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FRANCESCA ORSINI



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Chandrakanta and Early Hindi Fiction in Banaras

Chandrakanta, the first novel by Devkinandan Khatri (1861–1913), is considered significant because of the fame for which it became known. This was the novel for which thousands of readers learnt Hindi—or rather the Devanagari script. Within the history of Hindi literature, the phenomenal success of this novel counts therefore as an important victory in the difficult, but ultimately victorious, competition of Hindi with Urdu, a triumph that compensates for the negative critical assessment of the novel as such. In the words of a famous Hindi literary critic, “the aim of [novels such as *Chandrakanta*] is weird and wonderful events, not the supremacy of feelings or character building. They are really adventure narratives or tales [*qissas*] that make no attempt at depicting the various aspects of life, which is why they do not come under the category of literature [*sahitya*].”¹ In the history of modern Hindi literature, then, and of the Hindi novel in particular, *Chandrakanta* and the sub-genre of adventure as well as *tilismi* novels that it spawned are usually not thought of as literature but considered at best an unfortunate stage in the progress towards the realistic novel represented by the work of Premchand.²

¹ Ramchandra Shukla, *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas*, quoted in Gopal Ray, *Hindi Upanyas ka Itihas*, New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2002, p. 74.

² For an account in English, see e.g. Amrik Kalsi, ‘Realism in the Hindi Novel’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1975. *Tilism*, as we shall see, is an enchanted space: the adventures that befall characters in these enchantments and their efforts to “break them” (*tilism torna*) are a major attraction of this sub-genre of novels.

निम्न लिखित पुस्तके पढ़ने योग्य हैं :—

बाबू देवकीनन्दन खत्री लिखित ।	सप्तमासकी उपन्यास
चन्द्रकान्ता चारो भाग ... १)	प्रसन्नपथिक " १
चन्द्रकान्ता सन्तति २० भाग १७)	बहुविजिता "
चन्द्रकान्ता उर्दू में ... २)	सच्चा अहमदुर २ भाग ...
" गोर्षाभाषा प्रथम भाग ४)	लोकान्वती ... १
नरेंद्रमोहनी उपन्यास ... १)	रघुवीर प्रेममोहनी नाटक
कुसुमकुमारी " ... १)	उषाहरण नाटक ...
बीरेन्द्रवीर " ... ४)	द्रापदी चारहरण नाटक ...
काजर की कीठड़ी १ भाग ४)	लक्ष्मकुमारी नाटक ...
दूतरीं श्री लिखी हुई ।	मोलदेवी नाटक ...
परीलागुरु उपन्यास ... ४)	मैराबाई का जीवनचरित
रामेश्वरयात्रा " ... १)	चन्द्रिकाबाई " ...
इला " ... ४)	महाराज शिवाजी " ...
प्रसिला " ... ४)	सोचिकिसा ...
जया " ... ४)	जापान का इतिहास ...
स्वर्णलता " ... ४)	सैले मजन ...
दुर्गेश्वरनन्दनी " ... ४)	चिन्तविनीद ...
दोपनिष्ठा " ... ४)	ठगड़ेकान्तमाला ... ३
बीरनारी " ... १)	पुनिसहताम्तमाला ...
कमनिनी " ... १)	उद्येको ... ३
चन्द्रकला " ... १)	चन्द्रप्रभा पूर्णप्रकाश ...
दलितकुसुम " ... १)	मानसकोष ...
दीनानाथ " ... १)	शुक्लपन्डान ... ३

* डाक खर्च जिम्मे खरोटार होगी :-

भंगाने का पता — **मैनेजर लहरी प्रेस, काशी**

Fig. 16: List of "books worth reading", available for purchase at the Lahari Press, Banaras, including editions of *Chandrakanta* in Urdu and in Nepali ("Gorkhabhasha"), shown on the back cover of Devkinandan Khatri, *Virendravir*, 1902 3rd edn, Banaras: Lahari Press.

Critics recognize Khatri's skilful manipulation of narrative elements, largely borrowed from Urdu dastans and contemporary theatre, as leading to the novel's unprecedented popularity and commercial success. A shrewd and perceptive critic of the Hindi novel like Gopal

Ray has also recognized Khatri's role in educating the reader to the new novelistic conventions; and the writer Rajendra Yadav reflected in a famous essay on the reader's experience from a subjective point of view, as well as on the cultural significance of the novel.³ But, as in Ramchandra Shukla's case, a narrow definition of "literature" and the "novel" has mostly prevented a positive appreciation of Khatri's extraordinary innovation. From the perspective of commercial publishing, *Chandrakanta* was path-breaking in the way it managed to create a habit of novel-reading in Hindi. Like *Fasana-e Azad*, it represents the most successful attempt by a fiction writer to engage with the possibilities and requirements of entertainment in print, combining the attractions found in already current genres with new ones and creating, through serialization, the expectation of more. Instead of Sarshar's attempt to move away from Urdu dastans, Khatri adopted many of their conventions and adventurous ambience. At the same time, by manipulating the narrative elements and core values of dastans, he also managed to create a "novel experience" that proved to be as involving and satisfying as that of *Fasana-e Azad*, and accessible even to those readers for whom the Perso-Urdu literary world was alien.

The Longest Hindi Novel of the Nineteenth Century

At 300 pages, 4 parts, and 92 chapters, *Chandrakanta* was the longest book in modern Hindi written until then. The first part was written in 1887, as the author's introduction indicates, and published in 1888

³ In 'Dayniy Mahanta ki Dilchasp Dastan' (An Interesting Story of Pathetic Greatness), Rajendra Yadav argues that the novel corresponds to the collective *imaginaire* of the period: "After the defeat of 1857, people accepted the material and social defeat, but not the intellectual and spiritual defeat. The celebration of vigilance [*chaukannapan*] and extraordinary intelligence in *Chandrakanta* can be linked to this. *Chandrakanta* does not accept defeat but transforms the terrible defeat of feudal prowess into intellectual cleverness—in other words a feeble attempt to prove one's intellectual excellence after one's material strength proved worthless"; first published in *Pandrah Upanyas* (Fifteen Novels) and now inserted as an introduction to the Rajkamal Paperbacks edition of *Chandrakanta*, New Delhi: Rajkamal Paperbacks, 1986, pp. 24–5. For the new novelistic conventions, see also Khatri's detective novels discussed in ch. 7.

in Banaras.⁴ All four parts were published, all with moveable type, separately in 1891 and together in one volume in 1892. The success was immediate, so much so that in 1894 Khatri launched his own monthly novel magazine, 'Upanyas Lahari' (Wavelet of Novels) and started publishing the sequel to *Chandrakanta*, *Chandrakanta Santati* (Chandrakanta's Offspring), whose twenty-fourth and final part he completed by 1905. Meanwhile, *Chandrakanta* and *Chandrakanta Santati* appeared in a variety of editions, cheap and deluxe, Hindi and Urdu, under Khatri's imprint, the Lahari Press, though printed at other presses.⁵ In 1907 Khatri started yet another sequel, *Bhutnath*, based on a character who had appeared in *Santati*. He managed to write and publish the first six parts of this before his death in 1913. His son, Durgaprasad Khatri, succeeded him at the helm of the Lahari Press and wrote another fifteen parts of *Bhutnath* between 1915 and 1935. All in all, *Chandrakanta* and its sequels compare in length with the achievement of the *Dastan Amir Hamza*. And yet Khatri had his reasons for telling readers, several times, that "from the beginning until now, I have been writing this small book in brief [*mukhtasar hi men*]."⁶ Why did Devkinandan Khatri, who clearly had the Urdu dastans in mind when composing his novel, claim he was writing "in brief"?

