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Readings in Hindi Literature

Candrakanta – Bringing the *Dastan* Closer Home

The advent of western literary genres in India was characterized by the same

complications that were seen in the fields like reform and education – an ideal state of affairs, an

untainted past, was achieved by rigorous application of new western conceptual categories to

traditional knowledge. Efforts were made to preserve tradition from an alien culture while

incorporating certain aspects of the same culture to ensure development. How did the novel, as a

feature of modernity, insert itself in the literary idiom in India?

As an outcome of the kind of modernity brought in by the colonial encounter, the modern

novel in India was characterized by a mission. The ornamental, vernacular verse style of older

literature was replaced by standard Hindi prose which prided itself on its didactic nature. This

was a dramatic and enforced departure from the earlier genres present in India. Literature took an

amalgamated form as modern and pre – modern aspects were integrated in an unprecedented

manner, taking in the genre of modern western literature, but fusing it with indegenous tales in a

way which was not seen in the western novel.

Even as Hindi as a language itself was a new development of the colonial period, early

modern Hindi literature in India had several new functions to perform.[1] It was meant to develop

an established Hindi canon, propagate Hindi as the language of Indian nationalism and to

educate the masses about the recent sociopolitical developments. In other words, it was supposed

to entertain as well as foment revolution at the same time. Add to it the fact that the printing

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[1] McGregor 197, page 63.

press was an expensive new advancement of the era, and therefore practical financial considerations were also significant. Few early Hindi novels were that multipurpose.

Candrakanta and Modern Hindi Literature

The first vastly successful Hindi novel, Devakinandan Khatri's *Candrakanta,* belonged to the generation of modern Hindi literature. Mainstream Hindi novelists of the era often critiqued its reliance on Hindustani, the blend of Urdu and Hindi used by common folk, as opposed to their own usage of standard Sanskritized Hindi for writing Hindi novels. Ironically, it is said that thousands of people learnt to read Hindi (in Devanagari script) in order to read the novel.[2] *Candrakanta* singlehandedly created a tradition of popular novel reading in India and was instrumental in the propagation of Hindi language reading. The other critique of *Candrakanta* was the fact that it did not agree with the modern notion of purposeful literature, of the explication of emotions through the characters of a novel. Many critics, therefore, are reluctant of even including *Candrakanta* under the rubric of modern literature, simply because it apparently does not have a coherence with real life.[3] Some have lamented its failure to raise social issues because of Khatri's apparent abandonment of serious literature.[4] However, a literary analysis of *Candrakanta* reveals that although it took birth within the *dastan* tradition, it was characterized by the inclusion of such modernizing elements in the *dastan* narrative which led to manifold advances in the journey of the modern hindi novel. This paper will explore how *Candrakanta* straddled two worlds, that of the modern novel and of the *dastan* by means of a comparison between *Candrakanta* and the popular Urdu dastan of the era, *Dastan – e – Amir Hamza*, within the context of the western and westernized novel.

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[2] Devakinandan Khatri quoted in Ray 2002, page 70.
[3] Ramchandra Shukla, quoted in Ray 2002, page 74.
[4] Sharma 2000, page 22.

As Bakhtin says, the novel is capable of accomodating other genres, and other literary genres which belong to the age of the novel find themselves novelized in many ways.[5] By the standards of the western novel, it is possible for a modern novel like *Candrakanta* to assimilate the *dastan* into its narrative, or even to parody it. However, it is here that the difference in the development of the novel in India becomes apparent vis – a – vis its western counterpart. It becomes clear that although the novel as a genre was adapted from the western literary tradition, it followed a very distinct trajectory in the Indian literary sphere. What is seen in *Candrakanta* is a steadfast association with tradition, complicated by modern ideas. In the western novel, the influence of modernity is seen in the disintegration of epic distance by bringing the world of the novel much closer to that of the reader by means of radical shifts in the framework of the novel.[6] In *Candrakanta*, the same goal is achieved by means of insertion of specific ideas and tropes within the original framework of the *dastan*. It is not merely a modern parody of an older literary tradition, but a continuation of a traditional genre by strategic modifications which portray the modernity of the world it inhabits while displaying its roots in the familiar. It was not, as R.S McGregor would have us believe, that 'There is little to this fanciful tale, except presumably the most general conventions of the novel, which derives from contact with the west, and its enormous success reminds us forcibly that even by 1890 Western standards of taste had not been assimilated in any significant degree in the Hindi language area.'[7]

