

PANDITS AND PULP FICTION: POPULAR PUBLISHING AND THE BIRTH OF NEPALI PRINT-CAPITALISM IN BANARAS

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...[बनारस] हिन्दू धर्मको तीर्थस्थल छै नेपाली साहित्यको तीर्थस्थल अनि धर्मप्रसिद्ध, पानप्रसिद्ध र माझीप्रसिद्ध मात्र नमानेर यसलाई प्रकाशन-मुद्रणप्रसिद्ध पनि मानिनुपर्छ ।

Just as Banaras is a Hindu pilgrimage site, so is it a pilgrimage site for Nepali literature; it must be considered famous not only for religion, and rice-water, but also for printing and publishing.

Hīrā Chhetrī (1993: 26)

“साँचो नभएको भएदेखि यो किताब काशीमा किन छापियो?” प्रश्नको उत्तर हामीसंग थिएन । सबै जना चुप-चाप भयौ ।

To the question ‘If it weren’t true why would it be printed in Kashi?’ we had no answer. We all fell silent.

Abhi Suvedī (2056 v.s.: 13)

Introduction

Banaras was in many ways the birthplace of modern Nepal.¹ It occupied a central position in the development of Nepali writing from the end of the nineteenth century until at least the 1920s. It was home to many writers and, more importantly, the crucible of the Nepali publishing industry. It facilitated the creation of a discursive and self-reflective Nepali public culture, and in the dying years of the Rana regime, it provided a base for the incarnation of political ideals in revolutionary organisations. Established for centuries in the imaginations of Hindu Nepalis as the holy city of Kashi, it played a pivotal role in the creation of a modern Nepali public culture and in the development of a fully articulated sense of Nepali identity. Yet there remain wide gaps in research on the social,

1 This article is based on one draft chapter of a doctoral thesis. Research has been supported by the Bagri Foundation, the UK Arts and Humanities Research Board, the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and the AHRB Centre for Asian and African Literatures. For comments and advice I am grateful to Kamal Dixit, Martin Gaenszle, Michael Hutt, Pratyoush Onta, Francesca Orsini, Philippe Ramirez, Nutan Sharma, John Smith, Abhi Subedi, Seira Tamang, Manjushree Thapa, and Mark Turin. The analysis presented here has also benefited from seminar discussions at the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies and Martin Chautari. Arthur Pazo helped greatly with editing illustrations; Figure 9 is reproduced by courtesy of Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya.

cultural and economic systems developed by Banaras-based Nepalis. This article forms one plank of a larger interpretation of the formation of Nepali social consciousness. It argues that three key areas largely ignored by traditional literary histories—readerships, popular literature, and the commercial basis of publishing—must be addressed in order to understand the fundamental role of print in providing a basis for social transformation.

The place of Banaras in standard histories of Nepali literature has been assured since the earliest stages of establishing a critical canon.² Importantly for the birth of a modern literature, it was the adopted home of Motīrām Bhaṭṭa (1866-1897), poet, publisher and biographer of Bhānubhakta Āchārya, Nepali's so-called *ādīkavi* or founder poet.³ The pre-eminence of Motīrām is recognised by Tārānāth Śarmā (2051 v.s.: *passim*), whose standard work on the history of Nepali literature labels the crucial formative period 1883-1919 the “Motīrām era”.⁴ Motīrām was greatly influenced by his association with Bhāratendu Hariśchandra, the nineteenth century's foremost writer and promoter of modern *khaḍī bolī* Hindi.⁵ On his return to Banaras in 1881-82 he and Hariśchandra became friends and it was under his influence that Motīrām encouraged his friend

2 Our understanding of Nepal-Banaras links will be considerably enhanced by Martin Gaenszle's article which appears in the preceding pages. The subject matter of the present article complements Gaenszle's, following it both chronologically and conceptually by examining the basis for creation of the “proto-nationalism” through print-capitalism identified in his conclusion.

3 A note on transliteration and citation: for the sake of accuracy all Nepali words and names have been consistently transliterated with diacritics. The only exceptions are place names that have passed into common English usage, and the names of Nepali authors writing in English. Other writers' transliterations have been retained in direct quotations. As some of the illustrations demonstrate, the unstandardised Nepali of this period displayed many orthographic and grammatical inconsistencies: these are reproduced without alteration except where emendation for the sake of consistency or intelligibility has proved essential.

4 Śarmā's is not the only periodisation. The leading authority on literature of this period, Śaradchandra Śarmā Bhaṭṭarāi (2050 v.s.: 76), proposes a fourfold division for prose narrative: almost all publications examined here fall within his “Intermediate Era” of 1885-1933.

5 Hariśchandra sought to establish this new form of Hindi as the medium for a public sphere engaging in politics, religious and social reform and the arts. He was actively engaged in many projects throughout the 1870s and until his death in 1885, including editing the journals *Kavivachanasudhā* (1868-85) and *Hariśchandrachandrikā* (1873-85). Dalmia (1997) analyses Hariśchandra's significance in relation to language, literature and religion.

Rāmkr̥ṣṇa Varmā to invest in a press, Bhārat Jīvan, in 1884 (Onta 1996a: 56).⁶ In his preface to Motīrām’s biography of Bhānubhakta (Bhaṭṭa 1927a: 1), Sūryavikram Jñavālī describes the milieu within which he wrote and published, and reports that he persuaded Varmā to start printing Nepali books.⁷

The traditional profile of Banaras as a locus of spiritual authority thus came to be supplemented by the growth of new movements in the arts and religion, and by the development of a printing and publishing infrastructure.⁸ In his early efforts Motīrām, and his successors, were able to draw on both the stylistic experiments of writers in Hindi and the physical resources of efficient presses.⁹ Meanwhile, modes of learning were also undergoing radical changes, as Brahmanical, Sanskrit educational paradigms found themselves in competition with a *naī śikṣā* (new education) which had its roots in post-Enlightenment Western rationalism and Utilitarianism. The most basic outcome of changing patterns of education was the growth of the literate population and consequent increase in potential readership for new publications, be they in English or local vernaculars.

This article aims to address some significant shortcomings in previous accounts of this stage in the development of Nepali writing and reading. The first limitation has its roots in the separation of academic disciplines and the inherent narrowness of either a purely literary or purely historical analysis of writing and publishing. This problem is not confined to Nepali: writing of Hariśchandra, Dalmia (1997: 10) notes that “the two approaches, the literary and the social-historical, have tended to remain

6 Onta reports on the basis of Motīrām’s biography that he and Hariśchandra became “very good friends”. However, we should note that “a vast circle of friends and acquaintances were drawn to [Hariśchandra]. A number of them wrote for his journals and were inspired to bring out periodicals themselves, some of which, in their turn, were to contribute significantly to the formation of Hindu cultural and political identity and opinion” (Dalmia 1997: 139; see also pp. 140-142 for details of the most prominent members of Hariśchandra’s circle).

7 Sūryavikram believed that he gave up publishing Nepali books after Motīrām’s death but this is not the case (see fn. 54).

8 For an excellent general introduction to both the religious nature of Banaras and its role as a milieu for literary patronage in the late nineteenth century, see Dalmia’s chapter “The Holy City and the House of Hariśchandra” (1997: 50-145).

9 Indeed, by 1925 sustained growth in the industry led to Banaras accounting for one third of all works published in the United Provinces (King 1994: 42). It is worth noting that to this day Banaras remains a centre, albeit declining, for printing Nepali books.

mutually exclusive”. The analysis presented in the following sections demonstrates that literary and historical approaches can be successfully integrated to provide a richer interpretation of a formative period in Nepali writing and the development of Nepali society.¹⁰ Thus it draws primarily on evidence relating to patterns of publishing, pricing, consumption and market dynamics but closely relates them to issues of literary form and content, genre and style.

An equally significant limitation lies in the selectively canonising aims of many literary histories. Attempting to establish a definitive great tradition of Nepali writing, they concentrate primarily on high literature in prestigious forms such as the short story and novel. Standard histories have generally ignored popular literature, other than perhaps religious publications, and have thus chosen to highlight production in a circumscribed set of genres. This is generally the result of a restrictive and prescriptive view of what should constitute acceptable literature. For example, the *laharī sāhitya* (romantic/erotic poetry) examined below is summarily dismissed by the influential critic Tārānāth Śarmā (2051 v.s.: 87), for whom its poor moral pedigree disqualifies it as valid literature.¹¹ This is as much an entrenched historical attitude as later

10 This is an increasingly well-trodden path. Apart from Dalmia’s own work on Hariśchandra (1997), which probably represents the most sustained demonstration of this approach, another foundational figure of Indian nationalism, Baṅkimchandra Chaṭṭopādhyāy, has been the subject of similar enquiry by Kaviraj (1995) while Chatterjee (1996) examines the wider intellectual history of the emergence of academic disciplines in colonial Bengal. Orsini (2002) provides a wide-ranging and detailed account of the Hindi public sphere and the relation of literature to nationalism. With regard to Nepalis in India, Hutt (1997a, 1997b, 1998) and Onta (1996a, 1996c) have analysed literature and the circumstances of its production in a socio-cultural historical context.

11 He accuses the “Banaras publishers” of “corrupting and spoiling the barely literate young men and women of the hills by spreading indecent subjects in their society and titillating their sexual desire”. He identifies “the very first Nepali literary *jhyāure* work” as Sāpkoṭā’s “reformist (*sudhārātmak*)” *Manlaharī*. In fact, it seems that the *laharī* format had been used for moral works from an early period, for example Bhānubhakta’s contemporary Jñāndīl’s *Udaylaharī* (Chhetri 2059 v.s.: 7). *Jhyāure* is an immensely popular folk rhythm (*lay*), marked by a caesura on the fifth, tenth and fifteenth syllables. Bandhu (1989: 126) notes that the *jhyāure* folksong “developed as a powerful element of unification in the multi-lingual society of Nepal, especially in the central and eastern hill regions” in the period following the 1814-16 wars. Elsewhere (2058 v.s.: 132-34) he gives a fuller description of the *jhyāure* form, citing *Premlaharī* uncritically as one of the first instances of *jhyāure* rhythm being adopted in Nepali literature.

critical snobbery: writing in *Ādarśa*, Pārasmaṇi (1930: 37) had also deplored this class of writing and the moral degeneracy among young people that he believed it encouraged. A later issue of the journal chose as a counterbalance to reproduce one section of Mahānanda Sāpkoṭā's "reforming" *Man laharī* (1923). Here too the situation in Nepali can be related to that analysed by writers on other South Asian language spheres. Of Hindi, Orsini (2002: 68) observes that "literary histories ... have so far included only texts and authors of an either educational or reformist character. What about cheap, popular publications?" Meanwhile, Anindita Ghosh (1998: 173) is in no doubt about the exclusivity of past approaches to Bengali literary forms, noting that "the world of cheap print has gone largely unappreciated in the writing of the social and cultural history of nineteenth century Bengal. Historians have tended to draw on the refined literature of the educated middle classes to inform their understandings, and have ignored the cultural self-expression in print of lesser social groups."

The lack of attention paid to popular genres may be attributed to their low profile in the literary collections available to scholars as well as to deliberate disregard. Thus Bandhu (2058 v.s.: 215) praises many *savāī* poems (described below) but observes that "as published *savāīs* ... remained among the little educated, the assessment of Nepali *savāī* literature can for now be only based on estimation." The degree to which "lower" forms of Nepali literature were necessarily the "cultural self-expression ... of lesser social groups" is also debatable: as we shall see, many were rather the productions of higher groups that were readily marketable to a cross-class range of consumers. Yet Ghosh's primary argument (1998: 173.) about the new potentialities created by the technology of printing remains highly relevant to the Nepali sphere in India: "...the very ease and cheapness of mass print technology allowed for a number of competing versions of language and literature, some subversive in intent, others deviant only by implication, to exist and circulate as widely as the dominant forms".

A final limitation of scholarly approaches to date is that literary histories have generally paid only the most cursory attention to the fact that the arrival of print led to the commercialisation of writing and publishing.¹² New technologies, modes of production and patterns of

12 Devkoṭā's research (1967) on the establishment of presses and journalism in Nepal is a worthy exception to this pattern, although it does not address the social and cultural impact of print. While large-scale studies of Nepali publishing and public

distribution directly influenced the development of new styles of literature. This gives rise to two important considerations that deserve to be weighed alongside assessments of purely literary merit: first, that paying attention to only one side of the narrative contract (i.e. focusing on writers while ignoring their readership) provides a distinctly limited view of the wider social and cultural functions of literature; second, that readership must be understood as both an audience and a market. In short, Nepali literary histories have yet to be supplemented by histories of publishing. As Orsini (2002: 68) suggests for Hindi and other Indian publishing, its investigation “as an industry and a market ... would shed a different light on the literary system as a whole.”

It is not easy to redress the imbalances identified here, not least because of the patchy nature of the evidence available for scrutiny. This article only presents a preliminary reading of a limited range of sources which should be seen as complementing, rather than attempting to supplant, more orthodox critical approaches. Nevertheless, the materials presented here demonstrate the potential that the interpretation of writing and publishing as social, cultural and commercial transactions has to illuminate the formative history of modern Nepali society. In doing so, it identifies approaches which might answer some of the pressing questions identified by Orsini, and offers some preliminary answers and hypotheses. Where these remain suggestive rather than conclusive they may at least spur further work on the sources that could confirm, rebut, or refine them. This study demands an engagement with the concept of print-capitalism, to use Anderson’s term (1991), and an application of some of its theoretical foundations to the empirical case presented by early Nepali publishing.

Anderson saw European printers as the archetypal capitalists: searching for markets, establishing branches across the continent, moving on to the vernaculars only after saturating the Latin-reading market. While the old administrative languages were used for convenience without necessary national attachment or popular adoption, imagined communities were made possible by “a half-fortuitous, but explosive,

culture are lacking, many research articles and books by Kamal Dīkṣit (e.g. 2036 v.s., 1988, 2048 v.s., 2057 v.s.), Śaradechandra Śarmā Bhaṭṭarāi (e.g. 2050 v.s., 2056 v.s.a, 2056 v.s.b) and Ghaṭarāj Bhaṭṭarāi (e.g. 2037 v.s., 2045 v.s.)—as well as their joint article published under the combined name of “Kaśāgha”, 2054 v.s.—are of great value both in describing the literary milieu of Banaras in this period, and in highlighting lesser-known writers and works which are ignored by mainstream histories.

interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity". He argues that print-languages laid bases for national consciousness in three ways: (i) they created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars; (ii) print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation; (iii) print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars (1991: 38-45).

All of these considerations have relevance for the situation of Nepali in early twentieth century India, except that we may replace Latin with Sanskrit-Farsi-English (each occupying a superior position for different reasons), and that we do not need to relate Nepali imaginings exclusively to the goal of a nation state. Importantly, Anderson notes the emergence in nineteenth-century Europe of a class of "professional intellectuals" who shaped nationalisms. They were working within a market: "all these lexicographers, philologists, grammarians, folklorists, publicists, and composers did not carry on their revolutionary activities in a vacuum. They were, after all, producers for the print-market, and they were linked, via that silent bazaar, to consuming publics" (Anderson 1991 71, 75).

In terms of consumers rather than producers (and again with a specific historical and geographical bias but wider relevance), Habermas (1989: 55) had already noted that the family and the "intimate sphere" were caught up in the requirements of the market, and not as independent as might be assumed. Of course, the masses were illiterate and poor, lacking "the buying power needed for even the most modest participation in the market of cultural goods" (1989: 38). Yet he credits the "commercialisation of cultural production" with giving birth to a new social category, arguing that serious reading by an interested public in western Europe "arose only in the first decades of the eighteenth century, after the publisher replaced the patron as the author's commissioner and organised the commercial distribution of literary works."

The applicability of public sphere based analysis to colonial South Asia has been demonstrated by a number of recent writers, and assessment of the role of print and publishing has been central to their analyses.¹³ For example, in her study of western India, Naregal (2001: 4)

13 Jürgen Habermas's concept of the "public sphere" was developed in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989); my usage of this phrase is

sees print as “basic to the making of colonial literacy”: “Print was not simply a new communicative technology; it also signified a shift from prevailing assumptions about the distribution of cultural and political power.” This article introduces the role played by print in creating a Nepali readership, in reaching out to neo-literates, providing written materials for the public consumption of lower and upper classes. This is the context within which the shifts in social models, and negotiations of cultural and political power, that defined a self-conscious Nepali society must be understood. Motives of power and profit can also be discerned in the operation of the literary system. As the final section of this article demonstrates, successful Nepali publishers displayed entrepreneurial flair and a talent for sharp business practices. Editors of early newspapers and magazines with a more literary bent could not realistically hope for financial gain but they nonetheless wielded a certain power: as the precursors of professional critics, they could act as arbiters of quality and acceptability, gatekeepers to the world of print.

