

'Dirty' Hindi Literature

Contests around Obscenity in Late Colonial North India

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This paper focuses on obscenity and sexually coded representations in Hindi literature and advertisements of late colonial north India, with special emphasis on Uttar Pradesh (then known as the United Provinces, hereafter UP). While examining the impact of print and new literary sensibilities, it is broadly concerned with the 'moral panic' that gripped a section of the British and Hindu middle classes in this period, creating anxieties regarding questions of sexuality. The fashioning of a 'civilised' and 'appropriate' literature paved the way for a new kind of aesthetics, and for the fashioning of a modern collective Hindu identity. At the same time, the attempts to cleanse literature of all its perceived obscenities faced a serious challenge from more commercial forms of print literature. The sale of erotic, 'obscene' and semi-pornographic works and the publication of a number of advertisements for aphrodisiacs indicate an increasingly popular demand, and fed into female and male sexual fantasies and desires. Such works reveal literary pluralities, and the complex and contested terrain of Hindi literature.

Language, literature and print have been viewed as significant means for contests over power, propagation of dominant ideas and the fashioning of national, regional and community identities in modern Europe, Asia and Africa. In the context of sexuality and obscenity, it has been argued that there was a propagation of disciplinary regimes and increasing policing in domains of modern life, leading to distinctions of bourgeois identity. In the modern period, the denial of eroticism developed into a dominant image, a renewed insistence upon control and upon the danger of licentiousness. In Europe it is also asserted that obscenity emerged as a distinct regulatory category at this time, in part due to the rise of literacy, the spread of print, and in part due to Victorian notions of chastity.

In India, the first obscenity laws appeared in the late nineteenth century. Sections 292, 293 and 294 of the Indian Penal

¹ It has been argued that in particular historical moments, widespread social fears and anxieties may result in 'moral panics' around sexuality, especially among the middle classes. See Stanley Fish, *Demons and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London, 1972), p. 9; Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (1981), pp. 14, 92.

² For example, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983); Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, Cambridge, 1991; Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan Sheridan, London, 1972; Elisabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (1979).

³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, 1978, pp. 24-25, 145-46.

⁴ Lynn Hunt, 'Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800', in *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800* (New York, 1993); Peter Michel, *Speaking the Unspeakable: A Poetics of Obscenity*, 1993, p. 3; Brian McNair, *Mediated Sex: Pornography and Postmodern Culture*, 1996, pp. 42, 53. The debate on obscenity has extended in recent years to pornography. Sharp lines have been drawn between anti-pornography and anti-censorship feminists. Catharin Mackinnon, in her powerful critique of pornography claims that it institutionalises the sexuality of male supremacy, fusing the eroticisation of domination and submission with the social construction of male and female, Catherine A. Mackinnon, 'Pornography, Civil Rights and Speech', in Catherine Itzin, *Pornography: Women, Violence and Civil Liberties*, 1992, p. 462; Catherine A. Mackinnon, *Words* Cambridge, 1993. However, Judith Butler questions the pervasive power of pornography. She builds a case for performative contradiction, whereby utterances cannot be assigned a consensus of meanings, Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York, 1997), pp. 71-102. Divisions often made between legitimate erotic art on the one hand and obscene pornography on the other have been attacked, linking it to debates on high and low culture, Pamela Church Gibson and Betty L. Gibson, eds, *Women, Pornography, Power* (London, 1993). It has also been pointed out that distinctions need to be made between sexually explicit representations and sexism. Consensual and coercive sex cannot be collapsed, *Feminists Against Censorship and Feminism: The Case Against Censorship* (London, 1991); Jane Duncan, *Between Speech and Silence: Hate Speech, Pornography and the New South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1996). Some even say that pornography actually reflects male anxieties and fears, Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh, eds, *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornographic Debate*, 1992. Moreover, it is argued that while women are victims of violent crimes, the persistent foregrounding of pain and political correctness marginalises women's sexual pleasures and desires, Carole S. Vance, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, 1984.

Code were explicitly designed for the prevention of any form of obscenity. They were defined to include any visual or written material that was 'lascivious or appealed to the prurient interest' or which had the 'effect of depraving or corrupting persons exposed to it'. Section 194 of the Sea Customs Act and Section 3 of the Dramatic Performances Act also made provisions against various forms of 'obscenity'. Further, Section 20 of the Post Office Act, 1898, forbade the transmission of any obscene article through the postal network. At the international level, British India signed an agreement for the suppression of obscene publications in Paris on 4 May 1910. An international conference in Geneva in 1923, resulted in the Obscene Publications Act, 1925, in India. However, in spite of various rules, regulations and agreements, the term 'obscenity' has remained vague. It has often been used to attack not only 'pornography' as it is often defined today, but also in the nineteenth century England, to outlaw publications on birth control. In colonial India too, there was no clear definition of the term, and it could encompass a variety of meanings in common usage and debates. This paper looks at obscenity in this broad sense, as distinctions were often blurred, and extremely divergent material could be classified as obscene or indecent.

Susie Tharu and K. Lalita have highlighted the case of the eighteenth century Telugu poet and courtesan Muddupalani, whose erotic epic *Radhika Santwanam* was republished in 1911. This classic work placed the sensuality of Radha at its centre. The British soon banned this edition on charges of obscenity, and a long controversy followed. Lalita emphasise the role played by the British, but the first vehement criticism of the text came in 1887 from the Telegu social reformist, Kandukuri Veershalingam, who denounced the work for its crude depiction of indigenous concern was not just a borrowing of Victorian morality; indeed, British sensibilities were often shaped by indigenous representations. Tharu and Lalita speculate that 'it is possible that the work became so controversial... principally because it was written by a woman!'. However, charges of obscenity cut across gender lines; many works which were to become equally controversial were written by men, signifying perhaps that it was the issue of 'obscenity' that was central.

Any discussion on obscenity is closely linked with the debate on elite and popular literature. Some scholars argue that in India, new elite literary sensibilities marginalised popular traditions, and that print displaced performance. Standardised and sanitised literary norms became a marker of modern national identity and culture for the educated middle classes. Roger Chartier (and others) has emphasised the strong continuity between the age of the manuscript and that of print. Printed texts could be transmitted in varied idioms -- educational, oral and performative; read and staged -- each offering different meanings. In addition, Robert Darnton has stressed that in pre-revolutionary France, the canon of great

⁵ The test was based on the famous English case of R.V. Hicklin, decided in 1868. The English authorities stated that the test of obscenity is 'whether the tendency of the matter is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall'. There was an intense debate among the British officials from the 1870s on how to interpret Section 292 -- what it covered and what was left out. For details see 229-232/January 1890, Public, A, Home Deptt (NAI); 457-483/October 1891, Public, A, Home Deptt (NAI).

⁶ 193-204/April 1913, Judl, A, Home Deptt (NAI).

⁷ 570/1923, Judl, Home Deptt (NAI); S. H. Sarkar, *Code Penal Law of India*, (Delhi, 1980)² Edn, p. 1996.

⁸ Susie Tharu and K. Lalita (eds), *Women Writing in India: 600 B. C. to the Present, Vol. I: 600 B. C. to the Early Twentieth Century* (Delhi, 1991), pp. 1-12, 116-20.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp.2-3. Also see Manjari Pandey, 'Ashlita ke Bahane Nari ke Prashn' (January-December 1994), p. 27.

¹⁰ Eugene F. Irshid, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795-1895*, (1994).

¹¹ Tharu and Lalita, *op. cit.* 118.

¹² Svati Joshi (ed), *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language and Culture* (New Delhi, 1992); Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta* (Calcutta, 1989); idem, 'Marginalisation of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaidya (eds), *Women: Essays in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi, 1989), pp. 127-79; idem, 'Bogey of the Bawdy: Changing Concept of "Obscenity" in Nineteenth Century Bengal', *South Asian Studies*, July 1987, pp. 1197-1206; Tapati Roy, 'Disciplining the Printed Text: Colonial and Nationalist Surveillance of Bengali Literature', in Partha Chatterjee (ed), *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal* (Bengal, 1995), pp. 30-62.

¹³ Roger Chartier (ed), *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1989), esp. pp. 1-5; idem, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations* (London, 1988); Sydney G. Cochrane (Cambridge, 1988);

'Publishing Drama in Early Modern Europe', The Panizzi Lectures 1998, British Library (8-10 December 1998).

Enlightenment philosophers like Voltaire and Rousseau was read by the people only to a limited extent. The best-sellers of the time were the forbidden, salacious and pornographic books, sold clandestinely.

In UP, print stimulated new expressions of vernacular literature. Not only did oral-performative traditions, scribal cultures and spoken languages continue to hold sway, but also genres like *masnawi* and *sangit*, *qissa* and *kahani*, and languages like Braj and Avadhi adapted themselves to new commercial forms. Print gave them a wider diffusion. It was an arena where printed, oral and visual media criss-crossed, leaving their imprint on each other.

A complementary line of analysis has drawn sharp distinctions between high and low literature, and between small, popular presses and writers, and big, elite ones. The Hindu literati attempted to discipline writing, but reading practices and the market led them to borrow some popular elements in their work. Peter Burke has argued that in early modern Europe also, the upper classes did not wholly withdraw from common culture. Similarly, popular literature selectively appropriated certain values of elite literature. Meryl Attman maintains that popular sex literature could sometimes be a medium through which the dominant culture, under the guise of breaking taboos, could actually reinforce them.

There is a tendency to view popular culture uncritically as healthy, sensual and subversive. On the other hand, Rustom Bharucha sees it as 'pornographic continuum' and 'violent titillation', a 'bombardment' and 'infiltration', aiding rightwing men to assert their masculinity. Such 'all or nothing' readings deny contradictory meanings, as popular culture and literature are by themselves neither reactionary nor liberating. They do not simply reflect or create particular values. However, in specific historical moments, even when falling under the dominance of patriarchy and male hegemony, they can offer a variety of interpretations. In colonial UP too, popular licentious literature helped at times in reconstituting and delegitimizing conventional values. At the same time, the high Hindi literary canon was itself not homogeneous.

The first part of this paper briefly examines colonial perceptions of obscenity. The second section explores the attack on late medieval literature, particularly on charges of obscenity, by a section of Hindi literati. It simultaneously probes the commercially popular literature, with a special focus on 'dirty' books. The final section concentrates on notions of brahmacharya and printed advertisements for aphrodisiacs, and attempts to explore through them questions of male sexuality, and how that too changed the moral contours of the period.

I. Colonial Perceptions of Obscenity

British perceptions of 'obscenity' in India had complex origins. A section of Orientalists had certain notions of romanticism and harped on the myth of the golden age of the ancient Indian/Hindu civilisation, which was then usually portrayed as a victim of the coming of the Muslims. The Hindu past too was often only selectively appreciated. A higher place was accorded to the philosophical abstractions of Hindu religion. However, its other aspects, like erotic temple carvings, 'indecent' sexual portrayals in texts, and emotional bhakti cults were either ignored, or understood as 'lower' and 'popular' forms of religion, which appealed to the magical and sensual mentality of the common people.

¹⁴ Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (London, 1996).

¹⁵ Anindita Ghosh, 'Cheap Books, "Bad" Books: Contesting Print-Cultures in Colonial Bengal' (1998), pp. 173-94 draws a more sophisticated analysis, but she too at times succumbs to making a sharp distinction between respectable and popular presses.

¹⁶ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978).

¹⁷ Meryl Attman, 'Everything They Always Wanted You to Know: The Ideology of Popular Sex Literature', in Carole S. Vance (ed.), *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (London, 1984), pp. 115-30.

¹⁸ Banerjee ParLOUR.

¹⁹ Rustom Bharucha, *In the Name of the Secular: Contemporary Cultural Activism in India* (Delhi, 1998).

²⁰ For details see Uma Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to "Das"?: Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past', in Sangari and Vaid (eds), *Re-Visioning*, pp. 27-87.

Horace Hayman Wilson, successor of Sir William Jones, was grimly proper. He shrank from all that was physical. He did not expressly condemn the erotic element; he disregarded it. He studied *Radhakavya* but he curtly disapproved of those where Indian attitudes towards love and sex were boldly proclaimed: 'The great mass of it is taken up with tiresome descriptions of Vrindavan and Gokula, the dwellings of Krishna... and the *gopi* of the Radha towards him'.

Wilson published his views in 1840. Wilson and Griffith in their translation of the *Gitagovind* revealed similar puritanical concerns. In 1875, Sir Edwin Arnold translated Jayadeva's *Gitagovind*, but the last canto was too much even for him and 'in order to comply with the canons of western propriety', he left it out.

There were other reasons for disapproval towards certain sensual elements in India sculpture, literature and art by some British officials. The apparent lack of 'scientific knowledge', 'reason' and 'decency', with emphasis on voluptuous details, was distasteful. As late as 1933, Roger Fry objected to the intrusion of erotic representation into the aesthetic form in Indian art. It was 'primitive' on aesthetic grounds, discrepant with the ideas of post-Renaissance Europe. He remarked:

The general aspect of almost all Indian works of art is intensely and acutely distasteful to me.... The sensuality of Indian artist is exceedingly erotic – the leitmotiv of much of their sculpture is taken from the more relaxed and abandoned poses of the female figure. A great deal of their art, even their religious art, is definitely pornographic and although I have no moral prejudices against that form of expression, it generally interferes with aesthetic considerations by interposing a strong irrelevant interest which tends to distract both the artist and the spectator from the essential purposes of art.

