the British Rāj established a strategy of consolidation of its power in Indian territory which was previously ruled by the Mughals and the Nawabs: indeed, in different historical circumstances, it was "the political ruler who gave support to religious communities in order to achieve society's acknowledgment" (Bevilacqua 2018: 95). The religious branch that mainly benefited from the political patronage of the British Rāj was the one formed by Rāmānandīs, which was, in Horace Hayman Wilson's words, "by far, the most numerous class of sectaries in Gangetic India" (Wilson 1846: 67). This support was certainly not casual. Indeed, more than other local religious communities, the Rāmānandīs were eager to re-assess their customs, values and hagiographies with the view of fulfilling the social and spiritual expectations of groups at the margins of the caste system. Patronage was, however, provided only to certain groups,¹⁵ such as the Rasik

¹⁴ See, for example, the introduction of the 1884 Hindi version of the *Bhaktakalpadurum*, published by the NKP. Here, the author stressed the concept of beneficence/protection (*upakār*); further, he outlined that the edition was made for the sake of all the devotees (1884: 13).

¹⁵ It has been noted that the relationship established by British institutions with the Rāmānandīs deeply varied over time depending on various sociocultural and spiritual inclinations manifested by different branches of this religious community. Indeed, before Rāmānandīs received support from the colonial institutions, Warren Hastings had banned (in 1773) activities of the *vairāgī* ("detached" monk-priests) Rāmānandīs, with the exception of those who proved, quoting Has-

Rāmānandīs of Ayodhya (Bevilacqua 2018: 96–98), who were more inclined to be “co-opted” by British institutions; even the Vallabhāites benefited from political patronage (Saha 2007a), although they were involved in some financial controversies with British institutions (Saha 2007b).¹⁶

Through which strategies did such political patronage reveal itself? Doubtless, the most overt strategies consisted of the concession of the ownership rights of pilgrimage centers; furthermore, pursuing a strategy which was previously followed also by the Moghul Empire, British institutions favoured certain religious communities by granting them estates in big religious centers and adjacent urban areas. At the same time, it is reasonable to presume that British institutions favoured Indian communities not only by adopting such clear-cut strategies, but also, in a more indirect way, by making them engage in cultural activities which, being connected to the ideological objectives of the “power construction” (Milanetti 2002) of the Empire, contributed also to increasing the socio-cultural and political influence of the groups. In a tentative way, it could be postulated that this specific kind of ‘indirect’ patronage was pursued in two distinct ways: primarily, by making main representatives of these groups commit to the educational, socio-cultural and research activities pursued by British institutions. Secondly, this strategy was pursued by establishing connections with enterprises, such as local publishing houses which, if not always directly managed by the *sam-*

tings, to be more prone to “quietly employing themselves in the religious function” (Bevilacqua 2018: 97).

¹⁶ Here a reference is made to the controversy between this community and the British Rāj which took place in Rajasthan regarding the control of wealth accruing in the pilgrimage center of Nathdwara. This conflict, as noted by Saha, deeply contradicts the stereotypical picture where the people who joined these communities were seen as “socially aloof individuals who concerned themselves purely with the non-worldly pursuit of single-minded devotion” (Saha 2007b: 287). It is reasonable to assume, however, that this was not an isolated case, with other incidents to control places of worship or pilgrimage producing a struggle between different actors and, particularly, between British political institutions and local religious communities.

pradāys, in many cases doubtlessly counted on a network of scholars and artists revolving around these communities (Stark 2007: 394–395). Therefore, given such a complex network of patronage between the British and local religious groups, it is also likely that Kempson never really meant to raise criticism *tout court* of the hagiographical genre; indeed, as previously seen, the printing and the coeval study and re-assessment of the devotional past formed a part of the administrative and ideological aims of the colonial government. Rather, it seems that Kempson underestimated or, simply, did not fully understand the value of the attempts made by local biographers to re-mould old religious texts in a modern way. To quote Orsini, he criticized those historical and critical texts which, in this period, began to occupy a “distinctive middle ground” (Orsini 2015: 438) between the old and modern literary styles and genres.¹⁷ The situation radically changed in the second half of the 1880s. After the publication of several anthologies in Hindi/Khari boli by the NKP in the 1870s, British officials began to rely more on critical writings by Hindi scholars. As further discussed below, this change was also encouraged by the advent of new publishing houses, such as the Khadgavilas Press (1880) and the Nagaripracharini Sabha (Nāgarī-pracārīṇī sabhā, 1893), which started working on projects to set up a national education system based on the values drawn from early modern bhakti literature.

Hariścandra’s concise and entertaining biographies in context

Rām Vilās Śarmā, one of the pillars of Marxist literary criticism in Hindi, in the monograph *Bhārtendu Hariścandra aur hindī nav-*

¹⁷ By addressing the Santbānī-Pustakmālā texts published by the Belvedere Press since the first decade of the 20th century, Orsini claims that: “Compared to the miscellaneous collections of Sant songs and verses that had been in the market since the 1860s, the scholarly editions brought out by the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, or the lineage pothis, the Santbānī-Pustakmālā occupies a distinctive middle ground” (Orsini 2015: 438).

jāgaraṇ kī samasyāē (1953, “Bhārtendu Hariścandra and the Problems of Hindi Renaissance”), while reflecting on the literary eminence of the author, included a small but significant paragraph in which he scrutinized Hariścandra’s contribution to the field of Hindi literary criticism (*ālocnā*). It is worth quoting a part of Śarmā’s acute reflections, which have deeply inspired the whole of this article and well introduce the content presented in this section:

Bhārtendu has never written critically on the poets in an extensive way; nevertheless, his comments, scattered throughout his work, show the main features of his critical assessments. He praised the spontaneity of the characters in Kālidāsā’s poetry. He has portrayed both Kālidāsā and Shakespeare as deep critics of human society. In the essay titled ‘Convention of Intellectuals in Heaven’, Bhārtendu placed people like ‘Dādū, Nānak, Kabīr and other practitioners of *bhakti* and learned men’ in the group of liberal divine beings. This means that he considered the doctrine of these *sants*¹⁸ to be a part of liberal thought.¹⁹

Śarmā described Hariścandra not only as an influential poet (*kavi*) and novelist (*upanyāskār*), but also as a literary critic (*ālocak*) who provided long-standing historiographic and aesthetic ideas about Sanskrit and/or the North Indian vernacular poets (Śarmā 1953: 150). According to Śarmā, Hariścandra’s critical assessments were not systemically and extensively declared. Rather, he outlined his

¹⁸ This word, which literally means “virtuous” and “pious”, is generally used to refer to a group of early modern poets, who lived in India between the 13th and 17th centuries. Many of these mystics are, still, venerated by religious communities and groups and inspired by their spiritual teachings.