Ultimately, the power to decide what would and would not be published was based on a combination of editorial and financial factors. The early stages of Nepali publishing in Banaras saw this power effectively restricted to a small number of individuals who were hardly representative of the wider community. Subba (1992: 229-30) sees control over the publication of Nepali periodicals in India until the 1940s as representative of an educational and cultural hierarchy: “most of [them] were edited by Nepali Brahmins and Newars who were always educationally and culturally more advanced than most other castes and tribes subsumed under the term ‘Nepali’.” Yet the complexities, and anomalies, of such a hierarchical model demand further investigation. Patterns of cultural control and transmission in the age of European print-capitalism did not necessarily replicate pre-existing social orders; so too the dynamics of change in the Nepali public sphere cannot be reduced to a historically rigid class or caste-based model.

The Creation of a Readership

As the development of print opened up new opportunities for literary production and distribution it laid the foundations for engagement in a

informed by his work and by Calhoun (1992). For my introduction to Habermas and the potential relevance of his thinking to South Asia I am indebted to Francesca Orsini, who generously provided me with an early draft of her *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940* (2002).

new public sphere. Yet at the same time it exerted a circumscribing influence, limiting the definition of literature to that which is printed and thus excluding both unprinted literature and illiterates from this new sphere.¹⁴ As in other societies, there was a vast difference between existing South Asian speech communities and emergent print communities. Images of the new readership and the public sphere it occupied were reflected in books and journals, as well as being deliberately presented to readers. Such representations were both realistic and aspirational, not to say occasionally ironic or critical.

There is, however, cause to doubt the very existence of a readership worth investigating at this period. Even the most cursory perusal of the pattern of journal publication from Banaras in the first two decades of the twentieth century indicates that the lack of a market was a substantial problem for this pioneering generation of editors and publishers. The early demise of *Upanyās Taraṅginī* (1902) has been variously attributed to lack of interest in prose writing in society (Sundās 1976: 77) and lack of subscribers: Chhetri (1993: 37) reports that *Sundarī* used to be sent to 250 readers but only 85 paid the subscription fee.¹⁵ In 1914, an editorial in the fifth issue of *Chandra* (1(5): 24) complained that while the journal was of good quality and reasonably priced, “it is a matter of great sadness to us that people have given so little in the way of financial support. It will be clear from this that our fellow countrymen still have no love for learning”. At least this frustration spurred some novel subscriber inducements: an editorial note from the following issue explains that “some gentlemen complain that their articles are published with great delay; we beg to inform them that we print the articles of our own customers first”. Also anyone making six new subscribers will receive

14 This is a slight oversimplification: hand-written journals were produced in later periods, although their impact was probably minimal in comparison to their printed counterparts. More significantly, some of the popular romances which formed the backbone of Banaras publishers’ catalogues enjoyed wide circulation and longevity through recitation to those who could not read themselves, for example the *Virikkā* in Manipur in the first decades of the twentieth century (Deepak Thapa, personal communication) and *Madhumālātī* in Kathmandu in the 1950s (Nirmal Man Tuladhar, personal communication). The same was surely true for *savāī* and other lyrical genres.

15 250 readers is perhaps a more impressive total than it at first appears: even Hariśchandra’s renowned journals had only a small number of subscribers (see fn. 16). In fact, the publication records examined below suggest that *Sundarī* had a much larger readership than 250, with an initial print run of 600 stabilising at 500, then increasing to 1,000 copies throughout its second volume.

one year's free subscription (when they send in the money). *Gorkhālī* too recognised in its first editorial (27 September 1915, p.2) that lack of interest in language development among its "Gorkha brothers" was a problem: "at a time when people of all nations (*sarva jāti*) are engaged in the upliftment of their languages, that our Gorkha brothers alone should allow their language to languish behind all others is a matter of great sadness". With regard to books, Pārasmaṇi (Pradhān 1917: 92-93) noted that the Gorkhā Granth Prachārak Maṇḍalī in Bombay had been forced to stop publication due to a lack of readership. He cites a letter from its director, Paṇḍit Harihar Āchārya Dīkṣit: "O civilised people! Shame on us Gorkha people that there is no desire for learning in our society!! If we can't even sell the books we have already printed then what is the point of printing new volumes?"

This failure of successive literary journals and serious books to find a market seems to indicate that there were simply not enough Nepali-speakers who were able or willing to read. But this was not the case, as the analysis of popular publishing presented here demonstrates: for example, the immense popularity and commercial success of Bhānubhakta's *Rāmāyaṇa* (into its 21st edition by 1925) implies that a large readership for Nepali books did exist. The editors and backers of literary journals which could not break even were perhaps victims of their own high-mindedness. After all, even Hariśchandra—the scion of a wealthy family whose fame and status were assured in his own lifetime—had great problems financing his journals and increasing their circulation, despite his extensive potential audience and good relations with sympathetic city authorities.¹⁶ The despair evinced by Harihar Āchārya Dīkṣit surely owed more to the lack of an enthusiastic readership for his improving books than to the lack of a readership *per se*. In his didacticism he is supported by Pārasmaṇi, who argued that a regular journal is the most effective medium for promoting *bhāṣonnati* (language progress). He claims that anything published in a journal will within weeks reach the ears of at least 300 people while if published in a book it might take years to be heard by even that number. Yet his prediction of a comfortable

16 Cf. Dalmia (1997: 230ff.): his *Kavivachanāsudhā*, for example, had a print-run of 300 copies, of which 100 were bought by government (1997: 236-37): "This patronage was the life-breath of the paper, for as it frequently complained, the number of readers willing to subscribe on a regular basis remained scanty and with the best will in the world it was difficult to finance a journal out of one's pocket alone."

readership for journals is tempered by disillusionment with regard to the tastes of Nepali readers:

For that reason to bring about particular progress (*viśeṣonmatī*) and propagation of the [Nepali] language one must promote periodicals. But what a pity! What a great pity!! What sadness!!! (*aphsos! mahāaphsos!! śok!!!*) The Gorkha *jāti* has not the slightest taste for journals either. Even great people (*ṭhūlā ati ṭhūlāharū*) feign deafness on hearing their language's cries of distress. The hope that *Sundarī* would make the Gorkha language beautiful came to nothing.¹⁷ It seemed that *Mādhavī* might achieve something but just as it was progressing it seems to have been buried by a landslide and brought to a halt. (Pradhān 1917: 95)

In spite of Pārasmaṇi's despair, his confidence in the potential audience for journals, and the influence their contents could exert, is testament to the fact that the circulation of printed Nepali materials was increasing and exerting a significant influence on a widening readership. Yet despite the gloomy assessments of so many writers, an examination of publishing activity in Banaras reveals a young industry in rude health, its varied products catering to a surprisingly large market. The survey of this vigorous industry that forms the remainder of this article draws on publication records and readings of an extensive range of primary sources, as well as limited secondary materials. It attempts to reconstruct the development of the Nepali publishing business and to establish this history as an important subject worthy of study in its own right.¹⁸

The official *Statements of Publications* in the United Provinces (*SP*; rightly described by Orsini (2002: 69) as “wonderful sources”) have, to the best of my knowledge, not been assessed by Nepali literary historians.¹⁹ These records—and my interpretation of them—suffer from a number of deficiencies and cannot provide a definitive picture.²⁰

17 *Sundarī* means “beautiful (woman)”; here Pārasmaṇi assigns it and *Mādhavī* feminine verbal concord.

18 This survey included books in the collections of the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya, the Oriental and India Office Collection of the British Library (henceforward OIOC), the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and private collections in Darjeeling.

19 The Director of Public Instruction drew up quarterly reports of registered publications, entitled *Statement of Particulars Regarding Books and Periodicals Published in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, Registered under Act XXV of 1867*. For concision, these are referred to here simply as *Statements of Publications*, abbreviated to *SP* (see References for full details).

20 Some comments on the limitations of these records are essential. My survey of records from 1894-1920 suffers from some notable deficiencies. First and most

Nevertheless, the information that they offer on patterns of printing and publishing, size of print runs, quality of production and pricing is an extremely valuable supplement to existing data on early Nepali publishing. The summary provided in the table below, for example, gives some statistical indication of the overall increase in Nepali publishing activity in Banaras over two-and-a-half decades.²¹ From this growth in the production of Nepali print we may conjecture a growth in consumption, and (at one further remove of extrapolation) an increase in the number of consumers. In comparison to, say, Hindi and Urdu publishing,²² the quantity of Nepali output is very small and does not form a sufficient basis for making confident claims on trends in genres, the nature and composition of readership, etc. For such analysis, we must turn to other sources. However, these records offer a convenient starting point for an investigation of the mechanics and dynamics of the publishing industry.

To turn to some more specific examples and detailed analysis, we may first observe that large numbers of textbooks were being produced in repeated editions: from this we can reasonably assume a sizeable population of students who, with increasing literacy skills and developing tastes, would swell the ranks of a potential readership for adult works. There is no space to deal in depth with the development of Nepali textbooks here, but a few examples are illustrative. In 1908, Kul Bahādur

important, these records certainly do not reflect the entirety of publications: for example, there appears to be no record of the Banaras-based journals *Upanyās taraṅgīnī*, *Mādhavī*, *Chandra* or *Gorkhālī* (even though in the latter case Nepali literary historians write of the complications of registering its editor and publisher, and later issues include the registration number “A. 743” on the masthead). They detail no more than half of the publications they should, and probably a much smaller fraction than that. Second, although the entries are sorted by language, there are inconsistencies in the way in which Nepali publications were categorised. Third, a small number of apparently Nepali books appear to have been misclassified under other language headings. Fourth, as well as individual languages, these statements contain large sections devoted to “Polyglot” works. I have had to ignore these although they could contain, for instance, Sanskrit texts with Nepali commentaries or Nepali-English dictionaries.

- 21 Although the records cover the whole of the United Provinces, all but a handful of Nepali works were published in Banaras.
- 22 For the light these records shed on the growth of Hindi publications and decline of Urdu, see both King (1994: 37-47) and Orsini (2002: 68-80), who offers a more detailed analysis of publishing and the literary system, including a brief survey of popular genres that serves as interesting background to the Nepali experience described here.

Guruṅ's *Nepālī pahilā pustak* ("First Nepali Book") saw a first edition published by the author himself (stationed in Quetta, presumably in military service) and printed in 1,000 copies in Banaras; a few months

Period	Total copies	Number of publications
1896-1900	50,750	35
1901-1905	21,500	22
1906-1910	47,350	48
1911-1915	62,000	30
1916-1920	116,657	83
Total	298,257	218

Nepali publications registered in U.P. over five year periods 1896-1920 (*SP*). The recorded figures are probably only a fraction of the actual total (cf. fn. 20).²³

later a new edition of publisher Puṅyaprasād's *Gorkhā bhāṣāko varṇamālā* (an alphabet) ran to 2,000 copies; 1909 saw what looks like an attempt by Viśvarāj and Harihar Śarmā²⁴ either to ride on the success of Guruṅ's book or to eliminate it from competition: their own *Nepālī pahilī* (sic) *pustak* was launched with a run of no less than 5,000 (and an enlarged edition in 1912 had an unprecedented run of 10,000); by 1910 Gaṅgādhār Śāstrī's mathematics primer *Gaṇit chandrikā* (whose third edition had been published in 1902), was also producing print runs of 2,000, also published by Viśvarāj Harihar. While far from a comprehensive account, these glimpses demonstrate that there was a significant market for basic primers; these were gradually supplemented with more sophisticated textbooks and an increasing number of English-learning aids. It should be noted that none of these books were yet officially approved by educational authorities: they would have served a market of private schools, *pāṭhśālās*, home tutoring, and self-teaching. The presence in this market of the major Nepali commercial publishers (joined by later arrivals such as the Krishna Madho Company, whose

23 The surprisingly large total for 1896-1900 is partly accounted for by the publication in 1896 and 1897 of seven individual *kāṇḍas* of Bhānubhakta's *Rāmāyaṇa*, each in a run of 3,000. In contrast, many later editions appear to have been omitted from the statements.

24 This uncle-nephew partnership is henceforth referred to simply as Viśvarāj Harihar. Some writers use their family name of Lāmichhāne.

language primer dates from at least 1915) indicates that there were profits to be made. In the years before the First World War thousands of Nepalis were reading and learning to read.

Many mildly erotic *śṛṅgār* poems and other popular books were affordably priced²⁵ while the very large typefaces used in many publications (e.g. *Prem ras laharī* 1926) suggests the targeting of neoliterates or those not confident at reading.²⁶ It would be wrong, however, to assume that the market for such books was entirely lower class. The back cover of *Navīn-prem-laharī* (1929), a version of the frequently reworked and republished *Premlaharī*, is devoted to adverts for “karma-kāṇḍa kā pustak”, books explaining religious rites. Clearly the publisher expected that ritual practitioners might also be reading *Premlaharī*. An even more striking demonstration of the presumed overlap in markets is demonstrated by “Rājvaidyā” Paṇḍit Devprasād Upādhyāya’s catalogue for his Śrī Mahākālī “medicine shop” (Figure 1).

Madan-laharī (1928) offers more direct evidence of a higher class readership.²⁷ It is of true pocket book size and neatly produced with a price to reflect its quality: Rs. 1 for a cloth-bound volume, and also available in a more luxurious leather binding for one-and-a-half rupees. Such editions indicate the existence of a certain number of well-heeled readers. Meanwhile, readers of Subedar Major Śrīśersimh Rāṇā’s eminently respectable account of his visit to London (1913, described below) are treated to five pages of adverts for other books available from the publisher. Apart from a decent-sounding English grammar in Nepali, Rāmprasād Satyāl has selected a couple of Hindi books that perhaps reach areas not yet probed by Nepali writing. *Rāt meṃ sāt* (“Seven in the Night”) is both risqué and good value, reflecting the economies of scale of Hindi mass-market publishing: “this book in the *deśī* language contains the remarkable spectacle of seven kinds of whoremongers. This is a wonderful, captivating book and the price is also cheap: only one anna.”

25 For example, Thāpā (1914) at 3 annas; Pradhān (1918) at 4 annas; Rāī (1919) and Śarmā (1926) at 8 annas (and with a print run of 1,000).

26 This is distinct from the printing of *karma-kāṇḍa* works in large print to enable reading at a distance, e.g. while performing rites.

27 *Madan laharī* had an enduring popularity: in 1956-57 Homnāth Kedārnāth published their fifth edition, still in pocket size with large—12 lines to the page—print. He was still printing at the Hitaiṣī Press and advertising the Hitaiṣī Company (see fn. 82). Even today, works such as *Premlaharī* are being published in Banaras and sold in Kathmandu (Abhi Subedi, personal communication).

