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Politics, Public Issues and the
Promotion of Urdu Literature:
Avadh Akhbar, the First Urdu Daily in
Northern India

LAUNCHED IN 1858 from the Naval Kishore Press in Lucknow, *Avadh Akhbār* was the most lucrative journalistic venture of the famed North Indian publisher and print capitalist Munshi Naval Kishore and a great success with the Urdu reading public. At a time when most Urdu papers were short-lived, it remained in circulation up to the year 1950, its lifespan of almost a century covering a crucial period in the history of colonial India. In 1877 *Avadh Akhbār* (hereafter *AA*) became the first Urdu daily in northern India. It was to remain the only commercially viable daily newspaper in Urdu for a whole decade, until its first serious rival emerged in the form of the *Paisa Akhbār* (est. 1887) of Lahore, a paper emulating the concept of the British penny paper.¹ Exemplifying the early phase of commercialization in the Urdu newspaper trade, *AA* was read across a wide geographical region ranging from Delhi to Haidarabad and from Lahore to Calcutta. This essay traces the history of the paper's first

¹According to Muhammad Sadiq, the *Paisa Akhbār* marked a turning point in Urdu journalism and a dividing line between older and modern journalism in that it initiated the differentiation between the literary journal and the newspaper as a mere purveyor of news. M. Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 616. In actual fact, the matter is hardly that simple, for newspapers continued to include poetry and fictional writing in their columns. *AA* is a case in point. For the difficulties in providing a theoretically rigorous distinction between newspaper and literary magazine in the nineteenth century, see Graham Law, *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2000), p. xv.

forty years, during which it made a distinct impact on the emerging Urdu public sphere. Outlining the growth, contents and policy of *AA*, it will look at both economic and human factors in the making of an outstanding popular success in nineteenth-century Urdu journalism.²

Munshi Naval Kishore (1836–95) is one of several eminent Hindu publicists who figure prominently in the history of nineteenth-century Urdu journalism. Following his higher education at Agra College, he went to Lahore to receive his training as a printer and journalist at the famous *Kōh-e Nūr* Press (est. 1849) of Munshi Harsukh Rāʿē (1816–90), the doyen of Urdu journalism in the Punjab.³ At the beginning of 1856 Naval Kishore returned to Agra to establish his own Urdu weekly, *Safīr-e Āgra*.⁴ His plans, however, were thwarted by political events. In September 1857 we find him back in Lahore where he assumed the editorship of *Kōh-e Nūr* and successfully saw the paper through the uprising of 1857. His loyalty towards the British at the time would be amply rewarded when he moved on to Lucknow in 1858—he was the first Indian to be granted a license to operate a printing press in the city after the “Mutiny.” Established under the name of Maṭbaʿ-*e* Avadh Akhbār in 1858, the Naval Kishore Press (hereafter NKP) rose to great fame in the history of commercial and scholarly publishing in India with an unparalleled range of publications in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindi and Urdu.

Compared to other North Indian urban centers, Urdu journalism started late in Lucknow. This was due to the particular circumstance that, following a temporary closure of all printing presses in the city by Vājīd ʿAlī Shāh in 1849, conditions of strict censorship prevailed in Avadh. No sooner had the *navābī* come to an end through the British annexation of Avadh in 1856 than at least seven Urdu weeklies were launched in

²I am grateful to Christina Oesterheld for patiently assisting me in reading through the files of *AA*.

³Munshi Harsukh Rāʿē, a Kayastha from Sikandarabad, had earlier served as editor to the *Jām-e Jamshēd*, an Urdu journal of Meerut. At the instigation of the British he moved to Lahore in 1849 where, with the support of the Punjab Administration Board, he established his own press and launched the first Urdu newspaper in the Punjab. With a circulation of nearly 350 copies (1854) the *Kōh-e Nūr* remained for a long time the most influential Urdu paper in the province. Harsukh Rāʿē subsequently rose to a position of prominence in Lahore society.

⁴*Safīr-e Āgra*, a weekly comprising twelve pages, was launched on 19 January 1856. Nādir ʿAlī Khān, *Hindustānī Prēs, 1556–1900* (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdu Akademi, 1990), p. 286.

Lucknow within a year's time.⁵ The 1857 uprising, however, brought the city's thriving print and publishing industry to a complete standstill. The vacuum Naval Kishore encountered on his arrival in Lucknow in early 1858 and the initial absence of local competition in the newspaper trade certainly did much to enhance the early growth of *AA*. The paper's lasting and extraordinary success, however, must be attributed to a number of other factors.

The first factor was British patronage in the form of subscriptions and the overall support extended to the NKP. From the outset Naval Kishore entered into an intense business collaboration with the colonial administration, printing all kinds of government forms and registers. He not only held a monopoly in textbook printing in Avadh, but subsequently managed to get the lion's share of official patronage in the amalgamated North-Western Provinces and Avadh: by 1882 over 75 percent of British printing commissions went to his press, the remainder being shared by fifteen presses.⁶ A large proportion of the profits made from government-job work was reinvested in Oriental book publishing and some went into sustaining *AA*. The government, in its turn, patronized the paper by subscribing to a number of copies which were distributed to the schools and colleges in the provinces. If official statistics are a measure to go by, colonial patronage of the paper was not quite as substantial as some later voices made it out to be: With 50 out of 820 copies in 1877, 94 out of 732 copies in 1886, and 94 out of 521 copies in 1895, government subscriptions hardly ever exceeded twenty percent of the paper's total circulation.⁷

⁵The most important was the *Ṭilism-e Lakḥna'ū*, edited by Maulvī Muḥammad Ya'qūb of the Firangi Mahal family. Details in Nadir Ali Khan, *A History of Urdu Journalism* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1991), pp. 294–355.

⁶*Proceedings of the Government NWP & Oudh, General Dept.*, May 1886, p. 16.

⁷The circulation of *AA* during the nineteenth century never exceeded 850 copies. It has to be borne in mind, however, that circulation figures at no time reflect actual readership. Newspapers like *AA* were widely recirculated and frequently read out to groups of non-literate people in both private homes and public arenas. See my paper "Lucknows *Jalsa-i Tabzib*: Urbane Elite, organisierte Handlungskompetenz und frühe 'associational culture' in Britisch-Indien," in *Handeln und Verhandeln. Kolonialismus, Transkulturelle Prozesse und Handlungskompetenz*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné (Muenster: LIT, 2002), pp. 69–70; and also

The second success factor concerned the professional management of the paper. *AA* was one of the first Urdu papers to be run along sound commercial lines. This implied that the paper partly financed itself through advertisements. Compared to British newspapers at the time, which made larger incomes from advertising than from sales,⁸ the proportion of space given to advertisements was relatively small. A typical issue of *AA* in 1871, for example, comprised sixteen pages of which an average of four would be given to advertising. Subsequently advertising came to account for an increasingly important part of the paper's revenue. In 1879, the rate obtaining for occasional small advertisements was 2 annas per line and column. Rates for regular commercial advertisements depended on how often an ad was placed in the paper and ranged from Rs. 12 for insertion once a month to Rs. 60 for insertion six times a month.⁹ By that time *AA* carried regular advertisements for branded goods and for patent medicines such as the widely advertised Holloway's pills and ointments or the "celebrated medicines" of one Dr. De Roos, of which the publishing house acted as a sole distributor. Local firms such as Murray & Co., a large retail company selling wine and general merchandise, and the Shaikh Haji Muhammad Bakhsh Company, a contractor of tents and uniforms, started to place regular full-page ads in the paper. The NKP, of course, also used the paper as a cheap medium to extensively advertise and invite subscriptions for its own book publications. In the early days of *AA*, announcements of important publications such as Ghālib's Persian *Kulliyāt* or his *Qāṭi'-e Burhān* would feature prominently on its front page (*AA* of 1 January 1862). Later, such notices were relegated to the interior or back of the paper but still appeared so frequently that the Delhi-based *Nuṣratu 'l-Akhhbār* was prompted in 1876 to accuse *AA* of being totally "self-interested": "The editor has been instructed not to write any article beneficial to the public, but only to print reviews of the books [published by] the press."¹⁰

Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 38–9.