However, colonial perceptions were not homogeneous. Woodroffe for example drew favourable attention to what had been thought depraved -- tantric practices and beliefs. Havel and George Birdwood admired Indian crafts. However, these are only indirectly relevant here, as they did not explicitly intervene in subjects thought to be 'obscene'.

In many of the missionary, ethnographical, recruitment and official policy discourse, Indian traditions and practices were denigrated as barbaric, involving women in important ways. They went on to see Western knowledge as an enabling and civilising agency for the improvement of the natives. In UP for example, a number of tracts taken out by the North Indian Christian Tract and Book Society, Allahabad, disapproved of many Hindu customs for their 'obscenity'. One such tract stated:

We all know the kinds of evils and indecency prevalent during Holi. However, if the Government puts a stop to these bad things, it is regarded as an interference.... There are a large number of Hindu temples which have such obscene portrayals that anyone seeing them would feel impure and still people say that to go to such temples is a matter of religion.... When Krishna committed all indecent things with *gopis*, was he not evil?

Someone like William Crooke had an interesting note to make while talking of the marriage songs of northern India: 'The Indian woman's bodice is in reality no covering at all. It rudely shelters the breasts and leaves the stomach exposed. But chiefly on account of its indecency it has been the subject of many praises in the compositions of authors and poets, who only think of love in its meanest form'.

The weakness and depravity of Hindu women and their visibly low status in contemporary Indian society was emphasised by many observers. Sexual obsession was seen as one of the problems. The *resacred* man typified India's moral

²¹ Quoted in Archer Papers, Mss. Eur. F. 236/107 (IOL).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Professor Westmacott wrote in 1864, 'There is no temptation to dwell at length at the sculptor of Hindustan... [They] usually consist of monstrous combinations of human and brute forms, repulsive from their ugliness and outrageous defiance of rule and even possibility' quoted in Archer Papers.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Especially see James *The History of British India*, with notes and continuation by H. H. Wilson, 1858th edn, pp. 310-15.

²⁶ North Indian Christian Tract and Book Society, *Dharma ke Phal* (Allahabad, 1905th edn) pp. 26-7. Also see North Indian Christian Tract and Book Society, *Idryaon ki Nirdhan* (Allahabad, 1909); A. C. Clay, *Preachers in Print: An Outline of the Work of the Christian Literature Society for India* (London, 1911).

²⁷ William Crooke, 'Marriage Songs in Northern India' *Antiquary* 55 (1926), p. 83 fn.

degeneracy. Not only did she live a life of idleness in closed and unhealthy rooms, her entire existence was seen as suffused with sensuality. The sexuality of the Indian woman was in sharp contrast to that of the English woman who, veiled in modesty, remained vigorous but delicate, active but demure. As one writer stated:

The opinion is firmly established throughout the whole of India, that women were only created for the propagation of the species, and to satisfy men's desires.... Experience has taught that young Hindu women do not possess sufficient firmness, and sufficient regard for their own honour, to resist the ardent solicitations of a seducer.

From a different perspective, Katherine Mayo attacked the excessive obscenity of many religious practices of India and attributed many of the country's problems to child mothers, rearing sickly idle sons in the midst of sexual obsession.

Obscenity and backwardness took on a more serious connotation with notions of decadence and lascivious lifestyle of medieval Muslim rulers and with attacks on certain 'degeneration' in religious practices and literary forms in the medieval period. Several separate observations were often conflated to present an impression of pervasive obscenity in medieval literature and culture particularly. Vincent A. Smith observed:

One of the best and most instructive of the old travellers was Monsieur Jean de Thevenot, who visited India in 1666 and 1667.... Writers on Indian art have not yet noticed, as far as I am aware, his criticism of the Agra and Delhi paintings, which I transcribe as being of considerable interest: '...since those of Agra are for the most part indecent, and represent lascivious postures, worse than those of Aretin, there are but few civil Europeans who will buy them'.... When I examined hundreds of specimens of Mughal and Indo Mughal art three years ago, I found only four... which could be reproached for indecency. The wholesale accusation of indecency brought against the artists of Agra, no doubt quite justified, has been a surprise to me. The explanation of the absence of such objectionable works from the London collections, must be... that 'civil', or decent Europeans seldom bought the indecent paintings... The lasciviousness of that school may be ascribed reasonably to the evil example set by Shahjahan.

It has been remarked that poetry was quite often singled out as a source of moral deficiency of Indians like F. E. Keay, who were otherwise full of praise for Hindi literature, could not resist stating the following, especially about late medieval poetry: 'That literature of this kind has, however, a very dangerous tendency has too often been shown.... Another thing to be noticed in Hindi poetry is the limitation of the range of its subject matter.... There is indeed a good deal of erotic poetry of a very unhealthy type'.

The position of women too was shown to have degraded due to many practices. In her monograph on the glorification of Hindu women in ancient India, inspired by Max Muller, Clarisse Bader too associated decadence in the position of women with the spread of eroticism, and the growth of the sensuous Vaishnav and Krishna cults. She argued that India was further corrupted by the influence of Islam. Moral degradation was a direct result of replacement of duty with passion.

Many British had clear notions of propriety and respectability. Observations from different perspectives counterposed concepts of 'state' and 'civil society' to notions of vulgarity in aspects of Indian religion, culture and literature, especially in medieval times. They revealed an interest in demarcating what was 'obscene' and what was permissible in present-day civic order, showing not only their concern with Victorian notions of sexual morality and chastity but also aesthetic tastes and anxieties over public health and decency.

II. 'Obscenities' in Hindi Literature

²⁸ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 107-9.

²⁹ Abbe J. A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* (London, 1906), p. 207.

³⁰ Vincent A. Smith, 'Painting and Engraving in Agra and Delhi', *Journal of the Asiatic Society* (1914), p. 124. Smith refers to the same in his book *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, p. 336.

³¹ Gauri Viswanath, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York, 1989), pp. 82-83.

³² F. E. Keay, *A History of Hindi Literature* (London, 1920), pp. 79-80, 102.

³³ Quoted in Chakravarti, 'Whatever', pp. 44-46.

There were parallel trends within contemporary indigenous assessments, though for different reasons. The Hindi literary sphere not only contested and selectively appropriated some of these observations, but also influenced and left its impact on colonial perceptions.

II.1. Indigenous Elite and Literary Concerns

A vocal and influential section of the Hindu middle class literati of UP was trying to fashion a new collective identity for itself, especially from the late nineteenth century. The period saw a rapid development of public institutions, libraries, and print culture, with growing publishing houses, presses, newspapers and *Sanskrit* a Hindi magazine started from Allahabad in 1900, and its editor Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, were to become extremely influential over the next 20 years, and adopted the role of educators of the Hindi literati. Educational institutions like the Kashi Vidyapeeth, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and Allahabad University argued for standardisation of syllabi and text books in schools and colleges. Kamta Prasad Guru (1875-1947) wrote the first authoritative Hindi grammar. Ramchandra Shukl, Professor of Hindi at BHU, composed his landmark *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas* in 1929. It was to become a reference point for future generations. Literacy acquired new meanings, as it was linked more and more to employment in offices, schools and print media. Various other magazines, journals and newspapers like *Chitra* and *Abhyudaya* became means of journalistic, literary and linguistic expression for assertions of self-identity by a confident Hindu middle-class, and for a growing Hindi public sphere in the early twentieth century. Prose took over from poetry. Text creation became a wider activity and the impact of the printed word extended beyond the literate level. The attempt made by Arya Samaj to use Hindi to develop the self-perception of a Hindu community in the urban educated groups made a significant contribution to the association of Hindi with Hindu. These processes aided the demarcation of the Hindi literary and linguistic canon in the syllabi, school-books and university departments of the period.

This important strand of Hindi literature was strategically tied to the nation, and to the assertion of civilisation and pride. Endeavours at linguistic standardisation were combined with attacks on any hints of eroticism and obscenity in literature, seen as hallmarks of a decadent, feminine and uncivilised culture. There was a growing fear of romance, of sexual and bodily pleasure, seen as a transgression of the ideals of the nation itself. The assertion of a nationalist Hindu identity became associated with the formation of shared notions of morality and respectability. In the process, tradition was redefined to work out a new modernity. There was a deliberate distancing from the 'uncomfortable' traditions of the past and an attempt to establish a monolithic, high textual cultural norm. In this quest for a new and 'proper' Hindi literature, embodying new aesthetic values, the image of women in late medieval literature particularly was declared unfit for public consumption. In a large part of canonised high Hindi literature, there was a gradual shift in emphasis from the erotic and sexually active and Radha of medieval poetry to the chaste and virtuous Hindu wife and mother. This shift from the sensual to the virtuous radically altered gender imagery and the woman was gradually transformed from a figure of eroticism, sexuality, excess and

³⁴ C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 338; idem, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 427-30.

³⁵ Krishna Kumar, 'Quest for Self-Identity: Cultural Consciousness and Education in Hindi Region', *ES* 180-235 (June 1990), pp. 1247-55.

³⁶ Nandi Bhatia, 'Twentieth Century Hindi Literature', in Nalini Narayan (ed.), *Twentieth Century Literatures of India* (Westport, 1996), pp. 137-38.

³⁷ Kumar, 'Quest'.

³⁸ This was visible in other regions as well. See Pragati Mohapatra, 'The Making of a Cultural Identity: Language, Literature and Gender in Orissa in late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', unpublished PhD thesis (SOAS, University of London, 1997).

playfulness, to a classic, calm and perfect figure in the majority of 'high' literature. The assertion of a moral code in a canon of literature became a national virtue.

For more than 300 years, from the mid-sixteenth to the nineteenth century, Braj was a dominant vehicle for the vernacular Hindi poetry.³⁹ The bulk of this period is commonly known as *Riti Ka*⁴⁰ when pious devotional poetry gradually gave way to *riti* verses. The deliciousness of *gōpī* poetry rested largely on the ambiguity of reference inherent in traditional poetic situations and characters. There had been long-established conventions of embracing devotional contexts within the Sanskrit tradition. Jayadeva's *Govind* composed in the twelfth century, is one of the examples of open eroticism and intense passion, celebrating the love between Radha and Krishna, and expressing the complexities of divine and human love.⁴¹ During the *Riti Ka* this tradition was enhanced, *andingar ras* and *nayak-nayika bheda* became the hallmarks of poetry. Radha here stands as a potent symbol of every woman in love and is neither mother nor wife. The sexuality of Radha and the *nayika* generally cannot be contained within any rigid bounds of conventional propriety. She is mostly described as *parakiya* and her unconventional love is privileged over *shakya*. There is an accumulation of sensual and voluptuous detail in this poetry. Radha and Krishna are engaged often in a daringly adulterous and incestuous relationship. It is even argued that the *gōpīs* of Krishna were largely low caste, rural and adulterous. *Riti Ka* poetry was influenced by Vaishnavism, but also followed certain rhetorical and stylistic models which allowed the liberal use of Perso-Arabic words and even folk elements, signifying a somewhat syncretic culture, composed of the residual Vaishnav mysticism and Muslim Sufi ethos, combining to form the medieval high art tradition. This poetry is a vast collection, but here I give two examples:

Wearied after climbing her breast-mountains, my glance went on, desiring her mouth;
but couldn't move again, just lay there fallen into the cleft of her chin.

Or:

The embodiment of beauty,
young, intelligent,
graceful, lovely, brilliant --
thus is the *nayika* described by *dhī*.

The *nayika* here itself emerged as an allegorical motif. Laden with poetic metaphors, she remained the central aesthetic category of this literature.

³⁹ For a basic study of Braj Bhasha see Rupert Seal *Hindi Classical Tradition: A Braj Bhasha Reader* (London, 1991), pp. 29-36.

⁴⁰ Some outstanding poets are Biharilal, Kesavdas, Matiram and Devdatta. Biharilal (1617-67) was born in Gwalior, married and settled in Mathura and was later attached to Mirza Raja Jaisingh of *Satsai* (a collection of verses) is full of eroticism and Kesavdas (1555-1617) was born in a literary family of Sanadhya Brahmins of Tehri Garhwal. He was later attached to the court of Orchha and his best work is *Rasikapriya*. Matiram Tripathi was born near Kanpur in 1616. Devdatta was born in a village of *Uppam* in *Uttar Pradesh* is regarded as the last word on the treatment of love and an in-depth study of the psychology of women. See *Riti Ka* by *Rajendra Prasad*, *Sangraha* (Allahabad, 1961); K. P. Bahadur (trans.), *Rasikapriya of Keshava* (Delhi, 1972); K. P. Bahadur (trans.), *Satsai of Biharilal* (Delhi, 1990); Lala Bhagwan *Bimari Bodhi* (Kashi, 1925); Madan Gopal *Origins and Development of Hindi/Urdu Literature* (New Delhi, 1996), pp. 79-84.