Candrakanta drew its framework and characters from the story – telling tradition of North Indian literature, known as the *dastan*, brought to Urdu through Persian. The elements that made the *dastan* fantastic and exciting were those that were beyond the mundane realities of its audience – the chivalrous world of battles and the royal court (*razm – o - bazm*), beautiful women and their gallant lovers (*husn – o - ishq*), all connected by the idea of masculine valor

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[5] Bakhtin 1981, page 5.
[6] Ibid, page 13.
[7] Mcgregor 1970.

(*javanmardi*). The world of the *dastan* was also characterized by mysterious events and articles, and most importantly, *tilism*, magical illusion. The male protagonist of the *dastan* was a courageous, chivalrous young man who's adventurous spirit took him to far corners of the earth. The most entertaining and exciting character in the *dastan*, however, was not the male protagonist, but the '*ayyar*. '*Ayyars* seem like mere sidekicks to the primary male and female characters, but over the course of the *dastan*, it becomes clear that they are responsible for much of the excitement, drama and humor that the *dastan* offers. Still, it is the love story between the male and female protagonists situated within the world of royal courts, battles and '*ayyars* that is the core of the *dastan*. Similarly, *Candrakanta* is at its core a love story of prince Birendra Singh and princess Candrakanta. Their respective families are opposed to this match, thanks to Candrakanta's father's evil chief minister, who has his eyes set on her. The novel takes the reader through this love story and the struggles that Birendra Singh and his trusted '*ayyar*, Tej Singh, encounter in order to unite the lovers.

Although a love story is the characteristic central feature of both the *dastan* and the romance novel like *Candrakanta*, Lakshmikant Sinha has raised the issue of the role of the author's experiences in the writing of a modern novel.[8] In stark contrast to epic literature, the novel provided a means for the expression of the author's own experiences and feelings through his literary talent. In pre – modern literature like the *dastan*, set frameworks were operative, and although the author could use his creativity to bring about some innovations, the genre as a whole was too rigid to be experimented with.[9] Although *Candrakanta* is based on such a kind of traditional literature, what was fresh about it was the fact that it allowed the author to take certain subtle creative liberties with it, and insert his own experiences and opinions within the narrative. Devakinandan Khatri had spent a significant amount of his youth in the jungles around the

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[8] Sinha 1966, page 132.

[9] Although as noted by Farooqi, the transition of the *dastan* from the Persian literary world to the Urdu one was characterized by numerous modifications in their stories, with a conscious idea of experimentation that the newly born language offered. Farooqi 2000, page 125.

Benares – Mirzapur area working as a contracter for King Ishwarinarayan of Kashi. Khatri's adoration of the natural beauty of the forest, and his sense of wonderment at its various caves, tunnels and ruins are well known. Perhaps it was this closeness to nature that compelled Khatri to base his novel in a similar forest. Sinha even goes one step ahead and attributes the romantic tone of the novel to Khatri's own youthful adventures. In the same way, it is said that the names of some of the '*ayyars* in *Candrakanta* are actually those of his own friends.[10] Thus, the process of familiarization of the *dastan* begins at a fundamental level in *Candrakanta,* with the possibility of the inclusion of the author's own stories within that of the novel.