⁸Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 16.

⁹See *Fihrist-e Kutub-e Maṭba'-e Munshī Navalkishōr* (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1879), p. 4.

¹⁰*Nuṣratu 'l-Akhhbār* of 1 August 1876; quoted in Imdād Ṣābirī, *Tārikh-e Ṣaḥāfat-e Urdū*, vol. 2 (Delhi: Jadid Printing Press, 1953), pp. 97–8.

The third factor, to be discussed later, was the group of people who led the paper. *AA* had the distinction of being headed by a number of eminent editors who were scholars, poets or prose writers in their own right. This latter circumstance also accounts for the paper's influential role in the promotion of modern Urdu literature for, in the typical fashion of early Urdu papers, *AA* combined the functions of newspaper and literary journal. It promoted both poetry and prose writing and evolved into a forum for literary debate, attracting the contributions of eminent Urdu literati of the day. The press office of *AA*, then, was not only a place where information was generated, it was also a meeting point for the Urdu literary scene.

From Weekly to Daily: Growth and Development of *Avadh Akhbar*

Whether it's because the study of a commercially produced newspaper does not fall within the purview of modern scholars of Urdu, or perhaps because of the scarcity of extant early issues,¹¹ *AA* has received surprisingly little attention outside the standard works on Urdu journalism. In giving a brief overview of the paper's growth and development, the following paragraphs will try to fill some lacunae and also refute some inaccurate claims concerning the paper's format, frequency and editorship. As with many early Urdu papers, there is some disagreement over the date of first publication: While several authorities on Urdu journalism maintain that the first issue of *AA* did not appear before January 1859, the late Amīr Ḥasan Nūrānī, himself an authority on the NKP, asserts that on the closure of the firm's Kanpur press he chanced upon the first issue of the paper dating from 26 November 1858. Unfortunately the rare document was subsequently lent to a reputed Urdu scholar and could not be retrieved.¹² While there is no reason to disbelieve Nūrānī, later editorial notices appearing in the paper contradict his information and support the

¹¹The Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library, Patna, holds issues of *AA* from 1866, 1869, 1870–2, and 1875. The OIOC, London, has in stock almost complete runs of the paper between 1875 and 1884. According to Amīr Ḥasan Nūrānī, some files from 1862 and 1870 are kept in the Aivān-e Ghālib Library in Delhi.

¹²Amīr Ḥasan Nūrānī, *Savānīḥ-e Munshī Navālkishōr* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1995), p. 136.

1859 date.¹³ Most importantly, the issue of 8 January 1862 was marked as volume 4, no. 2, which clearly indicates the year 1859 for the first volume. This, however, does not altogether preclude the possibility that Naval Kishore did indeed launch a first issue in 1858. Given the many tasks he had to attend to on opening his press, he at first may not have been able to publish his new paper on the intended regular weekly basis. This would also explain why Nūrānī maintains that *AA* was initially brought out on a fortnightly basis. As things stand, regular weekly publication of *AA* only took off a couple of weeks later, starting a fresh count with volume one in January 1859.

AA was initially a four-page weekly in the standard format of early Urdu papers, that is, 18 x 22 cm. Its frontispiece was adorned with a drawing of the Chattar Manzil and Farhat Bakhsh palace complex, evoking the erstwhile grandeur of *navābī* Lucknow. It is worth noting that the frontispiece in its layout bears a striking resemblance to that of the *Illustrated London News*, one of the most popular Victorian weeklies at the time (Figures 1 and 2). Appearing each Wednesday, *AA* was well received and during the following years successfully competed against the rapidly growing number of Urdu papers. By 1864 its size had increased to sixteen pages.¹⁴ Simultaneously, the format was enlarged to 22 x 29 cm. So overwhelming was the success of *AA* that on opening his printing press in Kanpur in September 1865, Naval Kishore decided to bring out a local edition in the form of the *Kānpūr Gazat*. It was edited by Muḥammad Ismā'īl, the manager of the firm's Kanpur branch. Within the next two years, however, communication between Lucknow and Kanpur improved to such an extent that the Kanpur edition was rendered superfluous. Accordingly, it was discontinued.¹⁵

¹³*AA* of 22 December 1871, for instance, carried an editorial notice which referred to the paper's lifespan with the words "This is the thirteenth year of God's divine grace," pointing to 1859. A similar notice in *AA* of 2 January 1874 expressly stated that "In this factory in 1859 [a paper] called *Avad^b Akhbār* was put into circulation."

¹⁴J.H. Garcin de Tassy, *La Langue et la Littérature Hindoustaniens de 1850 à 1869*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie de Maisonneuve et Cie, 1864–69), p. 245. The French scholar's claim that by 1867 the size of *AA* had further increased to 24 pages (*ibid.*, 1867, p. 372) is inaccurate. The issues of 1871 still comprised no more than 16 pages on average.

¹⁵Garcin de Tassy, 1867, p. 373.



Figure 1



Figure 2

The next major step in the growth of *AA* illustrates the direct impact of government measures on the still volatile newspaper market. In 1871 the standard postage for newspapers was reduced from one anna to half an anna. With newspaper distribution depending almost entirely on the

colonial postal system, postage from the outset constituted a vital factor in the commercial history of “vernacular” papers. Nothing much had changed since 1822 when Harihar Dutt had solicited the government for free postage, complaining that the circulation of his weekly *Jām-e Jahān Numā* had been “materially impeded and obstructed even in spite of my best exertions and efforts to extend it.” This, Dutt maintained, was “in consequence of its being liable to payment of full postage, which has restrained many intending subscribers in the mofussil from patronising the said News Paper.”¹⁶ The adverse effects of postage on circulation continued to be a vexing problem for Indian newspaper proprietors. So much so that in March 1869 Munshi Naval Kishore initiated a campaign for the reduction of postage for newspapers and periodicals and rallied a group of twenty-five influential newspaper proprietors and editors from all over North India, Calcutta and Bombay in drawing up a petition to the government. The petition at the time was rejected.¹⁷ Yet the government seems to have had second thoughts, for in 1871 it introduced a fifty-percent reduction in the standard postage. Not surprisingly, the measure gave an immediate boost to the Urdu newspaper trade. It not only led to “a striking increase”¹⁸ in the number of new launches, but also benefited well-established papers like *AA* which were able to attract larger numbers of subscribers. From August 1871 *AA* started to appear twice a week, and from May 1875 three times a week. Even after the reduction, postage continued to account for a considerable proportion of readers’ expenses: In 1877 the annual cost for ordinary subscribers was Rs. 20 excluding and Rs. 30 including postage, postage thus comprising a third of the cost. Higher subscription rates of Rs. 40 and Rs. 50, respectively, obtained for the gentry and nobility. The provincial government at the time subscribed to 50 copies charged at ordinary subscription rates—Naval Kishore’s attempt to introduce higher rates was rejected outright.

AA did much to enhance the spread of the newspaper reading habit among the aristocracy and educated middle class in the North-Western Provinces and Avadh. That the paper also enjoyed growing popularity

¹⁶Quoted in P. Thankappan Nair, “Origin of the Persian, Urdu and Hindi Printing and Press in Calcutta,” *Indo-Iranica* 43 (1990), p. 35.