⁴¹ Barbara S. Miller (ed.), *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva Govinda* (New York, 1977).

⁴² Rakesh Gupta, 'The Nayaka-Nayika Bheda', *Sahitya Darshan Review*, 9 (October 1956), 1, 12 (January 1957) and 2, 3 (April 1957), pp. 14-19, 20-25 and 102-9 respectively. *Siddhis in Nayaka-Nayika-Bheda* (Allahabad, 1967); Usha Prasad *Braj Bhasha Kavya Mein Radha* (Delhi, 1990); Narendra Nath Bhattacharya, *History of Indian Erotic Literature* (New Delhi, 1975); A. W. Entwistle, *Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage* (Groningen, 1987), pp. 48-97; Richard Barz *Bhakti Sect of Vallabhadra* (Fyzabad, 1976), pp. 97-100; Sudhir Kakar, 'Erotic fantasy: the secret passion of Radha and Krishna', in Veena Das (ed.), *The World: Fantasy, Symbol and Record* (Delhi, 1986), pp. 75-94; John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulfe (eds.), *The Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India* (Berkeley, 1982); John S. Hawley, 'Images of Gender in the Poetry of Krishna', in Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell and Paula Richman (eds.), *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* (Boston, 1996), pp. 231-56.

⁴³ Taken from Sneh *Hindi* p. 135, verse from Biharilal *Satsai*

⁴⁴ Taken from Karine Schomer, 'Where Have All the Radhas Gone? Images of Woman in Modern Hindi Poetry', in Hawley and Wuff (eds.), *Divine* p. 92.

The reception and critical treatment of sensuous themes in Hindi literature has a long and varied history. However, from the late nineteenth century, in the wake of reformist puritanism and the increasing availability of such literature through print, the attack on such sensual poetry became more systematic and pervasive. The general image of the period immediately preceding British rule was of chaos and courtly decadence. *Alankaar* was seen by most of the contemporary Hindi writers as symbolic of that very decadence. *Yuthika* a collection of essays approved for the BA examination of the BHU, connected the debauchery and luxury of Muslim rule and its long lasting aftermath to the growth of 'Sudras' poetry. The Hindi writers drew a straight line between the degenerate state of women and the sensuous poetry of the late medieval times. Ramchandra Shukl linked the construction of such poetry to a decline in Hindu masculinity and pointed that if the Hindu nation had to invoke its masculine power, poetry charged with sexual pleasure was the greatest deviation and threat. Thus for Hindu male prowess to assert itself, it was perceived as necessary. *Shringar* This also explains why Bhushan, the famous poet of this period, who mainly wrote poems highlighting the bravery and chivalry of Rajputs and Marathas, was eulogised. The Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in fact compiled *Bhushan Granthavali*. His poem 'Shivraj Bhushan', written in praise of Shivaji, was the most celebrated.

The most serious attack on *shringar ras* poetry, however, was the charge of obscenity, centring on the woman's body, made by an influential section of Hindi writers. The process began in the late nineteenth century with Bharatendu Harishchandra himself, though he could not rid himself entirely from writing such compositions, showing the strong influence of this literary tradition. However slowly not only such poetry but even its language Braj came to be rejected for its rhetorical and stylistic models. Poetry was to be cleansed of all Persian, Arabic or Urdu words.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, with the coming of the Dwivedi period of Hindi literature, the *Rash* revolt against *Kal* became sharper and systematic. Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi placed *Rash* poets, Dev, Bihari and Matiram, not only below Tulsī and Sur but also below Bharate. Regarding *gayika bheda*, he wrote:

Similar to Hindi, languages like Bengali, Marathi and Gujarati too have emerged from Sanskrit, but may be to most the as much as in Hindi... Let us see what is written in these books: examples of dirty deeds of prostitutes! Sinful conduct of unmarried girls!! Meaningless babble of shameless and lewd women, who corrupt the minds of men!!!... *Sanyas* here some running in the dark on the banks of Yamuna, somewhere she is waiting in moonlight for her beloved... Can there be any greater power to destroy the moral conduct of our people?... I plead for an immediate stop to the composition of such works and the proscription of those already existing.

Along with the sensuality, the objection here was also to any irregularity in behaviour. One of the most famous poets of this period, Maithilisharan Gupt, who has been labelled the 'Rash (The Kavi) Poet), lamented in his leading *Bhakt Bharati* first published in 1912:

The literature of our community was filled with noble precepts,
but now we are just filled with lust and desire.
Shashtra, Ramayana and Mahabharata have been replaced by *gayika bheda*.
Obscene literature is causing great harm to our character....
Shringar ras has become the object of poetry....
To excite lasciviousness is the only business of poets,
even *vir rashes* changed into the battle of coition....

⁴⁵ Ram Bahori Shukl, 'Dwivedi Yug ki Kavita ki Pragati', in Ram Bahori Shukl (ed.) (New Delhi, 1936), pp. 101-2.

⁴⁶ Ramchandra Shukl, *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas* (Lucknow, 1952, 2nd edn), pp. 60, 240-41.

⁴⁷ Shukl, *Hindi* 254-58.

⁴⁸ *Bhushan Granthavali*, ed. Ram Naresh Tripathi (Allahabad, 1918).

⁴⁹ Vasudha Dalmi, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth-century Delhi* (Delhi, 1997), p. 247.

⁵⁰ Ramvilas Sharma, *Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi aur Hindi Navjagat* (New Delhi, 1977), pp. 273-77.

⁵¹ Harprakash Gaur, *Saraswati aur Rashtriya Jagat* (New Delhi, 1983).

⁵² *Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi Rachnavali*, ed. and comp. Bharat Yayavar (New Delhi, 1995), pp. 55-58.

Blessed be such poets, blessed be their lust.

And he goes on to give a clarion call to the poets:

Till when will you poets continue with hackneyed repetitions.
Oh, do not sacrifice yourself while alive, on the hair, breasts and sidelong glances of women....
For long you have sung the tune of union and separation,
now fill yourself with moral strength and endeavour.

Pandit Badrinath Bhatt (later Professor of Hindi in Lucknow University) went on to write a *Miss America* in which the central character of Buhari is caricatured as a poet who loves obscenity and vulgarity. He is depicted as falling in love with a 'Miss American' who is the epitome of all stereotypes of a western woman. Links are drawn between *shringar ras* on the one hand, and western obscenity and vulgarity on the other. Thus goes a conversation between the two:

Buhari These days our countrymen are opposing all poems which even have a slight hint of obscenity.... I think vulgarity is the life of poetry....

Miss You are absolutely correct.... We should definitely support ras.

Buhari Even if I myself am unable to compose obscene verses, it gives me great pleasure to recite those of previous poets.

Miss I cannot digest my food till I do not see some lewd pictures printed in Paris, though the government is now showing a tendency to ban such things. What a terrible move!

Buhari You are indeed very romantic. Our poets these days are even criticising ancient painters and sculptors.... I don't know how such stupid poets have entered our society.... I challenge the present-day Hindi poets. They are not seeing literature.

The play obviously ends with disastrous consequences for Buhari and he is deprived of his wealth and self-respect. The sarcastic tone adopted throughout the play, where Buhari is equated almost with a eunuch, speaks volumes for the way eroticism came to be viewed.

Other established poets of Hindi similarly attacked this literature. Their vivid descriptions of female amorous gestures were seen as transgressions of decency and evidence of the disintegration of family values, repugnant to the refined tastes of modern Hindus. Sumitranandan Pant, an important poet of the *Chayava* period, took on the poets in an impassioned statement:

What was there for them to do? Stimulated by desire, their infinite power of imagination spread like Draupadi's veil and coiled itself around every limb... their vision rarefied and ever in search of a thrill only from the toe to the head.... What an all-embracing sensibility! What astute genius! To be able to see the whole universe in a single limb!... As a result, the image of the Indian woman -- devoted, steadfast, chaste -- became transformed into a riot of gaudy, sensual reflections, and caught up in this maze, we were unable to see our simple, modest Sati of old.

Gayaprasad Shukl Snehi admonished, 'Seeing your continuous attachment to the goddess and your deep interest in the *parakiya* mother Saraswati, the goddess of learning, is shedding tears incessantly'. At the same time however, *Chayavad* poetry created its own sensuous heroine, who was often closely aligned to and even this poetry was censored from magazines *Saraswati*.

It also appears that obscenity was redefined by many literary writers, specifically to control certain sexual identities of women. The debate on obscenity was largely a debate on sex for pleasure and recreation versus sex for reproduction. In the

⁵³ Maithilisharan Gupta (*Bharat Bhara*), Lucknow, 1937, (1st edn), pp. 120-21.

⁵⁴ Gupta (*Bharat*) pp. 170-71.

⁵⁵ Badrinath Bhatt (*Miss America*) (Prayag, 1929), pp. 44 - 50.

⁵⁶ It may not be incidental that the character is named Buhari, reminding one of the famous Bihari.

⁵⁷ Shukl (*Hindi*) p. 241. Shukl alleged that many a poet in delineating the erotic emotion stooped down to the limit of obscenity; and in doing so, they reflected the taste of the patron kings, whose lives, according to him, were void of all deeds of heroism. H. S. Jyamsundardas, (*Sahitya*) (Allahabad, 1944), p. 313. He also said that the depiction of immoral love was done to satisfy the libidinous gestures of the kings of medieval times.

⁵⁸ Sumitranandan Pant (*Pallav*) (Allahabad, 1926), pp. 9-13. Translation from Schomer, 'Where', pp. 97-98.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Shrikshna (*Adhunik Hindi Sahitya ka Vichar*) (Allahabad, 1942), p. 114.

discourse of the nation, non-reproductive and hedonistic sexual behaviour came under extraordinary negative pressures, resulting in a near exclusion of all non-reproduction oriented sexualities. Thus *Kalidasasbhaw* was considered 'legitimate', in spite of detailed erotic descriptions, since it ultimately leads to the birth of the male child. As soon as the sexual descriptions celebrated desire and eroticism for their own sake, they became unacceptable and obscene. Further, there were attempts to carve out a genre of 'classics', representing a glorious Hindu ancient past, in which *Kamasutra* even could be embraced. However, sexual representations were to be condemned in the 'degenerate' late medieval period and were unacceptable for modern day Hindi literary writings.

What happened to the imagery of Radha in this? She almost completely disappeared from normative, standardised poetry.⁶⁰ This was especially reflected in text-book literature. Thus for example Ganga Prasad, Headmaster of DAV School in Allahabad, and Dhriendra Verma, Lecturer of Hindi at Allahabad University, *Selected of Hindi Poems* for the use of high school students in 1928. The book was divided into typical groups such as narrative, pathetic, lyric, reflective, descriptive and patriotic. Its aim was stated as being clearly to realise the pure spirit of poetry; there was not a single poem on love or the sexuality of Radha, and none of the *Gitika* poets was included in it.

There was an interesting composition on Radha in this period, which reflects the shifting imagery. Ayodhya Singh Upadhyaya, popularly known as Harioudh, composed his famous *Priyapravas* which recounts the familiar story of Krishna's departure from Mathura. However, the differences here are glaring. The love between Radha and Krishna is extremely restrained, bound by propriety. Further, Udhava exhorts Radha to overcome her selfish desire for union with Krishna and instead morally and ethically to serve humanity. *Humanity's* correspondence with George A. Grierson, Harioudh wrote about *Priyapravas*

Though it deals with the well-known incidents in the life of Shri Krishna, and of Radha, which have been... narrated by more than one author, this book presents them in a quite different light. I read in them the lessons and examples of a practical life; of high, pure and moral love; of a sense of duty unsurpassed; examples which we can put before us, nay before the whole world, with advantage.

In such poetry, however, Radha was transformed from being a figure of incomparable joy into an incomparable bore. From a predominantly aesthetic category, the image of woman became a patently moral one. Sensuousness, passion and emotion gave way to concerns over social depravity, reform, chastity and morality. Prose and poetry acquired a new purpose. The pathos of child marriage and widowhood, a glorification of motherhood and service to the nation became frequent motifs, under considerable influence of the Arya Samaj. Virtuous women struggling to devote themselves to lord and husband against all pressures were the new carriers of cultural authenticity and integrity of the Hindu nation. Here women became the paradigms of marital duty; marriage itself became primarily a devotional hierarchical relationship.

Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi highlighted this respectable, ideal woman -- she wears a sari, puts on a bindi and decorates herself with flowers. She goes to the temple, prays for her husband, is educated, *subhyante* meetings and, on coming back, wins the heart of her husband. Historically, wrote Gupt,

*Arya kanya man leti svapn mein bhi pati jise,
bhinn usse phir jagat mein aur bhaj sakti kise?*

(Even in her dreams if an Aryan woman recognises someone as her husband, she cannot ever think of worshipping anyone else but him.)

⁶⁰ Schomer, 'Where'

⁶¹ Ganga Prasad and Dhriendra Verma *Selections of Hindi Poems* (Allahabad, 1928).