¹⁹ “Bhārtendu ne vistār se kaviyō ādi kī ālocnā nahī likhī, lekin jahā-tahā unkī ṭippaniyō se bhī unke mulyākan kī viśeṣtā dikhāi de jāī hai. Kālidāsa ke kāvya mẽ caritr-citraṇ kī svābhāviktā kī unhōne praśamsā kī hai. Kālidāsa aur Śekspiyaar donō ko mānav-samāj kā gambhīr samālocak dikhāyā hai. ‘Svarg mẽ vicār sabhā kā adhivēśan’ nām ke nibandh mẽ Bhārtendu ne ‘Dādū, Nānak, Kabīr prabhṭi bhakt aur jñānī’ logō ko devatāō ke liberal dal mẽ rakhā hai, jiskā arth hai, vah santō kī vicārdhārā ko udār mānte the” (Śarmā 1953: 150). All translations, unless specified otherwise, are mine.

ideas by resorting to brief and sketchy comments (*tippanī*), which may be found disseminated in a variety of his literary texts.

Unfortunately, Śarmā did not go into a detailed analysis of the texts in which Hariścandra showcased his ‘critical’ abilities. Therefore, it is relevant to illustrate the texts to which Śarmā probably alluded in his analysis. First of all, Hariścandra explicitly reconnected himself with classical hagiographies when he wrote the *Uttardhābhaktamāl* (1876, “Latter Half of the Garland of the Devotees” 1876). In composing such a poetic and hagiographical composition, his aim was to finalise the religious task begun by the early modern 16th-century hagiographer Nabhādās (Dalmia-Lüderitz 1992). Hariścandra also adopted tropes and symbolisms drawn from the early modern bhakti literature with the purpose of “re-making” (Bornstein 1988) them in his own poetry. He then compiled some anthologies and wrote brief essays on the history of the Hindi language and literature. Some of the most relevant texts were *Hindi Selections* (1867), *Hindī kavītā* (1872) and *Hindī bhāṣā* (1883), all of which became milestones in the development of Hindi literary historiography (Dalmia 1997: 274–275). Finally, although mostly neglected by Hindi and non-Hindi critics, we must mention the fact that in the period between 1871 and 1880, Hariścandra wrote many biographies (*jīvnī*),²⁰ mainly dedicated to Sanskrit and vernacular bhakti authors and published in *Kavivacansudhā* and *Hariścandra-candrikā*. These literary magazines, patronised and supported by the British administration and, more marginally, also by local patrons and connoisseurs, were edited by Hariścandra (Dalmia 1997: 236–237). Other biographies were published in famous journals and literary magazines of the time (Hariścandra 1987: 588). There was a specific reason for deciding to publish in journals and not elsewhere, for example, in monographs containing biographies of prominent literary figures. Indeed, in the 1870s, literary magazines provided an experimental setting which was perfect for the introduc-

²⁰ Apart from the word *jīvnī*, Hariścandra often used other terms to assess these writings, e.g., *jīvan caritr* and *itivyrtt*, which can be rendered as “chronicles”.

tion of new subjects and literary genres to a new generation of Hindi readers.

In this perspective, Hariścandra's innovative and ambitious, self-assigned task, was to introduce the audience to historical figures who were influential by way of their contribution to the field of religion and/or literature.²¹

Pre-colonial theorisations on literature, especially those produced during the 17th and 18th centuries by vernacular courtly poets/thinkers such as Bhikhārīdās, the author of the *Kāvyanirṇay* (Judgment on Poetry, 1746), had tried to inscribe authors with different literary attitudes and objectives within the common ground of vernacular (*bhākhā*) literature. Indeed, according to Bhikhārīdās, certain North Indian early modern poets such as Sūrdās and Tulsīdās, mainly wrote literary texts with religious ends in mind; conversely, others such as Keśavdās, Bhūṣan, Birbal, etc., pursued more mundane ends, such as wealth and fame (Busch 2011: 118). Remarkably, this clear-cut separation between different streams of vernacular literature had a long-lasting life in Hindi literary criticism and was likely to also inspire a separation between two distinct devotional and “mannerist” (*rīti*) streams of Hindi vernacular literature.²²

In the 19th century, many Hindi and non-Hindi authors of stories and/or biographies related to bhakti poetry avoided setting clear boundaries between the religious and literary interests of the bhakti poets. This is seen, for example, in William Price's *Hindee and Hindostanee Selections* (1827), where the 15th-century poet and mystic Kabīr was considered a religious “reformer” rather than a proper literary author. Another good example of the theoretical intermixing between religious and literary analysis is found in the *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus* (1846) by Horace Hayman Wilson, a work on the history of the main religious *sampradāys* in North

²¹ However, Hariścandra also showed an interest in historical figures, such as the semi-legendary king Vikrama in the Indian context and Napoleon III in Europe, both hailed for their contributions to the field of politics.

²² This separation was particularly developed by Hindi literary critics in the first half of the 20th century.

India. This tendency to avoid a clear separation between literature and religion was probably caused by the fact that many representatives of vernacular literature, such as Kabīr and Tulsīdās, were also the object of devotion by religious communities, still quite active in North Indian sociocultural settings. Furthermore, many of these groups were ideologically engaged in reassessing the hagiographic and religious values linked to these authors. Finally, it must be highlighted that in the North Indian context, well before Hariścandra, local scholars belonging to the intellectual elite of Bengal, such as Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809–1831), felt the urgency to set the criteria for an historical reconstruction of local literature (Harder 2010: 9). Hariścandra followed the tendency to investigate the linguistic and literary roots of vernacular languages by clearly differentiating historical literary authors from those contributing to other fields, such as philosophy and religion. In fact, some authors who played a decisive role in bhakti literature, such as Rāmānuja and Vallabhācārya, were primarily considered religious thinkers. Instead, poets such as Jayadeva and Sūrdās, also relevant from an intellectual and religious point of view, were mostly appreciated for their role in the literary field. This was not the only novelty of Hariścandra’s approach to the study of bhakti literature. A crucial aspect that cannot be dismissed when approaching his biographies is that they were conceived as texts with an ecumenical Vaiṣṇava value. In the biography of Jayadeva, for instance, Hariścandra raised the narrative for which Jayadeva, alongside being a poet, was also a “great Vaiṣṇava” (*param vaiṣṇav*) who contributed to spreading devotion that crossed sectarian affiliations (Hariścandra 1987: 608). The same narrative had an impact on the biographies of Rāmānuja and Vallabhācārya, the thinkers who respectively founded the *Śrī Vaiṣṇava sampradāy* and the *Vallabhā sampradāy*, two strongly regional but, at the same time, competing religious communities. We must note that even in the description of these thinkers’ thoughts and deeds, Hariścandra tends to adopt epithets and historical narratives which focus on the pan-Indian and pan-Hindu nature of their views. Hariścandra claimed that “Rāmānuja had lived on the earth for 120