Meanwhile there are occasional hints at the emergence of a female readership worth addressing. The pages of *Candra* contained a long-running debate between two women, Sukeśī and Anasūyā, over the role of

<p>(१२) पं. देवप्रसाद उपाध्याय ।</p> <p style="text-align: center;">* कर्म काण्ड का पुस्तक *</p> <p>बुडा उपनयन समावर्तन वेदारंभ देशान्तर सहित?) विवाह पद्धति) ग्रहशान्ति मानुकापुजा आभ्युदहकभ्राडादि) अग्नि स्थापना होम) अन्त्य पद्धति दश दान लगायत; वरखि संम ?) भ्रातृ एकोदिष्ट पावण तपण समेत) प्रेत संजरी ॥=) गोखोशौच निर्णय) वासीष्ठी विधीमा व्रत बंध उपनयन के) वासीष्ठी विधीमा विवाह ? के ?)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">* वेद *</p> <p>यजुर्वेद संहिता दुला अक्षर को ४० अध्याय) रुद्री पुजाविधि समेत पत्रादार) रुद्री गुठका सानुजिल्लादार)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">* गीत भजन ।</p> <p>गोर्वा भजन निर्गुण पुरा चारै भाग को) प्रथम भाग) द्वितीय भाग) तृतीय भाग) चतुर्थ भाग) राग मालश्री) तान राचरी) संगीत चन्द्रोदय) खाहों जगाउंने) चंडीश्रीकवचनवा)</p>	<p>श्री महा काली औषधालय बनारस सीटी (१३)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">* प्रेमलहरी *</p> <p>हे महाशय जुन किताब लाई तपायी हेर आज सम्म तलास गर्नु हुन्यो सोई (प्रेम लहरी) नाम गरको प्रीतीको थुप्रा बडा कठीन ले तैयार भयो यो किताब हातमा लिये पाछि सब आदि अन्त्य सम्म नवाची न हेरी को राख्न सकला जस्तो (प्रेम लहरी) नामछ उस्ने प्रेमरूपी अमृत ले भि-जकाछ ? किताब मगाई हेनु भये पछी आफै मालु हुन्येछ !</p> <p>प्रेम लहरी पैल्हा भाग ? के ।) प्रेम लहरी दोश्रा भाग ? के ।) प्रेम लहरी तेथ्रो भाग ? के ।) प्रेम लहरी चौथो भाग ? के ।) प्रेम लहरी चारै भागको ? जिल्लावाधे को ? के ?)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">* बालुन नजा बालुन ।</p> <p>अहाहा यो. पो. बालुन हेनुं-महाभारत बिराट पर्व को बालुन अत्यन्त ररिछ एक के) जमिनि भारत को बालुन) दशावतार को बालुन) सिता भारत को बालुन)</p>
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Figure 1: A catalogue of books and other consumer goods places a prominent advert for Pradhān's *Premlaharī* directly opposite *karma-kāṇḍa* books, *vedas* and *bhajans* (*Sūchīpatra* 1916: 12-13).

women and their need for education.²⁸ Interestingly, the author's preface to Śarmā's *Paṭṭhā-ṣaṭṭhī ko prīti prabandha* (1926), which unashamedly deals with the full range of *śṛṅgār* themes, not only justifies the propriety of the subject matter but expressly indicates its suitability for women. Erotic verse was commonly smuggled into Rana palaces in Nepal, where it was avidly consumed by the many isolated female servants of the

28 Chhetri (1993: 42) identifies Anasūyā as the wife of B. P. Śarmā; Bhaṭṭarāi (2045 v.s.: 316 fn.) attributes these contributions to Śambhuprasād Dhunḡyāl, who was apparently seeking to stimulate debate.

household.²⁹ Another readily identifiable sector of the overall Nepali readership was the military. With large numbers of Nepalis serving in both the Indian Army and in local police forces (over 24,000 even before the start of the First World War³⁰) it is not surprising that publishers might

(६२) पं. देवमसाद उपाध्याय ।



॥ अर्थात् पुष्टाई भोगको सुख ॥

रती विलास

हे मित्रवर ! जस्को धातु पतला भयेको छ जुन पुरुष मा नामर्दी छ स्त्रीभोग गर्दा कमजोरी ले बाहे पतन हुन्छ अथवा वृद्धापस्था हुदा सक्ति के भई लोचार् छ भने इत्यादि धातु सम्बन्धी रोगमा र बुझाई सम्बन्धी साक्षात्पन मा यो (रती विलास) को सेवन गर्नु धातु गाढा हुन्छ नामर्द मर्द हुन्छ श्री भोगमा धातु गाढा भई स्वस्थनसक्ति वृद्धि बृद्धपनी पैन्हेको अवस्था सम्झनेछ श्रीभोगमास्त्रि र रहुँछ धेरै क्या लेखु यो (रती विलास) ? मा प्राणानु र वेदामा यो (रती विलास) को चमत्कार दवाइले आके बताउने छ ।

श्रीमहाकाली औषधालय बनारस सिटी (६३)

२) रतिबीलास १ सीसी के डा. म. पे. १।
 ५) रतिबीलास ३ सीसी के डा. म. पे. ॥।
 ६) रतिबीलास ६ सीसी के डा. म. पे. ॥।
 १५) रतिबीलास १२सीसी के डा. म. पे. १।

चीनीको सार
 (अर्थात् मीठा चीनी)

यो "चीनीसार" ? चामल बराबर ? गीलास (पानीमा) अथवा एक गीलास (चाह) मा अथवा एक गीलास (दुद) मा जे खुके मा हाले पनि एक चामल बराबर हालनाले एक पाउ चीनी हाले जति गुलीयो हुँछ यो मजा अचेमको पीज नीसकेकोछ एक सीसी मगाइ हेर्नु भो भने दर्जन को दर्जन मगाउनु हुनेछ ।
 मीठाचीनी एक सीसीके १) डाकमसुल मनिचाडर १)

खटाइ सार

यो पनि उस्तै मीठा "चीनीसार" बमोजीम ? चावल बराबर अचार मा चटनीमा हाली दीनु अत्यन्त अमिलो हुन्छ यो अमिलो अत्यन्त गुनी पनि छ वांगार गर्दैन ।
 खटाइसार १ सीसी के १) डाक मसुलमनिचाडर १)

Figure 2: This explicit advert for the aphrodisiac *Ratī Bilās* ("Pleasure in lovemaking") perhaps indicates that publishers hoped the consumption of erotic literature might spur additional market demands (*Sūchīpatra* 1916: 62-63).

target them and that writers might make use of military themes, as we shall see below. Meanwhile, there is evidence of a sizeable market for certain publications within Nepali itself.³¹ Thus the demand for Nepali

29 Kamal Dikṣit, personal communication.

30 Pradhan (1991: 198), on the basis of Vansittart's *Handbook* (1915).

31 Nepal's Gorkhā Bhāṣā Prakāśinī Samiti, headed by Rāmraṇī Āchārya Dikṣit, produced a number of instructional books in the early 1920s. Among these, the legal manual *Gorakhā-adālati-sikṣā* (Āchārya Dikṣit 1981 v.s.) ran to four parts, originally published from 1922-24 in print runs of one thousand, with at least the first volume going to reprint in the same numbers in 1924-25 (the preface of the reprint explained that the first run had sold out). The accounting textbook

books in the first decades of the twentieth century was both growing and becoming more complex. The consumption of reading materials was becoming intertwined with other material pursuits, and market segments were both stimulating production in particular areas and overlapping in surprising ways. Despite the despairing wails of the discerning literati, Nepali had developed a flourishing readership, or rather readerships. Their expansion, interaction and segmentation were fuelled by a prolific and eclectic outpouring of popular literature.

Popular Literature

The following sections offer a brief introduction to the major genres of popular literature that were produced by the Nepali publishing industry in Banaras, primarily in the 1914-1940 period. This is by no means a complete survey but it does feature most of the common types of publication. Where appropriate, it includes some more detailed samplings and readings to highlight the stylistic developments prompted by commercialisation and changing audiences. While available data point to the numerical dominance of populist formats compared to other types of Nepali book, it would also be wrong to imply that Banaras produced only popular literature. Apart from the older works of Bhānubhakta and Motīrām—which were saleable as well as (gradually) critically acclaimed—Banaras also published new highbrow literature, such as Dharaṇīdhar Koirālā’s famous collection of poems *Naivedya* (1920a).³² Equally, Banaras was not the sole site for Nepali publishing. For example, Lekhnāth Paudyāl’s important *Ṛtuvichār* (1917) was printed (to a higher quality than any contemporary Banaras work) at Bombay’s Nirnayasagar Press, published in Kathmandu by Kulchandra Gautam, and distributed in Nepal by the Advait Kāryālaya (of Bhoṭāhīṭī) and the Gorkha Agency.

Gorakhā-srestā-sikṣā (Āchārya Dikṣit 1979 v.s.b) was produced in a near identical format in three parts divided into two volumes (published in 1922-23, print run 1,000), the first of which was reprinted in a run of 1,500 within a year. These figures appear to indicate that by the 1920s there was a sizeable legal-bureaucratic middle class with basic education *within Nepal* itself (for as these books related specifically to Nepalese laws and practices they would have had little market among Nepalis in India, except perhaps those students who aimed to join government service).

32 This was published in Banaras by Maṇisimh Guruṇ (of Shillong) and marketed there by the Nepali Trading and Publishing Company Limited. A selection of the poems in *Naivedya* (including the famous “Jāga jāga”) was also published in the same year under the title *Pañchāmṛta* (Koirālā 1920b).

This selective presentation should not be interpreted as a dismissal of other work, merely as an attempt to bring attention to many overlooked and critically unappreciated creations. It also serves to illuminate the problematic nature of the relationship of populist Nepali genres to “lesser social groups”. The role of two higher social groups as patrons and producers deserves particular mention. Within Nepal, the ruling Ranas were the only powerful patrons of literature and the arts: their tastes tended distinctly towards the lowbrow, with a particular fondness for Urdu romantic theatre (cf. Onta 1997: 75 ff.).³³ Meanwhile, Banaras’s Nepali writers, and even more so the publishers, were almost exclusively Brahman, members of a religious, social and educational elite.

Waves of Love: the Lure of Laharī literature

कोही मूर्ख मानीस के भन्छन भने शृङ्गारदर्पण हेरनाले बुद्धि विग्रन्छ भन्छन् ति महापशु हून हेरनूहोस वात्स्यायन ऋषिले ‘कामसूत्र’ कस्तो बनायाको छ ‘अनङ्गरङ्ग’ कस्तो बनेको छ यस्ता कामशास्त्र १०/१२ सम्म देखियाका छन् फेरी महाकविकालिदासले शृङ्गारतिलक आदि बनायाका छन् विह्वल कविले ‘चौरपञ्चाशिका’ बनायाकाछन् सो कविपतञ्जलि तीर्थराजहरूले भाषाश्लोक बढ गरेका धेरैले छपायाका छन् तेस्मा बाकी केही छैन, यस्मा ता मैले स्पष्ट गरेको छैन चौरपञ्चाशिका र शृङ्गारदर्पण भिडाई वाचन अनिखेर ज्यादा रहेछ भने शिखरनाथ लाई दोष दिनु होइन भने बम्बाद गर्नाको के फेदा ? छपाउन हुने सम्म गरेको छ नहुने गरेको छैन, यो रस नभेकन शन्तानको वृद्धि हुदैन...

Some stupid people will say that by looking at *Śṛṅgārdarpaṇ* one’s mind will be corrupted but they are great fools.³⁴ Look at how the *ṛṣi* Vātsyāyana made the *Kāmasūtra*, look at the *Anaṅgaraṅga*: there are some dozen of these love *sāstras*. Then again the great poet Kālidāsa wrote the

33 Indeed, the entertainment for the wedding ceremony of King Tribhuvan in early 1919 was an Urdu-Hindi romantic play performed by the India Imperial Opera House (Onta 1997: 79). The Ranas’ most notable influence on the early development of writing and publishing was their strict censorship which encouraged literary production over the border in India. By the end of the period of this study, however, a handful of Rana writers and scholars—perhaps most notably the educationist and linguist Puṣkar Śamśer and his younger brother the poet and dramatist Bālkrṣṇa Śamśer (later Sama)—were actively involved in major developments in Nepali language and literature.

34 *Mahāpaśu* literally means “great beast(s)”; it recalls the Sanskrit saying *aśikṣito paśuḥ* “an uneducated person is a beast”. The insult is typically knowing and humorous, mocking the high-minded with a coinage in their own language and ironically echoing *mahāpuruṣ* “great man”. Suvedī was one of the most naturally talented writers of the period: he had a gift for parody and turned his hand to almost every genre (see Barāl (2055 v.s.), Śarmā Bhaṭṭarāī (2050 v.s.: 223), Bhaṭṭarāī (2045 v.s.: 34-42)).

Śṛṅgāratilaka and the poet Bihlaṇa (sic) the *Chaurapañchāśikā*: many have printed vernacular verse editions of this by poets such as Patañjali Tīrtharāj and nothing is left out in them! I have not been so explicit in this: compare the *Chaurapañchāśikā* and the *Śṛṅgārdarpaṇ* and if it is excessive then blame Śikhmāth, if not then where is the point in complaining? This

contains as much as is appropriate for printing and nothing inappropriate.
Without this *ras* there would be no children born...

(Suvedī 1917: preface)

सामान्य जनताका बीच लहरी साहित्यको लहर चलेको थियो ।

The population at large had been swayed by the wave of *laharī* literature.³⁵

(Bandhu 2058 v.s.: 105)

As we have seen above, the failure of worthy efforts at selling moralistic books on learning cannot simply be attributed to the non-existence of a literate Nepali readership. It does, however, underline the importance of genre in ensuring the commercial viability of a publication. It is not surprising that didactic tomes should have struggled to compete with racier volumes of love poetry in the emergent mass market. However mild the erotic content of such books might be—and most stretch only to fairly tame innuendo—some authors and publishers still felt that this genre needed to be defended. Śikharnāth Suvedī’s comments (above) are of interest both for their confirmation of the existence—at least in Banaras—of a public sphere capable of sustaining some debate over the appropriateness of literary publications, and for their demonstration of the lack of a clear line between “low” and “high” forms of writing and their practitioners. They also provide an entry point to consideration of the most strikingly successful popular Nepali genre, *śṛṅgār* poetry.

This class of writing was certainly not new. Indeed, it was the dominant genre at the *kavi sammelan* gatherings of Hindi poets (Orsini 2002: 81-85), which some Nepalis doubtless attended. In addition to editing Bhānubhakta’s *Rāmāyaṇa* and writing his biography, Motīrām had indulged in writing on themes of love and mild eroticism (Hutt 1988: 126).³⁶ This bridging of stylistic boundaries by writers extended also to publishers and to readers. And as Suvedī (originally of

35 The frequent appearance of the word *laharī* (literally “wave” or “ripple”) in the title of *śṛṅgār* works led Kamal Dīkṣit to name the genre “*laharī sāhitya*”, a useful term now widely adopted.

36 Motīrām’s simultaneous promotion of religious literature and enjoyment of more worldly pleasures also echoes Hariśchandra, who effortlessly reconciled his contradictory passions (Dalmia 1997: 267): “Hariśchandra as the spendthrift and dissolute son of an opium-eating merchant-poet chose to occupy the middle ground in his writings and champion the cause of the ascetic and frugal merchant ethos which he himself so obviously flouted in his own life.”

Machchhegāuṃ, Lalitpur) implies, the lengthy and sophisticated tradition of Sanskrit erotic poetry was not the object of critical censure. While Nepali popular works drew on this tradition in *śṛṅgār* poetry, writers and their publishers were careful to make suitable adjustments for their projected market. In particular, they can be seen to have achieved this by catering to specifically Nepali tastes. The version of *Māyālaharī* that forms the second part of *Māyālaharī premlatā* (1928b) is described as a *gorkhālī chudki gīt* (a song accompanied by finger-snapping), while the lengthy *Madan-mañjarī* (1934) includes occasional regional specialities such as the “hill song” *Rellī māñā, arthāt parvate gīt*.³⁷ Śarmā (1926) blends cultural references with prose, letters, a variety of songs including the typically north Indian *gāzal* and the typically Nepali *jhyāure*, as well as some contemporary scene-setting in Calcutta.

Interestingly, the foremost author of *laharī* literature was the non-Brahman Ratan Nārāyaṇ Pradhān, whose *Premlaharī* was a runaway success. First published in 1909, this two-part poem (which expanded to four parts in the following year) spawned many imitators. Interestingly, given the moralistic criticisms that would be levelled at this work and others like it, Pradhān also published a didactic collection of Sanskrit moral tales, *Pradhān nīti kusum*, within a few days of *Premlaharī*'s appearance. But while he published this himself in Garhwal (no doubt at his own expense), the *Premlaharī* was snapped up by the canny publisher Padmaprasād Upādhyāya of Banaras, who also had the foresight to register the copyright in his son Puṇyaprasād's name. After a year, Pradhān produced two further instalments, which went to press at the same time as the first two were being reprinted (*SP*). By 1916—possibly fuelled by sales to First World War recruits—the fourth edition of the first part had a run of 4,000. This, however, apparently took two years to sell: it was not until 1918 that a further run of 2,000 was printed. Derivative works included the almost identical *Premtaraṅga māyālaharī* (1911) produced by rival publishers Viśvarāj Harihar.³⁸ Pradhān does not feature in any detail in literary histories and details of his life remain

37 The spelling of “māñā” reflects an early Nepali orthographic convention—abandoned by the mid-twentieth century—whereby the character ञ (ña) indicated nasalisation of the attached vowel.