⁶² Ayodhya Singh Upadhyaya 'Harioudh' *Priyapravas* (Banaras, 1941).

⁶³ Letter by Ayodhya Singh Upadhyaya to Grierson, 25 May 1915, Azamgarh, Linguistic Survey of India Records c.1900-c.1930, S/1/5/7 (IOL).

⁶⁴ Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi *Rachna* Vol. 13, pp. 248-49. Also see Sridhar Palit *Mahavir* (Banaras, 1917), pp. 25-29.

⁶⁵ Maithilisharan Gupta *Uttar Mein Bhaag* (Lucknow, 1927), 2nd edn, p. 22.

The woman was invested with new values, at once nationalist and Hindu. The dominant image of women as sexual beings was reversed and transformed into an ideology of female 'passionlessness', framing an oppositional womanhood against colonial designations of derelict sexuality. The recast chaste wife was an emblem of femininity, purity and sublimated sexuality, which colonial discourse had denied Hindu society. The taboos on her behaviour were aimed to enclose and discipline female bodies, to ensure a new social and moral hierarchy of power, and to integrate chastity with middle-class identity. Sexual pleasure thus came to be regarded with extreme suspicion and the modern Hindu cultural discourse, even from its diverse angles, seems to converge on the gender question, where there was a clear demarcation between aesthetic and obscene, ennobling and forbidden. However, it was not just that the feminine ideal involved restraint and suppression of pleasure. Rather, respectable womanhood in the literary canon was actively defined around a notion of pleasure that encompassed notions of self-sacrifice, 'positive' missions and the wider good. Aesthetics became an exercise in ethics.

II.2. 'Dirty' Literature: Contesting the Logic of Morality?

However, the 'canon' of Hindi literature was not entirely clear-cut. There was a variety of aspirations, motivations and contexts of literary production. Just as the devotional movement increased in popularity despite the attacks by puritanical apologists,⁶⁶ so too popular tastes and reading practices resisted and reinterpreted the high Hindi literary norm. Print facilitated the widespread production of vernacular material as a commodity, and erotic consumerism became a part of the publishing boom in UP, surreptitiously disturbing the dominance of 'clean' literature. These different alternative genres -- erotic sex manuals, popular romances, entertaining songs, texts offering advice on sexual relationships. -- were often indiscriminately conflated by their critics. 'Obscenity' could be a catch-all category. Some of these books contested the terrain of 'obscenity'.

The commercial press developed slowly but steadily in UP, coinciding with the rise of printed vernacular languages. It became a means of disseminating and mediating Hindi literature, independently of the official channels, sites and practices sanctioned by universities, government publications and elite literary circles. The number of presses in UP had risen from 177 in 1878-79 to 568 in 1901-02 and 743 in 1925-26. The concentration in UP had initially been on the publication of vernacular newspapers. Thus, 591 such papers were published in 1878-79 in UP in comparison to just 26 in Bengal. Bengal had dominated in the production of vernacular books, but by 1925-26, UP had surpassed it. There were 2,777 such books published in UP that year, in comparison to 2,543 in Bengal. The use of lithography was quite common. Most of the publishers of these books were also booksellers. In the 1860s and 1870s, the largest number of presses in UP was found at Agra, followed by Bareilly, Kanpur, Banaras, Shahjahanpur, Roorkee and Allahabad. Lucknow saw the growth of

⁶⁶ The *rasik* oriented bhakti is a part of the Ramanandi order. Ramanand has been seen as the first major saint of northern India. The followers of *rasik* tradition pursue the path of 'devotional aestheticism' and form the largest part of Ayodhya's Ramanandis. They reinterpret the relationship between Ram and Sita in erotic terms, and adopt the persona of a handmaid to Sita. To this end, Ram's most devoted servant Hanuman, normally the paragon of masculine strength, is recast as the leading girlfriend. Male devotionalists dress as women during temple worship. Devotionalism cannot be viewed as a negation of mainstream Hinduism, as it too owes as much to permeation by hierarchical values, as it does to resistance against them. At the same time, it does offer a counterpoint than the one assigned by modern, political interpretations of Hinduism by the Hindu Right. For further details, see Peter Goss, *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre* (London, 1988), pp. 159-72; Philip Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text: Performing the 'Ramcharitmanas'* (Berkeley, 1991), pp. 309-21; C. J. Fuller, *Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 155-69; Bhagwati Prasad Singh, *Bhakti mein Rasik Sampradaya* (Barrampur, 1957).

⁶⁷ *Statistics of British India for the Judicial and Administrative Departments* (Calcutta, 1879), pp. 48-49; *Judicial and Administrative Statistics of British India for 1901-02 and Preceding Years* (Calcutta, 1903), p. 25; *Statistical Abstracts for British India from 1916-17 to 1925-26* (Calcutta, 1927), p. 323.

⁶⁸ 'Reports on Native Presses in the NWP for 1862, 1863, 1864 and 1865, from the Records of the Government of India, 1849-1937 VI/23/121, Part 44, Article 1, p. 2 (IOL).

one of the oldest and most reputed press, the Newal Kishore Press. In the early twentieth century, Allahabad had taken over as the centre of publishing activity. Most of the presses were small, and survived by regularly churning out almanacs, religious and mythological literature, poetry, sensational novels and romances. They published accessible but badly printed pamphlets and ephemeral literature on topical themes, available for a few annas, written in a colloquial language. Most of the romances and poetry were written in Urdu and Persian initially. In 1862, out of the 14 vernacular romances published in UP, 9 were in Urdu, 2 in Persian and only 3 in Hindi. Kempson, the Director of Public Instruction in UP at this time, commented on the considerable demand of such love stories:

The general character of these stories is romantic in the extreme, and they are here and there decked out with hyperbolic descriptions.... The denouement is generally a protracted description of the marriage, and this is not considered perfect, unless the reader is furnished with an insight into the proceedings of the nuptial chamber, and with a peep behind the veil.... When pictures accompany such books as these, the evil is heightened, and the indecency presented in its most degrading aspect.

However, very soon Hindi translations of Persian and Urdu poetical works and romances became common. Thus in 1864-65 Kempson remarked:

I am sorry to report the fact that Hindi translations of Mahomedan poetry of the amatory kind are becoming popular. The increase in the number of persons able to read their own vernaculars has created a demand for books which illiterate and unprincipled printers meet with trash of this description; and it is a melancholy reflection that the vernacular, which we take so much pains in utilizing as an organ of education in the masses, should thus become a vehicle of immorality.

Many of the Hindi writers of cheap poems and romances cast their style and language entirely in the Persian type, because of their easy appeal. In 1869 a Hindi book was published by two different presses in Agra. One edition printed 700 copies, priced at 1 anna each, and the other 1,500 copies at 9 pie. M. Kempson referred to it as 'bazaar trash in the shape of ribald verses, some of them grossly indecent. It is the stuff of this kind, which arms native opposition to female education with its most powerful objection, and which poisons the minds of the youths in large towns. For one who reads, there are 100s (sic) who hear the libidinous suggestions and illustrations. In the same year, another book *Prabodh* was a metrical Hindi version of a well-known Sanskrit treatise on passions, which formed a part of the *Shastri* in nine passions, or moods, were described, of which the first, love, occupied nearly the whole of the book. It was feared that many press proprietors pandering to 'licentious' tastes prevalent in society, would not reveal the names of such publications in the list which they furnished to the government. Many such books were surreptitiously printed and circulated. In 1873, C.A. Elliot, Secretary to the Government of UP, remarked that books of the 'very worst and most licentious class' could be obtained in the region, though the number was limited at this time. It was demanded that such books be marked objectionable and illegal, and that the law for the registration of all presses and of every printed book and paper rigidly enforced.

By 1868, publications in the Devanagari script began to rise, and by 1925 Hindi newspapers, books, journals and periodicals far exceeded and surpassed those in Urdu. In the early twentieth century, wide-ranging pulp and popular literature -- semi-pornographic sex manuals and romances in colloquial Hindi, thin tracts and small formats of songs and

⁶⁹ *Uttar Pradesh*, 9 (February 1981) [Special issue on Munshi Newal Kishore]; Syed Jalaluddin Haider, 'Munshi Nawal Kishore (1836-1895): Mirror of Urdu Printing in British India', 31, 3 (1981), pp. 227-37.

⁷⁰ Allahabad supplied 18 of the papers published in UP, *Report on the Administration of UP, 1907* (Allahabad, 1908), p. 52.

⁷¹ 'Reports' *Selections* Part 44, Article 1, p. 5.

⁷² 'Reports' *Selections* Part 44, Article 1, p. 8.

⁷³ 'Reports' *Selections* Part 44, Article 1, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁴ 'Books submitted to Government by Native Writers' *Selections* VI/23/129, Vol. 3, Article 2, pp. 56-57.

⁷⁵ 'Report on Publications Registered at Curator's Office, Allahabad, during 1869' *Selections* VI/23/129, Vol. 3, Article 15, p. 244.

⁷⁶ 'Report' *Selections* Vol. 3, Article 15, p. 244.

⁷⁷ 'Reports' *Selections* Part 44, Article 1, pp. 17-18; 'Publications Registered by the Curator of Government Books under Act XXV of 1867 during 1872' *Selections* VI/23/131, No. 6, Article 27, pp. 535-550.

⁷⁸ *Report on the Administration of UP, 1924* (Allahabad, 1924), p. 91.

poems in Braj, flooded the market in UP. It was reported in 1905-6, 'the original works of fiction generally display extravagance and want of taste, and often moral depravity'.⁷⁹ Again in 1909-10 it was said that metrical works had grown in quantity and the subjects were largely erotic and immoral, while poetry on social subjects frequently degenerated into pedantry and platitude.⁸⁰

Printed sex-manuals in Hindi were a genre that saw a substantial growth in early twentieth century UP. Aligarh and Moradabad appear to have been thriving centres for their publication. The lines between sexual science, erotic art and obscenity were often blurred. Many of them used a highly Sanskritised language and ran into numerous pages, signifying that they catered to an elite Hindu audience. At the same time, there were popular, thin and cheap versions, written in colloquial Hindi. However, all of them claimed to have been inspired by classical *kāmkosha*.⁸¹ Almost all stressed in their introduction that they were *ashli*. The fear of being banned on charges of obscenity was constantly referred to, and thus most such books camouflaged themselves in the language of sexual science, claiming their authenticity by highlighting scientific 'facts' of sexual life. Many claimed to be prescriptive texts, essential for sexual compatibility and fulfilment. At the same time however, to make their books attractive for their audience, they stressed their erotic element, especially the presence of coloured pictures, in their advertisements, which were carried in prominent papers and magazines. A book, in its full-page advertisement in the leading Hindi daily, warned unmarried brahmacaryas to remain away from it, but recommended it highly for married women and men. It went on to say that it had attractive pictures, which thrilled the heart and that it was full of *śringar*.⁸² An advertisement for another book, claiming to profess the use of Vedic and Unani methods and then went on to describe the coloured pictures that it contained of sexual organs of women, parts helping in formation of semen, loose breasts, healthy nipples. As the first established its 'scientific credentials' and then said that it had coloured and spicy photographs of women not only from India but also from Africa, Germany, France, Italy and Australia.⁸³ It was reported that many of these books adopted a semi-pornographic format. Several of them went into multiple editions. Pyarelal Zamindar's *Kok Shastra*, initially published in 1900, had already gone into seven editions by 1905, with 2000 copies in each edition. Written in a relatively simple Hindi, the book had titles like 'Javani-Divani' (Crazy Youthfulness), and it was reported to have been particularly popular among young boys.

Some other books offered pure erotic pleasure. *Shumban Mimansa*, published by S. S. Mehta and Brothers of Kashi, was a translation of a Gujarati book, describing the history, development and methods of kissing. On its cover was stated that it was meant only for private circulation. Dr. Haridas Vaidya translated *Śringar Shatak*, categorically stating in the preface:

I am proud to say that I write all my books for second and third grade citizens, since I am also one among them.... Pandit Mohanlal Nehru of Prayag sees a lot of faults in my book, like degeneration of women. But in due course of *Ramcharitmanas* there are many lines against women.... Should not the Hindus ask publishers of these as well to burn their books?... If we are critics of

⁷⁹ Report on the Administration of UP, 1905-6 (Allahabad, 1907), p. 41.

⁸⁰ Report on the Administration of UP, 1909-10 (Allahabad, 1911), p. 51.

⁸¹ Kanhaiya Lal Sharma's *Kok Shastra athva Yauvan Mimansa* (Moradabad, 1900); Jaidev Nirbhay Ganesh (Ratis) *Janja* (Moradabad, 1906); Mohan Lal Gupta's *Saga* (Aligarh, 1908, 2nd edn); Ganga Prasad Gupta's *Prachin Kok Shastra* (Aligarh, 1916, 2nd edn); Kanhaiya Lal Agarwal's *Kamrahasya* (Allahabad, 1932); Jagannath Sharma Agarwal's *Kok Shastra arthat Kamshastra ka Vrihad Granth* (Banaras, 1935, 2nd edn); Ramchandra Vaidya Sharma's *Sanyogava* (Aligarh, 1939).