¹⁷See Stark, pp. 67–8.

¹⁸*Oudh Administration Report for the Year 1871–2*, p. 128. ‘Abdu ’s-Salām Khurshīd, *Ṣahāfat Pākistān va Hind Mēn* (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqī-e Adab, 1963), p. 180.

among those sections of society who could not afford to subscribe to a newspaper regularly is borne out by the quaint testimony of a correspondent of *AA* who, writing from Hoshangabad in 1874, complained of the common malpractice of the servants of the post office who were in the habit of opening the covers of the paper addressed to him. Not only did they read it themselves, they circulated it among their friends, on which account the paper reached him very late.¹⁹ One eminent subscriber of *AA* who publicly welcomed its expansion and growing influence was Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān. In the opinion of the great Muslim reformer, Munshi Naval Kishore was to be credited with having popularized the notion of a news magazine and created widespread public awareness for modern concepts of information among Urdu-speakers in the North-Western Provinces and Avadh.²⁰ In an article published in his own reformist journal, *Tahzību 'l-Akhlāq* (est. 1870), Sir Sayyid expressed his hope to see *AA* expand even further:

Avadh Akhbār has been a very respected paper before and nothing can be added to it now. We hope that our contemporary journalists will imitate *Avadh Akhbār*, and as for Munshi Naval Kishore's magnanimity—God's blessings upon him—we hope that his paper will appear on a daily basis in the manner of the large renowned English newspapers. May God let it be so.²¹

The praise and good wishes were mutual for *AA* openly sympathized with Islamic modernism and the Aligarh Movement. It did its best to support *Tahzību 'l-Akhlāq* when soon after its inception the paper faced severe opposition from the Muslim orthodoxy. The editor of *AA* at the time was Ghulām Muḥammad Khān “Tapish,” a long-standing supporter of Sir Sayyid. He not only reprinted many of the articles published in *Tahzību 'l-Akhlāq*,²² but also adopted a policy of refusing to include in the

¹⁹*AA* of 16 October 1874, *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers Published in the Punjab, North Western-Provinces, Oudh and Central Provinces (SVN)*, 1874, p. 493.

²⁰Syed Jalaluddin Haidar, “Munshi Nawal Kishore (1836–1895)(Mirror of Urdu Printing in British India),” *Pakistan Library Bulletin*, Vol. XII, No. 1, p. 20.

²¹My translation. *Tahzību 'l-Akhlāq*, 1 Jamādiu 'ṣ-Ṣānī 1288 A.H., quoted in Khurshīd, pp. 180–1.

²²For example, Sir Sayyid's influential review of William Hunter's *The Indian Musalmans* was reprinted in the *AA* of 22 December 1871.

columns of *AA* any article or letter that took an overt stance against the great Muslim reformer.²³ As a result of this active support for the highly controversial reformist journal, *AA* and its proprietor in turn became a target for Sir Sayyid's orthodox opponents. As Ghulām Muḥammad Khān informed Sir Sayyid in a confidential letter, on a visit to Kanpur, Munshi Naval Kishore had been summoned by the Deputy Collector, Maulvī Imdād 'Alī, and severely reprimanded for "bringing about the ruin of his paper by having employed a Christian editor." The allusion was to the many articles by Sayyid Aḥmad Khān that *AA* used to reprint. Out of consideration for his enterprise in Kanpur, Naval Kishore could not but humbly submit to the scolding. Nevertheless, as the letter went on to report, the Deputy Collector had mounted a diatribe against the editors of both papers. Ghulām Muḥammad Khān was eager to assure Sir Sayyid of Munshi Naval Kishore's unfailing friendship and respect, but also pointed out that the publisher was operating under many constraints. He finally urged Sir Sayyid to occasionally write to the publisher and assure him of their solidarity and common cause.²⁴

Eagerly anticipated by Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, the shift of *AA* to a daily paper came in 1877. As was announced in a special supplement to *AA* on 23 May 1877, starting from 1 June 1877 the paper was to be published on a daily basis, initially for a six-month trial period. The bold venture, it was explained, followed public demand, for readers had for some time expressed their keen desire to receive information on a more regular, daily basis. Moral and financial support came forth from prominent citizens such as Lucknow's veteran printer-publisher Maulānā Ḥājī Ḥarmain Sharifain, C.S.I., and Deputy Collector Rājā Jai Kishan Dās, C.S.I., the former secretary of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's British Indian Association. Extolling the generous contribution of Muḥammad 'Abdullāh Khān

²³See Ghulām Muḥammad Khān's letter to Sir Sayyid, quoted in Mirzā Muḥammad Riḏvān, "Munshī Navalkishōr kē Muta'alliq Čand Mutafarriq Bātēn," *Nayā Daur*, Vol. 3, Nos. 8–9 (1980), p. 232.

²⁴"Letter from Editor Oudh Akhbar to Syed Ahmad Khan" (undated), quoted in *Selected Documents from the Aligarh Archives*, ed. Yusuf Husain (London: Asia Publishing House, 1967–), pp. 210–1. Given this overt support for Sayyid Ahmad Khan and *Tahzibu 'l-Akhlāq* expressed in *AA*, it remains a curious fact that in 1873–74 the NKP published a number of pamphlets authored by Maulvī 'Alī Bakhsh Khān, one of the most outspoken critics of Sayyid Ahmad's religious ideas, in which the latter was wholeheartedly condemned as a heretic.

Bahādur of Tonk, who had promised a yearly subscription of Rs. 100 in support of the venture, the paper hoped that other members of the local aristocracy and affluent class of *ra'ises* would follow suit (*AA* of 25 May 1877).

That *AA* could continue as a regular daily even after the six-month trial period is inextricably linked to the specific historic context, notably the urgent need for news that the Turko-Russian War (1877–78) and the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–80) were creating among North Indians, particularly among Muslims.²⁵ The paper provided extensive coverage of the wars. In the process, it introduced new features such as a special column entitled “*sarhad/maidān-e jaṅg kī tāzatarīn khabrēn*” (Latest News From the Frontier/Battlefield) and inserted maps and illustrations. It is interesting to note that even though *AA* was never an illustrated newspaper, the visual element became increasingly important in its coverage especially of foreign news. Readers were, among others, regaled with large drawings of the Paris International Exhibition of 1878 (*AA* of 1 October 1878), of scenes from a Kabul war camp (*AA* of 28 February 1879), and of a Zulu warrior chief (*AA* of 31 May 1879).

The publication of *AA* on a daily basis was also sustained by a second, altogether different factor. Following the assumption of the editorship by Pandit Ratan Nār^h “Sarshār” in August 1878, installment publication of his famous Urdu novel *Fasāna-e Āzād* was started. This in fact was the first time that serialized fiction was successfully introduced in an Urdu newspaper. A landmark in the history of modern Urdu fiction, *Fasāna-e Āzād* met with an unprecedented public interest which gave a great boost to the paper.²⁶ The survival of *AA* as a daily then rested on a combination of contemporary politics and modern prose fiction. Information and entertainment as the two sustaining factors can hardly be dissociated from one another for Sarshār cleverly incorporated current political affairs into his fictional narrative: Readers of *Fasāna-e Āzād* were made day-to-day witnesses of the hero Āzād’s journey to Europe and his brave exploits in fighting the Russians on the side of his Turkish fellow-Muslims.

²⁵For a similar increase in sales of British daily newspapers provoked by the Turkish crisis, see Brown, p. 40.