38 It is the *Māyālaharī* section (34 ff.) which is modelled on *Premlaharī*. This work ran to at least three further editions, but copies from 1924 and 1927 (in the OIOC) had been reclaimed by Puṇyaprasād. In 1931, it was published by Śivaprasād urpha Rāghorām. Although the book does not name its authors, *SP* identifies them as Chandradhvaj and Surajmān Rāi (interestingly, like Pradhān, non-Brahmans).

unclear: Ajit “Nirāśā” (1976) provides a biographical sketch, but is apparently unaware of his *Pradhān sundarī śikṣā* (1910) and confused on the dates of his career.³⁹ He does, however, appreciate *Premlaharī* as literature (“sāhitya sṛjanā”; 1976: 15): “Making a suitable analysis of categories such as love and romance, happiness and sorrow, meeting and parting, consolation and inspiration, Ratan Nārāyaṇ Pradhān was truly a romantic poet or lyricist.” He cites a few samples of *Premlaharī* approvingly (1976: 16-17)⁴⁰ and—tendentiously but amusingly given critical dismissal elsewhere—compares him directly and favourably to Mādhav Prasād Ghimire and M.B.B. Śāh.⁴¹

Limited as the Nepali women’s readership may have been, at least some male writers and publishers were willing to offer them access to slightly risqué material that could not have been considered half a century before by Hariśchandra.⁴² Thus Śarmā (1926: preface) published his “collection of incomparable love ... in the hope that it will bring pleasure to both women and men, for without playful amusement how can love be complete?” As Suvedī made clear, love poetry was hardly without precedent, and most Nepali erotic poetry pays its respects to long-established Indian *śṛṅgār* conventions, be it in *nakhśikh* (toe-to-head) descriptions of women, or simply the frequent use of traditional metaphors, such as *Māyālaharī*’s (1911: 34, 35, 45) “your voice is like that of a cuckoo, your form that of a peahen ... your face is like the moon, your eyes are lotuses ... your eyes are like a deer’s, your body a peahen’s.”

39 A sketch of Pradhān’s life illustrates his varied experiences. He was born in Dehradun in 1889, the son of a Havildar Major who had emigrated from Nepal and served with distinction in the army over 22 years, receiving four bravery medals (His father’s second name was Nepālī, implying low caste origin; Pradhān adopted his mother’s (Newar) surname). He passed the Entrance Examination in 1908 and had a good knowledge of English, as well as presumably Hindi and Bengali through his work. He became the first teacher at Kurseong Middle School (among his pupils was the writer Pratimān Siṃh Lāmā) then joined the 2/39th Garhwalis, Lansdowne. On retirement he joined the police, serving as Inspector of Police in Kurseong until his untimely death in 1917.

40 These are just fragments: he did not have access to a full copy of *Premlaharī*.

41 M.B.B. Śāh was the *nom de plume* of King Mahendra (r. 1955-1972).

42 Cf. Dalmia (1997: 244-51, esp. 247): “male editorship ... probably accounted for ... the extremely controlled, even censored, nature of the subject matter offered [in Hariśchandra’s *Bālābodhinī* and other women’s journals] ... for instance, the conventional Brajbhāṣā verse which was printed so extensively in Hariśchandra’s other journals was here entirely absent, since it was obviously considered too erotic.”



Figure 3: The illustrations for *laharī* works could draw on traditional symbols (such as lotus eyes and peacocks) while hinting at a voluptuous modernity, as illustrated by the cover of *Prem ras laharī* (1926).

Yet at the same time, some works are highly innovative. The narrator of the *Māyālaharī* is clearly a soldier, and the affordably priced (4 anna) poem was designed to appeal to *lāhures* (Nepali recruits in the Indian military). References to transient army life allow the age-old concept of *viraha* (anguished separation of lovers) to be updated, recontextualised for the early twentieth century, and related to the ordinary soldier.⁴³ Meanwhile the appeal of a new sophistication became perhaps a further

43 Prasād Siṃh Rāi's *Prīti-laharī* (1919: 14) similarly establishes a military background for its narrator:

अङ्ग्रेजै ज्यान्को जहाजै चल्यो । 'रेड सी' लाइ चिरेर ॥
प्यारीको लागी म आजे भागी । खुकुरी भिरेर ॥

The ship of the British set sail, entering the Red Sea;
for the sake of my darling I ran away and returned, armed with my *khukurī*.

tool for the ardent *lāhure* to employ in the wooing of his beloved. *Māyālaharī*'s narrator frequently employs the English "dear" to address his lover (e.g. (p. 34) "It's time to take my leave, dear (*diyār*), give me just one kiss"). This term adds a strikingly modern flavour to a traditional form and demonstrates the *lāhure*'s worldliness, the casual use of English words contrasting his urbanity with the rustic simplicity of rival suitors from Nepal.

Śikharnāth Suvedī's *Śṛṅgārdarpaṇ* offers a more sophisticated interpretation of traditional themes and forms.⁴⁴ It is almost an instruction manual, setting out examples of the main types of love poetry, some with Sanskrit originals rendered into Nepali, others shown in various versions as theme and variation. All are accompanied by notes explaining their context and technicalities such as the complex Sanskrit metres (for example *sārdūlavikrīḍita*) which he frequently employs. Individual notes are also used to explain difficult words, indicating that Suvedī aimed to bring this poetry before an audience which may not have had a traditional Brahmanical education. He included commentary and verse at least as risqué as most of his contemporaries. In this exchange (1917: 16-17) a young wife expresses her sexual frustration:

A playful woman says to the young woman "O sister! I heard that your husband came back from abroad last night. Did you play at *dadhilā* ('curd-play') or not?" To which she cleverly replies in *śikhariṇī* metre:

खसं मेरा आये, बहुत दिन पर्देश घुमदै ।
बिती गो आधा रात्, गनधन कुरा बात गरदै ॥

My husband returned after long travels abroad;
we spent half the night in gossip and talk.

शयन्को लीला ता, न भइकन निद् राँड पसि गै ।
अनी सौता जस्ती, पुरब तिर लाली निकलि गै ॥

But as for bedroom play, sleep descended like a loose woman before we even started; and then the morning dawned like a second wife.

To conclude this sketch of *laharī* literature, some extracts from a later work demonstrate the stylistic idiosyncrasies of the genre while simultaneously depicting the changing economic and social environment for Nepalis in India. Published in 1938, Paṇḍit Chhavikānta Upādhyāya's

44 Despite its sophistication, this work (first published in 1906) was cited by Sūryavikram (Jñavālī 1919: 20) as an example of the embarrassing populist bias of Nepali publishing: "what answer may we give when Calcutta University demands books suitable for teaching? Shall we put forward *Śṛṅgārdarpaṇ*?"

Rasīlo premlaharī is a slight work, forty-eight pages of verse printed in a fairly large typeface, a total of one hundred and eighty-four more or less rhyming couplets. While not devoid of traditional metaphors it is far more notable for its eclectic references to a modernity that finds little place in more traditional *śṛṅgār* poems. The structure of the poem is simple and standard to this genre: it consists entirely of an exchange between a man and his lover. The man is trying to persuade his reluctant enamored, who appears from contextual references to be a rural Nepalese girl, to travel to India with him. His attempts to win her over entail a lengthy exchange of views on the advantages and disadvantages of life in India. This makes for a revealing commentary on popular perceptions, especially as they are coloured by consumerism and materialism. This work can be read as an interesting parallel to its near contemporary, Bālkr̥ṣṇa Sama's celebrated drama *Mukunda indirā* (1937), whose Kathmandu Newar hero has stayed on in Calcutta after his studies, lost in a life of urban debauchery while his faithful wife awaits his return.⁴⁵

Rasīlo premlaharī is surprisingly involving, primarily because its characters emerge as plausible and engaging. The fact that the outcome of the discussion remains hanging in the balance throughout the poem also adds to its page-turning quality. Indeed, the argument is left unresolved, the poem ending with a last plea by the man to which he receives no response. This volume is described on its cover as "Part One"; the author presumably intended to continue the story in a further part or parts, for which the inconclusive (and metaphorically risqué) final verse would serve as a cliff-hanger: a good example of the incorporation of new marketing techniques in writing itself.⁴⁶ This work manages to rework and subvert a traditional medium, using the *śṛṅgār* framework of exchanges between lovers—also recalling the competitive to-and-fro of the popular Nepali *dohorī gīt* format—to develop an ironic depiction of the situation of Nepalis in India.⁴⁷ This use of irony—not a feature of traditional literature—is in itself a hallmark of modernity. Upādhyāya's

45 Onta (1996c: 230-44) describes Sama's personal experience of Calcutta (which he visited for matriculation examinations in 1921-22) and concludes that *Mukunda Indirā* presented "an image of a pure Nepal that was free of the cultural vices associated with the colonial city of Calcutta".

46 I have not located a second part.

47 Upādhyāya was best known as a parodist, following his playful pastiche of Prem Prasād Bhaṭṭarāi's *Viraktapuspāñjalī*. He reportedly edited the short-lived 1940 Banaras journal *Sarvahitaiśī Patrikā* (Bhaṭṭarāi (2045 v.s.: 402); according to Hirā Chhetri (1993: 72) he was the publisher).

creation is a revealing demonstration of the flexibility of a literary genre and the potential for imaginative development of older narrative styles. The opening verse (1938: 1) sets the tone of the rest of the poem, and makes it clear that the reader will have to adjust to an unflinchingly contemporary idiom that parodies older *laharī* works:

मौका को घडी, हातको छडि, मुखको चूरोट ।
आँखाको चस्मा झिकेर, प्यारी जोर्दछु द्वीओट ॥ १ ॥

Taking this chance, with walking stick in hand and cigarette in mouth,
I take off my glasses and join my two lips, my dear.

The woman's responses to her suitor's gambits introduce an element of cynicism about his ability to turn words into action that is entirely alien to traditional *śṛṅgār*. The author makes use of the knowing, sceptical character he has developed for his leading lady to put into her mouth (1938: 4-5) some sharp comments on the state of Nepalis in India:

मुन्डाका फेला परेर बर्मा आसाम जाँदामा ।
खसिया जस्ता गोर्खालि भये कुल्लि भै खाँदामा ॥ १३ ॥

One finds plenty of *gundās* on the road to Burma and Assam;
the Gorkhalis have become just like the Khasis and make their living as coolies.

नारिमा घरि गोड़ामा बुट मुखमा चूरोट ।
देख्नुता निकै मानिस जस्ता बस्नेता गौ गोठ ॥ १४ ॥

They have watches on their wrists, boots on their feet and cigarettes in their mouths;
looking at them they seem real men but they live like cattle.

These criticisms do not spare Gurkha soldiers. Many verses are devoted to elaborating a stereotypically pejorative view of *lāhures* as drunken lechers who waste any money they earn on drinking, women, and gambling. Here (1938: 17, 19) the soldier fresh off the train in an Indian railhead town has headed straight to the local inn:

पदछ मस्त लाहुरे दाइ माग्दल बजाइ ।
तरनि नानि लाहुरे माथि गर्दछे रजाइ ॥ १३ ॥

The *lāhure dāi* loses himself in enjoyment playing the *mādal*,
meanwhile young girls are having their fun with him.

जागिर छुटि पिन्सिन मिल्यो सिपाहि जंदारि ।
पिन्सिन बुझ्ती रोयेर जान्छन् जुवा मा धन्हारी ॥ १८ ॥

On leaving service the soldiers receive their pensions;
they collect their pension but leave in tears having gambled their wealth
away.

However, ironic as the author's intentions may be—and he certainly shows little reluctance to caricature the ways in which Nepalis aim to seek and spend riches in India—the picture he offers of new consumer temptations must reflect an increasingly materialistic reality. The hedonism with which the hero attempts to entice his lover (1938: 8-9) is founded on earning and consumption:

ब्रान्डिल सस्तो चुरोट सस्तो सब् थोक सस्तो छ ।
पर्देन सोधनु प्यारिले केल्ये त्यो चिज कस्तो छ ॥ २५ ॥

Brandy's cheap, cigarettes are cheap, everything's cheap:
my dear, you'll never have to wonder how anything is.

घ्यु, माछा, मासु, तर्कारि खाइ सुखेले दिनकाटि ।
बसौला रिक्सा चढौला प्यारी भन्दछु नढाँटि ॥ २६ ॥

We'll pass the days feasting on ghee, fish, meat and vegetables,
and I tell you we'll ride on rickshaws—my dear, I don't lie.

भर्सक आराम् पुलिस महा अथवा फौजमा ।
जागिर खाइ रामरो लाइ बसौला मोजमा ॥ २७ ॥

If at all possible I'll get a job in the armed police or army;
we will dress well and live a life of luxury.

दर्बान भइ बसेँदा पनि विस् रय्याँ मिल्द छ ।
तेत्तिले पनी पुगिने हाल्छ फेरि के चाहिन्छ ॥ २८ ॥

Even work as a watchman brings in twenty rupees:
that much will be more than enough—what else can one want?

यो यो चिज् आज घर्भित्रै भन्दिनु तिम्रो काम् ।
किनेर ल्याइ थुप्राइ दिने छँदैछ मेरो काम् ॥ २९ ॥

Your job will be just to tell me what's lacking at home each day
and my job will always be to buy it and pile it up.

The woman's response (1938: 9-10) is an intriguing—and not entirely convincing—combination of innocent adherence to her simple village ways alongside a sophisticated commentary on social and economic realities in India. Both serve to undermine the “Indian dream” being promoted and to reaffirm the value of an old-fashioned Nepali lifestyle:

चढ् दिन रेल, तान्दिन चुरोट् ढिडो नै खायेर ।
बस्त छु घरे काट्छु घाँस जंग लमा गयेर ॥ ३२ ॥

62 Rhoderick Chalmers

I won't get on a train, I won't smoke cigarettes, but living off *dhimdo*
I'll just stay at home and go to the forest to cut grass.

हलोनै जोत्ने भये तापनि त्यैसंग विवाहा ।
गर्न म राजि, छु कुरा सुन्दा पाइ यो सब था हा ॥ ३३ ॥

I'm ready to get married even to a ploughman;
listening to your talk I've realised this.

जुन्कुरा गर्दा आँउछ धन हजुर्का ईलम ।
के के छ फेरि भन्नोस अनी जाँउला शीलाड ॥ ३४ ॥

But as for the thing that will bring in wealth—your learning and skills
tell me again what they are and maybe then I'll go to Shillong.

आज्काल भरी आइ.ए.-गर्ने नपाइ नोकरी ।
घुम्दछन्साहा गोर्खा.-लि कोता यौटा त्यै खुकुरी ॥ ३५ ॥

These days all the Gorkhals are wandering around doing IAs without
finding jobs—the only weapon in their armoury is their *khukurī*.⁴⁸

Still, the economic imperative for migration is underlined repeatedly.
Whatever the dangers of India—both moral and physical—it remains the
only realistic escape route from the grinding poverty of near-subsistence
farming in the relatively cash-free economy of rural Nepal (1938: 12-13):

पेट भरि भात पाइन्छ खान देश मा गयेर ।
को सकृछ बस्न साहुको ज्ञाहा कर्कर सहेर ॥ ४४ ॥

In India⁴⁹ you can eat your fill of rice;
who can live here suffering the harassment of moneylenders?

ठाउने छैन पैसा को काम न चलने भयेर ।
पालनु पर्यो यो ज्यान प्यारि - देशमा गयेर ॥ ४५ ॥

There's nowhere to live where there's no cash jobs to be had;
one's got to look after oneself, my dear, by going to India.

The clearest temptation of remunerative employment in India is the
chance to participate in the emergent materialism that is characterised by
the advertising in populist Nepali publications (examined below):

राखौला अना द्वितिर टुला हेरौला दंपति ।
काटेर मोज फिरौला ज्ञाहा कमाइ संपति ॥ १३ ॥

48 IA: Intermediate Arts degree, a halfway stage between matriculation and a BA.
The *khukurī* reference implies that Nepalis' employment opportunities in India are
limited to *khukurī*-carrying jobs as soldiers, police or watchmen.

49 India is referred to throughout the poem simply as *des*, a standard usage.

We'll put large mirrors on either side and admire ourselves as man and wife;
when we've had our fun and earned property we'll come back here.

तिन्चार वर्ष बसौला प्यारि फकरि आउँला ।
गहना पात लुमा को ठाँउ देखाइ जाउँला ॥ १०० ॥

We'll stay for three or four years, my dear, and then we'll return;
I'll show you the elegance of jewellery and clothes.

(Upādhyāya 1938: 26-27, 30)

Rasīlo premlaharī could be seen as the apogee of this Banaras period of literary development. Upādhyāya has not only identified his audience but has turned it into a subject for ironic reappraisal; he has drawn on tradition in his choice of form but has laid claim to modernity by his subversion of its content; he has recognised the trend of increasing consumerism and incorporated it as an integral part of his text; and he has done all this as an upper class Brahman writing for and about lower class economic migrants. If nothing else, this reading of his work hints that the study of *laharī* literature can be more entertaining and intellectually rewarding than critical disdain suggests.