What made *Candrakanta* so successful was its combination of the familiarity of the fantasy of *dastan* literature with the familiarity of real life. Thus, even though it situated itself in the world of princes and princesses, it also performed the ideal function of the novel in the modern world, that of portraying the lives of ordinary people. It belongs to that period of the colonial encounter when modern society could define its present situation with tools supplied from the past. With the added ease of the language in which it was written, *Candrakanta* immediately became a phenomenal success.

Khatri's choice of language for *Candrakanta* was a conscious one. He was well aware of the type of Hindi used by other Hindi authors of the era, and had expressed the need to use a language which was within the reach of the general public for the writing of modern Hindi literature.[11] Thus, the process of naturalizing of the *dastan* begins from language itself, with the abandoning of both the elaborate Persianized Urdu of the *dastan* and the complicated Sanskritized Hindi of contemporary Hindi literature. Ironically, although Hindi language itself was an outcome of the modernization of colonial India, it could not be absorbed in the popular literary idiom for the same modernizing reasons – people now wanted to read in a language they lived in. The kind of Hindustani used in *Candrakanta*, with a register which is not too

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[10] Tandon quoted in Sinha 1966, page 135.
[11] Devakinandan Khatri quoted in Ray 2002, page 70.

complicated by the standards of both Persianized Urdu and Sanskritized Hindi, was the language of the masses for spoken and written communication.[12] It is said it was *Candrakanta*'s usage of colloquial Hindi that raised its level from a language used merely to write letters and documents to one with literary importance. It also opened the gateways of the *dastan* world for those who did not read the Urdu script, and for many, it was an introduction to the fascinating world of the *dastan*.

The passage of the *dastan* from the world of an Urdu oral tradition to the world of written Hindi was also visible in the loss of an important feature of the *dastan* of suspending its linear narrative by the development of a separate description of some of its places or articles, known as 'arresting the *dastan*' or *dastan rokna*[13]. This is an important device in the oral recitation of the *dastan*, developed both to enrich the tale and to prolong the recitation as much as possible. Efficient *dastan gu*s (*dastan* tellers) were judged according to their abilities of developing such alternate narratives.[14] In *Candrakanta*, description is not given much importance. In fact, short, brief scenes is how the *bayans* of *Candrakanta* are arranged, with each *bayan* ending in a way which whets the reader's appetite for more. Such theatricality was the basis of its success. It also points to the shifts in public consumption of print material as compared to oral tales. This was seen in the written *dastan* tradition itself, but in *Candrakanta*, the *dastan* was given a novelization which further intensified its literary nature.[15] The evolution of '*ayyars* as they are in *Candrakanta* also points to its need to modify the narrative of the *dastan*, taking it ahead in a fast paced manner akin to a novel as opposed to spending time describing the activities of the '*ayyar*, amusing as they are, like in the *dastan*.

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[12] Sinha 1966, page 133.
[13] Pritchett 1991, 20.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid, page 24. Pritchett speaks about the *dastan gus*' scorn at the idea of confining the *dastan* to a single volume.

'Ayyars – the Prerequisite

The most significant point of uniformity between the *dastan* and *Candrkanta* was its dependence on *'ayyars* for adding, quite literally, a new dimension to the tale. The idea of the *'ayyar* has a long history, with roots in Arabic and Persian literature. The *'ayyar* is characterized by the values of wit, humor, courage, trickery, disguise and adventure, and often offers deep friendship along with servitude to the main characters. Although they are often the most exciting characters that the *dastan* offers, they cannot be conceptualized as the protagonist in any way. In *Dastan – e – Amir Hamza*, 'Amar the *'ayyar* is shown as the exciting and weirdly wonderful sidekick of Amir. Frances Pritchett provides a description of *'ayyars* as members of the royal retine who:

> 'specialize in reconnaissance, espionage, disguise, commando tactics, and other forms of guerilla warfare, thievery, and dirty tricks. *'Ayyars* are not really part of the courtly elite, and so have less dignity to uphold; they are tremendously given to playing practical jokes, especially vulgar ones, on each other and on their enemies.'[16]