Like the Urdu dastan about Amir Hamza and his companions, *Chandrakanta* is set in a chivalrous world of princes and princesses, of

⁴ *Chandrakanta* was first published by Khatri's friend Babu Amir Singh, proprietor of the Hariprakash Yantralay. This edition is not now available. For this and the following information, see Ray, *Hindi Upanyas ka Itihas*, pp. 68-9.

⁵ The *Catalogue of Publications* also shows a 1892 edition of the four parts separately, printed by the Hariprakash Press, Banaras (1000 copies), 8 annas; it also shows an Urdu edition published by Devkinandan Khatri and printed at the Said ul-Matba' Press, Banaras in 1898 (600 copies), at Re 1 for each part. Another Urdu edition published by Khatri was printed in 1898 by Dhundhiraj Press, Banaras, 600 copies, for the same price. A reprint of *Chandrakanta Santati* appeared in 1896 by the Hariprakash Press, Banaras (1000 copies), at Rs 3 for 844 pages. A reprint of its second part in 1897 by the Amar Press, Banaras, cost Rs 2 for 470 pages. Like all Hindi novels mentioned in this and the following chapter, *Chandrakanta* was printed, not lithographed (unlike most songbooks and chapbooks of plays).

⁶ Devkinandan Khatri, *Chandrakanta*, Delhi: Rajkamal Paperbacks, 1997, 7th edition, p. 288. All page references are to this edition.

fighting and revelry, of war and the court (*razm o bazm*). The royal court, its etiquette and intrigues; the excitement and opportunity that battles offered for displaying one's valour (*javanmardi*); the splendid setting of palaces, royal gardens, and forests as hunting-grounds—all these elements are reproduced in the novel. Yet, as in the Urdu dastan, the splendour and chivalry of the princes and princesses here are somewhat overshadowed by the excitement offered by the activities of another kind of character, the 'ayyar. Male (and female) 'ayyars are introduced as "friends" of the princely characters but actually hold quite a distinct function and worldview.⁷ Already in the Persian popular romances, 'ayyars had first made an appearance as literary figures despite the fact that conventions required that the hero be a prince and that he be superior to the 'ayyar. 'Ayyars were in fact the real protagonists, and it was their ideals that the romances embraced.⁸ Elaborate descriptions of war (*razm*), of the splendours of the court (*bazm*), of beautiful women and love (*husn o 'ishq*), and of the elaborate tilisms and the clever tricks of the 'ayyar (*'ayyari*)—the four pillars of a dastan—were part and parcel of the dastan-go's oral art. In particular, to "stop the dastan" (*dastan rokna*) with long lists of items of a certain class was a mark of the narrator's virtuosity.⁹ Though all these elements are present in *Chandrakanta*, descriptions are by comparison relatively short and the narrative never "stops". In fact, the pace remains swift throughout the novel. This is achieved primarily by short chapters which work like theatrical scenes: every chapter opens in a new locale and the sudden end of a chapter works like the curtain falling at a suspenseful moment. As Gopal Ray aptly puts it, *Chandrakanta* is an "extraordinary mixture of *qissa-goi* and theatricality."¹⁰ One of the main theatrical innovations of Parsi theatre was its fast tempo and skilful manipulation of narrative pace: ". . . the new optics of the stage, the painted backdrops and stage effects, the footlights and curtains, the

⁷ For a definition of the 'ayyar in the Urdu dastan, see Pritchett, *The Romance Tradition*, pp. 40–1, quoted below.

⁸ See William Hanaway, 'Persian Popular Romances Before the Safavid Period', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Columbia, 1972. For 'ayyars as detectives, see ch. 7 below.

⁹ Pritchett, *The Romance Tradition*, pp. 16–21.

¹⁰ Ray, *Hindi Upanyas ka Itihas*, p. 75.

plot, narrative tempo, dialogue and song, the music and orchestration, actorly virtuosity and tableaux, identification and idealization, all combined in Parsi theatre to produce a cleverly synchronized performance style that employs velocity for emotional effects. The result was a new experience of the *drive of passion*, in a tempo that renders love both breathtaking and compelling, almost inexorable.¹¹ As with Parsi theatre, theatricality in *Chandrakanta* meant not only a new pacing of the action but also a multiplication of emotional effects, rashly juxtaposed. "Three-fourths of today have gone by in anxiety, anger and happiness, and not a morsel of food has passed anyone's lips" (p. 276), says the narrator in relation to a particularly eventful chapter, and there is little doubt that the same breathless emotional upheavals experienced by the characters were mirrored in the reader's experience. Moreover, while the qissas discussed in chapter 4 kept to the linear temporality of oral narration, *Chandrakanta* takes some significant liberties with this unwritten rule.¹²

But Devkinandan Khatri's manipulation of the dastan was by no means limited to contraction or a faster pace. His most significant innovation lay in the way in which he *naturalized* the dastan world. Naturalization included the Indianization of characters and locales, the ostensible explicability of all apparently supernatural characters and events, and the injection into the courtly ethic of dastan heroes and courts of local and "homely" elements through reference to caste beliefs, family relations, customs, and "Hindu religion and polity" (as the novel puts it) in a way not dissimilar to the multivocal *Qissa Tota Maina* (chapter 4), as well as to the homely aesthetic of printed

¹¹ Anuradha Kapur, 'Love in the Time of Parsi Theatre', in F. Orsini (ed.), *Love in South Asia*, p. 227.

¹² The most conspicuous case is the flashback in chs 14 and 15 of pt III, when we are told *how* Raja Jaysingh was kidnapped, an event simply mentioned two chapters earlier. The narrator does not highlight this deviation from linear time. Other, subtler, evidence is the narrator's analepses and prolepses in footnotes to the text, when he either reminds readers of clues or mysteries left unexplained in previous chapters, or suggests that what is left unexplained now may or may not be explained later—as in the case of the yogi splitting the earth with a kick: "whether it is possible or not to split the earth open will become clear in the fourth part": p. 231.

barahmasas (chapter 2). I would like to suggest that the “thrill of familiarity”, added to the “thrill of the marvellous”, contributed in great measure to the success of the novel. Princes and princesses, ‘ayyars, female attendants (*sakhis*) and fairies (*paris*), masked characters (*naqabposh*), and villains are all found in this novel, as they were in Urdu dastans. But the fact that their adventures take place in the area around Chunar fort, a bare thirty-five kilometres from Banaras, and that royal mothers and fathers behave very much like ordinary parents, provided unprecedented pleasure to Khatri’s readers.

Indianizing and Hinduizing the Dastan

Naturalization was long considered by literary critics to be a cosmetic intervention in what was essentially a phenomenon of borrowing—a phenomenon, moreover, that fundamentally invalidated a work, making it no longer “original” but a mere “imitation”. In the case of early Indian novels, where naturalization or Indianization can often be seen, it supported the notion that the novel was an import. The assumption was that what counted was what was foreign, while the Indian features—the names, the locales, the language of dialogues, the narrator’s occasional interventions—were simply local colour. As we saw in the previous chapter, Meenakshi Mukherjee was the first scholar to draw attention to the many and complex strategies that early Indian novelists put into practice in order to create texts that were new, both with respect to the “source” and the “target” literature, and also to the important presence of earlier narrative tradition in these “novel” texts.¹³ It now seems commonplace to notice how translations and adaptations that do not diverge, not even in minimal ways, from their originals may still produce effects that appear new and meaningful to their new readers. *Chandrakanta* is a particular case, in that the “original” was already familiar to Indian audiences. The Arabo-Persian world of Amir Hamza—ostensibly the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad—and his companions was familiar in the way Greek myths, King Arthur’s knights, and the Nordic sagas were familiar to European

¹³ See Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality*, and idem, ‘Epic and Novel in India’, in Franco Moretti (ed.), *The Novel*, vol. 1, pp. 596–631.

audiences: as a coherent world which was at once distant and familiar, and whose characters were alive as types as well as destinies. By Indianizing this world, Khatri was not making the unfamiliar familiar. Rather, he made characters and adventures that existed only in the imagination move closer to the world of the everyday. The result was not a "realistic" novel but the thrilling possibility of imagining oneself as part of that wonderful world.