Popular Religious Literature

The prominence given above to romantic verse is partly due to its emblematic status as the most brazenly populist literature. Nevertheless, religious works outsold *laharī* works by some margin, and certainly had a wider reach in terms of readers. We have observed above the immense circulation of Bhānubhakta's *Rāmāyana*, whose popularity, currency, and literary quality place it in a category of its own: it reached rural Nepalese audiences that were probably almost untouched by *śṛṅgār* verse. Print-capitalism's engagement with religious writings was potentially more revolutionary than other genres. Translation and publication enabled a bypassing of traditional gateways to sacred knowledge. Direct access to important texts of mainstream *sanātana* Hinduism (albeit generally of the *smṛti* tradition rather than the core *śruti*) were offered to a readership that included non-Brahmans, and indeed non-Hindus. However, this was a double-edged sword: as well as apparently empowering the common devotee in a way similar to *bhakti* poetry, it also enabled the mass promotion of a standardised set of Hindu texts, and standard interpretation of Hinduism. Such publications could thus also serve as normative texts, proselytising for a relatively restricted vision of religious and moral probity.

As noted above, publishers were aware that their readers' interests might stretch across different genres and were alive to the possibility of prompting them to further purchases through well-placed advertisements. The final page of Bābu Śivaprasād's *Madanlaharī* (1928), a classic *śṛṅgār* text, is devoted to an advertisement (luxuriously printed in red and green ink with a decorated border) for a work of greater religious merit, and much greater expense:

Devī bhāgavat! Devī bhāgavat!!

It is a matter of joy that this volume too has now been published in Gorkha vernacular verse. There are many amazing stories in this. The pleasure of poetry (*kavitāko majā*) can be found in this book. There are verses in all metres and *gazals* worth looking at, all filled with sentiment. Once one picks up this book one will be lost in it—it's beyond description. Because this volume consists of one of the eighteen *purāṇas* you will certainly gain religious merit from reading it, and at the same time you will experience great enjoyment. The book is hard-bound and it is available at cost price—we ask just Rs. 4, or Rs. 5 for leather binding.

Here the techniques of publishing and advertising are put to the service of an innovation less obvious but perhaps more radical, the promotion of religious knowledge to the masses. Just as Śikharnāth Suvedī had realised that his audience would need obscure terms explained in accessible Nepali, so does Bābu Śivaprasād explain the place of this *purāṇa*. Moreover, he is willing to promote it with a hyperbole worthy of the cheapest of pulp fiction.⁵⁰ Of course, the idea of presenting classic religious texts to the public in the vernacular was hardly new. This is not only what Bhānubhakta had done for the *Adhyātmā rāmāyaṇa* (upon which his version was based); he himself was following in footsteps of an illustrious Banarasi predecessor, Tulsīdās, whose *Rāmcharītmānas* remains the most widely circulating version of the ancient epic.⁵¹ Yet even Bhānubhakta's overwhelming success did not prevent other Nepali versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* from appearing. For example, Pūrṇānanda Upādhyāya's *Rāmāyaṇako bālun* (1912, published by Viśvarāj Harihar) gave print-permanence to a form of folk drama popular among Bāhuns

50 It seems that Bābu Śivaprasād's approach must have been profitable. Six years later Gaurīśaṅkar Śarmā's *Madanamañjarī* (1934) carried on its back cover the same advert for *Devī Bhāgavat*, reset with the contact address changed to Śarmā's own bookshop, the Bhāskar Pustakālay, Thāṭherī Bajār.

51 Tulsī's work (composed in Avadhī) was also adapted for a Nepali audience, as in Revatīramaṇ Śarmā (1981 v.s.).

and Chhetrīs of Nepal's central hills.⁵² Thus we must confront the complexities inherent in interpreting popular religious literature: even the appearance of *Rāmāyaṇa* reworkings may have done more to promote specifically Nepali folk traditions than to reiterate a homogeneous devotional culture. Meanwhile, there was a range of publications that fell somewhere between the purely religious and the purely secular. Śarmā (1926), for example, advertises a new *Kṛṣṇa pad gajal*, poems addressed to Rādhā providing a convenient sacred framework within which to present *gazals*, a verse form entirely alien to older *bhakti* traditions.

Overall, translations or renditions of the *purāṇas*, and episodes from the epics, were the most popular subjects.⁵³ The *Mahābhārata* was not ignored, giving rise to publications such as Gopīnāth Lohanī's *Nalopakhyaṇ bhāṣya* (1899, Bhārat Jīvan Press) and Kuñj Viās Upādhyāya's *Mahābhārata śalya parva* (1900, Hitachintak Press). More general moral works also had wide currency. 1902 saw the third edition of Śivadatta Upādhyāya's *Jñānmālā* (edited, printed and published in 2,000 copies by Motīrām's collaborator, Rāmkrṣṇa Varmā).⁵⁴ Meanwhile, more technical works, particularly those designed for use by practising *purohīts*, occupied a swathe of the market in keeping with the large number of Brahman students in Banaras or within reach of its booksellers. Such works included astrological guides, calendars, *karma-kāṇḍa* manuals, original Sanskrit texts with Nepali commentaries. Some of these publications rivalled textbooks in the scale of their production and, given the student market, the comparison may not be inappropriate. To cite only a few egregious early examples, Kedārnāth Śarmā's

52 Bandhu (2058 v.s.: 278-80) provides an interesting description of *bālun* performance but does not discuss published versions. Another alternative *Rāmāyaṇa* was Bhoj Rāj Bhaṭṭarāī's *Ānanda rāmāyaṇa* (1902, Viśvarāj Harihar).

53 See Hutt (1985) for OIOC holdings of versions of the *Bhagavad gītā* and the *Bhāgavata purāṇa* (2-4), devotional poetry and "Hindu Hymns" (7-8, 13-14), the *Mahābhārata* (17-18), other *purāṇas* (including seven editions of *Satī sāvitṛī* and six editions of the *Svasthānī vratakathā*), the *Rāmāyaṇa* (including twenty-four editions of Bhānubhakta, mainly complete but some published as individual *kāṇḍas*), and other religious poetry (34-39).

54 On the Hindi writer and publisher Varmā's continuing involvement with Nepali after Motīrām's death see Śarmā Bhaṭṭarāī (2050 v.s.: 223). Puṇyaprasād's later version of the *Jñānmālā* went through a remarkable number of separate editions by a succession of publishers, illustrating the vibrancy of the publishing business: 1917 (himself), 1924 (Divākar Śarmā), 1924 (Śivaprasād urpha Rāghorām), 1928 (Homnāth Kedārnāth), 1939 (Motī Devi). The *Jñānmālā* was also based on the *Mahābhārata*, consisting of a selection of Kṛṣṇa's advice to Arjun.

Dharmārtha parīkṣā (1912) ran to 6,000 copies, the fourth edition of Chirañjīvē Śarmā's astrological handbook *Bele pañchāṅga* (1912) to 5,000, and the sixth edition of Pratāp Dil Sādhu's guide to omen divination *Śakunāvalī* (1913) to 4,000, the latter two published by Viśvarāj Harihar (*SP*).

Finally, we can observe the emergence of a cross-category of technical works that had an interest for the general market reflecting social changes. Thus descriptions of pilgrimage places appear to cater for a more mobile Nepali population. The Gorkhā Pustakālaya produced a two-part *Tīrthāvalī* (1924) whose cover declared that it contained the names and places of all India's famous pilgrimage deities (i.e. their shrines and temples). Its "Bhāratvars" obviously includes Nepal: the guide starts out in Kathmandu with temples at Buṅgamatī, Paśupati, etc., before moving further east to the Tista and Rangit rivers (in Sikkim and Darjeeling). The second part concentrates on India and includes Kashi but the supposedly encyclopaedic handbook seems to have been a selection tailored to Nepali pilgrims in areas with which they had an established relationship. Also popular were varieties of *Tharagotravarāvalī*, works more or less exhaustively cataloguing caste origins and status. Śikharnāth Suvedī's English preface to his version (1915) describes the format:

The book contains four hundred titles of Brahmans and Kshatriyas, fifty of Magars; the distinction between the titles of the four and sixteen caste of Gurun, the description of castes and the origin of the Kumai Brahman, Purbia Brahman, Jaisi Brahman, Hamal, Magar, Gurun, Nagarkoti with their customs. Further on it deals with the virtues and bravery of the Kshatriyas, Magar and Gurun living in the independent sovereignty of the Gurkha Raj and yet obtaining titles, medals and holding diplomas from the British Government on account of their chivalry and truthfulness with their titles, family or subcaste, Sutra, Upa Veda and Veda. This book has been presented most respectfully to the Gurkha chiefs by a well-known poet Shikhar Nath Sharma Subedi of Kathmandoo (at present residing at Panchaganga Ghat, Banaras) with great labour to meet with their necessary demands.

What Rāmprasād Satyāl's 1923 version lacked in detail (only 52 pages compared to Suvedī's 148), it made up for in style, setting much of the information (covering the same range of castes and groups) in continuous *savāī* verse interspersed with some individual short stanzas

and lists.⁵⁵ It is not necessarily possible to draw a neat dividing line between popular and sophisticated religious literature. For example, Gopīnāth Lohanī, introducing his (1924) Nepali *śloka* version of *Satya hariśchandra kathā*, thanked both his “best friend” Motūrām for his great help in making revisions and the aggressively populist publisher Harihar Śarmā in the same breath. Finally, even in the area of religious literature there is some interesting early evidence of non-Brahman authors: Siddhi Bahādūr Basnyāt was famous for his poem on the Tibet war (described below), but he ventured into at least one more genre with his *Śiva pārvatī saṃvād* (1897, Hitachintak Press). This may have been one of the earliest published Nepali religious works by a non-Brahman. One year later, Viśvarāj Harihar published a translation of part of the *Bhāgavata purāṇa* by the distinctly Chhetri-sounding “Subbā Bīr Bahādūr” (*SP*).

Savāi and Military Literature

While the vast majority may still have been illiterate, the tens of thousands of Nepalis who served in the First World War⁵⁶ surely included at least a proportion with basic literacy skills, while several displayed literary talent.⁵⁷ Nepali had practical purposes for the British as the language of command in Gurkha regiments (for example the *Battalion Standing Orders* for the 1-3rd Gorkha Rifles of Almora were published in Nepali in 1899) and it was exploited for publicity purposes. The story of Ratansimh Guruṅ is the tale of a soldier in the 1897/98 Tiraha campaign, supposedly translated from English in 1914 by Subedar Major Amarsimh Thāpā of the 2/5 Gorkha Rifles.⁵⁸ Its first run of a thousand copies was a

55 On Satyāl see Bhaṭṭarāī (2045 v.s.: 157-67), Śarmā Bhaṭṭarāī (2050 v.s.: 198-202).

56 The frequently-cited total of 200,000 Nepalis taking part is challenged by Onta, whose careful analysis (1996c: 104-06) suggests that the true total of combat troops was nearer 89,000. However, recruitment of labourers and other workers may have boosted this figure to the higher number usually claimed.

57 The most remarkable talent to emerge from a military background and with a primarily military audience was the singer and writer Mitrasen, whose work is not discussed here.

58 The cover tells us that the original story appeared in an English magazine but does not specify when or where. Indications in the text such as reference to “our hill people” (Thāpā 1914: 2) imply that the work was in fact composed in Nepali. Doubts over the existence of the original magazine and over the historicity of the “Tirāh” war lead Dikṣit to conclude (1988: 9) that the story is fictional: “This *Outpost* story must indeed be ‘story’ rather than ‘history’. Imaginary. A publicity work undertaken for British self-interest in order to gather recruits—

moderate publishing success with at least one further edition brought out from Dehradun.⁵⁹ The prose is not polished: it suffers from extremely inconsistent spelling and rough punctuation, where indeed there is any punctuation at all (the thirty-six page story consists of forty-three rambling single-sentence paragraphs). The commercial viability of this work must have been founded on factors other than its stylistic flair. Nevertheless, the senior critic Īśvar Barāl (2053 v.s.: 90) is enthusiastic:

Its language is the Nepali of Dehradun. Yet the story is extremely interesting, of the sort that it is impossible not to finish in one sitting. Its tragic unfolding pierces the reader to the quick. As a beautiful example of an event-based (*ghaṭanāpradhān*) story, it contains within it the seeds of the modern story.⁶⁰

What was it that made this short account not only readable but worth a new edition within two years of its appearance in Banaras? The stated purpose of the story (1914: 35-36) implies that the military had a vested interest in seeing it reach a specific audience:

O new recruits! This story has been written so that you may always remember how industriously Ratansimh carried out his service. However much good work you do, if you fall asleep while on sentry duty while in camp or during a war you will be punished just like Ratansimh. Once he had taken the King's shilling Ratansimh may have given his life through his bravery in war but he earned a name for himself within the government and among us Gorkhalis. As long as you are in the service of

'propaganda'." This should invite a revision of Barāl's declaration (2053 v.s.: 90) that "as it is a translation it is not a part of Nepali literature".

59 The first edition was published by Viśvarāj Harihar, who must have smelled a profit in either sales or subsidies. The second edition (Thāpā 1916), also of 1,000 copies, reduced the price from 3 to 2 annas, presumably to make it more affordable to its target audience. It has some minor differences in spellings and layout, perhaps simply the result of resetting.

60 The plot: Ratansimh attempts, despite his unprepossessing physique, to enlist in the army. A lengthy description of his troubles ensues (2-9). The pace picks up with description of his first action in a rear guard under fire; he then leads a bayonet charge and demonstrates his speed and bravery (13-15). After 10 days' fighting a whole brigade is encamped under threat of enemy attack. The crux of the story comes when an officer discovers Ratansimh asleep while on night sentry duty (17). He cannot escape court-martial and the probability of immediate execution. However his commander pleads his general good character and he is instead flogged in front of the other men. In further battles and an ambush there are many losses and Ratansimh runs through enemy fire, getting wounded many times, attempting to save his injured companion. He is evacuated to hospital where he dies after some days.

the government you must carry out your duties very well and, if you manage this, you will gain great respect.⁶¹

If we are to take this explanation at face value then the tale was designed to assist in the instruction of new recruits. Yet—despite Dīkṣit’s (1988) conclusion and Barāl’s suggestion (2053 v.s.: 90) that its aim was to show “an example of an ideal character” to soldiers—the story seems a strange choice for propaganda purposes: with its details of privations and harsh punishments it hardly presents a positive picture of army life. It seems more likely that the narrowness of Ratansiṃh’s escape from execution is related as a warning to others. Ratansiṃh himself does not appear to fit the mould of the ideal hero, performing no egregious feats of bravery and committing a shameful dereliction of duty. If anything, the tale bears the stamp of British military morality: Ratansiṃh was fortunate to have been saved from execution because this allowed him to die an honourable death having redeemed his sin of falling asleep while on duty. This serves as an example of the early adoption of a literary medium as a tool for the propagation of a particular brand of military mythology that is somewhat removed from traditional descriptions of *vīratā* and the panegyrics of early Nepali *vīrkālīn* poetry.

Educational opportunities within the military are demonstrated by further publications. For example, Havalḍār Chintāmaṇi Pāṇḍe, who translated the 2/9 Gurkhas history (1924) at the order of the commanding officer, was the regimental teacher. The translation (with parallel roman and *devanāgarī* text on facing pages throughout)⁶² was designed specifically for didactic purposes, its preface stating that “this has been written to be taught in the regiment’s *pāṭhśālā* and [by showing how] the regiment’s men have performed good work to boost morale and to make them undertake tasks with courage”. Works celebrating military ceremony and officially approved conduct continued to be produced.⁶³

61 Even if the story were a translation this final paragraph would have to be an addition for the Nepali readership.

62 The transliteration was done by another assistant from the regiment, Kisan Siṃh Boharā.

63 These included many editions of the *Khāṃḍo jagāune kabitta*, a description of military ritual which is still recited at Chhetri weddings in mid-west Nepal (Philippe Ramirez, personal communication). Its first published version (by Dhanvīr Bhaṇḍārī, also known as a *savāī* composer) dates to 1897 or before (*SP*), while Puṇyaprasād produced at least one later edition (Adhikārī 1919). It is notable mainly for its strange language, a bizarre mixture of Nepali or Hindi that may be one exemplar of the style of Nepali cultivated in British Indian regiments.