years and, after having spread the Vaiṣṇava community and having passed on to his own disciples the teaching of devotion, he left this world on the 10th day of the bright half of the month of Māgha²³. Vallabhā is generally deemed by Hariścandra to have inspired 16th-century *Aṣṭachāp*²⁴ poetry; furthermore, he was engaged in spreading the Vaiṣṇava doctrine (*vaiṣṇav mat*) in the whole of India (*sāre bhāratkhaṇḍ mē, ibid.:* 613). Similarly, when writing about Surdās, Hariścandra outlines that the biography of the saint is not remarkable only for the people belonging to a specific, distinct religious community but, also and above all, to the whole Hindu community. Indeed, the biographer states that “all the people who, to a greater or lesser degree, consider themselves Vaiṣṇavas will, to some extent, know about his life. His chronicles have been extensively described in *Caurāsī vartā*, in its commentary, in the *Bhaktamāl* and its commentaries.”²⁵ Great attention was paid in the biographies to tales about the conversion of people who did not initially accept the authority of the Vedas. Furthermore, the biographies follow a teleological narrative about the historical development of a unitary doctrine. Following Hariścandra, this faith was threatened by inner and outer crises which took place in India around the 9th and 10th centuries; later it was philosophically re-established by bhakti thinkers/poets, who fought against many competitors, whether Muslims, Kāpālikas or Buddhists. This is not the same as saying that Hariścandra avoided any connection with ideas and symbols drawn from the *Vallabhā sampradāy*, his own religious community. Doubtless, such affiliation affected many features of his biographies, with a greater impact on the writings from the beginning of the 1870s and less visible in those published at the

²³ “Ek sau bīs varṣa pṛthvīpar rahe aur cārō or vaiṣṇav sampradāy kā pracār karke sab śīśyō ko bhagavatbhakti kā upadeś karke māgh sudī 10 ko param-dhām padhāre” Hariścandra 1987: 600).

²⁴ A group of 16th-century Hindi poets.

²⁵ “Jo thoṛā bahut bhī vaiṣṇav hōge ve unkā thoṛā bahut jīvancaritr avāśya jānte hōge. Caurāsī vartā, uskī ṭīkā, bhaktamāl aur uskī ṭīkāō mē inkā jīvan vivṛt kiyā hai” (Hariścandra 1987: 616).

end of the decade. In any case, most of the biographies display the same historiographical tendency to consider the Vaiṣṇavas as part of a monolithic and unitary religious identity.

Another crucial element of the biographies is the stylistic register adopted by the critic in assessing the authors' qualities. Hariścandra's style is concise, vivid and captivating, far from the rigidity and pompous style found in many other Indian and Western critical writings from the 19th century. The reasons behind the use of such an expressive mode can be found in some reflections added by the author to his writings. For instance, in one passage of the biography that Hariścandra devotes to Vallabhācārya, he stated: "People will not want to read or listen to the biography of extremely famous people, and towards whom they lower their heads. For this reason, the biography of Vallabhācārya has been written here in a succinct form"²⁶. This was not an isolated case. Many other biographical or critical writings were produced out of the same haste (*śīghratā*) to express himself in writing. Another example is vividly offered by Hariścandra in the biography he devoted to philosopher Śaṅkarācārya, where he stated: "I plead the reader to forgive me if there is any mistake due to haste."²⁷ One natural question resulting from these statements is why Hariścandra decided to adopt this concise style of writing. The most obvious answer is that, especially after having lost British support in the second half of the 1870s, the poet had to publish most of his works at his own expense (Dalmia 1997: 241). This probably led him to publish short articles. Another possible reason is that these biographies included information collected by the author for other, more relevant literary projects. (From this perspective, we should mention that in the mid-1870s Hariścandra was busy composing the *Uttardhābhaktamāl*.) The biographical texts are furthermore characterised by an open, non-dogmatic na-

²⁶ "Jo log bahut prasiddh hāi aur jin ko lākhō manuṣya sir jhukāte hāi unke jīvancaritr paṛhne yā sunne kī kisīkī icchā na hogī. is hetu yahā par śrī vallabhācārya kā jīvancaritr saṅkṣep se likhā jātā hai" (Hariścandra 1987: 613).

²⁷ "Yadi ismē kahī śīghratā ke hetu bhūl ho to paṛhne vāle us par kṣamā karē" (Hariścandra 1987: 604).

ture. Why did they present such special characteristics? There are two possible reasons for this. Primarily, these texts seem to reveal an experimental intellectual disposition characterising Hindi scholars of the 1870s and 1880s, who adopted epistemological perspectives which deeply intertwined local and colonial modes. Literary studies during this phase did not represent a professionalized field; this could, at least partially, explain the proximity, in this historical period, of literary criticism to other old and modern literary genres. However, it would be restrictive to reflect on the intellectual reasons which produced these biographies without also considering the practical needs behind this disposition. These are well demonstrated in the last section of the biography that Hariścandra devoted to Sūrdās. Here, indeed, given the scarcity of information on this poet, Hariścandra officially requested other scholars to help him in the quest for Sūrdās's biographical information (Hariścandra 1987: 617). Therefore, we can say that Hariścandra coined a hybrid biographical style which also became a site for the experimentation of tropes and models of critical and historiographical study. From this perspective, it could be postulated that these biographies have in some way anticipated the approach adopted in the 1910s by the Belvedere Press for the publication of booklets on the early modern bhakti saints. To quote Orsini's words, in these biographies it seems that the author attempted to overcome "differences between literary and devotional poetics, between oral and manuscript traditions and print, and between panth-centred and 'generic' devotional publics" (Orsini 2015: 444). In addition, these biographies also reveal the will to compose texts which could be entertaining (*manorañjak*). This need could partially explain the presence of satire (*vyaṅgya*), a means often used by authors to carry out ethical assessments of early modern bhakti literature.²⁸ Other recurrent entertaining ingre-

²⁸ An interesting example of mixing between literary criticism and satire is evident in Hariścandra's satirical work *Svarg mē vicār sabhā kā adhivēśan* (Convention of Intellectuals in Heaven). In this work, the author depicts the dispute, in Heaven, between Indian conservative and liberal intellectuals. It is remarkable that,

dients are folktales and horoscopes (*kunḍali*).²⁹ These elements suggest the same “pleasure for print” that Orsini discovered in her study of putting to print some oral texts from the 1860s onwards, such as the *qissās* (tales), the *rāgas* (musical compositions) and the *bārahmāsās* (songs of the twelve months) (Orsini 2009: 106–159). This pleasure seems to be pursued by Hariścandra, whose biographies were imagined as fresh, catchy writings for a new generation of Hindi readers.