To all appearances *Chandrakanta* is a dastan. It tells the story of the contrasting love between Birendra Singh and Chandrakanta, the son and daughter of the two neighbouring rulers of Naugarh and Vijaygarh. Their fathers were once friends, until the divan of Vijaygarh successfully drew a wedge between them. Vijaygarh is the more powerful "petty kingdom" of the two, and both are tied to the ruler of Chunar, the famous fortress on the bend of the Ganges not far from Banaras. The divan of Naugarh, Jit Singh, was himself once an 'ayyar but gave up his calling when his son, Tej Singh, became proficient in the art. In Vijaygarh there is no divan-'ayyar but the divan's son—who is the main villain and is aptly named Krur ("Cruel") Singh—has two Muslim 'ayyars at his disposal, Nazim and Ahmad. Krur Singh's task is to prevent the love between Chandrakanta and Birendra Singh from resulting in marriage. In pursuit of this he does not hesitate to kill his own father in order to become divan himself and, when the plan misfires, he deserts to Chunar and incites its ruler, Shivdatt Singh, to move against Chandrakanta's father. Nazim and Ahmad and four of Chunar's own 'ayyars, including a Brahmin astrologer and expert at divination, Pandit Jagannath, are the main opponents of Birendra Singh and his only 'ayyar helper, Tej Singh, even though Chandrakanta's two sakhis, Chapala and Champa, are skilled at 'ayyari too. The first half of the novel consists of the repeated attempts of the 'ayyars to disrupt each other's plans and kidnap their opponents so as to put them out of action. The most common means is for an 'ayyar to change appearance (*surat banana*) and make the victim unconscious through a special powder (*behoshi ki dawa*), which makes any kind of food, drink, and even scent perilous. Once unconscious, the victim is tied into a sack which the successful 'ayyar takes away on his (and, occasionally, her) back. Tej Singh places his victims in a special cave, which is similar to, but not quite, a tilism or enchantment. Once in a tilism, there is no

way out, unless someone, designated by whoever set up the tilism, "breaks it".

The second half of *Chandrakanta* consists of the prolonged struggle by Birendra and Tej to dismantle, with the help of a "tilism book", the enchantment in which Chandrakanta and Chapala have wandered, only to find that the two women have disappeared into another, even larger, tilism annexed to the first. They are both helped and distracted in their quest by a group of women who wander in the forest on horseback. Their mysterious leader, called "Bankanya" or "Forest Girl", looks so remarkably like Chandrakanta that Prince Birendra falls in love with her at first sight, though not without feelings of guilt. In turn, the forest girl behaves very much like a pari in a dastan: she falls in love with the mortal man, declares her love openly, and for her help in recovering Chandrakanta sets the condition that Birendra should marry her at the same ceremony.¹⁴ Her written messages are delivered by masked riders (*naqabposh*), also familiar figures in dastans and qissas.

In the end, after the threat of another, even more bloodthirsty, 'ayyar called Zalim Singh is averted, Chandrakanta is handed back to her lover and her father by another mysterious figure who calls himself Siddhanta Yogi. Though it is a shame to give away the ending at this point, this Yogi is none other than Tej Singh's father Jit Singh. He had mounted the whole elaborate masquerade so that Birendra Singh could break the first tilism and earn all the riches hidden in it, as customary, and so that Chandrakanta could break the second tilism and acquire all its wealth as dowry.

Razm, bazm, husn, and 'ayyari, all the four elements of a dastan exist here. How does Indianization work, then, and to what effect? To start from the descriptions, we find in *Chandrakanta* all the predictable depictions of forests, gardens, pavilions, and beautiful women. Yet subtle changes are at work. Take this description of the garden of the women's mahal inside Vijaygarh fort:

¹⁴ Other supernatural, pari-like features include the fact that these women appear and disappear at will and the astrologer's divination (*ramal*) can ascertain nothing about them. When boating on the river one night they are described as an 'akhara of paris' (p. 172), and they once appear in colour-coded dress, like the paris in *Indarsabha*: here one is a "*sabz sakhi*" (green sakhi) and the other a "*surkh sakhi*" (red sakhi): p. 277.

The day is still lingering, Chandrakanta, Chapala and Champa are strolling in the garden. The scent of moist flowers mixed with the light breeze is delightful to the heart. All varieties of flowers are blooming. The thick mass of mango trees at the west of the garden and the sun rays shining through arouse a peculiar pleasure. Water has been sprinkled on the rows of flowerbeds, and the flower trees have been washed well with water. (p. 14)

The scene is the familiar one of the garden as a site of natural and female beauty and as the setting for love—this is the garden where, in a later chapter, Birendra Singh will visit Chandrakanta in secret. And yet, instead of launching into a long enumeration of poetic flowers, creepers, bees, and so on, this description uses a few light touches, including the “homely” detail of the daily sprinkling and watering of plants. Suddenly, the exotic palace garden with the princess and her sakhis has become any ordinary garden at dusk.

Even when the description is enumerative in the usual dastan way, the mention of *local* trees and animals is striking:

The kingdom of Naugarh and Vijaygarh is a hilly tract covered by huge and dense forests, with the rivers Chandraprabha and Karmanasha flowing between the hills. Here and there inside the mountains you find gorgeous natural caves and ravines. Among the trees there are *sakhu, tend, vijaysar, sanai, korla, go, khaja, peyar, jigna, asan*, and others, and also many *parijat* among the wild trees. They are uncommonly interesting hills, if you find yourself in a village you only need to proceed for one mile in one direction or another and you will find yourself enveloped in dense forest and you will neither be able to find the way from which you came, nor know where you should go. During the rainy season the scenery is breathtaking, you will cross ten streams in just one mile. Among the wild animals you will see, besides antelopes, panthers, bears, leopards, ravine deers, langurs and monkeys, and also tigers occasionally, though not in the rainy season, because when there is too much water their dens are ruined and they move up to the higher hills. There are no deer in these hills, but many can be seen below. Among the birds partridges and peacocks are in abundance. In other words, these lovely hills are still there in the same way as I've written and are by all means worth seeing. (pp. 48–9)

This is not a literary description of nature as we would expect it, nor a general one of a “wild forest”. The object is a specific area, with names

of local trees and local animals.¹⁵ It is partly a hunter's description—Khatri's pastime matched that of his dastan heroes—and partly a forest contractor's, which was in fact Khatri's occupation when he was writing *Chandrakanta*. However, nature is still a setting and suggestive of a mood, which in the case of the forest can be fear, intrigue, or encounter with strangers, and plays no other role in the narrative as yet.

The interiors of the tilisms, one with impressive ruins and the other with beautiful gardens and pavilions, are also described in great detail—and as if in moving sequence, following the point of view of the character who is exploring them. What is significant is that we are constantly urged to admire the arrangement (*sajavat*) of a garden and the splendid furnishings of a room or a pavilion.¹⁶ In other words, nature is domesticated and spaces adorned for handsome living.