²⁶This was rather late as compared to Britain where serial fiction was by no means an invention of the Victorian era but dates back to the eighteenth century. For the history of serialized fiction and installment publication in Britain, see Law.

Contents and Policy

AA was a product of the colonial experience in that it aimed at being a modern, professional news magazine. It emulated British models, its coverage including local, national and international news. In the name of spreading information and enlightenment among the Urdu reading public, *AA* aimed high, aspiring to be nothing less than the North Indian equivalent of *The Times* of London (*AA* of 1 January 1879). The news section made up the largest portion of the paper which prided itself in being able to cover “the whole world.”

How was efficient news coverage achieved and what were the channels of information transfer? It was only three years prior to the inception of *AA* that the opening of the first telegraph lines in India had induced radical changes in the dissemination of news on the Subcontinent.²⁷ No modern news agencies, however, were operating in India before the year 1866 when Reuters started extending its services there.²⁸ Reuters, at all events, was too expensive at first for the majority of Indian editors to make use of its services. To ensure a rapid and steady flow of information, Munshi Naval Kishore therefore relied on a more traditional system of information distribution and built up his own network of correspondents posted in the major urban centers in India. Apparently their number was legendary, as suggested by a contemporary saying to the effect that in every district and every princely state could be found correspondents of the colonial government and of Munshi Naval Kishore.²⁹ A substantial

²⁷The rapid development of the telegraph system has been summed up by David Arnold: “From a few miles of line in 1851, telegraphs had been extended over 4,250 miles of India and linked forty-six receiving stations by the end of 1856; they ran from Calcutta to Agra and the northwest as well as connecting Bombay, Madras and Ootacamund. By 1865 there were 17,500 miles of telegraph lines, rising to 52,900 miles by the end of the century.” *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 113.

²⁸Reuters set up its first office in Bombay in 1866. Further offices in Calcutta, Madras and Karachi followed, supplying the Indian press not only with foreign but also domestic information. The opening of the London-Bombay submarine telegraph cable in June 1870 greatly speeded up the transmission of news from England. Details in Graham Storey, *Reuters’ Century 1851–1951* (London: Max Parrish, 1951), pp. 62–8.

²⁹Şābirī, p. 112.

portion of the domestic and foreign news was also reprinted from English newspapers, particularly *The Times* of London, *The Pioneer* of Allahabad and the *Friend of India*. For news items regarding the Islamic world *AA* frequently made use of Persian and Arabic newspapers. At the same time, generating news and information was turned into a public, collective concern in which the participation of the readership was explicitly invited: Those who would regularly supply the paper with “important, recent, reliable and interesting news items”³⁰ were promised free copies of *AA* in return.

While introducing new concepts of modern informational culture, *AA* retained some features of the traditional newsletter as described by Michael H. Fisher.³¹ For one, there was the physical appearance of the handwritten and lithographed sheets. The paper retained the term “*akhbārāt*” for various categories of news; it adopted a Persianized vocabulary and cultivated a fairly ornate style. Published in two parts, on Wednesday and Friday, a typical issue of the paper in 1871 combined elements of traditional and modern newswriting in its standard departments. In the following overview of its contents the original Urdu has been retained to show how this intermingling of the traditional and the modern was reflected in the vocabulary used to label the various headings:

Avadh Akhbār in 1871

Part One ([issued] on Wednesday)	Part Two ([issued] on Friday)
1) General advertisements (<i>ishihārāt ma'mūlī</i>)	1) Lucknow
2) Poetry (<i>naẓm</i>)	2) Telegraph news (<i>akhbārāt tar-barqī</i>)
3) Letters to the Editor (<i>khaṭ-Kitābat</i>)	3) Editorial (<i>adīṭōriyāl</i>)
4) Proceedings of the Committee, ³² etc. (<i>maẓāmin kamiṭī vaḡhairah</i>)	4) Correspondent (<i>kāraspāndanī</i>)
5) Telegraph news (<i>akhbārāt tar-barqī</i>)	5) Translations from the English (<i>tarjuma angreẓī</i>)
6) Editorial (<i>adīṭōriyāl</i>)	6) Reprints from other papers (<i>manqūlā</i>)
7) Correspondent (<i>kāraspāndanī</i>)	7) Letters to the Editor (<i>khaṭ-Kitābat</i>)

³⁰*Fihrist-e Kutub* 1879, p. 4.

³¹Michael H. Fisher, “The Office of Akhbār Nawis: The Transition from Mughal to British Forms,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (1993), pp. 79–81.

³²I.e., the Lucknow Municipal Committee.

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| 8) Translations from English newspapers (<i>tarjuma angrēzī akhbārā</i>) | 8) Translations from the <i>Government Gazette</i> (<i>tarjuma gavarnmanṭ gazaṭ urdū</i>) |
| 9) Miscellanea (<i>akhbārāt mukhtalif</i>) | 9) Special notifications (<i>ishtihārāt ghair-ma'mūlī</i>) |
| 10) Local news/Lucknow (<i>lōkal akhbārāt</i>) | |
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By 1878 telegraph news had moved to the front part of the paper, whereas the advertisement and local news sections had been relegated to the back. This increased emphasis on rapid coverage of domestic and internal affairs, while immediately provoked by the wars, also formed part of a wider policy shift in which *AA* slowly moved away from older conventions of assembling and presenting news, towards a new kind of “efficient” and professional journalism that was clearly based on Western models.

The local section of the paper was comparatively small. It provided information on current affairs in Lucknow. Next to news items on crimes or spectacular incidents, it included steady features such as the timetables of the Oudh Rohilkhand Railway (printed in Urdu and Devanagari script),³³ legal notices, and the timings of court sessions. It also reported on a wide array of cultural events, including *mushā'iras*, public lectures and, most importantly, the activities of local civic associations such as the Jalsa-e Tahzīb or “Lucknow Reform Club” (est. 1868), of which Naval Kishore was a prominent member. Among *mushā'iras*, those organized by the NKP and taking place regularly on its premises were given special coverage. Reports on these gatherings, which attracted both well-known and minor Lucknow poets, at times read like an inventory of local poetic talent. The *AA* of 1 January 1878, for example, carried the following notice:

A special gathering of poets took place at the Avadh Akhbār Press on Monday. The occasion was graced by eminent poets among the noblemen of Lucknow. The pattern-line was “*saḥ tō yeh hai hī burā hōtā hai aḥḥā hōnā*” (True it is, indeed, that being good is bad). But since, due to the lack of time, the distinguished poets had only been informed one day in advance, there were very few ghazals that conformed to the pattern-line.

³³The railway timetable had become an integral part of suburban newspaper content in London's local papers since the 1840s. In introducing this feature the *AA* obviously acted on official demand.

Indeed, most did not conform to it. The audience gained extreme delight from the compositions of Janāb Navāb Sirāju 'd-Daula Bahādur "Junūn," Janāb Mirzā Ḥaidar Ṣāḥib "Afsūn," Janāb Dārōgha Mīr Vājid 'Alī Ṣāḥib "Taskhīr," Ra'īs of Lucknow, Janāb Munshī Ghazanfar 'Alī Ṣāḥib "Ḥalīm," Mīr Afzal 'Alī Ṣāḥib "Afzal," the sons of Janāb Tadbīru 'd-Daula Munshī Muẓaffar 'Alī Khān Bahādur and other distinguished gentlemen. The honorable proprietor of the press was extremely grateful for the kindness of all the gentlemen.³⁴

Besides its variety of news items, the paper contained articles on social and cultural topics, education and literature. In matters of social change, it generally adopted a reformist and progressive stance: For example, it urged the government to take strict measures against female infanticide (*AA* of 19 July 1870) and condemned the "sinful practice of polygamy" (*AA* of 26 July 1870).³⁵ "Public welfare" or "*rifāb-e 'ām*" was a frequently invoked key concept in such articles. In the name of "*rifāb-e 'ām*" the paper gave vent to public grievances. Complaints ranged from the want of proper sanitary arrangements in Lucknow (*AA* of 15 March 1869)³⁶ to the introduction of new taxes by the Municipal Committee which together with the government income tax were said "to have disgusted the people at large, and created a general disaffection and distrust towards the ruling power" (*AA* of 28 June 1870).³⁷ While such reports professed to give voice to public discontent, they were generally moderate in tone and clearly testify to the paper's self-styled role as an intermediary between the government and the Indian people.