The *'ayyar*'s job is thus to encompass all those qualities that are ungainly on the protagonist's persona in the narrow definition of a hero in the *dastan* genre. While the hero is the influential, inspirational man, the *'ayyar* is the one who is not afraid of risking his dignity in his bid to entertain. Devakinandan Khatri was well aware of the fact that it is the activities and personalities of the *'ayyar*s that make the *dastan* successful, much more so than the glorious exploits of the hero. In *Candrakanta*'s preface, Khatri makes it clear that the focus of his attention is the *'ayyar*, and his goal is to weave a story around the activities of *'ayyars*, for why should a Hindi reading audience be deprived of this marvelous character indigenous to the *dastan*. Khatri wanted to exploit this fact in his own rendition of the *dastan*, in which *'ayyar*s once again have important central roles to play, but the relationship between the characters of the

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[16] Pritchett 1991, page 40-41.

protagonist and the '*ayyar* sees a reversal because now the '*ayyar* supersedes the protagonist. To that effect, '*ayyars*, especially Tej Singh, is the star of *Candrakanta*, carrying many of the qualities previously reserved for the perfect hero. In *Candrakanta*, Birendra Singh is the loverlorn prince who is mostly ineffective because of his longing, and clumsy because of his immaturity. Perhaps it is here that we see the awkward balancing of the roles of a masculine brave hero and that of an emotionally dependent lover, the tradition for both of which is present in Indic literature. Tej Singh is the clever, courageous and more importantly stable minded male character who is in control of most situations and in fact advises and at times even admonishes Birendra Singh. He is seldom seen in the mischievous ways that 'Amar, the '*ayyar* in *Dastan – e – Amir Hamza* is seen. Tej Singh's character is imbued with much seriousness and depth than the '*ayyar* in the *dastan* would suggest. Such a reversal of power between the characters of the hero and the '*ayyar* was never seen in the *dastan*, and seems to be an attempt by Khatri to appropriate the two separate notions of the brave hero and the lovesick lover, with the clear implication that both cannot belong to the same personality. Tej Singh is the one who controls a love story which may otherwise go haywire, as it is described in this scene:

> On seeing Candrakanta, Veerendra Singh's heart gave a lurch; a shiver ran down his spine and he dropped unconscious. But Tej Singh remained unperturbed on seeing Veerendra Singh's plight. Taking out some *lakhlakha* (smelling salts) from his bag, he made Veerendra Singh smell them and revived him to consciousness. "Look, you should not lose consciousness in other people's premises. Exercise control over yourself and you remain here; let me go and talk first, then I'll take you there," advised Tej Singh.[17]

Although *Candrakanta* retained the tropes of romantic love found in the *dastan*, like fainting at the sight of each other, it did not employ such passion within Tej Singh's character. Tej Singh is also in love with Candrakanta's '*ayyara* Capala, but he is in control of his emotions and greatly focussed on his job as an '*ayyar* and his mission of uniting Birendra with Candrakanta. It brings to notice Khatri's careful examination of the character of the '*ayyar* and

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[17] Khatri 2004, page 33.

its popularity in the minds of the audience, and consequent manipulation of such affection to make him the quasi hero of the novel, a far cry from the world of the *dastan*, where characters are inflexibly defined.