⁸² *Vartman* 18 March 1925, p. 8, advertisement for *Kamrahasya*, published by Hindi Sevasadan, Aligarh.

⁸³ *Vartman* 21 November 1938, p. 6, advertisement for *Gupt Chikitsa*, published by Hindi Sevasadan, Aligarh.

⁸⁴ *Abhyudaya* 26 April 1924, p. 10, advertisement for *Kamrahasya*, published by Hindi Sevasadan, Aligarh.

⁸⁵ Report on the Administration of UP, 1924-25 (Allahabad, 1926), p. 112.

⁸⁶ Pyarelal Zamindar's *Kok Shastra* (Aligarh, 1905, 2nd edn). In its introduction, it was stated that before marriage it is extremely important to read and see this book. It also expressed the difficulty in writing such a book, as the charge of obscenity lurked at every corner, p. 6.

⁸⁷ Channulal Dwivedi's *Shumban Mimansa* (Kashi, 1929).

women, have we written thousands of pages in her praise?

There were other slightly different genres, which made eroticism popular. In early twentieth century UP, the publications in Hindi of thin, cheaply-priced pamphlets of songs and satires in Braj, greatly outnumbered those of educational and reformist literature. Babu Baijnath Bookseller of Banaras brought out innumerable such tracts, centring around Holi songs and themes of Krishna and gops. Most of them adopted *casilla* format. Also, there was a free use of Urdu and Persian poetry and phrases. Largely designed for a popular audience, this fictive literature dealt one way or another with sex, offered ephemeral pleasures and could be highly entertaining. Pritchett refers to *qissa*, and romances in Hindi, printed in pamphlet form year after year in huge quantities. Kathryn Hansen has traced a large number of *sangit* and *nautanki* in north India, which, besides being performed, were published and widely read pamphlets, though not especially innovative, extended their consumption via print and in a sense replicated, though in a more popular form. They captured contemporary popular imagination, and made profits for their publishers. Many books and pamphlets went into multiple editions, reflecting their easy availability and increasing demand.

These 'obscene' pamphlets created fresh anxieties among British officials and Hindu moralists, as they had more serious and dangerous connotations. The writers of these contemporary popular writings had the advantage of mass print, photographic technology and a commercial press. They could reproduce images, publish their books in substantially large numbers and ensure good sales; they were bringing 'obscenity' from the 'court' to the 'masses', and had a higher visibility and reach than *Riti Kalpoets* had ever had. Their market was not limited to the literati, who also in any case bought them despite the scriptures, but extended to an increasing class of functionally literate people, including clerks, shopkeepers, traders and students. Embracing the more commercial trajectory of the eroticised spectacle, such literature could now be found in the newly emerging book markets, local kiosks and railway stations. These authors tested the boundaries of decency, and were thought incompatible with the new ideals of nationhood and civilisation. They wrote what some thought should have been unwritten. *Shringar* was acceptable to an extent if it belonged to a fantasy world or was restricted to the elite. The trouble with eroticism for the masses was its subversion of usual rules of order and propriety.

The possibilities of wider access to such sexually explicit literature made the need for policing it more urgent. Grierson, while carrying out his linguistic survey, wrote a confidential letter in 1925, in which he expressed his concern over the widely-published galaxy of erotic works in UP:

Up to 1900, the existence of such books was known, but they were rare, and impossible to get except through secret channels. They were printed and sold simply for their indecent contents for young people whose tastes went that way.... But now these books are openly advertised and published, with full accounts of their contents, that leave no doubt as to their nature.

The British took an increasingly interventionist posture towards such material. They passed orders for the prevention of the sale of 'objectionable' literature at bookstalls on railway platforms. This was confiscation of sexually explicit material in the form of books, pamphlets, magazines, postcards and pictures, combined with a regular prosecution of presses, publishing

⁸⁸ Haridas Vaidya (trans.) *Shringar Shata* (Mathura, 1933rd edn).

⁸⁹ *SPBP, 1900-1930*

⁹⁰ See Sham Sundar *Alaban ki Dhul* [The Heat of Youth – Erotic Songs] (Mathura, 1900), in March 1915; Bhudeo Rasad and Sheo Sharan *Rasiya Rasilon ki Bal* [The Pleasures of Merry Beaus] (Agra, 1900), in March 1915, 32; Kaviran *Aurat-Mard ka Jhagra* [A Pornographical Poem] (Allahabad, 1925), in *SPBP, March 1922*, 62; Brijbasi Das *Braj Bilas* (Banaras, 1939); Bindeswari Prasad Tiwari *Chautal Champak* (Gorakhpur, 1932nd edn, 3,000 copies).

⁹¹ Frances W. Pritchett *Marvelous Encounters: Folk Romance in Urdu and New Delhi* (1985).

⁹² Kathryn Hansen *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India* (Berkeley, 1992).

⁹³ 669/1925, Judl, Home Deptt (NAI).

⁹⁴ 134/May 1917, Judl, A, Home Deptt (NAI).

houses and booksellers, on charges of 'obscenity'. Book-stores were often searched for licentious and sexually explicit material. A warning was issued to certain book depots not to keep any *Kapild*. A large number of publications, coming from France and Germany to India, were legally *Yam*. The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene in India, founded initially in England by Josephine Butler in 1870, was especially active in campaigns against obscenity through its central organiser Meliscent Shephard in India. These crusaders regulated representations of sexuality and sex, often taking the form of censorship of sexually oriented books, pamphlets and magazines.

Popular and particularly 'obscene' Hindi literature was criticised by various indigenous constituencies, including 'respectable' literary circles, women's associations and Gandhi. In an *Saraswati* Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi wrote:

I wish to also write that these days the storehouse of Hindi is full of plays and novels of magic, fantasy, detective works and love stories. This is not at all beneficial for literature. Instead, the lovers of Hindi should have the courage to lift their pens to write on business, technology, chemistry, the history of Europe and India, nature and means of European progress etc. This would definitely benefit Hindi and lead to the elevation of the character of its readers.

Madhuri a leading journal in early twentieth century UP, carried an article in 1925, specifically condemning works on eroticism and sexual science:

The state of *ratishastra* and *kamshastra* is shining once again.... Even if no other books sell, there is no dearth of the sale of such books.... Young men feel excited just by the mention of secret organs. And if you discuss 84 postures, 72 kisses, 128 types of embraces (and your language is spicy and erotic), which young man would not read your book with deep engrossment.... Is it necessary to reiterate *kamshastra* was composed at a time when there was excessive luxurious orientation in India, and in the end this only resulted in our enslavement?

The AIWC emphatically protested against the circulation of obscene literature. This protest was particularly against small bookstall holders who sold such literature to students of both sexes, and they urged the British authorities to take drastic and immediate steps to stamp out the evil. Gandhi too condemned such 'filth in literature'. Such dirty books had to be particularly kept out of the hands of women.

However, while many of the leading magazines and writers condemned such works, to an extent they also compromised in the face of popular demand and needs of the market economy. The discourse of the literary middle-class Hindus was not homogeneous and there was much greater diversity in the literature produced. There was constant resistance, negotiation and accommodation even within the high literary sphere.

It was not just 'low' writers and small presses that were writing and publishing such books. Some books published even by the prestigious Newal Kishore Press were declared objectionable on moral grounds. For example, it published *Ragvinoda* collection of *thumris*, *ghazals* and *khayals*, stating that it was meant for the consumption of *bhharasik* men.¹⁰³ Sheo Narayan Press, a prestigious press of Agra was publishing such books as early as the late nineteenth century. It published pamphlets in Hindi styled 'amorous poems'. *Bekshan Kavita* was an 8-page pamphlet, priced at 3 pie per copy, with 2,100 copies printed of the first edition. It was a passionate dialogue between Krishna and Radha. There was also 'The Calendar of the Love-sick Wards of Brindaban', which had verses about Krishna for each month of the Hindu

⁹⁵ 1398/1922, Judl, Home Deptt (NAI).

⁹⁶ 361/1937, Judl, Home Deptt (NAI); 372/1937, Judl, Home Deptt (NAI); 131/1939, Judl, Home Deptt (NAI).

⁹⁷ 831/1933, Judl, Home Deptt (NAI); 29/52/1937, Home Poll (NAI); 136/1940, Judl, Home Deptt (NAI).

⁹⁸ Editorial *Saraswati* (November 1901).

⁹⁹ Anon., 'Rati-Shastra ka Prachin *Madhuri* 3, 2, 6 (June 1925), pp. 847-849.

¹⁰⁰ AIWC, *Twelfth Session* (Ahmedabad, 1937), p. 47.

¹⁰¹ M. K. Gandhi, 'Filth in Literature', *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* LXVII (New Delhi, 1976), p. 407. Also see Gandhi 'Speech at Akhil Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad', *Collected*, Vol. LXII 346.

¹⁰² 'Report' *Selections* Vol. 3, Article 15, pp. 244-45.

¹⁰³ Mahadev Shukla, *Ragvinoda* (Lucknow, 1889).

year. Another one called *Barah Maas* maintained 37 couplets on 'Twelve Months of an Impotent Man', in which the wife expressed her complaints against her impotent husband. These books and pamphlets actually played on well-established literary genres. However, regarding their publication at this time, it was said:

The corrupt taste of the lower orders of the reading public in large towns is thus painfully apparent, but it is even more sad to find a man of Sheo Narayan's position and education lending his press equal with the low Mahomedan publishers of Agra to pander to the vicious tendencies of his fellow townsmen by giving currency to this unwholesome trash.... That they command a large and ready sale is apparent from the number of copies struck off in the Agra Presses.

Ganga Pustakmala Karyalaya, one of the biggest and most prestigious shops of Hindi books, located in Lucknow, and having its own printing and publishing house, kept the largest collection of books on romance, detective fiction, fantasy and magic, which were mostly published by it, as was clear from its extensive advertisements in leading magazines regularly carried full-page advertisements for sex manuals, along with those of aphrodisiacs.

From another perspective, some of the reformers and established publishing houses also felt that intricacies of sex and erotic life of the conjugal couple needed to be discussed explicitly, as sexual pleasure was an important facet of a modern married life. They wrote books and articles, which were not just instructive, but could also be titillating. Santram, an Arya Samajist and founder of the Jat Pat Torak Mandal, wrote an article in *Madhuri* in support of 'true' publications on sexual science, which was also publicity material for sex manuals. He went on to write books like *Kavahit Premand Rativilas*¹⁰⁸ Abhyudaya Press published *Kashmiri Kokshastra* and criticised the government for banning such books. Chand Press published *Dampatya Jivan* a book on 'kamshastra' written by a woman, who stated, 'Any book written in Hindi is not judged by the importance of its topic or its representative style but is always measured on the scale of morality and virtue.... I must say that we have made the entry door of our language extremely narrow, causing great harm in the present time'.¹¹⁰

Pandit Krishnakant Malaviya, nephew of Madan Mohan Malaviya, and sometimes referred to as 'Kumvar Kanhaiya' (Young Krishna) of Allahabad, wrote controversial books on sexual relations, which were published by the prestigious Abhyudaya Press. In *Suhagrat: Bahurani ko Sevak* men were told of ways in which they could control their husbands, and it claimed to be a leading sex manual. *Amahisrama ke Patra: Apne Premiyan ke Vas* written in a titillating fashion, claiming on its cover that it was meant only for husbands. The book attacked the puritanism of the west and stressed on sexual affinity between the married couple. It contained a series of letters written by the married Manorama to her four ex-lovers. They were expressions of the love and desires of Manorama, reflections on the weaknesses and incapacities in men, and suggestions on ways of leading a fulfilling erotic life.

Many of the famous Hindi literary writers like Daniram Prem, G. P. Srivastava and Pandey Bechan Sharma 'Ugra' (1900-1967) took to writing sensational romantic fiction, one of the most popular genres of the 1920s. Their stories and novels

¹⁰⁴ 'Report' *Selections* Vol. 3, Article 15, pp. 248.

¹⁰⁵ Advertisement *Madhuri* 1, 1 (July 1922) and 4, 1, 1 (July 1925).

¹⁰⁶ In fact, in the beginning of the very issue, which had an article condemning such publications, there was an advertisement of the book *Chakravarti Kokshastra* claiming to have 128 coloured pictures. *Madhuri* 3, 2, 6 (June 1925).

¹⁰⁷ Santram, 'Rati Rahasya' *Madhuri* 3, 1, 5 (December 1924), pp. 601-05.

¹⁰⁸ Ramnarayan Tandon (ed.) *Hindi Sevi Sansar*, Vol. 1 (Lucknow, 1951st edn), p. 307.

¹⁰⁹ Banarsi Lal Verma *Kashmiri Kokshas* (Prayag, 1928).

¹¹⁰ Sushila Devi Nigam *Dampatya Jivan* (Allahabad, 1930), p. 2.