The political outlook of *AA* was characterized by loyalty towards the colonial state and support for its policies. Official British opinion considered the paper to be "moderate and respected" and early on noted "the ability" with which it was written.³⁸ Yet at times this very moderation and

³⁴My translation from the original Urdu quoted in Ṣābirī, p. 95. In the usual fashion, the poetic compositions presented at these gatherings were subsequently published by the NKP in collections called *Guldasta*.

³⁵*SVN* 1870, p. 289.

³⁶*SVN* 1869, p. 126.

³⁷*SVN* 1870, p. 252.

³⁸"Memo on the Vernacular Press for Upper India for 1876–77" and Priya Das' Report in: *Home Department, Public Proceedings*, August 1879, pp. 292–303, and February 1883, pp. 187–8 (B). *Oudh Administration Report for the Year 1869–70*, p. 145.

this cautious stance could border on a kind of opportunism which was suspicious even to British eyes. As an official report noted in 1881:

Of the Oudh papers the best is the Oudh Akhbar. This paper is, however, somewhat timid in tone, and rarely ventures to advocate strongly any important measures till satisfied that they are likely to find favor with Government. Though a consistent and admiring supporter of Lord Lytton's various measures, no sooner did it hear of his resignation than it hastened to advocate those changes in policy which seemed likely would take place under the new Government.³⁹

Following the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, *AA* became a prime target for the nationalist Urdu press, particularly once its proprietor Naval Kishore had openly joined ranks with Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān's United Indian Patriotic Association and assumed a leading position in the anti-Congress movement.⁴⁰ It is difficult to dissociate political opposition from professional rivalry in the bitter attacks on *AA* that various Urdu journals started to indulge in at that time. The continuously large share of government patronage that Naval Kishore's firm and, with it, *AA* enjoyed was indeed prone to incite jealousy. The rival Urdu press invariably portrayed Naval Kishore as a sycophant of the colonial empire who in opposing the Congress was motivated by self-interest and servility alone. In the process, *AA* was declared unable to represent national interests. *Avadh Panč* defamed the paper as a money-minded "*baniā akhbār*,"

³⁹*Report on the Administration of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, for the year ending 31 March 1881, p. 359.

⁴⁰There is a persisting myth, perpetuated in much biographical writing on Naval Kishore, that the publisher was a fervent supporter of the Indian National Congress and the Lucknow delegate to the inaugural session of the Congress held in Bombay in 1885. This could not be further from the truth. The Lucknow delegate was Munshi Gaṅgā Prasād Varmā (b. 1863), the proprietor-editor of the rivaling Urdu journal *Hindustānī* and an outspoken adversary of Naval Kishore in the arenas of local journalism and politics. The confrontation of the two men was staged around the 1892 Municipal Elections in which Naval Kishore acted as chief canvasser for the anti-Congress candidate Bābū Shri Rām, whereas Gaṅgā Prasād Varmā supported the Congress candidate Panḍit Bishan Narāyan Dar. In 1893 the two men clashed again over the election of the Lucknow delegate to the Provincial Legislative Council. Details in Anand Shankar Singh, *Growth of Political Awakening in Uttar Pradesh, 1858–1900* (Varanasi: Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, 1991), pp. 144–6.

while *Hindustān* accused it of consisting chiefly of “translations of articles abusive of natives” taken from the *Pioneer* and the *Civil and Military Gazette*.⁴¹ Gaṅgā Prasād Varmā’s *Hindustānī* maintained that *AA* “blindly supported government measures and proceedings in utter disregard of the interests of the people.”⁴² *AA* in its turn claimed to have public opinion on its side and retorted that the public trusted the colonial government more than it did the seditious Congress and its organs. In lashing out their polemics the pro-Congress papers deliberately overlooked the deeper motives of Naval Kishore’s opposition to the Congress. No doubt the publisher had to protect his commercial interests and was careful not to endanger business relations with his major customer by publishing anti-British propaganda in his paper, but to narrow his motivation down to economic dependence is certainly overstating the case.⁴³ *AA* was not a loyalist paper by constraint but by choice. It firmly believed in the benefits of colonial rule. Yet loyalty and support of colonial rule, as understood by the proprietor and editors of *AA*, did not automatically exclude a critique of government. True to its claim of representing public opinion, the paper was on occasion quite capable of articulating dissonant “native” views. C. A. Bayly has aptly described its stance as “covert criticism of British rule in Hindustan along the lines of old patriotism, but in the voice of unalloyed loyalism.”⁴⁴

The coverage of the visit to Lucknow of the Prince of Wales in May 1876 provides a characteristic example of this stance. The paper not only published numerous poetical compositions in honor of the distinguished visitor but also, in its issue of 28 May 1876, contained a critical piece under the heading “Can the Indian Subjects be Content with the British Government?” which openly voiced its dissatisfaction with an administration that failed to cater to the basic needs of a populace assaulted by poverty and hunger.⁴⁵ In the issue of 6 March 1876 Munshi Naval Kishore, after a personal consultation with Vājīd ‘Alī Shāh in Matia Burj, voiced his protest against the treatment meted out to the former King of Avadh

⁴¹Quoted in Singh, pp. 25 and 65.

⁴²*Hindustānī* of 6 July 1890, *SVN*1890, p. 452.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴C.A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 91.

⁴⁵Cf. Garcin de Tassy, 1876, pp. 8–12.

by the British. *AA* also liked to pose as a spokesman of the Indian-language press and frequently took up its cause in its columns. The issue of 25 August 1874, for example, carried a complaint about the government's double standards in dealing with the English and Indian-language press, stating that it was "extremely unjust that, while Government grants special indulgences to editors of English newspapers, and exalts them to high offices in the public service, it should confer no such favors on the editors of vernacular newspapers."⁴⁶ No doubt careful sifting of *AA* will produce further such examples. A content analysis and assessment of its socio-political profile and public impact remains to be undertaken. Against the backdrop of Munshi Naval Kishore's active involvement in national politics, such an investigation will also have to address the intricate question as to what extent the political profile of *AA* was shaped by its proprietor rather than its various editors. In any case, it should be of great interest to see how the leading Urdu daily of northern India was walking the tightrope between loyalty to the colonial government and the increasing exigencies of Indian nationalism.

What can be safely said at this point is that from around 1890 the circulation of *AA* was in decline. By the turn of the century the paper had lost much of its former appeal. According to Bālmukund Gupta, the influential editor of the politically trenchant Hindi journal *Bhāratmitra*, this was due to the paper's very refusal to engage in nationalist politics. In resisting modernization and refusing to formulate its own distinct "policy," the veteran journalist opined, *AA* had failed to keep up with the tide of the times. Moreover, despite the paper's monetary resources and its excellent staff, the selection of English news items was "nonsensical," and their translations into Urdu "barely intelligible." Writing in 1905, Gupta concluded: "[*AA*] is exactly the same as it was twenty years ago and for this very reason it has not established a reputation for itself in the newspaper world during these past twenty years. Most newspaper readers won't even know its name."⁴⁷ To this critical observer at the beginning of the new century *AA* no longer met the needs of modern journalism, but had become a "*lakir ka faqir*" ("*lakir kā faqir*") and a "*besund ka hathi*" ("*bē-sūnd kā hātī*").