Depiction of Religion

The other area where *Candrakanta* differed greatly from the *dastan* was its portrayal of religion. Even as it appropriated a literary style which was specific to the islamicate world, *Candrakanta* was unabashedly islamophobic. The *dastan* itself has instances where the protagonist's success is measured in one sense by his power to convert infidels to Islam. In *Candrakanta*, Muslims are not given the opportunity to convert, but they are derided for their very Muslimness. The two '*ayyars* of Vijaygadh's evil chief minister, Krur Singh, Ahmed and Nazim, are Muslims. Krur Singh himself is a fickle Hindu who is willing to become a Muslim for the sake of political power. Islam is also treated as a political and ideological state of being. Krur Singh is advised by his '*ayyars* to embrace Islam as a means of gaining the support of the Muslim population. The other two Muslim characters are the bandits Afat Khan Khuni and Zalim Khan, both depicted as the archetypes of cruel, criminal Muslims. Later in the story, Birendra Singh is distraught to have an army full of Muslims, his primary concern being that they are not loyal enough to be trusted. This may be one of the diffuse allusions to the deficiency of character in Muslims in general, or more specifically a representation of the disloyalty of Muslims to the British. The solution to this problem is that the Muslim soldiers must be set out in the front so that in case they turn out to be treacherous, the Hindu soldiers at the back can kill them before going ahead with the actual battle. Jagannath, Krur Singh's *jyotishi*, eventually leaves service at his court and joins Tej Singh and Birendra Singh because of Krur's

irreligiosity.[18] This also seems to be a call to Hindus to give up service not only to Muslims but also to those Hindus who are not steadfast to their religion, and to make associations with those who do. Such developments in the narrative of the Hindi novel of that era are an outcome of the emergence of an anti – Muslim Hindu nationalism that pervaded much of knowledge creation. Not only the specifics of the Hindu – Muslim divide, but the very employment of religion as a modern sociopolitical concept finds expression in *Candrakanta*, with the clear allusion to the existence of a singular Hindu nation.[19] What is also evident from such a portrayal is that literature was now capable of mirroring society, a fact which was a great departure from the earlier genres.[20]

Apart from a strong islamophobic stance, *Candrakanta* also has a pro - Hindu sense not only at an ideological level, but also at the level of daily ritual. Was this an attempt to return to the uncomplicated definitions of religion that belonged to a pre – modern sensibility? Meenakshi Mukherjee suggests that such portrayals of mundane Hindu virtuosity might be a reaction to the sinister entrance of a strong, strange culture by way of colonialism.[21] What is achieved by such a representation is not only the expression of Hinduism, but also the representation of a similarity between the religious lives of the characters in the novel with that of the reader. The characters are, of course, Hindu Rajputs, instead of the Muslims depicted in the *dastan.* Beginning with the daily habits of *snana – puja - sandhya*, there are also references to various other Hindu rituals. Krur Singh is shown in the ritual *sutak* after his father's death which he abandons because after all he is a villian and therefore irreligious. Thus, the portrayal of religion itself found a two – fold manifestation in *Candrakanta*, as the modern social and

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[18] This despite the fact that the skills that he practices are called *ramal*, an arabic word which implies the telling of future by drawing lines in sand, a concept indegenous to the Arabic realm.
[19] Mukherjee 2008, page 174.
[20] However, the tradition of the writing of Muslim centric historical novels by Hindu authors continued well beyond *Candrakanta.* Babu Jayram Dasgupt's 'Nawabi Paristan' and Mathura Prasad Sharma's 'Noorjahan Begum wa Jahangir' are two such novels.
[21] Mukherjee 1985, page 66.

political actor, as well as the traditional marker of morality. In a complex mix of Hindu ritual and islamophobia, in a scene where Tej Singh tells the astrologer Jagannath that he could not kill him if a plan went wrong because he was a Brahmin, since Hindus incur great sin if they kill one, Jagannath tells him that he can become a Muslim and then kill him. This obviously was not meant as a practical solution to make sure Jagannath's death, but in fact to warn people of Muslims, who without the limits of the rules of Hinduism, can harm Brahmins freely and thus challenge the very essence of Hinduism. The inclusion of sadhus and yogis, and even a Brahmin 'ayyar', further hinduizes *Candrakanta*. Caste was also invoked which related not only to the Hindu heirarchy of castes, but also to its role in the practicalities of life for regular Hindus. Thus, what the readers percieved was that even in *Candrakanta* where bizarre things happen to people who are somewhat different from them, caste considerations are given due importance, just as they are in their own worlds.