A pivotal question has to do with the relationship of these biographies with Hariścandra’s coeval, hagiographical production. Did the biographer consider these texts to be an alternative to hagiographical narration or, conversely, were they deemed as modern, less religiously oriented branches of hagiographic/religious style? To answer this question, we should first address the broader definition and classification of the genre of hagiography. For instance, Gray defines it as a “written document inspired by the cult of the saints and designed to promote it” (Gray 2017: 103).³⁰ Considering such a definition, Hariścandra’s texts should not be considered proper hagiographic texts. Indeed, although the author does not hide his preference for specific religious values, narratives and symbols, we never feel that the final aim of his text is to “convert” the reader to a new sect or religious affiliation. From this perspective, these biographies look very different than the *Uttardhābhaktamāl*, which clearly aims at reassessing the lineage of the pan-Indian Vaiṣṇava community in a new and innovative way, also for religious ends. Without a doubt, they also deeply differ from the early modern hagiographic texts which inspired and laid the spiritual foundations for the *Uttardhābhaktamāl*. They could, therefore, be considered quite

among the liberals, he mentions Vallabhācārya and the saints Dādū Dayal, Guru Nānak, and Kabīr (see Hariścandra 1987: 984).

²⁹ The presence of the horoscopes is usually marked by the verses linked to an illustration towards the end of the writings.

³⁰ This technical definition has been postulated by Hippolyte Delehaye, one of the most prominent scholars of the Société des Bollandistes, a Jesuit foundation (see Gray 2017: 103–104).

unconventional biographies, where historical and critical reflections are juxtaposed, with no clear demarcation, with more hagiographical ways of narrating. Nonetheless, recent theoretical contributions tend to extend the nature of hagiography to texts which are not commonly associated with this genre. Broadly speaking, hagiography therefore refers to any text aimed at generating or “creating idolatry” about a specific historical figure. Furthermore, formally speaking, any hagiographical account is usually characterised by a tendency to be “formulaic, episodic and repetitive in style and content” (*ibid.*: 104). From this point of view, the broader assessment about the hagiographical and/or biographical nature of these texts changes partially. Indeed, although Hariścandra never pursues any religious or spiritual purpose, it is quite clear that he deeply sympathises with all the poets whose life and poetry are described in his biographies. Resorting to a concept coined by Gérard Genette, it seems that in the biographies investigated the author is prone to adopting a “mimetic” narrative style in order to push the implicit reader closer to the perspective of the narrated author.³¹ Moreover, it is quite clear that he considers all the poets—to whom the biographies are devoted—paragons of virtue epitomising certain ideal aesthetic and moral values. To do this, Hariścandra adopts episodic and repetitive formulas to describe the qualities of all the authors assessed. In most cases, such formulas are not totally innovative. Rather, they reprocess assessments extracted from the hagiographic tradition or, in other cases discussed below, from the courtly literary production of the *rīti*granthas (books on method).³² However, these biographies are also multi-layered texts in which biographical elements, literary critical assessments, anecdotes and popular legends seem to coalesce.

³¹ Genette differentiates a mimetic style, whose aim is to “bring the audience close to the events which are the subject of the text” from a diegetic style, where “the events are not merely depicted by the narrator but evaluated and interpreted, connected to other events and reflected on” (Gray 2017: 111).

³² The *rīti*granthas are courtly ornate poems composed in Brajbbhasha over the 17th and 18th century.

The promotion of Kṛṣṇaite literary lineage

Unfortunately, we do not know precisely how many and which biographies Hariścandra had written in the 1870s. Having such information would greatly facilitate the analysis of the impact of these works on the history of Hindi literary criticism. Furthermore, it would be useful to understand whether Hariścandra's texts were in any way patronised by a religious community or an association. Although we know that Hariścandra had progressively abandoned sectarian positions in favour of more pan-Hindu revivalist ideas, it is undeniable that some ideas drawn from the Vallabhāite religious context were also echoed in his more mature works, e.g., in the biography devoted to Vallabhācārya (1880). The biography of Vallabhācārya is shorter than the one on Sūrdās (1871). Moreover, as mentioned above, it shows a subtle irony toward the Vallabhā's group founder, which is both strange and interesting considering that Hariścandra's work was published in *Vallabhadigvijay*, a journal probably produced in the milieu of this *sampradāy*. It is also hard to understand whether Hariścandra was serious in claiming that common people would not enjoy reading or listening to Vallabhācārya's story. Indeed, even in the Indian context, satire has often been characterised by an antiphrastic way of expressing moral and ethical ideas. However, as shown in the satirical essay *Svarg mē vicār sabhā kā adhivēśan*, Hariścandra never developed any negative views about Vallabhācārya. On the contrary, he assessed him as being one of the most liberal and progressive intellectuals in his imagined heaven. In any case, his assessment of Sūrdās was quite different. First of all, for Hariścandra, Sūrdās was primarily a great devotional poet, in no way any lesser than the 12th-century Sanskrit poet Jayadeva. With regard to Jayadeva's poetry, Hariścandra stated:

Is there perhaps someone who has not been satisfied, amazed, enchanted, and shaken after tasting the nectar of Jayadeva's poetry? Is there any wise man in the world who, having some knowledge of Sanskrit, has not loved the sweetness of the latter's poetry? It is a matter

of pride for Jayadeva that even grapes and sugarcane appear tasteless after one experiences his poetry; this is the truth.³³