Yet the genre which came to be most closely associated with martial topics and military writers was the *savāī*. Bandhu's two-word description of the genre as "descriptive folk-poetry" (2058 v.s.: 214) cannot be bettered. He notes the main topics of *savāīs*—natural events, social change, wars, and biographies of great people—as well as the fact that Nepalis resident in India, with a particular contribution from the north-east, were largely responsible for their "creation, publication, and reading". Bandhu is not only enthusiastic about the potential of the *savāī*'s natural and direct diction (he finds descriptions of wars "exceptionally lifelike and effective") but offers a valuable encapsulation of the dynamics of production and consumption:

Savāīs can be written in simple, conversational language. With their rhymes they gain *ras*. A skilful writer can invest a *savāī* with the necessary *ras*. *Savāī* reciters can lose themselves in emotion and can declaim it in an uninterrupted flow, and listeners too can devote their attention to it right from beginning to end. (Bandhu 2058 v.s.: 214)

This genre was produced commercially in Banaras but, probably more than any other type of literature, drew in a wide range of authors and readers: this ethnic and geographic diversity certainly owed much to the medium's popularity among soldiers.⁶⁴ Early contributions from India's north-east included Tulāchan Ale's *Mañipurko savāī* (1896); Dhanvīr Bhaṇḍārī's *Abbar pahāḍko savāī* (1894); and *Bhuiṃchāloko savāī* (1897).⁶⁵ Yet this genre managed to embrace more subjects than the historical or martial. The collection *Savāī pachīsā* (1914, Viśvarāj Harihar) merited a print run of 1,000 copies despite its potentially prohibitive cost of two-and-a-half rupees. Presumably it was targeted at a relatively unsophisticated but not penniless audience, for whom 538

Military histories included Jaisī's ([1906] 1981) account of the 8th Gorkha Rifles' battles.

64 This underexplored area would surely form an interesting counterpart to cultural histories of Gurkha soldiers that only deal with what was written *about* them, rather than *by* them.

65 This tale of the Shillong earthquake was later published by Puṇyaprasād (Bhaṇḍārī 1917) in what might be described as typical format for this genre: the slim contents (forty-seven pages of verse in a very large typeface, with only ten lines to the page) enhanced by an attractive cover (a bright green and red design with leaf-and-flower edging which had been recycled from Jaṅgabīr (1916)). *SP* records that this was its second edition. One could hazard that the *Sundar kāṇḍa* of Bhānubhakta's *Rāmāyaṇa*, published by Puṇyaprasād some five days earlier and with the same print run (2,000) and cover price (4 annas), was aimed at an overlapping market.

pages of verse in large typeface (fitting only fourteen lines to the page) might represent a decent investment. The poems cover a range of subject matter, from the religious (“Śiva-pārvatī, Gopinī, Bhakti, Brahmatattva, Viṣṇu, Dharmādharma”), the social and moral (“Sāsuhārī, Duī bhāiko prīti, Upadeś laharā”) to the military, or those which would particularly appeal to a military audience familiar with the campaigns of the north-east (“Maṇipur, Nāgāhīl, Āsām, Bhoṭ”). The collection also included one *savāī* of historical interest (on Jaṅg Bahādur), as well as two on the Shillong earthquake.

Works such as this indicate the ease with which a popular format was adopted and commercialised by Banaras publishers. As with the Shillong earthquake, Puṇyaprasād also added Jaṅgabīr’s (1916) description of the 1899 Darjeeling landslide to his catalogue. That this traditionally framed tale of the heroism of Gurkha soldiers in their rescue efforts should become a vehicle for the profit of a canny entrepreneur is indicative of the ambivalent relations between participants in the emergent Nepali print-capitalism system. The publishing infrastructure developed in Banaras offered new outlets for *savāī* literature and promised to bring these verses to a wide audience in a convenient, and generally affordable format. In doing this they also elevated folk-style rhyming tales to a form of *sthāyī* (permanent) printed literature: the composer of a successful *savāī* could hope for some fame and increased literary respectability. Yet for a publisher such as Puṇyaprasād, the most important verses were surely the rhyming couplets on the back cover that he hoped would carry the message of his wondrous Mahakali oil to new markets. While members of historically non-Nepali-speaking, working/soldiering classes were being offered entry into a previously inaccessible arena, the major beneficiaries of any commercial success remained confined to a small circle of Banaras-based Brahmans.

There is early evidence of a successful cross-over market between *savāī* and *śṛṅgār*: even by 1896, Siddhi Bahādur Basnyāt’s *Bhoṭ kā laḍāiko savāī ra siddhi bahādur kṛt śṛṅgār tilak kā ślok samet* (a *savāī* on the Tibetan war combined with *śṛṅgār* verses, published by Viśvarāj Harihar with a run of 1,000 copies), was in its third edition (*SP*). Separated from the *śṛṅgār* component, this incredibly popular *savāī* enjoyed a further two editions by 1899. Counting only editions preserved in the OIOC (see Hutt (1985: 12-13) for cataloguing details),⁶⁶ Siddhi

66 See Hutt (1985) also for OIOC books on the Darjeeling earthquakes (7), other heroic verse (12-13), and books related to military life (18-19).

Bahādur's *Bhoṭ ko savāī* ran to at least six editions from 1917 to 1928, and a further six under the title *Bhoṭ laḍāīko savāī* by 1939.⁶⁷ The 1926 edition is bundled with a *bāhra māse* poem (pp. 32-35) as well as a collection of odds and ends including *śṛṅgār ślokas* (pp. 36-40). The *savāī* itself is not lengthy (31 pages with only 11 lines to each page) and the style is straightforward, as the opening verse illustrates:

सुन सुन पञ्च होल म केहि भन्छू ।
 अगम संग्रामको सवाई कहन्छू ।
 सब कुरा छोडी एक कुरा भन्छू ।
 भोटमा भये को लडाञ्चि कहन्छू ॥ १ ॥

Listen, listen, o *Pañcha!*⁶⁸ I shall say something.
 I shall tell the *savāī* of a boundless conflict.
 Leaving aside all others I shall say one thing:
 I shall tell of the war that took place in Tibet.

The role of *lāhures* in spreading folk and popular literature is touched upon by Bandhu (2058 v.s.: 105). Yet their contribution to the development of the Nepali language is perhaps most emphatically stated by Dikṣit, who concludes an article on the subject with the unambiguous declaration (2057 v.s.: 62) that “the ownership of this national language Nepali” belongs to *lāhures* no less than to Bāhuns and Chhetris.

Novels, Stories and Tall Tales

This final section brings together, for convenience, a range of narratives, from traditional tales to books which brought accounts of the wider world to Nepali readers. Foremost among these are the popular romances *Vīrsikkā* and *Madhumālatī*, which were both print and oral recitation phenomena (cf. fn. 14). As these well-known tales have been described by other writers (e.g. Śarmā Bhaṭṭarāī 2050 v.s.: 211-16), they need not be revisited in detail here. Sadāśiva Śarmā (who also used the title *Adhikārī*) played a significant role in developing the popular romance genre: while his own novel *Mahendraprabhā* (1902-03) is recognised as the first published Nepali novel, his translation of the popular Hindi novel

67 Bandhu (2058 v.s.: 215) describes Lāl Bahādur Āṁmāsī's *Bhoṭko savāī* as Nepali literature's most celebrated *savāī*. I am not sure how his and Siddhi Bahādur's works are related.

68 The address to the *Pañcha* and the *bhanchhu ... kahanchhu* opening rhyme are standard features.

*Chandrakāntā*⁶⁹ and close association with the production and popularisation of *Vīrsikkā* were perhaps achievements that gained a wider public audience.⁷⁰ Bandhu (2058 v.s.: 294) dates *Vīrsikkā* to 1889-90 and includes it among works that are related to folk stories, but establishes the first true collection of folk tales (“folk stories that are current in folk usage (*lokyavahārmā prachalit lokkathāharū*)”) as the *Dantyakathā* compiled by Bodhvikram Adhikārī in 1939-1940. Thus while it no doubt had an impact on tastes, choices of subject matter, and patterns of writing and reading, folk literature *per se* in a printed form had little role to play in the world of Nepali print. However, this is not to say that there were no efforts to being folk or traditional elements into publications. Starting with Motīrām, some writers had taken an interest in Nepali proverbs, demonstrating the links between folk inspiration and printable literature. Darjeeling’s pioneering priest and publisher Gaṅgāprasād Pradhān produced an interesting collection (1908) of 1,438 proverbs which described themselves as “pure Nepali proverbs”.⁷¹ Kājī Mahāvīr Siṃh Garataulā Kṣatrī (1917) contributed a slimmer and less well organised collection of popular sayings (*Ukhān bakhānko pravāha*) which, despite claiming to be author-published, was produced in 500 copies by Viśvarāj

69 On Devakīnandan Khatrī’s 1891 original, an “astounding success ...which combined the motifs of Rajput heroism with elements and narrative patterns from the Persian and Urdu romance tradition of the *dāstān*”, see Orsini (2002: 211-12).

70 Mohanrāj Śarmā (2040 v.s.: 17) notes that while the authorship of the *Vīrsikkā* is uncertain, Sadāśiva was “connected” to it, and it played a major role in popularising the novel form in Nepal. Śarmā Bhaṭṭarāī (2050 v.s.: 153-59, 178-79) cites *Vīrsikkā* as one of many Nepali narratives derived from Hindi and credits Harihar for bringing it into print, although its popularity dated to the mid-nineteenth century, well before its publication in book form. The *Vīrsikkā* gained such currency that it came to be used as a teaching aid, as in Thakur’s edition (1918) which presents seven chapters in roman characters with English translation: this may have been designed partly to train Nepali recruits in romanised writing but the opening ten pages of “Notes on Khuskura [sic] Grammar” must be for British officers. Vasudev Tripāthī (cited by Śarmā Bhaṭṭarāī 2050 v.s.: 179) acclaims *Vīrsikkā* as an epoch-making work that introduced the “Intermediate Era”. Hutt (1985: 39-40) details some editions of popular romances such as *Vīrsikkā* and *Madhumālātī*.

71 The proverbs are arranged alphabetically; Kārthak (2001: 100-04) reproduces one sample for each letter of the alphabet. The *Mahā okhān bakhān* (1897) attributed to Badrī Nārāyaṇ and published by the Hitachintak Press may be a version of Motīrām’s *Ukhān ko bakhān*, which had been published by Rām Kṣṣṇa Khatrī at the end of 1894. If so, it indicates an early interest in the topic: both books had print runs of 1,000.

Harihar.⁷² The apogee of such investigation and compilation was Puṣkar Śamṣer's (1998 v.s.) extensive two-volume dictionary of sayings and popular usage, *Nepālī ukhān, ṭukkā, vākyāṃśa, vākyapaddhati, ityādiko koṣ*. Some early—if unsophisticated—historical writings (such as Hariprasād Śarmā's (1923) self-published biographical pamphlet on Keśav Vikram Śāh) also started to familiarise the audience with a distinctly Nepali history.

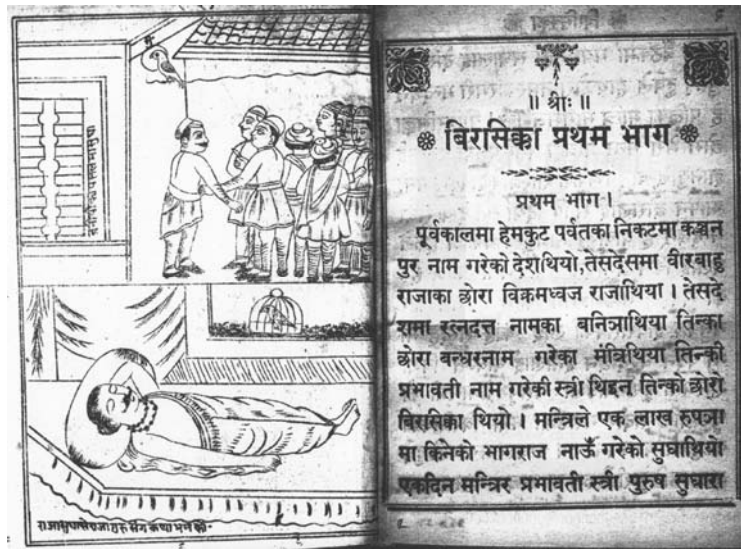


Figure 4: This reproduction of the immensely popular story *Vīrsikkā* (1923) demonstrates two means of appealing to an unsophisticated readership: simple illustrations (the page shown here is the last of a series of 16 that form an extended frontispiece tracing the main outlines of the tale) and large, bold typeface.

Emerging concerns with authentically Nepali topics did not, however, prevent writers from drawing on the wider resources of Indian storytelling, as is well illustrated by Śambhuprasād's successful series of

72 Viśvarāj Harihar failed to censor one subversive entry (1917: 21): "Like distant relatives, like wealth in another's hand, the learning of books is never any use."

Akbar-Birbal tales. The dedicatory verse to the third instalment (Ḍhuṅgyāl 1916) indicates their presumed appeal:

अमृत समान मधुरो रसले भरेको ।
सम्पूर्ण लोक हरका मन खूब परेको ॥
यस्मात्थि प्रेम गरी दिल् धरि वक् सियेला ।
यो 'बीरबल्' कन ग्रहण गरि वक्सियेला ॥

Filled with sweet *ras* equal to nectar,
Extremely popular among all people,
Please offer it love from your heart,
Please take up this 'Bīrbal'.



Figure 5: Even relatively cheap books generally featured attractive covers with intricate border designs, often in red and green ink, as in this five anna third installment of Śambhuprasād Ḍhuṅgyāl's (1916) version of the popular Akbar Birbal stories. Note that publisher Puṅyaprasād's name (and that of his shop) appear in larger print than the author's.⁷³

⁷³ The prominence accorded to the publisher is entirely typical not just of Puṅyaprasād (e.g. Ḍhuṅgyāl n.d.) but also of rivals such as Viarāj Harihar (e.g. Sadāśīva Śarmā 1917).

Later editions (e.g. 1920, n.d.) include a six page introduction which explains the historical context of Akbar-Birbal stories. Meanwhile, other tales were bringing knowledge of the world to Nepali readers. Satyāl's *Joy of the World* (1921: 2) announced its educational goal:

यस्मा रीति विज्ञान नीति सहितै देशादिको वर्णन ।
लेखेकोछु, कृपा गरेर दिल दी हेरीलिनू सज्जन ! ॥

In his descriptions of customs, morals, countries and more,
Have I written; please devote your heart to looking at it, good sirs!

यस्तो पुस्तक आजसम्म कहिले थियेन हामीकहाँ ।
यात्रा आज धरे बसी गरिलिनू सन्सारको लौ जहाँ ॥ १ ॥

Until now we have not had such a book;
So here—take a trip round the world today while sitting at home!

Most descriptions (including Nepal's) start off with a more or less contrived effort to get the precise area of the country to fit into verse. A lengthy description of China (13-27) includes geography, landmarks, food and culture; Japan (27-38) is also given a lot of attention which reflects the interest it had attracted in other Asian countries for its economic and military progress. Yet the collection becomes rapidly inaccurate and entertainingly bizarre. The people of Cambodia (40) are described as Aryan and reportedly speaking a language like Sanskrit. America (67-68) and the United States (69-70) get separate entries, as does California (70), while Finland's entry (75) is wildly misleading:

फिन्ल्यान्डमा तुर्कहरू रहन्छन् ।
इस्लामको धर्म इन्हैरु मान्छन् ॥
कङ्गाल् पनी पण्डित हुन्छ सोही ।
शराबि हूँदैन मनुष्य कोही ॥

There are Turks in Finland,
They follow the religion of Islam.
Their priests are poor as well,
There are no drunkards.

Rāṇā's (1913) earlier factual account of his visit to London for the coronation of George V (published by Satyāl, perhaps inspiring his own geographical efforts) is more sober and more interesting for the empirical basis it gives to subsequent debate about social progress and the perceived backwardness of Nepalis. Written in a diary format, starting from the day his ship docked at Southampton, he presents detailed descriptions of places and institutions such as London Zoo and the

Houses of Parliament. The value of learning is an explicit theme and underlies his interpretation of British success from the outset. As they disembarked on a clear morning (1913: 1), Rāṇā explains to his readers that “This place called Southampton is on Britain’s seashore, here ships berth and here is the dwelling of the goddess Sarasvatī, in other words the light of learning.” He is very taken with the underground system (1913: 38): “Today was the first day that we were able to ride the tube railway. Oh Mother Britain! Thousands of thanks to you for your brave sons who through the power of learning have turned this mortal world into a near heaven and have shown wonders to the world.” Rāṇā was fulfilling a commission from his friends, who had entreated him to record the current state of Britain (*belāyatko hāl*) for them. He disclaims any didactic aims but still manages to provide a clear rationale for his tale:

The purpose of writing this book is not that the Gorkha *jāti* may gain any kind of new education from it, but simply to publish my heartfelt feelings. All sorts of books, accounts of travels across countries and continents, have been produced in Hindi but none has yet been made in our Nepali (Gorkha) language. For this reason I have, as far my miserable intellect permitted, written this small *London Coronation Journey* book and dedicate it respectfully to you.