Rationality and Reality

Colonial literature theorists often criticized the lack of reality in traditional Indian literature. Indian literature, especially the *dastan*, was taken as the collapse of the rational, with no regard for real life.[22] Perhaps it was a reaction to colonial complaints of the fantastical in the *dastan*, or more likely, it was Khatri's own entrenchment in the tenets of modernity which caused him to rationalize most aspects of the dastan. Thus, there is a scientific explanation for every wondrous article or event, which was previously taken merely as mystical magic. Events like the spontaneous opening and closing of doors and the functioning of strange objects that are crucial to the development of the narrative are attributed to technological assistance as compared to the previously held notion of magic. Now there was a new found need of the author as well

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[22] Russel 1970, page 109.

as the reader to know how things came to be and how they functioned. The steady development

of technology in the public sphere and the advent of western education, also may have made

readers to look for scientific explanations to the same *tilisms* that were previously taken at face

value. The scientific explanation of magic dissociates the world of *Candrakanta* from the

mystical and impossible, and makes it very much a possibility of the modern world, especially

because of its rooting in science and technology. The tension between bridging the real and the

fantastical, is however, visible in various ways. Although Khatri takes great pains to explain the

magic seen in *Candrakanta*, like powders that can make people unconscious and salts that can

wake them up, he still conjures up the world of *tilism*, which is integral to the dastan but can

have no scientific explanation behind it. *Tilism* is a sort of enchantment with magical beings,

things and happenings inside which the hero and the heroine find themselves in, and which can

only be broken, but not stepped out of. Although Khatri uses the idea of the *tilism* in

Candrakanta, he obviously fails to come up with a suitable present day equivalent.

Candrakanta's entry into a *tilism* happens by way of a mysterious crane that she comes across

while strolling through ruins. Although made of stone, the crane was able to open its mouth and

spread its wings. Chandrakanta's reaction upon seeing this crane is described as follows:

> 'Chapla had so conditioned Chandrakanta's mind that both had learnt to reject the existence of ghosts and jinns or magic, and considered it all a part of some espionage activity. An ordinary human being would have possibly died of fright. But Chandrakanta, on seeing the wings spread out, moved behind it and as she did so, her step fell on a stone fixed in the ground, behind the crane. The crane moved and turning quickly, picked up the princess with its beak and swallowed her.'[23]

Even though entering the *tilism* is made out be mechanical logic, its existence itself is left

unexplained. The idea of *tilism* in the *dastan*, though, is merely a continuation of the unreal

realm of the *dastan*, while in *Candrakanta*, it is a conscious, definite shift away from reality.

Tilism, like '*ayyari*, was integral to the *dastan* experience, one of the factors that made it

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[23] Khatri 2004, page 128.

wonderful and popular. Khatri wanted to incorporate both in his novel but with in – built explanations for either. He tried his best to explain '*ayyari* as an interesting professional talent, but the idea of *tilism* itself was not accounted for. To counter the fact that '*ayyars* are a type of character alien to the realities of his audience, Khatri offers a rationalization of their existence as a historical tradition of clever servants to kings. Khatri also claims that '*ayyars* are akin to *bahurupiya*s, providing a local, familiar flavor to the archetype of the '*ayyar*, and in fact, freeing it from historicity and unreality and placing it in the ordinary present. Like '*ayyar*s and *tilism*s, Khatri was aware of the fact that the other exciting aspect of the dastan, *pari*s, or fairies, were a trope required in his novel to make it both entertaining and acceptable. However, the idea of fairies similarly harkens back to magical unrealism, which is why in Khatri's novel we see a similar character in the *bankanya*s. They behave in ways very similar to the *pari*s, including casting figurative spells on the protagonist and having great romantic influence on him. Khatri uses the idea of forest dwelling, perhaps tribal, women one of whom looked much like Candrakanta to explain the existence of such women in his novel. Prince Birendra's entrancement with her is explained on the basis of her resemblance to Candrakanta, which conforms with the overall essence of the novel. Rationality was a new found concept in colonial India, and its integration in literature especially was emblematic of the modernizing tone of colonial Indian literature. Khatri himself makes it clear that his work is not merely an exercise in ornamentation but indeed has functional value by asserting that reading *Candrakanta* would help the readers protect themselves from similar tricks played on them. Thus there is a strong authorial desire to showcase the rationality of writing and reading *Candrakanta*, conforming to the modern definition of meaningfully functional literature.