⁴⁶*SVN* 1874, p. 355.

⁴⁷My translation. Bālmukund Gupta, *Gupta-Nibandhāvalī*, eds. Jhabarmal Sharmā and Banārsidās Čaturvedī (Delhi: Gaurav Gāthā Saṅgam, 1994), pp. 262–3.

Promoting Urdu Literature: Editors and Contributors

The self-proclaimed aim of *AA* was to work towards the progress and welfare of India by informing and educating the Indian public through a broad news coverage. Yet at the same time the paper also assumed the function of a literary journal. It promoted both poetry and prose writing, covered literary events, announced new publications and provided a forum for literary debate. While the paper attracted the contributions of some leading Urdu literati from outside Lucknow, its role in the promotion of Urdu literature and the development of a modern prose style goes specifically to the credit of a number of eminent intellectuals among its editors. According to Şābirī, no other Urdu paper of the period boasted such an illustrious range of editors as *AA*.⁴⁸ While some of them were already well-known figures in the world of literature and learning when they joined the paper, others used *AA* as a stepping stone in their future careers as publicists and writers.

Although we have a fair picture of the various personalities associated with the editorship of *AA*, to establish a definite chronology of the paper's editors remains problematic. Since there was no formal declaration of the editor on the front cover of *AA* and since, according to common practice, editorial pieces generally remained unsigned, their names can only be gleaned from references within the paper (a difficult task given the scarcity of extant issues) or from secondary sources. With many contradicting statements standing in the way, the following account can only be tentative.⁴⁹ Equally, given the scarcity of extant issues for the period 1859–1875, for the time being we can only look at the kind of intellectuals that *AA* was able to attract. To assess the nature and quality of their contribution and the way in which their writings helped to shape the distinct profile of *AA* remains subject to the future availability of source material.

The first issues of *AA* were almost certainly edited by Munshi Naval Kishore himself. However, he was soon forced to delegate this time-consuming task to others. In 1859 Maulvī Hādī 'Alī "Ashk" (d. 1865) was appointed the first formal editor of *AA*. Born in a family of reputed scholars in the *qaṣba* of Bijnor, Hādī 'Alī "Ashk" had been educated at the

⁴⁸Şābirī, p. 59.

⁴⁹The following paragraphs draw largely on Şābirī and on Akbar Haidarī, "Munshī Navalkishōr aur *Avadh Akhbār*," *Nayā Daur*, Vol. 35, Nos. 8–9 (1980), pp. 20–47.

Lucknow Madrasa Niẓāmīya before he went on to serve the Muḥammadi Press of Hājī Ḥarmain Sharīfain, one of the earliest and most famous private printing presses in *navābī* Lucknow.⁵⁰ Ashk was an eminent scholar of Arabic and Persian, a master calligrapher and a poet who excelled in the art of composing chronograms (*tārīkh-gō'i*). He was a *shāgird* of Navāb Faṭḥu 'd-Daula Mirzā Muḥammad Raẓā “Barq” in whose company he spent some time at the court in exile of Vājīd ‘Alī Shāh in Matia Burj. Ashk joined the NKP in 1858 as a calligrapher, but on account of his vast expertise was soon promoted to the double position of editor of *AA* and head proofreader in the firm’s lithographic department. While editor of *AA* he prepared the edition of Ghālib’s collected Persian verse *Kulliyāt-e Ghālib* (Lucknow: NKP, 1863) and prepared the calligraphy of a widely acclaimed large-letter edition of the Qur’ān, published posthumously as *Qur’ān Sharīf Jalī Qalam* (Lucknow: NKP, 1870). Due to his failing health he had to abandon the editorship of *AA* in 1864.

It is not clear who took over after him. According to Garcin de Tassy, Munshi Shiv Parshād, the manager of the NKP, assumed the editorship in 1864. The French scholar, however, may have confounded the tasks of press manager and editor. He certainly made a rather consequential mistake in confounding Shiv Parshād with his namesake Rājā Shivprasād of Benares, the eminent educationist and textbook author, who, ever since, has been erroneously associated with the editorship of *AA*.⁵¹ Munshi Shiv Parshād, whose background remains obscure but for his origin in a distinguished Lucknow family, had originally been hired as a calligrapher for *AA*. By 1862 he had become manager of the NKP, a position in which he served the publishing house until his death in the late 1890s. Shiv Parshād was a poet of Urdu who adopted the *takhalluṣ* “Wahbī” and has a *Kulliyāt-e Wahbī* (Lucknow: NKP, 1880) to his credit. Specimens of his verse frequently appeared in *AA*.

According to an editorial notice published in a later issue of *AA* it was Muftī Fakhru 'd-Dīn Aḥmad “Fakhr” Lakḥnavī (d. 1892) who took over the editorship from Maulvī Hādī ‘Alī in 1865.⁵² The son of the reputed

⁵⁰For an anecdote illustrating his superior skills as a calligrapher, see Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, trans. E.S. Harcourt and Fakhir Husain (London: Paul Elek, 1975), p. 105–6.

⁵¹Cf. Garcin de Tassy, *Histoire de la Littérature Hindouie et Hindustanies*, vol. 3, 2nd ed., (Paris: Adolphe Labitte, 1871), pp. 268–73.

⁵²*AA* of 2 January 1874, quoted in Šābirī, p. 58.

Firangi Mahal scholar Maulānā Zafar Aḥmad, Fakhru 'd-Dīn had himself been educated at Firangi Mahal and gained distinction for his remarkable rhetorical skills and his expertise in Islamic law. Like his predecessor, Fakhru 'd-Dīn, while serving as editor of *AA*, assisted the publishing house in various tasks, particularly as a proofreader and translator of Persian texts. At Naval Kishore's instance he prepared the first Urdu translations of al-Ghazzālī's *Kīmīyā-e Sa'ādat* and the *Tafsīr-e Ḥusainī*, a Qur'ān commentary by the fifteenth-century Persian moral philosopher Ḥusain Vā'iz Khān. Written in fluid and lucid style, both texts were to assume special importance in the religious and moral instruction of Muslim women.⁵³

Fakhru 'd-Dīn did not remain editor of *AA* for long. In 1866 he was succeeded by Muḥammad Mehdī Ḥusain Khān, the ex-proprietor of the Riyāz-e Nūr Press (est. 1851) of Multan and former editor of an Urdu weekly of the same name. Apparently Mehdī Ḥusain Khān had been forced to close down his press in 1856, following a sentence of imprisonment of several years. He joined *AA* after his release from jail.⁵⁴

In 1867 Mehdī Ḥusain Khān in turn was succeeded by Maulvī Raunaq 'Alī (1846–76), a scholar and poet of Persian and Urdu who wrote under the pen names "Afsūn" and "Raunaq," respectively. The son of a *talūqdar* of Barabanki district, Raunaq 'Alī had come to Lucknow in 1859 to receive his higher education in Islamic learning. He was initially employed as a proofreader for *AA* but was soon promoted to the position of editor. Naval Kishore seems to have thought highly of him for in 1870 he sent him to Patiala to oversee the establishment of a new printing press in the princely state. From there Raunaq 'Alī launched the *Patiāla Akhbār* in

⁵³Published as *Iksīr-e Hidāyat* (Kanpur: NKP, 1866), the translation of *Kīmīyā-e Sa'ādat* was to figure among the books recommended especially for women in the standard works on Muslim female education, i.e., Alṭāf Ḥusain Ḥālī's *Majālisu 'n-Nisā'* and Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī's *Bihishti Zēvar*. The Urdu version of the *Tafsīr Ḥusainī*, entitled *Tafsīr-e Qādirī* (Lucknow: NKP, 1879–80) headed the list of books that Thānavī deemed suitable for women. Details in Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 46 and Barbara D. Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 376–8.