These works do not represent the sum total of early Nepali engagement with world travel and geography (a description of Jaṅg Bahādur’s 1850 visit to Britain was also published; Pārasmaṇi translated and serialised Gadādhara Sīṃh’s *Vilāyat yātrā*—first printed in the Allahabad Hindi journal *Strī-darpaṇ*—in *Chandrikā*). Yet, aside from their inherent interest, they demonstrate that some Banaras popular publishing was enabling Nepalis to start locating themselves in a wider world. Thus different forms of narratives brought to a reading public narratives that included old-fashioned Hindi-Urdu modelled romances, modern works influenced by developments in the South Asian novel, and some tall tales from the further reaches of the globe with which to entice pioneering Nepali armchair travellers.

Publishing, Promoting, Advertising

काशी जी मा पाइने यावत माल र हारा काखानामा छापिएका पुस्तक घडी औठी माला दवाई अष्टेरिया चाँदि का भांडा बर्तन गहना रामनामि र छोट बनारसी कपडा पाइँछ सूचिपत्र मगाई हेर्नु होस, गुनकेशरी को अत्यन्त सुगन्धीत तेल ४ औन्स को सीसी के १) माहाभारत वनपर्व श्लोकवद्ध के ४) बेपारि लाई धेरै खया कमिशन मिल्ल, नेपाल का श्री ५ सरकार श्री ३ सरकार का अपूर्व दर्शनिय

78 Rhoderick Chalmers

औठी १) चादि को ३)१०) र. को पुस्तक किन्नेलाई असल जेवि घडी इनाम मिल्ल स्तोत्र भजन आरति हरूभय कोटूलो सूचिपत्र मगाइ हेनु होस्.

Order a catalogue and see all the products that are available in Kashi: factory-printed books, watches, rings, necklaces, medicine, ashtrays, silver containers, dishes and jewellery, *rāmnāmī*, printed Banarasi cloths, extremely fragrant narcissus oil at Rs. 1 per four-ounce bottle, the verse *Mahābhārata vanaparva* for Rs. 4 (traders will get many rupees' commission), amazing new picturesque rings of Nepal's King and Prime Minister for Rs. 1 (Rs. 3-10 for silver). Book-buyers will receive a prize of a genuine pocket watch. Order and look at a large catalogue with prayers, hymns and worship.

(*Premtaraṅga, māyālahari* 1911: back cover)

Alongside the growth and refinement of popular forms, the other major development in Banaras publishing was the introduction of new commercial techniques. The advertisement from publishers Viśvarāj Harihar reproduced above illustrates not only this association but also a typically sophisticated scheme of promotional incentives, tying book-buying to the purchasing of other consumer goods.⁷⁴ Of course, this was not a uniquely Nepali phenomenon. The birth of printing in Europe was also led by entrepreneurs: Johann Gutenberg was a businessman with a successful line in mirrors, while William Caxton drew on commercial acumen fostered as a cloth-trader in Bruges when he established his press in Westminster. And for the prominent *chhāyāvādī* poet Sumitrānandan Pant, one of the benefits of *khaḍī bolī* Hindi over Brajbhāṣā was that it offered “a market for novelties and ‘consumer goods’ (*upabhogya padārtha*) from all over the country and abroad” (Orsini 2002: 152).⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the commercialisation of the Nepali publishing industry is a particular empirical case, and one which can inform our understanding of literary, social, and economic developments among Nepalis in India and Nepal. The economic viability of publishing depended on a number of factors, including basic elements such as the cost of printing and

74 It was Harihar Śarmā who packed off Pārasmaṇi's father Bhāgyamaṇi Nevār to the Darjeeling area with a load of books—including one copy of Bhānubhakta's *Rāmāyaṇa* which he sold to a Newar working in Kurseong's Clarendon Hotel—to “promote them” (Pradhān 1978: 20). Pārasmaṇi (Pradhān 1993: 109) claims that he ultimately sold thousands of copies of Nepali books and this sparked the love for Nepali which he passed on to his children: “the load of books which my father received as a gift was small, but there was a great power in it.”

75 This is from the lengthy introduction to his influential collection *Pallav* (1926) which was a wide-ranging manifesto for *chhāyāvād* poetry and *khaḍī bolī*.

distribution.⁷⁶ The primary focus of this section is marketing and advertising, which offer evidence that enables us to build a more accurate picture of the relationships between producers and consumers of literature.

A striking feature of many advertisements is that books are readily grouped with other consumer items, especially items that are slightly luxurious but not perhaps beyond the aspirations of a large number of readers. Many publishers—even individuals such as Śikharnāth Suvedī—refer to their “factories” (*kārkhānā*), a term which almost expressly negates any romantic image of writing as art for art’s sake. We may recall Anderson’s assertion (1991: 34) that “in a rather special sense, the book was the first modern-style mass-produced industrial commodity”; compared to sugar or textiles, the individuality of each book is remarkable, “a distinct, self-contained object, exactly reproduced on a large scale.”

Indeed, even the dividing line between literature and advertising is blurred: just as literature now comes with adverts, so do lists of products come with religious verses. Reader-consumers, even of popular literature, are expected to be sophisticated judges, willing to spend money on books if satisfied (or tempted) by both their content and their physical presentation. Thus *Prem ras laharī* published by R.J. Śarmā (1926) carries on its back cover an advertisement for *Madan vinod laharī* which touches all the appropriate bases:

The songs of all the *laharīs* which have been published in our Nepali language to date to allow [readers] to sink themselves in waves of bliss are like roses blooming in a garden. I have brought out a *Madan vinod laharī*, in line with current literary tastes (*vartamān sāhityamā milne hisāb sita*), without indecency (*dherai phohor kurā narākhī*), with elegant songs and various types of entertaining moods, because none of the *laharīs* published so far show any literary merit for their ornamentation or *śṛṅgār*. This volume which will meet anyone’s standards is in sixteen

76 Even a preliminary survey reveals a large number of presses in use in early twentieth century Banaras for Nepali printing, among them the Satyanām Press, Maidāgin; Hitacintak Press, Rāmghāṭ; Jyotiṣprakāś Press, Viśveśvargañj; Sarvahitaiṣī Press, Nīchībāg; Kāśī Nāgeśvar Press; George Printing Works, Kalbhairau; Mahādevprasād Kalyāṇ Press, Bāgsundardās; The Himalayan Press (of Madho Prasad Regmi), Pañchagaṅgā; Dūrgā Press, Rāmghāṭ. Nepali printing was not confined to Banaras: O’Malley (1907: 33) observed that “there are presses in Darjeeling owned, managed, and worked entirely by Nepalese.”

parts, printed in a handy size for carrying in a coat pocket—a coral tree among flowers. Lovers of songs will surely purchase it.

Here again, boundaries are blurred: the work is praised both for its literary qualities and, in the same breath, for its convenient pocket size. Most significantly, such advertisements speak to us of nascent popular critical paradigms. From a period before the professionalisation of Nepali literary criticism, these represent publishers' understandings of the value

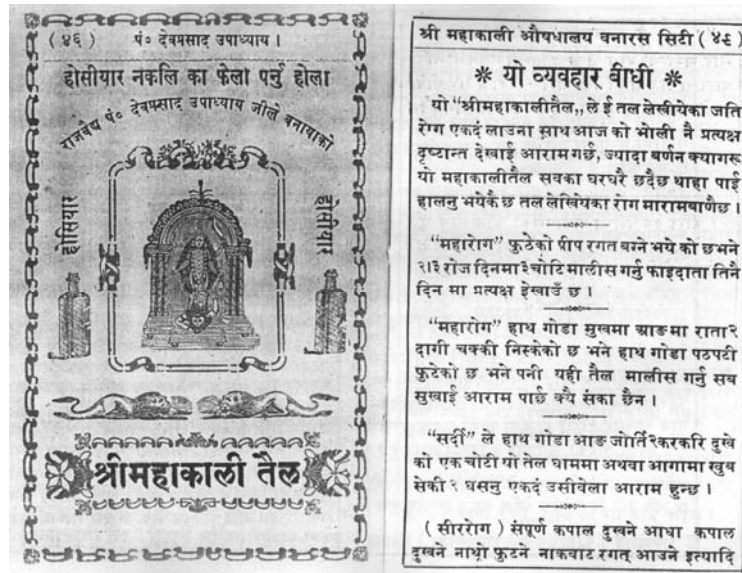


Figure 6: Oils of various kinds were among the most popular products to be advertised; publishers sometimes appear to have devoted more time to their promotion than to book production and the market was fiercely contested. This notice warns against counterfeit Mahākālī oil (one of the best known brands) and also offers guidance on its usage for a range of ailments (*Sūchīpatra* 1916: 46–49). The explanations, praise, and warnings continue for five pages. Apart from Devprasād Upādhyāya himself, Puṇyaprasād is named as the sole distributor (1916: 53).⁷⁷

⁷⁷ At least by 1925, Viśvarāj Harihar had also moved in on this market and produced their own catalogue for the Gorkhā Pustakālaya. The back cover of Bhaṭṭarāi (1925) carries an ornate advertisement in red and green ink with an engraved



Figure 7: Some of the eclectic range of products promoted by Devprasād Upādhyāya: a “genuine electric ring”, a diamond ring proudly advertised as a cheap fake which “nobody will recognise”, a ring of rhino’s horn which is recommended as a means to *mokṣa* for the ancestors of all good Hindus, and an apparently Swiss watch (*Sūchīpatra* 1916: 32-33).⁷⁸

Mahākālī illustration in red. The ailments for which it is efficacious apparently include headaches, severe colds, nosebleeds, all types of ear diseases, deafness, hand and foot pains, cracked skin, gout, cuts and burns, persistent boils, ringworm, mange, wind, white leprosy, aching waist, cow and buffalo wounds, foot and mouth disease, and hundreds more... those who want a more extensive list are referred to his catalogue. There is a complicated system of commissions for bulk orders, for example purchase of six bottles at Rs. 15 entitles one to “a railway watch worth Rs. 8”. Writer/publisher Rudraprasād Śarmā Ḍhakāl (1932) of Assighāt also offers Mahākālī oil (alongside medicines, hats, coats, pants, glasses, all sorts of Nepali books and goods from across the whole of India ... and a catalogue). Writer/publisher Rāmprasād Satyāl had long been battling in this crowded market: Rāṇā (1913) devotes two pages to advertising his “yoginī” oil, which he claims is very popular among the rich and nobility of Nepal. He defends his product with an implicit attack on the dirty marketing practices of his rivals: “Unlike so many others I shall not deceive everyone by praising myself with falsehoods in my notices. You may know what I say to be the truth.”

78 On the entry of foreign consumer goods into Rana Nepal see Liechty (1997). In his memoirs, Basnet (2043 v.s.: 6-7), whose father was in government service in Raṅgeli (in the Tarai district of Moraṅg), reports on the astonishment of locals when (ca. 1905) his father brought back a gramophone from Calcutta, where he was frequently dispatched on business. A crowd would gather at the office in the evenings to hear records by Hindi/Urdu singers.

systems according to which their readership might assess their products. While some publishers doubtless misjudged public tastes, those who were successful had their estimates of popular demand justified by sales. Indeed, the stock terms in which advertisements describe the reader's inevitable captivation stretched across genres. Padmaprasād's marketing (Pradhān 1918: back cover) of a new collection of Akbar and Birbal stories features the same tropes that we have seen above employed to sell the *Devī bhāgavat*:

Printed! New!! Just out!!!

Dear sirs! Until now only two parts of the *Akbar-birbal-vilās* with the usual stories have been published and many good stories have been left out. Now after much effort four parts have been prepared, filled with many types of Nepali songs (*nepālī bolīko gānāharū*)—*gajal*, *ṭappā*, *ṭhumrī*, *horī*, etc.—about Akbar's concubines and Tansen. Once you pick up this book you won't even notice hunger and thirst and the stories are such that I can hardly describe them! Once you've seen the book you will be praising them yourself. Order one copy and repay my effort—this is my request to you!

The parallels are not surprising: religious publishing was fundamentally implicated in the birth of the Nepali commercial book industry. Tulsidās did not have a publisher, but it is highly unlikely that Bhānubhakta would have gained his *ādīkavi* status were it not for the efforts of Motīrām and subsequent promoters. Indeed, Motīrām's dedicated efforts to establish Bhānubhakta prefigure the work of the Banaras publishers featured here. Significantly, he understood that publishing involved more than simply producing in print. Bhānubhakta's public needed a picture of the poet and his life, the product—in the argument's most cynical reduction—needed a trademark image to establish the brand. His biography aimed to provide that picture, even if he had to take significant liberties with his limited factual knowledge of Bhānubhakta's life. And the "picture" was a literal as well as metaphorical concern, for it was in the first edition of the biography that the now famous drawing of Bhānubhakta first appeared, despite its doubtful authenticity.⁷⁹ Influenced as he was by close association with the

79 Not only are many episodes described in this work likely to have been invented but it seems probable that Motīrām himself wrote several short poems which he attributes to Bhānubhakta. His publication of the *Rāmāyaṇa* also involved substantial editing, though it is not clear how much (Hutt 1988: 124-25; for an intriguing parallel in the world of Urdu poetry see Pritchett 1994: 49). Editing the

remarkable Hariśchandra, it is perhaps not surprising that Motīrām was alive to the concept of publisher-as-impresario.

Producing translations and adaptations of sacred texts provided the most common means of entry into the publishing trade. We have already encountered Śikharnāth Suvedī's *Śṛṅgārdarpaṇ* (1917) and *Tharagotravarāvalī* (1915); yet among his many works he was most successful with a particularly popular commentary (*bhāṣya*) on the *Rāmāśvamedha* (Śarmā 2051 v.s.: 49); he also ran a bookshop, the Nepālī Pustakālay, and was active in promoting his own work, as well as himself. The title page of Suvedī's *Akṣaramālā* (1913) highlights his multiple talents as "composer, compiler and publisher" of thirteen varied books. Meanwhile, the back cover of the same work provides a list of the works "made and printed" by Suvedī, generally appending a neat summary to each. Thus the 9 anna *Tharagotravarāvalī* is "a necklace of jewels of Gorkhali brothers' *jātidharma*"; the expensive (Rs. 2) *Bṛhatsvasthānī* is "unprecedentedly worth viewing (*apūrva darśanīya chha*)", and well-heeled customers can pay eight annas more for a binding that "no gentleman in Kashi has yet been able to use". All of these are available from his own bookshop, here referred to as the Kāśī Gorkhā Pustakālaya, with various incentives—commission of two annas to the rupee, free postage, further discounts for those purchased directly from "my factory".

Another colourful character on the Banaras scene was Subbā Homnāth Khativaḍā.⁸⁰ Originally of Kathmandu (and King Trailokya's "milk-brother", i.e. the son of his wet-nurse), he fled Nepal for political reasons and devoted the first years after his arrival in Banaras in 1881-82 to plotting.⁸¹ In an advertisement on one of his publications (*Śṛṅgārdarpaṇ*, 1928) he describes himself as "the king of verse books that have

second edition of Motīrām's biography, Sūryavikram rejected the picture and questioned its provenance, although by 1940 he was forced to accept it. For discussion of the origins of this image see Onta (1999: 90-93).