The Kṛṣṇaite affiliation of both poets cannot be deemed as casual. It seems that Hariścandra aimed at tracing an aesthetic and at the same time religious Vaiṣṇava Kṛṣṇaite lineage which ideally connected Jayadeva's Sanskrit works to Sūrdās's vernacular *Sūrsāgar*.³⁴ However, it is significant that Jayadeva was not the only author who wrote mainly in Sanskrit and to whom Hariścandra devoted a biography. There is thus a biography dedicated to Kālidāsa, the 5th-century author of *mahākāvya*s such as the *Kumārasambhava* and the *Raghuvamśa*, praised by Hariścandra for his poetry as being "plain, charming and suited to the subject" (*sādī, madhur aur viṣayānusārīnī*, Hariścandra 1987: 594). Kālidāsa's biography is not exactly part of the spiritual Vaiṣṇava/Kṛṣṇaite genealogy Hariścandra aims to re-construct. Nevertheless, in Hariścandra's view, Kālidāsa's poetry is aesthetically closely related to Jayadeva's. Indeed, in both biographies the thinker identifies and praises their ideal poetry, which could be formative and entertaining at the same time. The biographer believed that such aesthetic lineage was still alive in contemporary Indian society. Indeed, as previously mentioned, Hariścandra showcased an interest in recreating knowledge that integrates modern techniques (ethnographic research, literary criticism and historiography) and a "hagiographic" narrative register. He wrote: "Till today, in his [Jayadeva's] memory, at the entry of the sun in Capricorn, an important, big *mela* takes place in the

³³ "Jayadeva jī kī kavita kā amṛt pān karke tṛpt, cakit, mohit aur ghūrṇit kaun nahī hotā aur kis deś mẽ kaun sā esā vidvān hai jo kuch bhī saṃskṛt jāntā ho aur jayadeva jī kī kāvya-mādhurī kā premī na ho. Jayadeva jī kā yah abhimān ki angūr aur ūkh kī miṭhās unki kavita ke āge phikī hai bahut satya hai." (Hariścandra 1987: 604).

³⁴ The *Sūrsāgar*, which could be translated into English as 'Ocean of Poems', is an anthology of poems on Kṛṣṇa's childhood, already contained in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Ancient Stories of God), one of the main Sanskrit *Purāṇas*, characterised by the emergence of a feeling of *bhakti* ('devotion') towards a divine principle.

village of Kundeli; at that time, 60,000 or 70,000 people meet and recite *kirtan*³⁵ all around his *samadhī*”.³⁶ In the past, it was speculated that Hariścandra, through his comments on Sūrdās, aimed at creating a sample of a literary model as an alternative to the one based on the Rāmaite poet Tulsīdās (Mangraviti 2019: 147). It is worth reiterating that Hariścandra assessed Sūrdās as “the king and first master” (*rājādhipatī*) of North Indian early modern poetry (Hariścandra 1987: 615). Hariścandra said:

Among the chronicles of all the poets, Sūrdās’s biography is the one most worth narrating, since he was the most precious jewel among all the poets and his poetry was a combination of all their styles. His verses are composed in such a way that they are both extremely simple and difficult, all at the same time: this is not something we have seen elsewhere. [Every other] poet’s poetry stands out for one specific reason and is composed following one specific style, but his poetry is good from all perspectives and embraces diverse styles. As somebody at the court of Akbar said: “The best verse [is] Ganga’s; poetry’s best is Bāl Vīr,³⁷ [the best for] deep meaning [is] Keśav, Sūrdās, [is] master of [all] three qualities.” Apart from this, his poetry generates an effect that touches the heart/soul. For example, there is a hagiography in which it is narrated that, at one point, a certain poet was walking somewhere, and an extremely worried man appeared to him. After seeing he was in such a state of confusion, the poet uttered the following couplet: “Anyone who is hit by Sūrdās’s arrows, afflicted by

³⁵ Group singing of devotional hymns addressed to a deity.

³⁶ “Unke smaraṅ ke hetu kendulī gāṅv mē ab tak makar kī samkrāṅti ko ek baṛā bhāri melā hotā hai, jismē sāṅh satar hazār vaiṣṇav ekatr ho kar inkī samādhi ke cārō or saṅkirtan karte hāi” (Hariścandra 1987: 609). The word *samadhī* has many meanings. It primarily refers to a state of meditation and/or self-absorption. In this context, the word is used to refer to the place of entombment and commemoration of a saint. Nevertheless, it must be noted that there are no evidences that this poet was entombed in Kundeli.

³⁷ Here the verse probably refers to Bīrbal, who was one of the most prominent poets of Akbar’s court (16th century).

Sūrdās's suffering, or who has heard Sūrdās's verses has a maimed body."³⁸

There are two interesting elements in this passage. The first is related to the style adopted by Hariścandra, who made new aesthetic, critical assumptions through a reappraisal of earlier hagiographical ideas. The second is that the author does not embrace all the legends and hagiographies related to Sūrdās. Those included in the texts are used in such a way as to become relevant in processing ideas where the registers—both historical and hagiographical—are closely intertwined and produce unified narratives. The most relevant narrative that can be derived from Sūrdās's biography has to do with the 'all-encompassing' characteristics of his poetry. Hariścandra claims that Sūrdās's poetry was the point of reference and the conjunction of all the different styles adopted by other devotional poets in the early modern period. To support this critical assumption, which would make Sūrdās's poetry the best candidate to become the aesthetic epicentre of the Hindi canon, Hariścandra cites a couplet uttered by a courtly poet composing at the court of Akbar. Interestingly enough, in the pre-colonial period there were other thinkers who concurred in the development of competing narratives on the "all-encompassing" character of the poetry produced by certain vernacular poets. This, for instance, was the case of the 18th-century ornate courtly poet Bhikhārīdās who, in the *Kāvyanirṇay*, clearly stated that: "The two lords among the most excellent of poets were

³⁸ "Sab kaviyō ke vṛttānt pahile likhne ke yogya haī, kyōki yah sab kaviyō ke śīromaṇī haī aur kavita inkī sab bhāṭī kī miltī hai. kaṭhin se kaṭhin aur sahaḥ se sahaḥ pad bane haī aur kisi kavi mẽ yah bāt nahī pāī jāī. aur kavita ke kaviyō mẽ ek bāt acchī hai aur kavita ek ḍhāḡ par banī hai parantu inkī kavita mẽ sab bāt acchī hai aur inkī kavita sab tarah kī hotī hai, jaise kisī ne śāhanśāh akbar ke darbār mẽ kahā thā «uttama pada kavi gaṅga ko kavita ko bala vīra keśava artha gambhīra ko sūra tina guna dhīra.» aur is ke sivāy inkī kavita mẽ ek asar hotā hai ki jī mẽ jagah karai. jaise ek ek vartā hai kisī samay mẽ ek kavi kahī jāta thā aur ek manuṣya bahut vyākul paṛā thā. us manuṣya ko atī vyākul dekhkar us kavi ne ek dohā paṛhā: «kidho sūra ko sara lagyo kidho sūra kī pīra, kidho sūra ko pada sunyo, jo asa vikala śāfirā»" (Hariścandra 1987: 615).