A similar shift occurs in the description of female beauty. Here, as with nature, literary convention was particularly strong, and Khatri did not abandon it completely. But whereas every heroine would be introduced by an elaborate "head-to-toe" (*nakh-shikh*) description, in the chapter quoted above—in which we catch the first glimpse of Chandrakanta and her sakhis—no physical description is offered. We assume she is beautiful since she is the heroine. We are told that she is at various points in the novel and her picture (as the forest girl) is indeed described, but the absence of elaborate description cannot fail to strike us as an authorial decision.¹⁷ Women in the novel are

¹⁵ Local trees and creepers appear also in the first description of the cave-tilism, whose secret entry only Tej Singh knows: the fruit trees mentioned here are *karjani*, *ghumchi*, *ber*, *mukoiche*, *chiraunji*, etc.: p. 28.

¹⁶ Though the narrator explains such detailed descriptions otherwise: "Reader, I will not utter praises of a garden at every step and describe each and every flower and leaf, because I have been writing this small volume in brief from the beginning until now. Besides, the gardens in this cave are not so big as to justify wasting reams of paper on them, though I have to say that all the gardens in this cave, whether big or small, are arranged in a nice fashion, and not just in terms of flowers: the hillocks and the leafy greenery are also attractive to the extreme": p. 288.

¹⁷ We can recall the unease of another great nineteenth-century novelist, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya, at describing his heroine according to the usual, highly sensual, conventions: see Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Tagore and the Transformations in the Ideals of Love', in Orsini (ed.), *Love in South Asia*, pp. 161–82.

beautiful, as they always are in dastans, and they never fail to attract and enamour men. Chunar's ruler Shivdatt Singh is immediately smitten with Chapala, who arrives disguised as a singer in order to look for the whereabouts of Tej Singh, kidnapped and held captive inside Chunar fort. But this is how she is described:

Chapala was no ordinary woman. Apart from beauty and elegance [*khubsurati aur nazakat*], she also had strength. To fight with two or three men and capture them was but a trifle for her. She was fully competent in the art of using weapons. And apart from the art of 'ayyari she had many other qualities. Masterful at singing and playing music, expert in dancing, very fond of making fireworks—what else can I write? There was no art in which Chapala was not skilled. Her complexion was fair, her body shapely in every way, her delicate hands and feet suggested that to strike her with a flower would be a crime. Whenever she needed to go out she would consciously spoil her beauty or disguise herself. (p. 62)

The notion of beauty at work here is the usual one of fairness and delicate features, but, in the case of this female 'ayyar, exquisite beauty hides a tough, fearless, and resourceful woman. Chapala knows the feminine arts and will flirt with Shivdatt Singh in order to obtain what she wants, but she can also carry an enemy 'ayyar on her back.

What about Chandrakanta herself? Surprisingly, her only physical description is in the shape of a painting of the mysterious forest girl, as already mentioned, admired by Birendra Singh himself. As in the case of the interiors and gardens, her beauty is a mixture of bodily features and adornments, in this case jewels, and shies away from explicit sensuality:

Oh, what a good and clear picture this is! It shows her natural height, the same large eyes whose lines are drawn so sharply. Aha! How the rosinness of her cheeks has been depicted, her smile, the redness of betel on her thin lips. The large earrings in her ears, the mark on her forehead and her nose ornament are all there, but how beautiful and clear is the *gop* around her neck, whose gem in the middle and gold leaf work at the sides show that the highest craftsmanship has been expended in its making. Not only the *gop*, all her jewels are exquisite. The chain around her neck, the armlets, *kangan*, wristlets, bracelets, rings, everything is perfectly crafted . . . (p. 195)

It could be argued that this list of jewels is in line with the dastan-gos' tradition of enumerating all the items of one class, yet, if taken together with the description of the tilism's interiors (and other elements that we will come to later), it is hard to escape the impression that the aesthetic evoked is one of wealth rather than princeliness.

Descriptions in *Chandrakanta* are thus not structurally different from those in dastans, though by being shorter they serve the novel's faster and more dramatic pace. The mention of local features conveys a sense both of specificity and closeness. Descriptions of natural locations and individuals no longer necessarily conform to literary and aesthetic conventions, and when they do, as in the case of gardens and women, the emphasis is less on wondrousness and sensuality than on an aesthetic of wealthy pleasure.

Several critics have pointed out that supernatural objects, events, and characters, so typical of the dastan world, do not disappear in *Chandrakanta* but are all "explained" so as to bring them within the order of the natural sciences.¹⁸ The author takes great care when explaining how the tricks (*tarkib*) of the 'ayyars work: whenever someone is rendered unconscious by the ubiquitous "drug of unconsciousness" (*behoshi ki dava*), we are told where and when exactly the 'ayyar mixed it in the victim's food or drink or sprinkled it over flowers.¹⁹ The 'ayyars' prodigious ability at disguising themselves is explained by taking recourse to the performing art of certain disguise artists

¹⁸ "Although the multiform activities of the 'ayyars cannot altogether be explained logically, Khatri spares no effort to make them believable . . . Strange and wonderful descriptions of herons and snakes made of powder, the stone man, self-playing instruments, a laughing stone dog, walls that make you unconscious at the mere touch, doors that automatically open and shut, fake doors and marvellous tunnels are all found in Khatri's narratives. But Khatri has painstakingly and scientifically described the mechanical structure of these tilismi marvels. This is what makes Khatri's narratives, which he called novels, different from Persian stories of 'ayyars and tilism. Even if Khatri drew inspiration for these descriptions from Persian and Urdu dastans, in nature they differ completely from them. The tilism of his novels is no magical spectacle like that of *Tilismi Hoshbruba* but shows the *clear imprint of the new mechanical age*": Ray, *Hindi Upanyas ka Itihas*, pp. 72-3, emphasis added.

¹⁹ For example, Chapala tricks the 'ayyar Nazim, who has entered the palace garden disguised as Champa, by placing some "powder of unconsciousness" in

(*bahurupiye*), who still practised (or were said to practise) their feats of disguise in India then. The magic world of tilism is explained by way of mechanics: when hit in a particular fashion, stone slabs reveal secret doors and chambers; long tunnels are actually excavated in the rocks, secret doors can be opened with special locks and hidden knobs. The stone figure of a man reading reclined over a platform which "magically" moves when touched is actually moved by a steam coming out of his mouth (p. 147). As with the 'ayyars' disguises, these explanations do not fully account in the end for the tilism devices, but what matters is the consistent attitude towards their explicability. It is as if the author and readers, both well acquainted with the wonderful world of tilism and 'ayyars' from the dastans, mutually shared a novelistic pact according to which one of the novel's new *expectations* was accountability, and natural or mechanical explanations had to be provided. (While, for example, astrology and other forms of divination were considered wholly within the natural world.²⁰)

The same requirement is at play in the characterization of the Bankanya. As mentioned, Chandrakanta and her sakhis reappear in the tilism as "forest girls" and behave in an imperious way that strongly resembles the fairies of Perso-Urdu dastans. Khatri uses the motif of the fairies as a dissembling device, confident that his readers will readily accept the event of a fairy princess falling in love with the human hero, as well as the playful tricks that fairies play on human characters. The function of the forest girls is also similar to that of fairies in dastans in that they sometimes help and at other times hinder the hero in his quest. Only, here the forest girls are *not* fairies, they are not supernatural beings and do not perform supernatural feats, they are only women in disguise. Moreover, as we shall see, the confusion and unease felt by Prince Birendra when he is attracted to the forest girl, and the feeling of guilt he feels for thinking less of

her ear and asking Champa/Nazim to check what is it in her ear that is troubling her: p. 16.