¹¹¹ K. K. Malaviya *Suhagrat: Bahurani ko Sevak* (Prayag, 1930?); idem *Manorama ke Patra: Apne Premiyan ke Vas* (Prayag, 1927).

¹¹² G. P. Srivastava specialised in humour. In many of his stories, novels and plays, love, kisses and sex intermingled. The titles were catchy, promising light and romantic entertainment in a simple language. Some of his books include *Dijale ki* (Allahabad, 1936, 2nd edn), full of one line punchers on romantic pleasures. *Sanya-Jamni urf Prem Rahas* (Banaras, 1934, 2nd edn), a collection of stories variously titled 'Prem Prastav', 'Prem Milan', 'Ball Dance', and 'Safari Premika', promised mysteries of worldly pleasures of love (*sansarik prem rahasya ka ahand*)

were torn between nationalist and moral concerns and pleas for social reform on the one hand, and commercial interests, entertainment, emotional fantasies and romance on the other. Ugra's *Hasinon ki Khutwa* was a best-seller of 1927. Some of the personal letters of confession published in prestigious journals had been written by women, also legitimised individual needs and desires, upholding a right to feel and love. The charge of obscenity was levelled most strongly against Ugra's book published in 1927, which dealt with issues of sodomy, sexual acts between adult males and adolescent boys, and other aspects of male homosexuality. a collection of eight short stories, variously titled 'He Sukumar' (Oh, Beautiful Youth), 'Vyabhichari Pyar' (Transgressive Love), 'Jail Mein' (In Jail), 'Hum Fidaye Luckhnau' (I am a Fan of Lucknow), 'Kamariya Nagin si Bal Khaye' (The Waist Twists like a Female Snake), etc. Written in a titillating fashion, these stories were against sodomy and homosexuality, claiming to draw inspiration from real life incidents. However, by the process of condemnation, they also acknowledged the wide prevalence of such practices, especially in UP, where the beautiful young boys were called 'chocolate', 'pocket-book' and 'money-order'. *Chakle* claimed that men were becoming more feminine, hinted at homosexual tendencies between Krishna and Arjun, Ram and Tulsidas and Krishna and Suresh. *Chakle* proved to be a commercial sensation and within six weeks of its publication, two editions of it were sold out.

The guardians of morality launched militant criticism against the book, and through it, against many writings like Ugra's *Dilli ka Dalanda* and also books like *Vyabhichari Mandir* and *Abalaon ka Insaf*. Such works were referred to as *ghasleti sahitya* and a movement against it, known as *ghasleti andolan* was sustained for 12 years. Banarsidas Chaturvedi, the editor of *Vishal Bharat* took a lead, and was largely backed by the new Hindi loci of authority -- university departments, literary associations and important journals. In UP, the magazines *Chitra* and *Sudha* published material against such literature, and the associations, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha adopted resolutions against these books. Gandhi initially wrote against *Chakle* without reading it, but later after going through it, did not find it obscene. He wrote a letter to this effect, which, however, was brought to light only in 1951.

The point is, why did a book like *Chakle*, which actually attacked sodomy and homosexuality, lead to such a hysterical reaction? The campaign against it was at once a paternalist and a moralist stance, deployed to 'protect' the public from 'unhealthy' influences. However, its reach hints that here there was something more volatile at stake than the mere offending of ideas of purity and respectability. Ugra wrote on a taboo subject, an unmentionable act, and spoke the unspeakable.

¹¹³ Francesca Orsini, 'The Hindi Public Sphere: 1920-1940', unpublished PhD thesis (SOAS, University of London, 1996).

¹¹⁴ Pandey Becan Sharma 'Ugra's *Chakle* (Calcutta, 1953, edn, published after 25 years).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 56, 101, 125-35, 156.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 102.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 76, 117.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, cover.

¹¹⁹ Sphurna Devi *Abalaon ka Insaf* (Chand Press, Allahabad, 1936 edn). The book explicitly stated that it was an attack on the high caste Hindu men, especially of the Brahmin and Vaishya castes. It needs separate treatment, which I hope to take up at a later stage of my work. In brief, the book stressed the impact of the movement on the writer, where various women had confessed their tragic stories, and which encouraged her to write this novel. It had confessions by eight women, exposing the sexual misdeeds of upper caste men and making a case for widow remarriage. It was repeatedly emphasised that the stories were based on true incidents, and that attempts had been made to keep them away from obscenity, though some of it could not be avoided due to the subject matter. While offering a strong indictment of the upper caste Hindu male society, belying myths of ideal Hindu families, it also highlighted women's sexuality, desires and needs. At the same time, the book is written in a titillating fashion and at times, it is difficult to gauge its political and social location.

¹²⁰ Ratnakar Pandey *Ugra aur Unka Sahitya* (Varanasi, 1969), pp. 255-73; *Chakle*, pp. 1-12.

¹²¹ Pandey *Ugra* pp. 260-66.

¹²² *Ugra, Chakle* p. 1; Pandey *Ugra* pp. 271-72.

¹²³ Sodomy and homosexuality have aroused hysterical reactions in various other cultures and in different historical moments. See Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (eds) *Historic Homosexualities: Culture, History and Literature* (New York, 1997); Christopher Craft, *Another Kind of Love: Male Homosexual Desire in English Discourse* (Berkeley, 1994).

critics claimed that the actual effect of Ugra's writings was to titillate and excite his readers and thus to encourage, not discourage, homosexual desire. Colonial presence, growing nationalist movement, emerging high literary trends and its links with Hindu identity gave the campaign a specific colour in north India at this time. To Chaklet also part of a nationalist critique, as the de-gendered male was one stereotype of colonial domination. Chaklet brought into doubt the stability of the heterosexual regime, procreative imperatives and modern monogamous ideals of marriage. It was a stigma and a disgrace of effeminacy and sexual inversion in male behaviour, which was at best unmentioned.

Ancient texts and medieval court customs reveal a history of homosexual relationships. Chaklet highlighted that there were new institutions and sites for increasing male-male bondings like schools, colleges, hostels, cinemas, theatres, social service organisations, parks, clubs, fairs and the Jails Inquiry Committee of UP expressed its worries of having general association barracks, and besides fears of plots and escapes, there were increasing concerns of male sexual activities:

Closely connected with the improvements proposed is the question of separation by night. In order to improve conditions it is to be considered how far separation by night should be enforced to provide a suitable guard against moral contamination.... There is further a very unsavoury side to the general association barrack.... We refer to offences punishable under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. We have evidence which we accept that such offences are committed frequently inside the jails.... While collecting evidence with regard to a certain incident in which reprehensible conduct was proved to have been committed inside a general association barrack, one of the convicts, who admitted his complicity in this conduct stated to the Committee: 'As to night rounds they give no trouble. We always know when they are coming and are back on our berths before they arrive'.

We also get stray references to the formation of a Jigri Club and another local club in Moradabad exclusively for men, organised by 'a band of pleasure-seeking loose young men'.¹²⁴ Growth of public libraries as meeting places for men and male migration may have aided male friendships. Migration did not just disrupt household patterns of women but of men as well. Housing in the city was scarce and rents were high. Men on lower wages found it difficult to take their wives with them and were forced to live in distant industrial locations for long periods. Thus, in many of the industrial towns, there was a huge numerical disparity between the sexes, especially from the 1920s. In a city like Kanpur, where about half the population was of immigrants, there were just 670 females per 1,000 males. Corresponding figures were 778 in Allahabad, 784 in Agra and 722 in Saharanpur. This may have helped same-sex subcultures. The Director of Public Health in UP remarked of increasing cases of venereal diseases among workers, due to 'adult relations of either sex' and pervasive sexual immorality in *bastis*.¹³¹ It was remarked:

The workman who has left his family behind often clubs together with other workers, generally preferring relations, caste men, friends or men from his own village or town. Denied the comforts of a regular family life, the temptation to him to seek diversion after the day's work by resorting to drink or drugs or to the bazaar is greater. His life becomes monotonous and unattractive... the effect on family due to these lengthy separations quite undesirable and harmful.

Chaklet brought into public view emergent urban male attachments and alternate sexualities, posing a danger to civilisation, at a time when the imagery of a strong, masculine Hindu male was a concern of the nation. It opened an epistemological gap, a void in maleness itself.

¹²⁴ Ruth Vanita, 'The New Homophobia: Ugra's *Satya* in Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (eds), *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (New York, 2000), pp. 246-52.

¹²⁵ Gita Thadani Sakhiyani: *Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India* (London, 1996); Vanita and Kidwai (eds), *Same-Sex*

¹²⁶ Ugra, *Chaklet*, pp. 53-54, 87-95, 102, 125, 137.

¹²⁷ *UP Jails Inquiry (Stuart) Committee, 1928-29* (Allahabad, 1929), pp. 126-31.

¹²⁸ *Naiyar-i-Azam* 12 January 1907, *NR* 19 January 1907, p. 90.

¹²⁹ *Census of India, 1931, UP, Vol. XVIII* (Allahabad, 1933), pp. 138-39.

¹³⁰ *Royal (Whitley) Commission of Labour in India, Evidence, Vol. I* (London, 1931), pp. 140-41, 155.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

The consequences of this conflict, which pitted critics against popular literature, and by extension against entertaining fiction, was a long-lasting rift between Hindi literature that was enshrined in a large part of the canon. Reading such books was considered a crime for students, and critics made sure that they were never included in the syllabus, indeed in the history of Hindi literature. But this literature survived, thanks to its popularity. The conflict continued well over the coming period and saw many debates in the 1940s as well -- over Jainendra Kumar's *Sunita*¹³³ Yashpal's *Dada Comrade*¹³⁴ and Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaf*¹³⁵

To make the picture multivalent and complex, popular literature cannot be seen as a monolithic category. There were many popular works on mythological and historical chaste wives, with figures like Savitri, Sita, Sukanya, Gandhari and Damyanti occupying prized places, and a whole genre of conduct books which aided the modern, moral literature. Many of them can easily be classified along with various Christian missionary tracts, which appeared around the same time.

Print had thus opened vast avenues, with contradictory messages and meanings. It was not easy to make sexual pleasure a mere victim of the moral panic. On the other hand, even male sexual fantasies and desires were a challenge to the moral aesthetic literary categories of the period and this came out sharply in the case of advertisements, dealt in the next section.

III. Brahmachary *Kaliyug* and the Advertisement of Aphrodisiacs

Most feminist studies have highlighted the threat/fear that female sexuality has posed to various patriarchal societies. In the Indian colonial context, scholars have studied conjugality, emphasising how female sexuality was redefined and constrained in this period. It has been rightly argued that the chastity of the Hindu woman, within an uncompromising monogamy, became central to claims of nationhood at this time. Again it has been stressed that the woman represented the inner spiritual being who had to preserve the Hindu family, because the man had already succumbed to western colonial power in the outside material realm.

To shift the focus somewhat, Ashis Nandy and Mrinalini Sinha have examined issues of masculinity through an analysis of colonial discourse, largely within dichotomies of manly British and effeminate colonial subjects. It is not just to look at the male gender under the rubric of colonial masculinity, but also to problematise notions of Hindu male sexuality, by examining the strain under which it was put. Though the fear of unregulated female sexuality was great, even male sexuality

¹³³ Jainendra Kumar, *Sunita* (Delhi, 1935).

¹³⁴ See Madhulika Pathak, *Yashpal ke Katha Sahitya mein Kam, Prem aur Parivay*, (1992).

¹³⁵ For the case launched against it, see Ismat Chughtai, 'Ek Mukadme ki Dastan', translated, *Harvard*, 14 (November 1996), pp. 29-34.

¹³⁶ For example, see Chandrabali Mishra, *Shri Hindu Na* (Banaras, 1930); Lalita Prasad Sharma, *Shri Aravtarsha ki Sacchi Deviyan* (Bareilly, 1923, 2nd edn); Yashoda Desai, *Saccha Pati Pre* (Allahabad, 1910).

¹³⁷ Janardan Joshi, *Grh Prabandh Shas* (Prayag, 1918, 2nd edn); Ganga Prasad Upadhyay, *Mythila Vyavahar Chand* (Prayag, 1928); Gupt, 'Pagal' *Grhini Bhusha* (Kashi, 1921, 2nd edn); Jivaram Kapur Khastri, *Shri Dharma Sa* (Mathura, 1892). A similar point has been made in the context of late nineteenth-century Bengal, Tanika Sarkar, 'Hindu Conjugality and Nationalism in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal', in Jasodhara Bagchi (ed.), *Indian Women: Myth and Reality* (Calcutta, 1995), pp. 98-115. Sarkar shows how there was a thorough pedagogisation of even the minute mundane details of domestic life, from diet, furniture or sanitation habits to reorganisation of leisure and of familial relationships. Ordinary social common-sense itself was elevated to a systematic syllabus.

¹³⁸ For example, the Christian Vernacular Education Society, Allahabad, regularly published a reading book for women, advising them on domestic management and training of children. It saw continuous reprints of it, with slight modifications.