Tulsī and Gaṅga; their compositions were a meeting point of languages of all kinds”.³⁹ Hariścandra, doubtless, did not carry out a comprehensive assessment of Sūrdās’s poetry. However, as this biography seems to point out, he consciously decided to discard competing narratives on the alleged aesthetic superiority of other poets, such as Tulsīdās⁴⁰ and Gaṅga. Significantly, similar assessments are also found in the article *Hindī kavītā* (1872), published in *Kavivacansudhā*, which includes some historical explanations. By stressing the need for better informed studies on Hindi literary past, the poet once again expressed some brief critical comments on Sūrdās:

We have already written, somewhere else the last year, the chronicles of Sūrdās. He was the most precious jewel and the king of vernacular poets. Quite often, the new generations of poets adopt the same exact comparisons which Sūrdās had already chanted. He was the first writer of colloquial and literary Hindi.⁴¹

Obviously, the above-mentioned biographies clearly aimed at making Sūrdās’s poetry vivid and relevant to the present by connecting it to some pieces by modern Khaṛī bolī Hindi poets. Here, Hariścandra pays special attention to the poets belonging to his own religious community. As Dalmia points out, his intellectual and religious orientation changed slightly in the mid-1870s, when the poet partially abdicated his own sectarian affiliation. He then embraced the all-encompassing pan-Hindu principles expressed by rising Hindu revivalist associations such as the Tadiya Samāj (Dalmia 1997: 366–

³⁹ “Tulsī gangā doū bhae sukabin ke sardār, inke kāvyani mẽ milī bhāṣā vividh prakār” (Caturvedī 1956: 11).

⁴⁰ Tulsīdās as a Rāmaite poet of the 16th century is probably the most celebrated Avadhi author of the early modern period. He was deemed by most of the 20th century Hindi literary critics as the aesthetical epicenter of Hindi literary canon.

⁴¹ “Sūrdās jī kā jīvan vṛtt ham log vīgat varṣ ke kisī bindu mẽ likh cuke hāī. ye bhāṣā ke kaviyō ke mukuṭ maṇī aur mahārāj the prāyaś naye kaviyō kī kavītā vahī upamā milte hāī jo sūrdās gān kar gaye hāī. hindī ke bolcāl aur prabandh ke pahile likhne vāle yahī” (Hariścandra 1987: 1087).

368). In the *Uttardhābhaktamāl*, published in *Hariścandraçandrikā* from 1874 to 1876, by shifting from the biographic field to the merely hagiographic, Hariścandra seemed to lose interest in assessing Sūrdās's historical, religious and literary value. Conversely, he positively assessed the socio-cultural and political meaning of Tulsīdās's poetry.⁴² Much later, at the beginning of the 1880s, urged by the new British Rāj's need to publish school textbooks on the history of vernacular literature, Hariścandra once again provided some critical assessments of the Kṛṣṇaite early modern poets in the essay *Hindī bhāṣā*, published by the Khadgavilas Press (1883).

Hagiographic influences in anthologies of the 1870s

When Hariścandra was busy writing the biographies, first the NKP and then the Khadgavilas Press began publishing anthologies written by Khaṛī bolī Hindi authors. This was done as part of the general political patronage of the British Rāj and contributed to broadening the audience of Hindi readers. Furthermore, it was functional in projecting the symbolism and values drawn from the bhakti past on the rising Hindi public sphere. The first publishing houses to move towards the publication of these kind of texts had only limited distribution. This was the case with the Medical Hall Press, founded in 1858 in Varanasi, which contributed to the publication of Hariścandra's *Hindi selections* in 1867, used for many decades as a textbook in North India. A private enterprise which followed this direction was the Varanasi Sanskrit Mantralay (Vārāṇasī saṃskṛt mantrālay), a Varanasi-based publishing house founded in 1860 by poets close to Hariścandra's cultural *milieu*. This was one of the first local private enterprises to adopt advanced technological devices (Siṃh 1986: 40–43); it was engaged, *inter alia*, in the publication of

⁴² This view was expressed in the passage of the hagiographical work where Hariścandra noted that: "By the grace of the revered Tulsīdās, all people, the high and the low, praised Hari" (*śrītulsīdās-partāp tē nīc ūc sab hari bhaje*, Hariścandra 1987: 79).

Sundarī tilak, an anthology of Kṛṣṇaite poems which was then wrongly attributed to Hariścandra (*ibid.*).⁴³ Throughout the 1870s, new and more influential publishing houses contributed to bringing out new anthologies. The NKP played a great role in pursuing this objective. NKP's three most relevant publications were Maheśdatt Śukla's *Bhāṣā kāvya saṅgrah* (1875), Mātādīn Mīśra's *Kāvītt ratnākar* (1876) and Śivsiṃh Seṅgar's *Śivsiṃh saroj* (1878). Much has been written about the relevance of these books to the NKP's editorial projects.⁴⁴ Let us now add two brief observations. The first has to do with the encyclopaedic characteristics of these texts. These characteristics can be detected in the introduction to *Śivsiṃh saroj* as its author proudly claims the authoritativeness of his work apparently based on the scientific and detailed study of a number of manuscripts from Sanskrit, Persian and other languages. It is relevant to outline that, notwithstanding the alleged scholarly nature of this text, the anthology was produced with the same haste which marked Hariścandra's work. This obviously resulted in many critical historiographical mistakes made by the author, especially in assessing the poets and poems collected in his work (Gupta 1967: 117). Secondly, we must also outline the hagiographical character of some of the ingredients characterising these anthologies, especially *Bhāṣā kāvya saṅgrah* (Collection of Vernacular Poetry). Indeed, this work was introduced by some devotional Rāmaite verses produced by the author of this anthology, followed by Tulsīdās's *caupāī* (Śukla 1875: 1–32).

⁴³ The *Sundarī Tilak* was published on several occasions in the 1870s. The first edition of this work, published in Benares, presented a collection of *savaiyās* (a quatrain of dactylic structure) by 42 poets. Remarkably, the majority of these *savaiyās* belonged to Kṛṣṇaite authors or, otherwise, to poets, such as Keśavdās and Ghanānand, who, at the beginning of the 20th century, were considered mannerist poets of Hindi literary tradition (Gupta 1967: 71).