²⁰ In particular, *baladavi*, telling the future by swirling until one faints, and *ramal*, divination by drawing lines or figures on the ground. The astrologer Pandit Jagannath makes great use of ramal to discover the whereabouts of things and people, though ramal is powerless with tilisms and with the special metal of the amulets (*taviz*) that the forest girls wear: pp. 30, 56.

Chandrakanta and accepting marriage with the forest girl, are functional to the specific ethic that the novel proffers.

The final area of Indianization, or in this case Hinduization, worth considering regards the insertion of familiarizing elements pertaining to caste, family, and religion. The most obvious change introduced by Khatri is that all the main characters are Hindu: the princes and 'ayyars of the Perso-Urdu dastans are replaced with local Rajputs. Bengali novelists had elected Rajputs as the heroes of their historical novels,²¹ and the casting of Rajputs as protagonists makes *Chandrakanta* a historical novel by default. This is despite the fact that these are local Rajputs from the Banaras region rather than from Rajputana, and despite the historical period of the novel being unspecified. As we shall see, elements of modernity enter the novel at the level of genre ideology, making it a "dastan for a new age", but they do so surreptitiously, while the overall courtliness and adventurous quality of the novel suggest a more heroic age.

Transmogrifying the chivalrous ethic of Hamza and his companions in the Perso-Urdu dastans into *kshatriya dharma* was not a difficult move, since the ideals of heroism, magnanimity, generosity, and justice were common to martial groups across religious lines. The *kshatriya* ideal Birendra Singh subscribes to is defined by the same term used for dastan heroes, *javanmardi*, "gallantry", whose virtues include manliness, courage, and a magnanimous heart. Chunar's ruler Shividatt Singh is no *javanmard* because, among other things, he does not try to win Chandrakanta through his courage and generosity of heart (p. 96).²²

²¹ Notably, R.C. Dutt's *Rajput Jivan Sandhya* (1879), already translated in Hindi and published in Banaras probably in the early 1890s by the Bharat Jivan Press (see ch. 7); Gopal Ray, *Hindi Upanyas Kosh*, vol. 1, p. 312.

²² Actually, since 'ayyars with their feats dominate this novel, as they did in the dastans, the Rajput hero has only a few occasions to display his bravery, though his virtue is nonetheless never in doubt: "Your courage and *javanmardi* are not in doubt", Tej Singh's father reassures Birendra Singh while dissuading him from pursuing the 'ayyars who have kidnapped his friend Tej: p. 59. Birendra shines only on the battlefield, where he initially suggests that he and Shividatt Singh should fight each other singly, so as to spare the "unfortunate poor soldiers": p. 95. His proposal is refused, but he easily carries the day anyway.

Not only the princely heroes but even the divans and 'ayyars are predominantly Rajputs. This makes for a very cohesive social and ideological environment. In fact, here and there we find echoes in the novel of the anti-Muslim prejudices that, Shahid Amin has argued, found a wide echo in this period.²³ In passing, the mutinous villain Krur Singh claims that he has all the Muslims on his side, which makes the raja of Vijaygarh keep a wary eye on his Muslim soldiers and subjects (pp. 33, 39). And when an armed confrontation ensues between the ruler of Chunar and the raja of Vijaygarh, once again the threat of a mutiny of Muslim soldiers is voiced: they are made to fight in front, with a cannon right behind them (p. 84). Caste is mentioned only once in the novel, in relation to Chapala and her potential marriage to Tej Singh, but the discussion arising about it suggests that the novel is negotiating several stances at the same time. Intriguingly, it is Pandit Jagannath who raises the question:

Jyotishi: "So, Tej Singh, is Chapala of the same *jati* as you?"

Tej: "I don't know about her caste, but once love has happened, whatever the caste . . ."

Jyotishi: "But doesn't she have a guardian, anyone responsible for her? If she is not of your own caste, how will her parents agree?"

Tej: "If anything like that happens I will kill her and then I'll kill myself."

Prince [Birendra Singh]: "If you give me a reward I'll tell you what caste Chapala is . . . Chapala is of the same caste as we are. Her father was a very big landowner and an 'ayyar through and through. Her mother died when she was seven days old. Her father brought her up and taught her 'ayyari, he died only a few years ago . . ." (p. 245)

While the Pandit is introducing a realistic concern, in line with current social norms (the decision is not Chapala's but of whoever is her

²³ Shahid Amin, 'On Representing the Musalman', in S. Mayaram, M.S.S. Pandian, and A. Skaria (eds), *Subaltern Studies XII: Muslims, Dalits, and the Fabrications of History*, New Delhi: Permanent Black and Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2005, pp. 1-35.

“guardian”, *varis*), Tej reacts like a literary hero, to be precise a masnavi hero: caste, like religion and other worldly distinctions, does not matter when facing the power of love. And if their love cannot be accepted, they will be together in death. Birendra Singh’s solution introduces the typical novelistic motif of agnates. The two lovers are not only of the same caste, but also of the same social standing: while so far we only knew that Chapala was a female attendant to Chandrakanta, now we know that she is a zamindar’s daughter, thus perfectly fit to marry the divan’s son.

Behind these various Indianizing touches there lies a more basic Hinduization of the novel. Hinduizing is certainly involved in the presence of a Brahmin ‘ayyar like Pandit Jagannath, who on one occasion doubles as a messenger bearing a wedding proposal, a typical task of Brahmins and a nice touch (p. 73). Occasionally, sadhus and yogis also make an appearance, though mostly as a convenient and impressive form of disguise.²⁴ Thus, Jit Singh disguised as a yogi does not allow the rajas to prostrate themselves before him because he is not *really* a spiritual authority (p. 282). The vanquished Shividatt Singh declares that he will abandon his kingdom in order to perform austerities in the forest—a culturally accepted practice—though in fact he is plotting revenge (p. 238). Just as in the first volume of *Fasana-e Azad* every chapter began with Azad waking up and going out into the streets, again and again here a new chapter opens with a new dawn. And every time a new day begins for Birendra Singh and his companions, we see them taking a bath, performing puja as well as the *sandhya* ritual. Such examples can be multiplied. When Chapala is desperate trying to find Tej Singh, who has been kidnapped, she vows that she will fast and take no food or water (*anna-jal*) until she finds him: only when she discovers his whereabouts (through the power of her austerity?) does she allow herself to eat (p. 63). Finally, one of the sure proofs that Krur Singh is an unredeemable villain is not only that he has blithely killed his own father, but that he disregards the state of impurity and mourning (*sutak*) after his father’s death. When he hears that Birendra

²⁴ E.g. the ‘ayyar Devi Singh who, disguised as a Ramanandi sadhu, sings a song that informs Tej Singh about Krur Singh’s actions. Tej Singh’s father also disguises himself as a great yogi (*mahapurush*) “with a very long beard and matted hair”: pp. 36, 230.

has managed to enter Chandrakanta's garden, he runs to inform her father, Raja Jaysingh, as he is, "naked and with his head like a pan turned upside down" (p. 33).²⁵