A Story for the Ordinary

Candrakanta attempts a balance between the disintegration of class structures, as an outcome of modernity, while at the same time incorporating the ideals of social communion in a structured Indian society. *Dastan*s are stories about elites who belong to a royal court, who are much better off financially and socially than most other people, especially their audience. In other words, the *dastan* told common people the stories of the lives of the extraordinary ones. In *Candrakanta*, strategic themes, especially the one about garnering wealth, cause the novel to deviate dramatically from the *dastan*. First of all, even though *Candrakanta* is set in a royal setting, with the main actors being princes, princesses and courtiers, the behaviors and actions of these characters reveal their ordinariness as compared to the regality of those of the *dastan*. Tej Singh and even kings are shown as people attempting to make money, just like the readers. Therefore, *Candrakanta* no longer remains a story of people who are already rich and therefore do not need to seek wealth, this becomes a story of people who might be around the same class situation as those of its readers. Predictably, greed was always shown in a bad light in older Indian literature, even while showcasing the lives of the rich and the famous. In *Candrakanta*, a modern twist is given to the idea of materiality by stripping off its negative undertones, a straightforward portrayal of the new material ethic in Indian society. When Tej Singh disguises himself as Krur Singh's servant and exposes Krur's devious plan to Candrakanta's father, he is offered as much money as he can carry and he makes full use of this opportunity, in perhaps the only scene in *Candrakanta* which depicts Tej Singh in a humorous manner. Towards the end of *Candrakanta*, it becomes clear that Tej Singh's father, Jit Singh had set up the whole *tilism* because apparently if one breaks a *tilism*, he gets the wealth associated with it, and he wanted Birendra Singh to be rich and Candrakanta to gain more wealth for her dowry. The stress on making money, even the cultural concept of dowry in the mystical world of princes and princesses, made the readers identify with *Candrakanta*. Apart from the disenchantment with the idea of kings and spies as people who are somehow much superior to ordinary beings,

Candrakanta also ventured to depict the class and caste considerations at play within contemporary Indian society. Thus we find that the king of Vijaygadh, Jay Singh, is reluctant to marry his daughter to his *vazir*'s son Krur Singh because of the difference in their status, for daughters cannot be given to people who are inferior. The codes of conduct of ordinary people are also evoked in the admonishment that Tej Singh gives to Birendra Singh for fainting in other people's house. Even though Jay Singh is a king, his concern for the defamation of his daughter's character upon hearing Krur's stories is very much similar to that of any ordinary father. Even the independent and brave '*ayyara* Capala is entirely dependent on her parents' approval when it comes to her marriage, which itself depends on caste and class considerations. Most importantly, even though, like the *dastan*, *Candrakanta* is set in the world of royalty, there is an overall loosening of social etiquette which relates the novel more to the mannerisms of ordinary people rather than strict courtly protocol. This is particularly visible in the dynamics between Tej Singh and Birendra Singh, where the former is more likely to treat the latter as a friend rather than as a royal master. What we see here is a disintegration of class structures achieved by the naturalization of the grand world of royalty to the world of ordinary people, which in itself consists of set codes of conduct when it comes to class and caste, but in a more local manner.