⁴⁴ For a detailed analysis of the contribution of the NKP to the publishing of anthologies in the Hindi public sphere of the 1870s and 1880s, see: Stark 2007: 423–428.

Republishing of Hariścandra's works by the Khadgavilas Press

The NKP of Lucknow, established in 1858, played a major role in creating the Hindi public sphere. By publishing the above mentioned works, it certainly contributed to developing Hindi literary criticism. However, we cannot disregard the fact that in the 19th century there were other local enterprises which disseminated texts such as hagiographies, biographies and critical texts building on the bhakti past. One such major publishing house active between the mid-1880s and the mid-1890s was the Khadgavilas Press, founded by Bābū Rāmdīnsīḥ (1856–1903) in 1880 in Patna (Sīḥ 1986: 87–91). As in the case of Munśi Naval Kīśor, this publishing house was founded by a wealthy and politically influential publisher supported by the British administration. This support, on the ideological level, implied the co-option of this publishing house for the educational and cultural projects pursued by British administration. It is not easy at the current stage of studies to determine whether this publishing house had also received economic support from the government or not. However, it seems that the Khadgavilas Press, because of its limited presence outside Bihar, then part of the Bengal Presidency,⁴⁵ never established the ambiguous relationship of collaboration or the economic rivalry with British publishing houses which characterized the conduct of the NKP. Similarly to Munśi Naval Kīśor, Bābū Rāmdīnsīḥ was supported by several local patrons. He, too, was greatly influenced by his followers to establish a publishing house in a region which was far enough from Benares. But there were some differences between the two publishing houses. The main difference had to do with Rāmdīnsīḥ's closeness to the revivalist and Hindu-oriented milieu which began to make itself felt in North India in the mid-1880s. The NKP, as depicted in previous studies, had patronised Urdu as well as Hindi poets. It was a symbol of the deep linguistic, literary and cultural unity in the heterogeneity of North

⁴⁵ It must be noted that the province of Bihar and Orissa was separated from the Bengal Presidency only in 1912.

India. From this perspective, publishing bhakti texts was for the NKP a functional tool for raising awareness about the multicultural character of bhakti authors in the nascent vernacular public spheres. The Khadgavilas Press, on the other hand, was more committed to publishing classic and modern authors from a specific Hindu religious background. After all, Rāmdīnsimh himself, before establishing his own publishing company, was a champion of the Khaṛī bolī Hindi political controversy igniting minds in North India (*ibid.*: 188–189). The publishing of educational books in Hindi, from this perspective, was an ideological extension of campaigns for the acceptance of Hindi language in schools and tribunals, which the publisher started in the 1870s.

This historical phase is crucial also for another reason. During the years of political militancy Rāmdīnsimh became acquainted with Hariścandra. The connection between Hariścandra and Rāmdīnsimh can be seen in a number of official and private documents in which the two openly expressed their own opinions on editorial, commercial and political issues (*ibid.*: 189–193). It must be stressed that in the 1870s Hariścandra's works had been published by almost all the major publishing houses operating in the Hindi public sphere. In the 1880s, the Khadgavilas Press also started publishing his texts.⁴⁶ This was done for multiple reasons: first, the publishing house needed to extend its prestige in the Hindi public sphere by building

⁴⁶ With reference to the didactic books, the *Hindī bhāṣā* (Hindi Language) was published for the first time by the Khadgavilas Press in 1883. Later, the *Hindī bhāṣā kī pahīlī pustak* (First Book of Hindi Language), was released in 1895, followed by the *Hindī bhāṣā kī dusrī pustak* (1895, Second Book of Hindi Language), the *Hindī bhāṣā kī tisrī pustak* (1896, Third Book of Hindi Language, 1896) and the *Hindī bhāṣā kī cauthī pustak* (1898, Fourth Book of Hindi Language). The *Sundarī Tilak* was re-published by the Khadgavilas Press in 1892 (Simh 1986: 313). Significantly, parts of the *Hindī bhāṣā* were published in the two-volume school book *Bhāṣāsar* (Arrangement of Language), for the first time in 1881 and on many other occasions during the 1880s and 1890s (*ibid.*: 312). Of interest for the present discourse is the fact that this publishing house was also committed to publishing author's texts connected to the sphere of religion, with a focus on writings such as the *Bhaktasarvasva* (The Entirety of the Devotees, 1888), and the *Uttardhābhaktamālā* (1892), which deeply impacted the re-assessment of Vaiṣṇava traditions.

on the fame of this established poet. The desire to associate the name of the publishing house with the poet was proven when the publishing rights of Hariścandra's works (*ibid.*: 118) were acquired. This caused controversies with other publishing houses of the time, especially with those which, even after the death of the writer, kept publishing his books without having publishing rights to do so (*ibid.*: 119).⁴⁷ Being associated with the name of Hariścandra also meant acquiring ideological value. Indeed, the publishing house aspired to become the main point of reference for all Hindi readers who appreciated the reasons behind the Hindi/Nagari political movement. Finally, acquiring Hariścandra's publishing rights was necessary to preserve the relationship with the education institutions of the British Rāj. In the 1880s, especially through the mediation of Bhūdeva Mukharjī⁴⁸ and, later, by George Abraham Grierson, the Khadgavilas Press—which took over the position previously occupied by the NKP—became the main point of reference for colonial institutions in the publication of texts in Bihar and other North Indian regions (*ibid.*: 252–255). Clearly, the poet was also supported by this publishing house. Indeed, in the exchange of letters between him and the editor we learn he was financially supported by Rāmdīnsīṃh on many occasions.⁴⁹ The collaboration between this

⁴⁷ Among the publishing houses which had a legal quarrel with the Khadgavilas Press, one should mention the Bharat Jivan Press (Bhārat jīvan pres) located in Benares as they published the drama *Andher Nagarī* 1881, (The City of Darkness). For a study on *Andher Nagarī*, see: Dubyanskaya (2016).

⁴⁸ He was the director of the department of education in the North Western Provinces in the 1880s (Sīṃh 1986: 302–303).