The "domestication of the mythological"—and of the courtly we may add—and the "mythologization of the domestic" were, according to Anuradha Kapur, crucial to Parsi melodrama, "a mode which mediated the transition from courtly culture to the new domesticity and nationalism of the emerging middle classes." Love, she points out, "was critical to this process, as it domesticated the mythological and mythologized the domestic."²⁶ In this novel about chivalrous adventures and courtly characters inspired by dastans, we can see the very same domestication at work. It is at work in the royal characters, whose reactions are those of ordinary parents. Thus, when Chandrakanta and Birendra are in any danger, their fathers and mothers worry and fret. When Raja Jaysingh is warned by Krur Singh that his daughter Chandrakanta is dallying with Birendra in the garden and goes and finds no one there because Birendra has already left, he is doubly angry with Krur for "giving his daughter a bad name with no good reason" (*jhuth-muth badnam karna*, p. 28). And finally, when courtly and kinship etiquettes clash—as when towards the end Raja Jaysingh, who has already resolved to marry Chandrakanta to Birendra, visits Birendra's father—it is kinship etiquette that prevails. Courtly etiquette—and note the Perso-Urdu terms—would require that Surendra Singh, Birendra's father, welcome his neighbourly ruler (*istiqbal* is the term used) and offer him hospitality and refreshments (*ziyafat*, p. 281). But Jaysingh refuses the hospitality without giving any explanation, though Surendra Singh understands: Jaysingh's position as the father of the prospective bride overrules his role as an overlord to whom honour is due and puts him in a subordinate position in this situation.²⁷

Sometimes domestication is evident in the idiomatic expressions used. For example, when Tej and Birendra first discuss Krur Singh as

²⁵ Jaysingh is astonished to see him: "Krud Singh, you left your impure state and mourning for your father to come here—this astonishes me": p. 33.

²⁶ Anuradha Kapur, 'Love in the Time of Parsi Theatre', p. 227.

²⁷ Two other instances occur inside the tilism towards the end of the novel: the mysterious yogi (actually Jit Singh, Tej's father) first asks Birendra and Tej not to speak about Birendra's love and impending marriage to the forest girl to

one of the obstacles to Birendra and Chandrakanta's marriage, Tej observes that Raja Jaysingh will not "give his daughter to the son of his minister"—using the common expression "*larki dena*" (p. 12). The reservations against Birendra being Chandrakanta's prospective husband are removed pretty quickly in the novel, but even before then the princess's mother fondly recalls the time, before Chandrakanta's birth, when the child Birendra used to visit them often and the two fathers were "like one man". After Chandrakanta was born the two children played together, "and this was how their love for each other was born" (p. 40). The terms used for the intimacy between the two houses and the love between the two youths are domestic and domesticating ones, for she is trying to justify a love that has since become known and, hence, potentially objectionable.

Indianization, Hinduization, and domestication go hand in hand in the novel, then, bringing the wonderfully exotic world of the dastan tantalizingly closer home. In the same direction, another change emerges towards the end of the novel in relation to the very meaning of the adventure: this could be called a re-ideologization of the tilism.

The New Novel as a Dastan for a New Age

The trend in *Chandrakanta* towards elucidating supernatural and magical elements in terms of mechanical or quasi-natural "devices" (tarkib) has been rightly linked by critics like Gopal Ray to Khatri's

anyone outside: "You may talk about it between yourselves as much as you like, but if her parents find out won't they be displeased? Because for a girl of good family to meet a male stranger and correspond with him and make him an offer of marriage is very objectionable": p. 265. Later, the yogi asks Birendra to enter the tilism before the two fathers. The reason is that he wants Birendra to meet Chandrakanta safely out of sight of the two elders: "Usually, when one loses something one desires a lot and then finds it again after much effort or by surprise, one falls upon it just as a famished hawk falls on its prey. I know that you and Chandrakanta love each other very much, if you see each her or if she sees you suddenly in front of the two rajas, I would not be surprised if you or Chandrakanta were to do something disrespectful [*beadabi*], or if in a fit of passion you were to go and stand next to her. This would not be appropriate. Therefore I consider it better for you to meet the princess before them . . .": p. 283.

attempt to reconcile the dastan with modernity and with the modern genre of the novel. This trend is accompanied by a related intervention in the value system of the genre. In Perso-Urdu dastans the function of tilisms and of the other adventures of princes and 'ayyars was to provide entertainment. Ideologically, as we have already seen, the dominant courtly values of the princely characters were shared by all. Even though punctured and offset by the 'ayyars' irony, their earthy humour, and their greed, the 'ayyars themselves worked by their strict code of honour. To all appearances, *Chandrakanta* reproduces this dynamic balance between courtly ideals and the 'ayyars' counter-values; but towards the end of the novel a new explanation is offered for the existence of tilisms. This explanation, proffered by Siddhanta Yogi (Jit Singh in disguise), is worth noting, for while it is in line with the other attempts to "explain" the supernatural features of dastans, its foundations are not in courtly values but in wealth:

Baba: "A tilism is set up by a man who has a lot of wealth and treasures and no heir. He then asks the best astrologers [*vyotishi* and *najumi*] if a brilliant or worthy son is likely to be born in his family or his brothers' families. When finally the *vyotishi* and *najumi* inform him that after so many years a boy in his family is going to be brilliant and they write up his horoscope, a tilism is "tied" [*bandhna*] to his name, holding many treasures and beautiful precious objects.

Nowadays, the rule for setting up a tilism in somebody's name is that you put a little bit of money and treasure and then sacrifice one or two animals for it, which become ghosts or snakes and protect it and do not allow anyone, apart from the designated man, to take any money away. Earlier, the rule was different. In the old days, whenever kings needed to set up ["tie"] a tilism, *vyotishis*, *najumis*, *vaidyas*, craftsmen, and *tantriks* were gathered. In order to set up the tilism the ground would be dug up according to their instructions, then the treasure would be hidden in the ground and a tilism building would be erected on top. The *vyotishis*, *najumis*, *vaidyas*, craftsmen, and *tantriks* would then set their spells, each according to their strength, so as to hide the tilism, but they also kept in mind the astrological chart of the designated man. (p. 293)

The yogi/divan's explanation sets up an interesting historical narrative of ritual "simplification". According to this the elaborate tilisms found

in dastans and in the novel belong to an earlier period, when rajas conducted elaborate and expensive rituals with scores of specialists of religion and magic. They are not to be found "nowadays", not because they belong to a wonderful world as against reality, but because now tilisms are so small that they are hardly noticeable and cannot be distinguished from ordinary sacrifices (*balī*).²⁸ Even more striking, and in line with other shifts in the novel, is how the magical and wonderful world of tilisms is explained on the basis of the two co-ordinates of wealth and inheritance (cf. chapter 7). Why did Jit Singh become Siddhanta Yogi and prolong Birendra's search inside the tilism by distracting him with the forest girl and by hiding Chandrakanta in the second tilism? It was so that, by each breaking a tilism, Birendra and Chandrakanta could acquire the wealth hidden in the tilisms. As he explains:

"To bring the princess and Chapala outside the cave or bring them home would have been no big task for me, but I was inclined to have the princess break this small tilism with her own hand so that everything in it would become hers. Not just myself, everybody must know that the prince was breaking the Chunar tilism in order to free Princess Chandrakanta from captivity, and that he had no desire [*lalach*] for wealth and treasures. Had I taken the princess out of here myself and brought her to you, he would have stopped breaking the tilism and the treasure in it would have remained buried, too. I want you to prosper. I would never have accepted that so much wealth should go waste and that neither the prince nor Princess Chandrakanta should not get it."
(p. 295)

"*Mal-asbab*" is the term most often used in this passage, a term usually employed for household belongings.²⁹ The effect is reinforced

²⁸ Interesting also is how the various specialists of secret knowledge are grouped together: what they perform could be called magic, but this could also be viewed as their accepted secret and powerful knowledge.