¹³⁹ Sarkar, 'Hindu Conjugality'.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid* Also see Tanika Sarkar, 'Scandal in High Places: Discourses on the Chaste Hindu Woman in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal', in Meenakshi Thapan (ed.), *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity* (Delhi, 1997), pp. 35-73.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid* Also see Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Delhi, 1994).

¹⁴² Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi, 1983); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1995).

had to be controlled. Codes of sexual mores applied to men as well. I argue that the Hindu male was not totally absolved of the burden of preserving the virtue of the Hindu family, by looking at the shifting terms of discourse on brahmacharya. An examination of male sexuality through an analysis of printed advertisements for aphrodisiacs, published in large numbers at this time, provide an interesting study of male anxieties and desires in colonial India.

Brahmacharya has been one of the core doctrines of Hindu dharma. Hindu tradition emphasised the preservation of semen as essential for male empowerment and energy. At the same time, there has been a history of the celebration of sex in Hinduism, making aspects of the religion a combination of sensuality and celibacy. But it is the image of the brahmachari that remains the ideal, and there is a high cultural value placed on sexual continence in the colonial period, the concept of brahmacharya was infused with new meanings and transformed into a modern discourse.

Joseph Alter has emphasised how brahmacharya operates among the wrestlers of north India. The power of sex is turned away from the chaos of passion into disciplined masculine strength. Recently, he has examined the medical mechanics of being and becoming a brahmachari through modern yoga and naturopathy. He argues that the discourse about sex, semen and health is conceived of in terms of embodied truth. In the process, he works out a difference between a psychological western self and a somatic non-western self. Celibacy and self-control are viewed as the single most important requirements for achieving body discipline, and female desire and sexuality are the greatest evil. Vivekananda's call to sexual abstinence for building a nation of heroes gave brahmacharya a renewed meaning in the colonial period.¹⁴³ Gandhi applied a somewhat different concept of brahmacharya. He too believed that stored-up semen was the source of splendid energy in the male. But he turned brahmacharya into a discourse parallel to the integrity of the nation. The nation required an end to the wasteful expenditure of time and energy in the pleasures of sex. He further discussed sexuality almost entirely from the masculine point of view, seeing women as passive victims of a male sexual urge.¹⁴⁹

In the early twentieth century, brahmacharya came to be linked to nationalism and social service. Many of the Hindu publicists, Sanatan Dharmists and Arya Samajists eulogised it. Through their educational bodies like the Gurukuls, brahmacharya and semen control was strongly linked to pedagogy. In their arguments and publications, it was no longer just a moral doctrine of self-discipline. Their modern discourse was intertwined with eugenics, childbirth, and a scientific

¹⁴³ Gananath Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience* (Chicago, 1981); Sudhir Kakar, *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality* (New Delhi, 1989).

¹⁴⁴ Joseph S. Alter, *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India* (Delhi, 1993); idem, 'Celibacy, Sexuality and the Transformation of Gender into Nationalism in North India', *ASA*, 1 (February 1994), pp. 45-66; idem, 'The Celibate Wrestler: Sexual Chaos, Embodied Balance and Competitive Politics in North India', in Patricia Shimabir Reddy, *Sexuality and the State* (Delhi, 1996), pp. 109-31.

¹⁴⁵ Joseph S. Alter, 'Seminal Truth: A Modern Science of Male Celibacy in North India', *Anthropology Quarterly*, 70 (1997), pp. 275-98.

¹⁴⁶ Alter, 'Seminal'.

¹⁴⁷ Indira Chowdhury Sengupta, *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial India* (Delhi, 2000), pp. 120-49.

¹⁴⁸ M. K. Gandhi, *Brahmacharya aur Atm Sanjog* (Banaras, 1934, 2nd edn); idem, *Brahmacharya ke Anubhava* (Prayag, 1932).

¹⁴⁹ Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Thought* (New Delhi, 1989), pp. 172-206; Madhu Kishwar, 'Gandhi on Women', *EPW*, 20, 40 (5 October 1985), pp. 1691-1702 and 20, 41 (12 October 1985), pp. 1753-58; M. K. Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Boston, 1929); Kakar, *Intimate*, pp. 85-128; Richard Fox, *Gandhian Utopia: Experiments with Culture* (Boston, 1989); Pat Caplan, 'Celibacy as a Solution? Mahatma Gandhi and the Aims, Ideals and Needs of the Gurukula Vishwavidyalaya', in Pat Caplan (ed.), *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* (London, 1987), pp. 270-95.

¹⁵⁰ Carey A. Watt, 'Education for National Efficiency: Constructive Nationalism in North India', *ASA*, 9 (1997), pp. 339-74.

¹⁵¹ Durgadutt Parashar, *Brahmacharyopadesha* (Haridwar, 1908); Ram Deva, 'The Claims of the Gurukula on the Civilization of India', in *The Gurukul Kangri Mahavidyalaya* (Haridwar, 1911); Sewa Ram, *The Aims, Ideals and Needs of the Gurukula Vishwavidyalaya* (Bijnor, 1914); Gurukul Kangri, *Gurukul Vishwavidyalaya Kangri Haridwar ki Niyamavali tatha Bhin-bhin Vidyalya Mahavidyalayon ki Pathvidhi* (Haridwar, 1924); Yoganaresh, *Brahmacharya par Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati* (Lucknow, n.d.); Bharat Dharma Mahamandala, *Brahmacharyashram* (Kashi, n.d.).

'rationality'. Healthy bodies ensured strong Hindu men, who in turn were indispensable to a modern, masculine nation. Brahmacharya became closely tied to the fears and hopes of modern times. The pervasive anxieties and tensions of the age of *Kaliyug* were perceived as systematically undermining a healthy way of life, with Hindu males losing their physical and mental vigour.¹⁵² In the prescriptive literature of brahmacharya too, it was believed that obsession with unbridled sexual desire had increased in contemporary times, which was fatal for the Hindu nation. Certain evils of modern society like cinema, theatre, novels, immoral and unhealthy lifestyle were seen as making young men more susceptible to the consuming passions of modern entertainment and pleasure. Brahmacharya became a building block for claims to social and political power, cultural identity and a scientific way of life. Other moral reformers and numerous medical practitioners aided the discourse of celibacy.

Print brought a flood of cheap self-help guides on brahmacharya. Age-old instructions were repeatedly stressed, infused with modern definitions. The Hindu male was inundated with treatises on brahmacharya, masturbation and for the preservation of semen.¹⁵³ The Gurukul prospectus stressed complete brahmacharya till the age of 25, and remarking on the present woes, said:

Adulterous tendencies... have been refined and exalted by being characterised as 'sowing wild oats', free love'.... The supreme need of the age is therefore moral self-control... The system of education must be radically changed if society is to be rescued from dissolution, decomposition and disintegration.... The Gurukul at Kangri is the first earnest attempt made in this age to revive dharma and train students on spiritual lines.... We all know that youngsters, hardly out of their teens, read stupid novels, instinct with an immoral tone and catch-penny newspapers full of slapdash.... This state of affairs is impossible in the Gurukul.... Students... are permitted to read only such portions of a newspaper article as...are in harmony with the ingredients which go to form their mental structure and intellectual upbuilding.

The instructions to the Hindu male were endless. He was to make all-out efforts to control his sexual urges from a very young age. *Hast maithun svapn dosh*, *guda maithun*, homosexuality and fornication were encompassed as major evils of male sexuality, and were seen as involving orgasm and emissions. These in turn were seen as leading to various diseases. The semen was the essence of life and its discharge was a loss of vital energy, regardless of how it happened. To ensure male purity and to see that not a drop of semen fell on the ground, the Hindu male was drilled to keep a complete rein over his fantasies, passions and imagination. He was to give up masturbation completely. He was to keep his heart and mind at peace. All descriptions of women and touch had to be shunned. He was never to sit alone with a woman or even sit at a place where a woman had sat before. He was not to wear bright and dark clothes. Watching of *dances*, *theatre*, *cinema*, listening to songs or music especially sung by women during marriages, or reading of any novels related to romance and *shringar ras* was proscribed. He was to stop singing, playing of instruments and dancing. Contact and conversations with lower caste and class women were prohibited. He was not to ride on horses or camels. He was not to eat spicy food, not to dream of women, and was to abandon such language or expression which increased sexual desire. He was to even give up wearing shoes, carrying of an umbrella, use of scented oil and flowers, and sleeping off a soft bed.

These instructions took on complementary and complex forms after marriage, and the tasks for the Hindu male to control

¹⁵² Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (Delhi, 1997), pp. 186-215, 282-357, has explored the multiple strands that trailed in the late nineteenth century.

¹⁵³ Suryabali Singh, *Brahmacharya ki Mahit* (Banaras, 1928); Gaurdas Mahajan, *Brahmachari Bar* (Agra, 1928); Goswami Brijnath Sharma (comp.), *Haridwarasth Rishikul Brahmacharyasram ki Niyaam* (Agra, 1914); Pannalal Sharma, *Yuva Raksha* (Agra, n.d.); Lala Bhagwandir, *Brahmacharya ki Vaigyanik Vyakhyaan* (Kashi, n.d.).

¹⁵⁴ Chimmanlala Vaishya, *Yuva Raksha* (Meerut, 1928, 1st edn); Ganeshdutt Sharma Gaur, *Isvarn Dosh Raksha* (Banaras, 1929); Ramchandra Vaidya Shastri, *Balopyogi Virya-Raha* (Kanpur, n.d.).

¹⁵⁵ Deva, 'Claims', pp. xiii-20.

¹⁵⁶ Kangri, *Gurukul* pp. 1, 10-11; Anon., 'Brahmacharya Gurukul Samachar', 9-10 (April-May 1910), pp. 24-25; Anon., 'Navyuvakon ka Kartavya', *Kushwaha Kshatriya Mitra*, 1 (January 1928), pp. 3-8; Vaishya, pp. 25-46; Indra, *Svapn* pp. 5-10; Singh, *Brahmacharya* pp. 9-11, 88-90; Mahajan, *Brahmachari* pp. 11-12.

his body became more difficult. Gandhi emphasised that sex within marriage should be confined to the act¹⁵⁷ of procreation. Much of the prescriptive and reformist literature gave elaborate outlines on sleeping arrangements between husband and wife. Love as represented by such legendary lovers as Laila-Majnu and Siri-Farhad was wasteful and meaningless. The discourse of brahmacharya was thus qualified in conjugal relations from complete celibacy to sexual abstinence and restraint. The wider interests of not only the solidarity of the joint family but also claims to nationhood required not only the chastity of the woman but also sexual containment of the male. This was also a period when there was a new emerging ideal and moral code, which stressed middle-class monogamous marriages and companionship¹⁵⁸ in the past, although the Hindu woman was bound within her chastity, the Hindu male had the leverage to express his sexual desire through a plurality of relationships, including those with courtesans and prostitutes. However, the conceptual and institutionalised separation of the roles of wife and courtesan came under challenge in the colonial period. The Hindu male was increasingly restrained and could not go as freely as before to a prostitute, nor enter into plural relationships easily. He too was asked to practise uncompromising monogamy.

By contrast, however, advertisements for aphrodisiacs were printed in large numbers in many 'respectable' newspapers and magazines, especially from the early twentieth century. In such times, when concepts of brahmacharya were evolving and changing to serve new purposes, advertisements which whetted the appetite and fantasies of Hindu males, offering unattainable pleasures, proved to be extremely popular¹⁵⁹. Although traditional aphrodisiacs had been thrilling lovers for centuries in India, with printed advertisements they now took on new contours and shapes. Advertisements transformed secrets of sex into a public spectacle. They brought aphrodisiacs into the open market; low prices made them accessible to the general public. Many of the traditional remedies could now be sold in attractive packages. A number of quacks and companies floated, freely publishing their advertisements everywhere and everyday, largely catering to male consumers, and actively selling invigorating and vitalising medicines.

B. Pandey of Shivram Aushadhalay in Allahabad in his advertisement of 'Kamdev Vati' claimed that it gave immense physical power, could increase the formation of semen, make it thicker, and would benefit even¹⁶⁰. Advertisements of 'Madan Manjari' and 'Kamratan Goliyan' declared cures for impotency, premature ejaculation and nocturnal emissions, so that one could enjoy a better sex¹⁶¹. To take a sample of the large space occupied by these advertisements, on a single page of *Vartman* of 6 August 1938, there were five such advertisements. Kailash and Company of Kanpur and Vaidyaratana Satyadevji of Rupvilas Company at Etawah advertised extensively for their 'Kailash Viryavrij Churn' and 'Kamsundari Vati'. They offered remedies for laziness in seven days, restoring the man to his full power and glory, so that he was instantly attracted to his¹⁶². *Kamini* 'Tila Mastana', another aphrodisiac, was said to have a lightning effect on the¹⁶³. *Shobhini* Surati claimed refreshment of mind and body. Another advertisement for 'Mohini' claimed that whoever knew its secret

¹⁵⁷ Caplan, 'Celibacy'.

¹⁵⁸ Patricia Uberoi, 'Introduction: Problematizing Social Reform, Engaging Sexuality, Interrogating the State', *Social Utopia* (ed.), xxvi; Sarkar, 'Hindu'.