⁵⁴*AA* of 2 January 1874, cited in Ṣābirī, pp. 58–9. For *Riyāz-e Nūr*, see also Khān 1991, pp. 259–65; and Khurshid, p. 123.

October 1871 at the request of the Maharaja of Patiala. He died in 1876 at the early age of thirty.⁵⁵

A new era dawned for *AA* when, in 1870, Maulvī Ghulām Muḥammad Khān (d. 1904) assumed the editorship of the paper. A native of Delhi, he had spent part of his youth in the company of the Nawab of Patauri and subsequently gained experience as a journalist and editor in Meerut and other places. Ghulām Muḥammad Khān was a pupil of Mirzā Ghālib and composed poetry in Persian and Urdu under the pen name “Tapish.” During the eight years of his editorship *AA* thrived.⁵⁶ Relations between him and Munshi Naval Kishore, which for the longest time had been amiable, took a dramatic turn in 1876, when, after a supposedly serious altercation between the two men, Ghulām Muḥammad Khān was dismissed. What prompted the dispute is not known. It may have had to do with Ghulām Muḥammad Khān’s editorial policy, notably his overt support of Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān’s reformist paper *Tahzīb al-Akhlāq* which, as noted earlier, caused Munshi Naval Kishore some embarrassment. At all events, it was none other than Sir Sayyid who personally came to the editor’s rescue: in an article appearing in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* of 29 September 1876 he expressed his deep regret over Ghulām Muḥammad’s dismissal and pointed out that Naval Kishore had carelessly let go of one of the most capable editors of his paper, to whom *AA* owed its entire success.⁵⁷ The letter did not fail in its purpose: Ghulām Muḥammad was promptly reinstated in his capacity as editor. Yet, he did not remain with *AA* for much longer; several months later he decided to resign as editor and leave the paper for good. In May 1877 he informed the readers of *AA* that having devoted all his energy to the paper for the past eight years and having ruined his health and eyesight in the process, he was to quit *AA* and start his own paper *Mushīr-e Qaiṣar-e Hind* instead.⁵⁸

There is a rather dubious claim, probably going back to Garcin de Tassy, that, following Tapish, for a short period Maulānā Sayyid Amjad ‘Alī “Ashhari” (b. 1851) took charge of the paper.⁵⁹ This claim is not sub-

⁵⁵Garcin de Tassy, 1876, pp. 136–7.

⁵⁶Apparently Munshī Fidā ‘Alī “Aish” was assistant editor at the time. *Nūrānī*, p. 74.

⁵⁷The article is reprinted in Khurshīd, p. 182.

⁵⁸For Tapish, see Ṣābirī, pp. 99–104.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 104–6.

stantiated by biographical accounts on Ashharī.⁶⁰ Indeed, it would seem strange that this distinguished scholar of Persian and Arabic should give up his high administrative post in the state of Bhopal and move to Lucknow. In January 1881 Ashharī established his own printing press Amjad al-Maṭbaʿ in Bhopal from where he launched the journal *Dabīru l-Mulk*. A prolific poet and writer, Ashharī made an important contribution to historiographical and biographical literature in Urdu.

Mention has already been made of the next and most famous editor of *AA*, Paṇḍit Ratan Nāṭh “Sarshār” (1846–1902). If *AA* must be credited with having “launched the career of one of the most important prose fiction writers in Urdu,”⁶¹ it was Sarshār who, in turn, brought about the heyday of the paper’s fame. Born in a Kashmiri Brahmin family settled in Lucknow, Sarshār received his education at Canning College and later took up employment as a school teacher. He had for some time contributed articles to various journals, particularly to Sayyid Sajjād Ḥusain’s satirical journal *Avadḥ Panč* (est. 1877), when Naval Kishore appointed him as editor of *AA* on 10 August 1878. Apparently, Sarshār had been introduced to Naval Kishore by the Director of Public Instruction R. T. H. Griffith and employed with a view to counteracting the fierce attacks on *AA* that *Avadḥ Panč* had started to indulge in at the time.⁶² It comes as no surprise that Sarshār’s change of sides did little to alleviate the tension between the two papers. On the contrary, the publication of *Fasāna-e Āzād* and the ensuing boost it gave to the circulation of *AA* provoked jealous attacks and bitter criticism from *Avadḥ Panč*. The result, according to Sadiq, was “an open war between the two papers, which, after a crescendo of abuse and whacking blows on both sides, resulted in an honourable truce.”⁶³ This is not quite accurate, for the attacks continued throughout the 1880s: In August 1880 the *Avadḥ Panč* accused *AA* of being an anti-Muslim paper. In 1886, the serialized publication in *AA* of

⁶⁰See, e.g., Salīm Ḥāmīd Rizvī, *Urdū Adab ki Taraqqī Mēñ Bhōpāl kā Ḥiṣṣa* (Bhopal: Alavi Press, 1965), pp. 174–6.

⁶¹C.M. Naim and Carla Petievich, “Urdu in Lucknow/Lucknow in Urdu,” in *Lucknow: Memories of a City*, ed. Violette Graff (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 171.

⁶²Firoze Mookerjee, *Lucknow and the World of Sarshar* (Karachi: Saad Publications, 1992), pp. 57–8; Ram Babu Saksena, *A History of Urdu Literature* (1927; New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1990), p. 325.

⁶³Sadiq, p. 418.

Sarshār's novel *Sair-e Kohsār*, a titillating narrative about a young Nawab's illicit affair with a low-caste woman, prompted *Avadh Panč* to publicly urge the government to take legal action against Naval Kishore for publishing a "very obscene" novel in a paper delivered to countless schools in the province.⁶⁴

Fasāna-e Āzād was published in installments in *AA* from 13 August 1878 to January 1880.⁶⁵ It started out as a series of humorous sketches (*zarāfat*), published in loose succession. With its vivid and humorous portrayal of contemporary social life in Lucknow, it took the reading public by storm and, from January 1879, was published at daily intervals. While Sarshār's claims to *Fasāna-e Āzād* being a "modern novel" remain controversial,⁶⁶ its publishing pattern marked the breakthrough of a new narrative genre in Urdu—the serialized novel. As the first piece of original fiction in Urdu written expressly for publication in a newspaper, *Fasāna-e Āzād* broke new ground: For one, it was a text conceived in installments, demanding self-contained units which were sufficiently barbed with suspense to hook the reader to the plot before he was relegated to the next issue of the paper by the inevitable "*bāqī ā'inda ...*" ("to be continued ..."). Daily intervals imposed enormous pressure on the writer. The regular doses of opium that Sarshār was allegedly supplied with by the publisher may be a reflection of this. More important than the demands that the new mode of writing put on the author, however, was the new form of reader-writer interaction prompted by serial publication in a paper. Reader reaction to *Fasāna-e Āzād* was vivid, testifying to the existence of a critical literary public that was eager to discuss the notion of realism in literary fiction. Readers of *AA* sent in letters of criticism or suggestions to which Sarshār readily responded with comments or ad hoc modifications in the plot of his narrative.⁶⁷

⁶⁴*Avadh Panč* of 20 May 1886, *SVN* 1886, p. 406.