²⁹ When Prince Birendra finds the treasure of the first tilism, the instructions written in the book order him to transfer all the boxes out of the tilism: the process of carrying the boxes out and back to Naugarh takes all of ten days. The prince frets at this delay in the search for Chandrakanta, but the book is adamant: he can make no progress until he becomes master of all the wealth: pp. 192-3. In the case of the second tilism, the precious things it contains can

when Chandrakanta's father exclaims: "May those people be thanked who accumulated all this wealth [*daulat*]. Had I wanted to sell my whole kingdom in order to put together things for the dowry [*dabez ka saman*], I would not have been able to put together more than one fourth of this!" (p. 298). Although the prince's official values of javanmardi are reconfirmed, the wonderful tilism is here re-ideologized as a means to acquire wealth and dowry. If we juxtapose this statement with the aesthetic of adornment that we found in physical and natural descriptions, we begin to see that the dastan's courtly splendour has been transvalued into an aesthetic of wealth. Wealth is no longer an attribute of princely courtliness, a means to the display of awesome splendour. Wealth is an end and a necessity, both for the hero and the heroine, and inheriting it is the only way in which they can acquire it (see also chapter 7).

A third and final aspect of this modernization of the dastan is the ubiquitous presence of written documents: letters, undertakings (*iqrar-nama*), marriage agreements, posters (*ishtahar*), and books. While in detective fiction (as in the two novels by Khatri analysed in the next chapter), the emphasis on written documents is a function of the new genre—letters and wills act as crucial proofs—in *Chandrakanta* written documents enter more incidentally. The visible presence of such documents can even in a novel be related to the greater visibility and role they played in the life of ordinary Indians.

Major Stock Characters: The *Ayyars*

'Ayyars were undoubtedly the most popular characters in dastans, and the same is true of the 'ayyars in *Chandrakanta*.³⁰ Their genealogy lies in Persian popular narratives. Historians have traced the existence of

remain there since it will become a pleasure residence for Chandrakanta and Birendra: p. 300.

³⁰ "Talk to any readers of *Chandrakanta* or *Santati* and they will speak with much greater enthusiasm of the marvellous tricks of [the 'ayyars] Tej Singh, Bhairo Singh, Badrinath, Jit Singh, Bhutnath, and so on, and of the tilisms at Chunar, Jamaniya, and Rohtasgarh, than of the love stories of Birendra Singh and his children": Ray, *Hindi Upanyas ka Itihas*, p. 71.

'ayyar confraternities in Iraq and Iran from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. They embodied the concept and institution of javanmardi, which indicated: (a) a set of virtues such as chivalry, generosity, magnanimity, bravery, and virtuous youth; and (b) an organization of men devoted to these principles. Though contemporary court historians in Iran often spoke disparagingly of 'ayyars, their deeds were celebrated in popular romances which portrayed the ideals of javanmardi. 'Ayyars often stole the show from brave but rather less sensationally skilled princes.³¹ In Perso-Urdu dastans 'ayyars are part of the courtly retinue. In Frances Pritchett's succinct definition:

They specialize in reconnaissance, espionage, disguise (impersonating women with implausible ease), commando tactics (scaling walls, tunnelling into fortresses, killing sentries, knocking enemies unconscious with drugs), and other forms of guerrilla warfare, thievery, and dirty tricks. 'Ayyars are not really part of the courtly elite, and so they have less dignity to uphold; they are tremendously given to playing practical jokes, especially vulgar ones, to each other and on their enemies . . . ['Amar, the chief 'ayyar] is responsible for virtually all of the considerable amount of humor in the dastan.³²

While 'ayyar-like qualities, such as omnipresence, omniscience, and perfect disguise, are manifest in the detective or detective-like characters in Hindi detective novels (*jasusi upanyas*, in the next chapter), in *Chandrakanta* the *jasus* characters act as mere spies and the 'ayyars are more like helpers. It seems that in *Chandrakanta* Khatri started out with 'ayyar characters that were very similar to the trickster figures of

³¹ See Hanaway, 'Persian Popular Romances', and also ch. 7.

³² Pritchett, *The Romance Tradition in Urdu*, pp. 40–1. According to one Persian romance, these were the attributes of the 'ayyar: "The 'ayyar must be a master of stratagems and have many ways of doing things. He must be clever and have a ready answer. He must speak softly and be able to deal with everybody and not be at a loss. He must make the obvious unseen and not mention a person's faults, and hold his tongue and speak little": *Samak-e 'Ayyar*, II, p. 220, quoted in Hanaway, 'Persian Popular Romances', p. 153. 'Ayyars share a secret language and a special attire, first and foremost the satchel (*barua*) containing all their necessary implements and ingredients.

the dastans: greedy, humorous, mischievous.³³ But then Khatri gradually emphasized the 'ayyars' adherence to a strict ethical code and to the values of their princely rulers. In fact, as mentioned, most of the 'ayyars' in the novel are Rajputs or their Muslim "equivalents", Pathans. They are incorporated into the courtly elite as ministers or ministers' sons: they are granted *jagirs*, royal embraces, and "equal status" (*barabari ka darja*) in exchange for their services.³⁴ The 'ayyars' ethical code includes the refusal to use force in order to extract information from enemy 'ayyars, and they absolutely forbid their masters to harm and punish other 'ayyars except with imprisonment. This means that, even in times of war, 'ayyars are never unduly upset about what other 'ayyars do: if one manages to kidnap an 'ayyar or even an overlord, eventually they will be freed. This makes for a peculiar kind of warfare, in contrast with the brutal killing of soldiers in battle,³⁵ but also for a lighter

³³ The only instance of greed on the part of an 'ayyar takes place towards the beginning of the novel in chapter 9 of part I, when, in a comic scene, Tej Singh manages to wrestle Rs 10,000 out of the munshi of Raja Jaysingh of Vijaygarh, only to then go to his own master, Birendra Singh, asking for more: "Yar, this is devil's money, add something to it so that it becomes pure . . . but it should be no less than the amount because your status is higher": p. 32. Disguises, and especially cross-dressing, of course give rise to many humorous incidents, as when Tej Singh enters Chandrakanta's private garden disguised as one of her *sakhis*. She then starts bantering with Chapala, and in the ensuing scuffle Chapala grabs one of her fake breasts, p. 12. This kind of sexual frisson is found also in contemporary Parsi theatre: see Anuradha Kapur, 'Impersonation, Narration, Desire, and the Parsi Theatre', in Blackburn and Dalmia (eds), *India's Literary History*, pp. 87-118; and Kathryn Hansen, 'Stri Bhumika: Female Impersonators and Actresses on the Parsi Stage', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. xxxiii, no. 35, 29 August-4 September 1998: 2291-2300.

³⁴ While female 'ayyars, like Chapala above, are skilled at singing and dancing just like *qissa* heroines, status makes the case of male 'ayyars more ambivalent: Tej Singh is very skilled at playing the flute, but when Chapala makes him accompany her singing in front of Chunar's ruler in order to free him from captivity, he jokes about the lowly status of the accompanist as contrasting with his own status as a *divan's* son: 'I became your accompanist (*safarda*). I had to do what my fathers and grandfathers never did!', p. 68.