¹⁵⁹ The publication of advertisements in colonial India has not been subject to any systematic study. It has been pointed out that a study of the beginning of print advertisements provides a lively and provocative instrument to reveal the rise of consumerism, the emergence of a materially defined cultural ideal, and the transformation of society. Advertisements are historical documents, which can help us explore cultural ideals. They indirectly and unconsciously shape as well as reflect popular perceptions, *Colonial Advertising and Victorian Women* (New York, 1994), pp. iii-viii.

¹⁶⁰ *Abhyudaya* 11 April 1925, p. 36. Such advertisements appeared almost every day in all leading newspapers and magazines of UP. Advertisement of R. L. Burman and Comp. of Mathura for example was published in *Prakash* 17 October 1891, *NR* 22 October 1891, p. 722.

¹⁶¹ *Abhyudaya* 20 January 1923, pp. 6 and 10 respectively.

¹⁶² *Vartman* 6 August 1938, p. 8.

¹⁶³ *Vartman* 24 January 1925, p. 4.

would be able to compel his sweetheart to present herself before him within eleven days. Burman and Sitaram Vaidya of Calcutta advertised extensively in UP newspapers and magazines, again promising abundant energy to enjoy life to its fullest. They claimed that with their medicines, even the weakest and the oldest man could relish the pleasures of life. It is interesting to note that almost all such pills extensively used words with various suffixes, and other erotic titles, using them as a device to attract people, and making sex a spectacle and a commodity.

For the companies, doctors, *hakims* and quacks, advertisements provided the quickest way to popularise their products. Motivated by profit, these advertisers adopted an aggressive marketing technique. Money had to be specifically invested by consumers to buy 'obscene' books and these were also more 'visible'. However, aphrodisiac advertisements were remarkable and powerful in the sense that they could be inserted in 'respectable' 'high class' newspapers and books, and thus be 'hidden'. They supplied easy information by intruding into homes, caught the attention of readers and consumers, selling their products persuasively. The advertisers had a ready mass market as they perhaps perceived the real and imagined anxieties of man on the street, such as loss of vigour, impotence and premature ejaculation, in a more realistic fashion than did the brahmacharya manuals or the professional doctors. They knew what would sell, and to boost sales, they preyed on the weak, nervous and debilitated sufferers, promising them sexual heights with a little practical magic and restoration of health and vigour within weeks. Advertisements of 'Kamratan Goliyan' and 'Kansalathai' the present age, the dangers of feebleness had increased manifold and these pills could effectively provide cure for impotency, ensuring a wonderful sex life. In the actual world, the Indian male felt a real loss of material power. In such a situation these advertisements offered a fantasy realm, where men could compensate for their supposed loss of masculinity. Thus these advertisements did not just celebrate male sexuality, but can also be viewed as desperate attempts to allay fears of effeminacy and impotence. This may partially explain why the lion, a symbol of British masculinity, was an icon frequently used in various advertisements of aphrodisiacs at this time, showing the animal's subjugation by the virile Indian male.

At the same time, while these advertisements implicitly challenged the moral rhetoric of sex, they also adopted it to some extent. While they used male sexual fantasy to sell their products, they sometimes moulded their language according to moral perceptions. They also occasionally issued warnings against the perils of over-indulgence in physical pleasures. There was thus a simultaneous convergence and divergence of beliefs in safe and good sex.

These advertisements opened a new public space for sexual information and were seen as signifying a general breakdown of sexual morality, posing serious threats not only to notions of brahmacharya itself. It was their tremendous visibility and use of picturesque language, which created a moral panic and made it hard for many British and Hindus to accept them. The British government mounted a campaign against such advertisements and expressed its deep desire 'to take action to purify the tone of advertisements in the public press of 'obscene' language, taken as a sign of moral corruption, illicit intercourse and unclean thoughts, combined with fears of public health and eugenic arguments, were the usual reasons cited as justifying their banning. The Calcutta Missionary Conference submitted a memorial to the Viceroy and Governor-General of India in 1890 which stated, 'That your memorialists, as persons deeply interested in the moral welfare of the people of the country, have frequent cause to deplore the publication or circulation of advertisements of a corrupt and degrading kind'.

Many editors of newspapers in UP were prosecuted and convicted for publishing 'obscene' advertisements for

¹⁶⁴ *Anis-i-Hind* 9 November 1898, NR 15 November 1898, p. 601.

¹⁶⁵ *Vartman* 22 January 1925, p. 3, *Madhuri* 3, 2-6.

¹⁶⁶ *Leader* 8 January 1911, p. 10, *Leader* 10 January 1911, p. 10. See Illustration 1.

¹⁶⁷ 174-176/June 1911, B, Home Poll (NAI).

¹⁶⁸ 229-32/January 1890, Public, A, Home Deptt (NAI).

aphrodisiacs.¹⁶⁹ When, in 1890, several editors of Moradabad were convicted and fined on the charge, some of them resolved to submit a memorial to the local government with a view to find out what comprised 'obscene'. They argued that the advertisements were not published to encourage immorality or to outrage the public decency but were intended for public good. Obscene words after all were found even in legal and medical journals.¹⁷⁰ After two years, some editors in Agra also protested against government action on such advertisements printed in their newspapers, however, supported action against such advertisements, as they too considered them obscene, reducing the prestige of the press, and urged the government to punish even those men who issued such notices.¹⁷¹ Some were timid and warned the 'sellers of medicines for diseases effecting the organs of generation of men and women' against sending any advertisements to the editor for publication in, or circulation with, their paper. They asked the editors to be on their guard before publishing any such advertisements.¹⁷²

For many of the Hindu publicists, the advertisements reflected fears of unbridled sexual collapse and revealed the limits inherent in sexual discipline. They made a mockery of brahmacharya. Though these advertisements upheld strong patriarchal notions, they were at the same time a challenge to the moral order of that very same patriarchy. They were icons of a world of deviant sexuality, of disorder, and a potential site of loss of the rational Hindu male self-control. The 'good' brahmacharya could be controlled; the 'bad' male desire was beyond control. Thus, a discourse of fear and condemnation arose. An article in *Gurukula Samachar* entitled 'Vigyapan' (Advertisements) began by emphasising how aphrodisiac advertisements were an important source of money for the newspapers and for companies selling such medicines, but that this money was earned by selling dirt and not by good means.¹⁷³ Further said:

By reading such sexually arousing advertisements, women of decent households are filled with shame, and children wonder what is this pleasure of the night.... All feel like reading quality newspapers, but how can one know that they are filled with poison instead of nectar?... If readers glance at the names of medicines in these advertisements designed to arouse curiosity, then they realise that they are filled with the juice and love of sensuous pleasure and luxurious life.... These advertisements in reputed papers are a disgrace to civilisation and make man a slave of his genitals, tempting him with promises of no exhaustion.... On the one hand, the flow of education is increasing. Gurukuls and Rishikuls are opening up and innovative methods of brahmacharya are being propagated.... It is a state offence to publish obscene books. On the other hand, many are publishing and distributing such obscene advertisements, bringing the country to the brink of disaster.... Forget about buying such newspapers, they should not even be touched.... These various temptations are destroying brahmacharya.

The article ended with appeals to newspapers and government to immediately stop such advertisements. The AIWC adopted a resolution urging the government to censor all journals and newspapers that published obscene and outrageous advertisements, which could not be tolerated by any civilised country.¹⁷⁴ Gandhi urged newspaper proprietors to institute rigid censorship against such advertisements and to 'accept only healthy ones'.

However, advertisements for aphrodisiacs were a source of revenue for a press that was short of resources. Markets have their own logic. Many editors of newspapers, otherwise staunch supporters of the Hindu cause, defended such

¹⁶⁹ *Koh-i-Nur* 25 February 1888, *NR* 28 February 1888, p. 154.

¹⁷⁰ *Dabir-i-Hind* 10 January 1890, *NR* 20 January 1890, p. 32.

¹⁷¹ *Nasim-i-Agra* 23 May 1892, *NR* 25 May 1892, p. 182; *Alone* 1 January 1893, *NR* 11 January 1893, p. 19.

¹⁷² *Bharat Jiwan* 16 May 1892, p. 6.

¹⁷³ *Bharat Jiwan* 30 May 1892, p. 184; *Bharat Jiwan* 22 August 1892, p. 4.

¹⁷⁴ *Anjuman-i-Hind* 21 May 1892, *NR* 25 May 1892, p. 184; *Saraswati Prakash* 25 May 1892, *Karnamah* 25 May 1892 and *Adbar-i-Imamiah* 23 May 1892, all *NR* 1 June 1892, p. 194; *Nayaz-ul-Akhbar* 16 June 1892, *NR* 22 June 1892, p. 221; *Nayag Samachar* 25 January 1894.

¹⁷⁵ Anon., 'Vigyapan', *Gurukul Samachar*, 9-10 (April-May 1910), pp. 27-32.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 28-31.

¹⁷⁷ AIWC, *Twelfth* pp. 47, 186.

¹⁷⁸ Gandhi, 'Exercise the Copyright', *Collected*, Vol. XX, pp. 172-73. Also see Gandhi, 'Obscene Advertisements', *Collected*, Vol. LX, pp. 29-30; Gandhi, 'How to Stop Obscene Advertisements', *Collected*, Vol. LX, pp. 153-54.

advertisements. In spite of the concerted campaign against them, the manufacturers of aphrodisiacs continued to find ways to market their products.

Masculinity has multiple meanings. Brahmacharya stressed one kind while these advertisements posited another. Though both dealt with impotency and the crisis of Hindu male identity, they were pulling in opposite directions. One argued for containment, the other celebrated sex. The brahmachari Hindu male preserved his power for the nation; the one of the advertisements used it for 'selfish' sexual fulfilment. Masculinity was asserted in one by the containment of semen; in the other by its release. At the same time, both upheld patriarchal notions -- one by marginalising women, the other by overpowering them.

The documentary film *Father, Son and Holy Man* by Anand Patwardhan in the 1990s, and its persuasive analysis by Rustom Bharucha, describe a volatile intersection between male sexuality, patriarchy and militant political agency of Hindutva forces.¹⁷⁹ At one point in the film, an aphrodisiac seller's sales-pitch rhapsodising the semen 'shooting like an arrow from a bow' is juxtaposed with the icon of an arrow glistening in the night sky of a Shiv Sena rally. But puritanical images which repress male sexuality and celebrate brahmacharya also form part of the discourse of the Hindu publicists. Male sexual promiscuity is central to the maintenance of patriarchal and right-wing culture, and yet often stigmatised and opposed by those very forces. The Hindu publicists show a remarkable plasticity in adopting different images. Hindu male power can take diverse forms.

Male sexuality too was an arena of contest for Hindus in late nineteenth, early twentieth century. Increasing constructions of declining Hindu numbers, new definitions of conjugal relations, challenges of nationalist movement, moral panics of *Kaliyug* popular demands of market, all aided the tension posited between modern notions of brahmacharya and such advertisements, and contributed to questioning male sexuality as much as female sexuality.

Conclusion

It is clear that the Hindu moralists wished to establish their identity and a civilised modern nation by propagating a particular kind of literature, distancing themselves from notions of obscenity and sexual pleasure. There was an uneasiness towards the *shringar ras* of the late medieval elite literature, and more so towards the rising eclectic print culture and the market of popular publishing, which was seen as providing eroticism to the masses. Control and order were necessary for 'good' and 'useful' literature, thus proving the moral authority of an aspiring Hindi literati and aiding a Hindu nationalist identity. Literary ethics was linked to the morality of the nation. As far as the bulk of 'high' literary trends of this period are concerned, these efforts were successful. Most salacious works were no longer considered a part of literary culture. Textbook Hindi literature of the Dwivedi period specifically was largely aimed at creating a new aesthetic taste, where the chastity of the Hindu woman was an essential element.

This literature was important and influential, but it did not occupy the whole field of social identities. The picture is more complex if one looks at other Hindi publications. The bulk of them were indifferent to sanitised literary tastes, and to nation-building. What actually sold in the market and brought profits were a vast variety of sex manuals, romances, songs and advertisements. Old forms -- erotic Braj Bhasha *gossas*, *nautanki* and *sangit* -- were printed in huge quantities. New commercial genres like romantic novels and thrillers provided entertainment and even dealt with 'taboo' subjects. Advertisements catered to sexual anxieties. Sex manuals adapted a 'scientific' garb but also offered sexual titillation. This

¹⁷⁹ Rustom Bharucha, 'Dismantling Men: Crisis of Male Identity in "Father, Son and Holy Man"', *Public World* 26 (1 July 1995), pp. 1610-16; idem, *In the Name of* pp. 140-60.

literature was not on the margins, but at the centre of an emerging subculture. Patriarchal and moralistic notions were partly reconstructed and partly contested in such books. A simple distinction between high and low, elite and popular also does not take us very far. Some reformers thought sexual fulfilment essential in marriage. Moreover, the writers and readership of erotic material were themselves part of the Hindu middle class. The 'high' sanitised literature had limited readers.