80 Homnāth generally published in collaboration with his son Kedāmāth (see Bhaṭṭarāī (2045 v.s.: 209-18)).

81 Śarmā provides some basic biographical details but makes little mention of his publishing activities. He points out that his *Rāmāśvamedha*, although it came to be seen as the eighth *kāṇḍa* (section) of Bhānubhakta's *Rāmāyaṇa*, was not as popular as his Nepali verse adaptation of the *Virāt parva* of the *Mahābhārata*. He claims (2051 v.s.: 48) that the popularity of this 1000-*śloka* work is demonstrated by the fact that Nepali people "still recite the *Kālikāstuti* from it morning and evening". See Bhaṭṭarāī (2045 v.s.: 16-27) for more details and two poems.

now been in circulation for forty years”.⁸² Homnāth was one of the leaders in publicity and marketing among the Nepali publishers of the period. He understood the basic rule of self-publicising: that he should make it impossible for his readership to forget his name. Some of his books (e.g. *Māyālaharī premlatā* 1928 and *Śṛṅgārdarpaṇ* 1928) feature running titles proclaiming his name at the top of every page. *Māyālaharī premlatā* offers further examples of his techniques: no space is wasted, with the remainder of the final page of the first section utilised for an brief notice reminding readers of the availability of his books—“printed on good, clean paper”—in both Calcutta and Banaras. Meanwhile his interest in the Hitaiṣī Company of Calcutta is underlined by the full back cover illustrated advertisement for their watches, on offer at special bulk discount rates. In his 1925 edition of Bhānubhakta’s *Rāmāyaṇa* Homnāth included a special three-page advertising insert, with the products promoted ranging from books to watches and oils. Homnāth’s approach to publicity, his understanding of the relationships between supplier and customer, between culture and commerce, between the abstract benefits of education and the concrete delights of material consumption, are exemplified in one forthright, direct exhortation to his market (Homnāth Kedārnāth n.d.: last page):

You customers yourselves had looked at and read the books printed by various traders but as no one else had books as pure and genuine (*śuddha sakalī*) as those printed by the owner of the Hitaiṣī Company, Subbā Homnāth Kedārnāth, you lakhs of Gorkhali brothers, *paṇḍits* and *purohīts* have written that ‘we have not been able to read pure Gorkha books, so please will you print all books, correcting them yourself’. In accordance with the command of lakhs of Gorkha brothers, at a cost of thousands of rupees, having employed other great *paṇḍits*, making them very pure, we have printed [books] on good, shiny, smooth, white, strong paper, adding fine pictures. Now when you yourselves order books, ask specifically for those printed by Homnāth Kedārnāth; while buying them there [in person], look for and buy books with the name of Homnāth Kedārnāth.

82 This would imply that he had been publishing since 1888 or thereabouts (which other sources make plausible) but this has been impossible to confirm. The *Statements of Publications* for the third quarter of 1895 include his *Rāmāśvasmedha*, but this was published and copyrighted by Māyā Gaj Kumārī. According to his grandson Narendra Śarmā Khativaḍā, Homnāth’s brother Taṅka Prasād established his Hitaiṣī Company in Calcutta in 1886 and Homnāth started publishing shortly afterwards (Martin Gaenzle and Nutan Sharma, personal communication).

Looking beneath the hyperbole, we can see here an encapsulation of some of the arguments proposed in the preceding sections: the combined or overlapping audience of general “brothers” and *paṇḍits* and *purohīts*, the development of a personal relationship between producer (or even brand) and consumer, the emphasis on the physical qualities of the printed product (five adjectives for the paper alone!). It is only in his final paragraph (on this page at least⁸³) that Homnāth nods to the worthy cause of learning, although his brief acknowledgement of this ideal is rapidly tempered by a none-too-subtle reminder that his customers must accept the duty of repaying his investment in this cause:

Considering that Gorkhalis should be able to read pure books in the Gorkha language, and that learning should be propagated among Gorkhalis, we have invested thousands of rupees and printed all books as commanded by you lakhs of brothers. Now may you too bear in mind that it is your duty to order books in our name and to check for our name when buying books. What more can I write?

The successful publishing house run in Puṇyaprasād Upādhyāya’s name was set up and managed by his father Padmaprasād. Some details of the life and works of this remarkable man (as narrated by Bhaṭṭarāi 2037 v.s.: dha-na) are instructive. He had some dozen acknowledged wives and was known in Banaras as “jvāsāheb” (son-in-law or brother-in-law). As well as maintaining his publishing business, he also ran a gambling den and a brothel. He had all sorts of money-making schemes and a determination to enrich himself but little literary inclination. His son, who became involved with the publishing work, did develop writing skills but the real author of works in Padmaprasād’s name was probably Śambhuprasād Ḍhuṅgyāl, who had become involved with the business through force of economic circumstance.⁸⁴ Nonetheless,

83 The sales pitch also continues on the back cover, where all eighteen *parvas* of the *Mahābhārata* are offered individually at prices ranging from Rs. 1 to Rs. 3 (with some still in press): “These *parvas* of the *Mahābhārata* are not like those which others have had done and printed. One glance at [their] *ślokas* and contents (*kurā harū*) will tell you so.”

84 Bhaṭṭarāi (*ibid.*) claims that works in Puṇyaprasād, Bharat Prasād, and others’ names were also Ḍhuṅgyāl’s. As Bharat Prasād was only just born, he suspects that Ḍhuṅgyāl was engaged in straightforward flattery of his employer. Ḍhuṅgyāl had effectively been forced into exile and arrived in Banaras in 1920-21 looking for work just as Padmaprasād was searching for someone able both to run the publishing business and write books on demand (*ibid.*: jha-ṭa). Given the competition among publishers “finding someone as talented as Śambhuprasād Ḍhuṅgyāl, the Puṇyaprasād publishing house also made great progress. In

Bhaṭṭarāī (2037 v.s.: na) is generous in his appreciation of Padmaprasād’s indirect contribution to literary Nepali: “in whoever’s name these works were printed, by giving shelter to the destitute Ḍhuṅgyāl and encouraging him to bring out the skill and capability within him in the Nepali language, Padmaprasād and Puṅyaprasād’s contribution in this context must be considered as memorable.” Padmaprasād’s publishing business came to an abrupt and dramatic end in 1927 with his entanglement in the Rāj Kumārī murder case (2037 v.s.: ra), a major public scandal in which he was accused of procuring Nepali girls for immoral purposes.



Figure 8: The “publisher” Paṇḍit Puṅyaprasād Upādhyāya as illustrated on the frontispiece of Ḍhuṅgyāl (1916).⁸⁵

comparison with other publishers, the books of Puṅyaprasād started to become more weighty”. Śambhuprasād’s relationship with the house dates to before his arrival in Banaras: while his early poems were published by Viśvarāj Harihar and his *Śakuntala nāṭak* by Krishna Madho & Co., Puṅya Prasād had brought out his Akbar and Birbal Stories from at least 1916 (*Statements of Publications*).

85 This engraving also appears in other works, for example Pradhān (1918).

Viśvarāj Harihar were probably the foremost Nepali publishers in terms of sales and techniques, their flair for self-promotion frequently displaying itself in an amusing manner.⁸⁶ One of their early commercial success stories was Gangadhar Shastry Dravid's *English Guide* for Nepali students, of which the second part had already entered a fifth edition with a print run of 2,000 in 1911.⁸⁷ The sample phrases ended up peppered with some barely concealed plugs for their own business, as in this exchange (1911: 19-20):

Is this drama [*Śakuntalā*] translated into the Nepali language?
 Yes. Get one copy of it from Pandit Hari Har Sharma of Ramghat, Benares.
 What is the price of one copy?
 You shall have to pay only one rupee for a copy. The story of the drama of 'Sakuntala' is very interesting indeed.

As if promoting literature to students was not enough, a further plug (1911: 28) highlights the long-standing connection between bookselling and the pharmacy business in Banaras: "The medicines sold at the shop of Pandit Hari Har Sharma of Ramghat, Benares, are very efficacious".⁸⁸ Harihar Śarmā did, however, make a more serious contribution to high literature as publisher of several issues from the second volume of *Sundarī (Statements of Publications)*.⁸⁹ Of course, the frantic publicity

86 Books published in Divākar Śarmā's name were also Viśvarāj Harihar's: Śarmā was employed as the manager of their "office". Viśvarāj Harihar's names still appear on covers as the owners of the Gorkhā Pustakālaya, invariably more prominently than Divākar's (e.g. *Vīrsikkā* (1923), *Tīrthāvalī* (1924)).

87 Although he wrote several books for Nepalis, information on Dravid is lacking (cf. Śarmā Bhaṭṭarāī (2050 v.s.: 222-23)).

88 The inside back cover of this primer also carried an advert for Viśvarāj Harihar's other wonder medicine, *kastūrī chūrṇa*, which balances his catalogue by curing almost any complaint that cannot be treated with Mahākālī oil: stimulating the appetite and eliminating stomach-aches, colic, indigestion, etc.

89 He also donated to the Banaras Nepali Library (*Chandra* 1(7): 19-20). While cynics might contend that his contribution of one copy of each of his publications must have been a useful exercise in public relations, he maintained an interest in the library, attending its fourth anniversary meeting (*Chandrikā* 2(3): 87). This and other evidence—such as Satyāl's (1921) dedication of his book to the "charitable, generous, multilingual Paṇḍit Harihar"—suggest that Harihar had more literary leanings than Viśvarāj. Śarmā Bhaṭṭarāī accords him prominence among producers of prose narratives and lists some of his works (2050 v.s.: 177-80, 267).

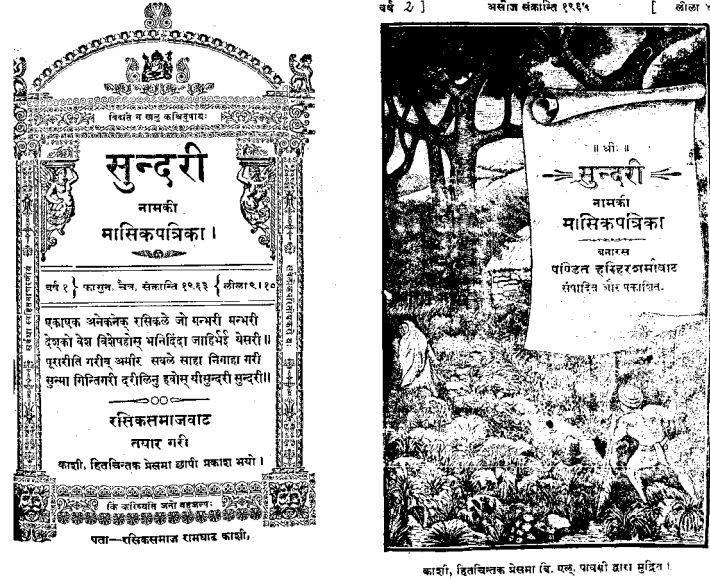


Figure 9: Techniques developed in populist publishing made their impact on highbrow publications. When Harihar Śarmā took over as editor and publisher of the literary journal *Sundarī* in 1908, he gave the cover design a dramatic makeover. The later version is on the right; apart from featuring new artwork, it displays his name prominently.

and promotion also reflected healthy competition among Nepali publishers. Or sometimes not so healthy: a successful publication could be “stolen” by a rival publisher and reissued. This is what appears to have happened to Viśvarāj Harihar’s *Āditya hṛday bhāṣāṅkā* (Śarmā 1985 v.s.): the near identical text appears in an edition by Homnāth (n.d.), which carries his name prominently at the top of each right-hand page. The theft and unauthorised reproduction of successful works (or thinly disguised version of them) was a constant feature of the competitive book market.⁹⁰ Although Banaras would dominate Nepali publishing for

90 We have observed several examples in the preceding sections. The three volumes of Revatīrajan Śarmā (1981 v.s.) each bear on the cover the explicit warning “Let no other gentleman print this”. Śarmā was not backed by a major publisher: his books were published by Śivadatta Śarmā (of Dugdha Vināyak) but they were also available in Kathmandu from Gaurī Ghāṭ and Makhantol.

decades, the models developed there inspired offshoots of the industry to take root elsewhere.⁹¹ The project of popularising and commercialising the publishing industry had undoubtedly succeeded: readers were not only reading, but consuming literature and being drawn into a market that played its own part in defining a new public sphere.

Conclusion

The survey presented in this article has, as indicated at the outset, made only passing reference to canonical, critically-praised works of literature published in Banaras. Nevertheless, this study is highly pertinent both to the development of more aesthetically refined writing and to the wider formation of Nepali public culture. The case may not be proven, but there are significant circumstantial indications that the readerships of populist and highbrow works overlapped. There is a wealth of persuasive evidence that the emergent book industry made its money and built up its market largely through the sale of basic textbooks and a range of lowbrow publications; this then subsidised other literary efforts and provided authors with established models of marketing and distribution. Even the Nepal government depended on the Banaras publishers: production of the Gorkhā Bhāṣā Prakāśinī Samiti's *Gorakhā-patrabodh* (Āchārya Dīkṣit 1979 v.s.a) was managed by Puṇyaprasād—whose Mahākālī medicine shop also gets a mention on the title page—and printed at the Durgā Press. Writing in *Chandra* as a contemporary commentator, *Gorkhāpatra* editor Kṛṣṇachandra Śarmā Aryāl (1915: 4) praised the work of “philanthropic (*lokopakāri*)” Viśvarāj Harihar in establishing the Durgā Press as significant for the creation of a large-scale publishing infrastructure. Mass-market publications made a serious and fundamental contribution to the constitution of a Nepali public sphere. In their pages we can discern the first indications of a shared and articulated sense of Nepaliness, the exchanging of experiences and traditions, the basis for a

91 For example, the founders of the Gorkha Agency within Nepal (Āryāl and Seḍhāim 1917) set out the organisation's purpose in terms which indicate clearly the influence of the Banaras publishing/trading business model: “for the benefit of all the populace (*prajā-bandhu*), we have established an office by the name of ‘Gorkha Agency’ ... All sorts of work are undertaken here: ordering goods from various countries and preparing goods to order, sales and purchasing, provision of travelling agents and any work in accordance with an appropriate request.” Although the notice appeared in the first volume of the Agency's *granthamālā* (which is devoted to analysing the state of the Nepali language), books clearly take second place to general goods in the business plan.

jātīya jīvan, tentative steps towards a common Nepali social consciousness. For the first time, young recruits from across Nepal could be reading printed versions of Bāhun-Chhetrī folk traditions, while Banaras Brahmans (also including a student population drawn from across Nepal) could be reading of *lāhure* exploits from Manipur to Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, popular literature—however much frowned upon by many contemporary and later critics—directly influenced the development of high literature. Introducing Motīrām’s biography of Bhānubhakta, Sūryavikram devotes a full page (Bhaṭṭa 1927a: 3-4) to the need to revive and make use of Nepali’s *jātīya chhanda* (national/ethnic metres), especially *savāī*. In fact, he is speaking more of rehabilitation among litterateurs than revival: we have seen that *savāī* was a healthy and flourishing format. He singles out Dharaṇīdhar for praise in turning to this topic but urges poets to work hard to rescue and make glorious the *jātīya chhandas*. This reflects an important aspect of modern Nepali literature as it was being formed in the early twentieth century: it sought to be both comparable to other South Asian literatures and yet to retain a unique essence. This distinctiveness, Sūryavikram argued, could be found in *jāti* heritage but had to be refined. As his metaphor has it, folk metres are like copper pots: they must be polished before they will shine. This neatly encapsulates desire for the authenticity of Nepali ethnic experience without sacrificing commitment to sophisticated stylistic values. The development of such an aesthetic owed much to the pioneering work that we have observed in popularising folk and regional formats, and even rediscovering Nepali proverbs as a topic for research.

This article has further highlighted various aspects of the early development of Nepali publishing in Banaras in an attempt to unravel the story of nascent Nepali print-capitalism. In particular, it has sought to understand the dynamics of an expanding readership which publishers hoped to serve and exploit by refining the practical skills of printing, publishing and distribution, and by introducing novel marketing techniques. It has also hinted at the diversity of this period’s vigorous and idiosyncratic writings, while demonstrating that success in Nepali publishing at this time depended on a combination of tradition and innovation. Popular literature drew on long traditions in different genres—be it through translation, adaptation or imitation—as well as expanding into entirely new forms such as the short story, and expressing new attitudes to society and morality.

Despite its manifest commercial success, however, there remained one overriding limitation of the Nepali literary scene in Banaras: caste and class domination by educated Brahmans who were not reflective of their changing audience. They managed to cater to popular tastes but there is little evidence of a democratisation of the literary system allowing “self-expression of lower groups”. Nor was the Banaras Nepali community structured in the same way as the much larger Nepali society of Nepal itself, or that of the Darjeeling area. Yet writing from Banaras engaged with topical issues and established the channels for distribution of a new rhetoric of social improvement which would shape the emerging Nepali public consciousness. Further radical changes in the role of Nepali occurred as it was adopted by a new generation of activists such as Sūryavikram, Dharaṇīdhar and Pārasmaṇi in Darjeeling and became a medium more representative of an ethnically diverse Nepali society. An increasingly assertive, sophisticated, and productive Nepali public sphere started to interest itself in local and national politics, both Nepali and Indian. At the same time as it enabled agitation for social and political change, its discursive potential was being used to address fundamental questions of Nepali identity and community. While the pulp fiction which nourished their businesses has earned little but critical disdain, the pioneering paṇḍit-publishers of Banaras laid the foundations for the print-based public culture which would shape modern Nepali society.

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