³⁵ A fact commented upon in the only real battle scene in the novel, pt II, ch. 5.

mood, in contrast with the often dejected air of the princes. Also, though Tej Singh conducts a romance with Chandrakanta's sakhi Chapala, 'ayyars are otherwise chaste and never take advantage of their disguises to, for example, enter the women's quarters of their victims.³⁶

The chief 'ayyar of the *Dastan Amir Hamza*, Pritchett notes, has a wicked, and often scatological, sense of humour, in sharp and no doubt pleasurable contrast with Hamza's dignity.³⁷ In *Chandrakanta* this contrast is blunted, and whatever little humorous contrast there is in the exchanges between Tej Singh and Birendra Singh results more from the 'ayyar's pungent irony at the prince's *lack* of princely dignity than from the 'ayyar carrying counter-princely values. When Birendra is about to eat a pear allegedly peeled by Chandrakanta herself and delivered by her sakhi Chapala (but actually from an enemy 'ayyar in disguise), Tej scolds the prince for disobeying his warnings: "The hell you recognized that this was Chapala or an 'ayyar! Enough, you only needed to listen to a wench [*randi*] sweet-talking you and you were duped!!" (p. 43). Later, Tej teases the prince on several occasions for his sudden love for the forest girl and lesser love for Chandrakanta: "He falls in love at every step, he is yet to come out of one misfortune and

³⁶ E.g. when Tej Singh disguises himself as the divan of Vijaygarh, he sleeps in the divankhana at night: p. 40. But, again as a mark of incorporation, the divan assures him that he would have taken no offence had he slept in the inner quarters because "you are more than my own son to me": p. 43.

³⁷ "Not only is the content of 'Amar's humor entertaining, but the very fact of its presence is notable as well, for humor has been held to be dangerous to the 'high style' of the romance . . . But in chapter nine, the sublime heights of Hamzah's rapture over Mihr Nigar, and the scatological crudity of Baḳhtak's being forced to foul his clothing and carpet, occur literally in the same room at the same time—yet thanks to the interposed figure of 'Amar, Hamzah's dignity is not jeopardized. By the same token, Hamzah keeps 'Amar's unbounded, cruel humour within some kind of necessary restraint": Pritchett, *The Romance Tradition in Urdu*, p. 41. There is only one instance of scatological humour in *Chandrakanta*, when Tej Singh's disciple and 'ayyar, Devi Singh, taunts the enemy 'ayyars: they ask him permission to feed their fellow 'ayyar Badrinath, who is held captive because he refuses to admit to having stolen the tilism book. "You can go and fetch food for him, grants Devi Singh, but what will you do when he has to go and crap" (*disha jana*)? p. 156. Devi is the rudest 'ayyar, positively insulting Maharaja Shivdatt Singh of Chunar: p. 93.

he is ready to acquire a new one" (p. 164).³⁸ The ease with which the 'ayyar teases the prince and with which the prince accepts the teasing stems from a less hierarchical relationship than that between master and servant: Tej and Birendra are friends (*yar*), and while in the official space of the darbar Tej must pay obeisance to the prince, in private they are on more familiar terms: Birendra positively depends on Tej for everything. Can we read the ambivalence in this hierarchical relationship as another sign that the courtly world of the dastan had been reinterpreted for a new class of readers who inhabited a more fluid social world?

Commercial Acumen and the Simplification of Hindi

What made Devkinandan Khatri the first commercially successful Hindi writer—much more than the towering figure of his compatriot Bharatendu Harishchandra? Gopal Ray, who has long reflected on the question of readers' tastes,³⁹ puts it down largely to a single crucial factor: works by Bharatendu's contemporaries were written with the aim of "enriching" Hindi literature; they wanted to educate their readers rather than meet their existing tastes and linguistic repertoires. "As a result, the novel of Bharatendu's age could not attract ordinary readers. Devkinandan Khatri easily filled this gap between novels and readers with his commercial acumen. Khatri was the first novelist in Hindi who created narratives keeping in mind the readerly competence and taste of contemporary prospective Hindi readers, who were barely literate and were well acquainted with colloquial Urdu words and expressions but ignorant of Sanskrit and who, despite their huge numbers, were neglected by writers."⁴⁰ Ray quotes Devkinandan Khatri himself as saying:

When I began writing *Chandrakanta* there were poets and writers like *Kavivar* Pratap Narayan Mishra and *Panditpravar* Ambikadatt

³⁸ See also pp. 169, 175, 210.

³⁹ See Gopal Ray, *Hindi Katha Sahitya aur Uske Vikas par Pathakon ki Ruchiyon ka Prabhav* (The Influence of Readers' Tastes on Hindi Narrative Literature and its Development), Patna: Grantha Niketan, 1965.

⁴⁰ Ray, *Hindi Upanyas ka Itihas*, p. 70.

Vyas. [. . .] At that time there were Hindi writers, but no buyers of Hindi books; now there are buyers but not such writers. Many of my friends speak of the ingratitude of Hindus, pointing out that they did not buy the excellent books of a patriot like Babu Harishchandra. But what I say is that if Babu Harishchandra had made his language a little simpler, our friends would have no cause for putting such blame on their own society, and by mixing natural words [*svabhavikshabd*] Hindi's passenger train would have become an express mail . . . I am the one who can ascertain which type of Hindi is mine, and I know that one does not need to reach for the dictionary in order to read it. When I started *Chandrakanta* I had no idea that it would become so widely read, I wrote it for my own amusement. But later when I saw how fond people were of it I also became attached to it and turned the book into a means for spreading those ideas which I had not been able to publish until then, and I wrote ordinary things in simple language which would make me the darling of that developing circle. [. . .] I am delighted to have been successful in this task and to have found such a good circle of buyers for my book. Many are aware of the fact that scores of men and women learnt the Nagari script in order to read *Chandrakanta*, and even those who never had to learn Hindi did so for this purpose.⁴¹

Khatri's colloquial register shunned "literariness" even for set pieces like natural and physical descriptions, a bold move for a writer of that period. Khatri included Perso-Urdu vocabulary whenever appropriate, e.g. for example for mechanical devices or terms relating to courtly transactions. As we have seen, he Indianized and Hinduized his characters, so that a *pari* became a *bankanya*, but by and large he maintained the Persianizing register that Rajput petty rulers would also have used. As Ray suggests, this was a judicious move. This was the language that Hindu and Muslim neo-literate people like "Betab", who were acquiring a basic Hindi and Urdu literacy, would have been familiar with. As a matter of fact, *Chandrakanta* was printed in the Urdu script as early as 1898, an indication that this Indianized and modernized dastan found favour among Urdu readers too. It could well be that readers already familiar with dastans, and those who were new to them,

⁴¹ D. Khatri, *Chandrakanta Santati*, pt XXIV, ch. 8, quoted in Ray, *Hindi Upanyas ka Itihas*, p. 70.

found different echoes in the text. For the former, *Chandrakanta* would have represented an addition to an already existing palimpsest formed by earlier dastans. For the latter it would perhaps have represented an autonomous work or a particular version of the Rajput palimpsest. Whatever the case, the long-lasting popularity of *Chandrakanta* suggests that its particular kind of eclecticism—mixing “Rajput heroism” with the dastan’s ‘ayyars and the marvellous with the familiar—became an integral part of the pleasure of print.

Chandrakanta was the most spectacular success of nineteenth-century Hindi publishing and created a wide audience for Hindi novels in the 1890s. In the next chapter, I will situate it within the development of commercial writing and publishing in Banaras in order to show the novelty it introduced, not just as a text but as a “field of possibilities” for commercial Hindi writers in the 1890s. This field came to be largely occupied by detective novels, which became the most widely published and read genre of Hindi fiction for at least the two ensuing decades. As a genre introduced, and not reproduced, from existing oral or literate traditions, detective novels raise a specific set of issues concerning genealogy and adaptation, as also the introduction and familiarization of new pleasures.