Orsini speaks about how the world of *Candrakanta* was domesticated, by replacing monumental descriptions of natural beauty to the homely details of gardens and houses.[24] Even the enumerative tradition of the *dastan* is employed in a modified manner to tell about the local vegetation and its relationship with the various seasons. The emphasis is less on the creation of a wonderful, exotic scenery, and more on that of a beautiful place where the reader might have wandered off on his own. Devakinandan Khatri (or his narrator) even provide an explanation for the brevity of the descriptions of natural beauty, obviously an outcome of a direct comparison of

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[24] Orsini 2009, page 207.

Candrakanta with the *dastan*. There is also a sense of appreciating the material goodness of a garden or house, with more focus on its wealthy grandeur rather than its royal one.[25] A major difference between the *dastan* and *Candrakanta* was the ambivalence of the time in which it was situated. Although the story itself was about royalty and wars, a thing of the past, the many explanations provided for the various magical happenings often utilize modern facilities like electricity. Thus, unlike the *dastan* which was situated in the past for sure, and hence was at a historical distance from its audience, *Candrakanta* could be believed to be in the present, along with the reader. Another aspect that further domesticated it for the reader was its definite placement in the two kingdoms of Naugadh and Vijaygadh, which Khatri claimed were near the forests of Benares. Chunar, an important kingdom in *Candrakanta*, is an actual town in modern day Uttar Pradesh. The proximity and reachability of these locations, as opposed to the strange, mystical lands depicted in the *dastan*, made *Candrakanta* a story of the known.

Like in the *dastan*, the love story between the male and female protagonists is central to *Candrakanta*. Such love stories are constitutive to the Indic and Perso – Arabic literary tradition. Most instances of the introduction of the female character in this case is accompanied by a detailed, ornamental description of the heroine, with special reference to her beauty. In *Candrakanta*, Khatri consciously avoids such descriptions, even though the presence of a princess who shares her name with that of the novel calls for such a description traditionally. As mentioned above, the description of female beauty centers more on the finery of her dress and jewellery, rather than a physical description. This avoidance can be equated to the author's decision of circumscribing the world of *Candrakanta* to middle class values, by deliberately disenfranchising the importance of physical beauty in the heroine. It may also be seen as an attempt to negate the notion that a woman has to be beautiful in order for her story to be documented, as it comes across in older literatures. Although it does not make any direct claims

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25 Ibid, page 208.

at being protofeminist, we do find that women's physical strength and their cleverness is more valuable to the novel experience rather than their beauty. Capala is so described:

> 'There was no need for Chapla to look pretty because she was so generously endowed that she could outshine thousands of beauties. Her objective was to hide her real identity by painting up her face.'[26]

Here it has to be added that although Capala is considered to be one of the most clever '*ayyar*s around, and is superior to the Muslim enemy '*ayyar*s Nazim and Ahmed, she eventually finds herself at a loss in front of the talent and wisdom of Tej Singh, thus displaying a neat hierarchy along the lines of religion and gender.

Conclusion

Candrakanta made an attempt to bridge the gap between the pre – modern and the Modern, and the extra – ordinary and the ordinary. The aesthetic of literature that was developing during the late 19th century allowed for a rooting in the traditional but with subtle incorporations of modernity and its accompaniments. *Candrakanta*'s unprecedented success led to multiple analyses of its genre, with numerous Indian critics disapproving of its similarity to the *dastan* as compared to conventional modern Hindi novels, and colonial theorists predictably attacking the apparent lack of realism that it was characterized by. What is often overlooked is the fact that modernity was not assimilated in the Indian milieu in its entirety. It entered various aspects of Indian society and culture in problematic ways, and hence the development of early modern Hindi literature cannot be judged by the standards of either western modernity or Indian nationalism. *Candrakanta* is a brilliant specimen of how modernity operated in the Indian realm, while being one of the most influential novels of all times.

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[26] Khatri 2004, page 70.

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