⁴⁹ The correspondence between the author and the publisher shows, on several occasions, the financial difficulties to which the writer was subjected at the time. In several cases, one of the issues debated by them concerns the rights to publish Hariścandra's works. These economic issues can be seen, for example, in the passage in which the writer reaches out to the publisher: "For certain reasons, not being able to make any arrangements here, I want to make a payment. I am at wits' end. Answer immediately. This letter will reach you on Thursday: please reply there and then by telegram and, if possible, send me money by post the same day. Inform me about other important news in another letter. Keep this matter under wraps for now." ("Maī kiśī viśeṣ kāraṇ se yahā kuch upāy na karne ke hetu yō

enterprise and Hariścandra mainly resulted in the publication of some literary works when the poet was still alive. Many of those works were published in the politically committed journal *Kṣatriya patrikā* (Journal of the Kṣatriyas) and in *Bhāṣāsar*, a schoolbook re-published on many occasions during the 1880s and 1890s by the Khadgavilas Press (*ibid.*: 262–263). Remarkably, apart from Hariścandra, this enterprise published several editions and commentaries on early modern bhakti poetry, with a preference for the edited versions of the poems of Tulsidās and Sūrdās (*ibid.*: 265–267). After the poet died, the publishing house exploited the copyrights acquired from the author himself and engaged in a number of other editorial ventures linked to the author’s name. The most important was probably the serialized publication of the poet’s complete works in the literary journal *Hariścandrakalā* (Hariścandra’s Art), brought out in the 1880s (*ibid.*: 169–170).⁵⁰ This was a great novelty in the context of Hindi publications: it had never happened before that an author’s work was published entirely in a journal dedicated to him. Another important, often neglected publication which played a major role in the canonization of Hariścandra was the biography *Sacitr Hariścandra* (Picture of Hariścandra, 1905), crafted by Bābū Śivānand Sahāy with the contribution of the entourage of writers connected to Hariścandra (*ibid.*: 198).⁵¹ We believe the poet’s closeness to this publishing house had a decisive value in the rise of the nascent Hindi public sphere. Among other things, it had a decisive impact on the reception by the Hindi audience of the historiographical and critical works on bhakti poetry written by the latter. Indeed, the publishing house endeavoured to make Hariścandra’s studies part of the mono-

bhugtān kiyā cāhtā hū. Baī ghabrāhaṭ mē hū. Uttar śighra. Yah art āpko gurūvar ko milegā usī kṣaṇ tār mē javāb dījegā ho sake to usī dīn dāk dvārā dravya bhejiegā. Viśeṣ sāmācār dusre art mē. yah sab vṛtt abhī gupt rahiegā.” Simh 1986: 339). Another of Hariścandra’s concerns was that other publishing houses might engage—with scarce and fruitless editorial results—in the publication of his works.

⁵⁰ The first issue was in 1881.

⁵¹ It is interesting to note that apart from this biography, other similar works, such as *Hariścandra kī jivnī* (Biography of Hariścandra), by Rādhākṛṣṇa Dās, contributed to the historicization of this poet’s life.

lithic Hindi/Hindu identity that the torchbearers of the Hindi movement in North India tried to establish at the beginning of the 20th century. Similarly, the process of Hindu radicalisation of publishing policies left its mark on other anthologies, hagiographies and critical writings published by the Khadgavilas Press.

Conclusions

Colonial institutions, through the patronage they provided to private enterprises, were crucial in the development of literary criticism. Although it is not easy to determine the exact measure of such influence, the Indian religious communities and revivalist Hindu associations started playing a decisive role in the development of this field in the second half of the 19th century. In this context, the biographies of bhakti poets written by the famous poet Bhārtendu Hariścandra in the 1870s are good evidence of these political, religious and intellectual tendencies. Although deeply influenced by a hagiographical character, they were also conceived by the author as concise didactic and entertaining works, which were to attract all the *Vaiṣṇava* devotees, with no sectarian differences. Therefore, similarly to the booklets published in the 20th century by the Belvedere Press, they seem to occupy a middle ground between old and modern literary genres. By tracing a literary and religious genealogy stretching from Jayadeva to Sūrdās, these biographies contributed to the development of an erudite public of *vidvāns* ('learned man', 'scholar') who identified themselves with the more general trends of a unified Hindu religiosity and, at the same time, were also trying to elaborate new scientific and critical strategies for the study of literature as a distinct field of investigation. From this point of view, while reflecting on the processes of construction of a Hindi/Hindu public sphere, the biographies also reveal processes of elaboration of a discipline which runs parallel but, at the same time, does not identify itself entirely with hagiography. The difference between literary and religious interests, reflected in the difference between hagiog-

raphy and biography/literary criticism, is neither clear-cut nor is it totally new. Indeed, in the 18th century some vernacular court poets had already started separating more religiously oriented authors from others more associated with “mundane” literary purposes. Therefore, it would probably be best to say that, while carving a specific space for the historical and critical study of certain poets, Hariścandra never considered biographies and hagiographies as two mutually exclusive modes of narration, rather as modes of narration which play different roles in different domains. We may also suggest that the biographies represent the phase of research and study which came before the elaboration of the *Uttardhābhaktamāl*. Nonetheless, these texts are also quite different from one another. First of all, the biographies are characterised by the presence of a prose style in Khaṛī bolī Hindi language which is not present in the *Uttardhābhaktamāl*. Furthermore, these biographies make use of academic strategies and methods.

Finally, the biographies showcase the rise of certain critical ideas which preceded the 1929s “professional” canon. In the 17th and 18th centuries, *rīti* literature, especially through some *rīti*granth, had already contributed to creating a literary science; nonetheless, by reassessing certain ideas extracted from Brajbhasha literature through the agency of Khaṛī bolī Hindi, Hariścandra elaborated portrayals of individual bhakti authors which preceded their canonisation in the 20th century. A major narrative theme detected in Hariścandra’s biographies has to do with the “all-encompassing” character of Sūrdās’s poetry; conversely, in the same years, most of the anthologies published by the NKP promoted a competing narrative focused on the aesthetic relevance of Tulsidās.

It has been stressed that the NKP had a quite liberal pluralistic view of bhakti literature. In the 1880s and along with the progressive decline of the NKP, one of the publishing initiatives that preceded the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in establishing a Hindi/Hindu-oriented publishing line was the Khadgavilas Press. This publishing house, founded by Rāmdīnsiṃh, one of the champions of the Khaṛī bolī Hindi, established a commercial and political relationship

with Hariścandra. In light of the above, it became the principal agent for British colonial institutions to commission the publishing of school textbooks. Moreover, it republished the major critical works of Hariścandra and, with the biography *Sacitr Hariścandra*, it contributed to his literary canonisation. Most importantly, by taking part in the canonisation of the author's literary production, it also played a major role in projecting on the latter the values and symbolism drawn from the ongoing ideological and political debates on the relationship between Hindi literature and Hindu religious and literary background. We may finally conclude that the Khadagvilas Press paved—even before the Nagari Pracharini Sabha—the way for the religious radicalisation of the Hindi public sphere discernible in the first half of the 20th century.

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