⁶⁵For the publishing history of *Fasāna-e Āzād*, see Mookerjee, pp. 78–80. As Mookerjee points out, the common notion that the novel was published in *AA* from December 1878 to December 1879 is based on an incorrect statement given in the first printed edition of 1880.

⁶⁶For a discussion of *Fasāna-e Āzād* under this aspect, see, e.g., Mookerjee, pp. 87–97, Ralph Russell *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature, A Select History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992) pp. 87–92, and M. Asaduddin, "First Urdu Novel: Contesting Claims and Disclaimers," *Annual of Urdu Studies*, No. 16 (1), 2001, pp. 84–6.

⁶⁷Mookerjee, pp. 102–33.

As R. L. Patten has pointed out in the context of the unprecedented success of Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, serial publication was a chief means of democratizing and enormously expanding the book-reading and book-buying public in Victorian England.⁶⁸ In India, too, if much later than in Europe, serialized fiction became a staple and important part of literary magazines and periodicals. Its wider impact on the development of modern fiction and the growth of the reading public in North India still awaits study.

Sarshār contributed to the success of *AA* not only with *Fasāna-e Āzād*, but with numerous articles on literary, educational, political and social themes in which he advocated progressive thought, enlightenment and modernity along the lines of what was called the "New Light." In his first editorial he laid out the editor's tasks as fourfold, notably (1) to serve his countrymen and lead them to prosperity, (2) to teach them to improve their ways, (3) to bring Indian views to the notice of the government and (4) to "illuminate with the radiance of the sun of refinement the dark chambers of the heart of those who languish in the pitch darkness of unfathomed ignorance, begging for light."⁶⁹ Accordingly, under his editorship increased coverage was given to social reform issues. His editorials reflect a particular concern with education and the status of Indian women. In their poignant and sometimes humorous literary style, they, moreover, gave a new dimension to journalistic prose writing in Urdu and assumed the function of a model. Sarshār could self-mockingly pose as an "inveterate hemp smoker" who in a fictitious letter to the proprietor of *AA* complained about the outrageous articles against drug-smoking and drinking with which the paper's new editor had driven half of Lucknow's population out of the city. He could equally well address the ailments of society in a more serious manner, never losing sight of his aim to bring the "New Light" to his compatriots.

Sarshār resigned from the editorship of *AA* on 1 February 1880 but remained attached to the NKP for some time to come. His novels *Fasāna-e Jadīd* (later published in book form as *Jām-e Sarshār*) and *Sair-e Kohsār* appeared in serial publication as special supplements to *AA* in 1880 and 1886, without, however, enjoying the same kind of success as *Fasāna-e Āzād*. Sponsored by Naval Kishore, Sarshār was able to return to his fasci-

⁶⁸Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p. 45.

⁶⁹Quoted in Mookerjee, p. 58.

nation with Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, which had already inspired *Fasāna-e Āzād*, and complete a long-cherished project of preparing an Urdu version of that great picaresque novel. His *Khudā'ī Faujdār* was published from the NKP in 1894.⁷⁰

It is difficult to reconstruct the various editors of *AA* after Sarshār, the reason being a shift in the paper's organizational structure. In the issue of 11 February 1880 it was announced that in future the NKP would take charge of the paper and no formal editor would be appointed. Instead, a group of "excellent and experienced persons" would be employed to run the paper.⁷¹ How strictly this policy was adhered to cannot be said. Among those subsequently associated with the editorship were Ghulām Ḥasnain Qadr Bilgrāmī (d. 1884), Maulvī Aḥmad Ḥasan "Shaukat" Mēraṭhī, Mīrzā Ḥairat Dehlavī and Munshi Dēbī Parshād "Siḥr." By far the most outstanding figure on the editorial staff during the period, however, was 'Abdu 'l-Ḥalīm Sharar (1860–1926), the great Urdu essayist and cultural historian of Lucknow. Having spent his early childhood in Lucknow, in 1860 Sharar joined his father at the court in exile of Vājīd 'Alī Shāh in Matia Burj, from where he contributed his first articles to *AA*. When, in 1880, he returned to Lucknow in search of a job, he was promptly employed by Naval Kishore as assistant editor at a monthly salary of Rs. 30. With Sharar as editor, *AA* went a step further in according Urdu prose writing a prominent place in its columns, and also gave increased coverage to subjects of cultural and social interest. Contributing articles on a great variety of topics, Sharar remained with *AA* until at least 1884, when we went to Haidarabad as a special correspondent of the paper. Soon after, he started his own monthly magazine *Dilgudāz*.⁷²

Next to its formal editors, *AA* also attracted the contributions of eminent Urdu literati, not least because it was among the first Urdu

⁷⁰Mookerjee, p. 229.

⁷¹*AA* of 11 February 1880, quoted in Khurshīd, pp. 184–5. This also explains why from 1883 onward the *SVN* lists Munshi Shiv Parshād, the manager of the NKP, as the editor/publisher of *AA*.

⁷²Sharar's famous literary controversy with Panḍit Brajnarāyan Čakbast over the foremost *maṣnavī*-writer of their times did not, as sometimes claimed, take place in *AA* but in the columns of *Dilgudāz* and *Avad^b Panč* in 1905. The NKP, however, published the debate in book form as *Mubāḥaṣ-e Gulzār-e Nasīm, Ya'nī Ma'rka-e Čakbast va Sharar* (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1913).

papers able to offer remuneration to its contributors. Unfortunately the sources are silent as to the customary amounts paid. Inviting “useful, excellent and interesting articles written in idiomatic and fluid English or Urdu,” notices in the paper made a discrete promise of *kāfi mu’āvaza* (“adequate compensation”). The best known outside contributor in the 1860s was none other than Mirzā Ghālib who submitted articles on a number of topical themes. Ghālib from the outset was a keen reader of *AA*. His correspondence suggests that within the first year of its existence *AA* was already circulated and read by the Urdu intelligentsia across a wide geographical region. When, in November 1859, Ghālib’s friend and publisher Munshi Shiv Narāyan “Ārām” forwarded him a copy of *AA* from Agra, Ghālib returned it with the comment that there was no need to waste postage since he already received the paper through his cousin Ziyā’u ’d-Dīn Khān who subscribed to it.⁷³ Several months later, in a letter to Munshi Naval Kishore dated 18 July 1860, Ghālib announced his own subscription to *AA*.⁷⁴ About to enter into a publishing agreement with Ghālib, Naval Kishore did not deem it suitable to ask the venerable poet for payment and started sending him the paper free of charge. In a letter to ‘Alā’ī dated 13 December 1863 Ghālib, who was in continuous financial distress at the time, gratefully acknowledged the savings of Rs. 24 that his “respected friend” Naval Kishore had thus afforded him. “True,” he hastened to add with his customary pride, “I send forty-eight stamps every year to cover the postage.”⁷⁵

Among Ghālib’s *shāgirds* who contributed to *AA* we find Ghulām Ḥasnain Qadr Bilgrāmī (for whom, incidentally, Ghālib had secured employment at the NKP in 1861), Hargōpāl Tufta, and Navāb Mardān ‘Alī Khān “Ra’nā” (d. 1879). The latter, a *ra’īs* of Murabadad, was a regular contributor to the paper in the 1860s and continued to write for it even after his rise to the position of Chief Minister in Jodhpur State in 1870. The way in which these representatives of Urdu literature adopted the modern medium of the newspaper to publicly expound their views not only on literary but also social and political affairs, to either engage in a critique of colonialism or to extol the benefits of Western civilization,

⁷³Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, eds. and trans., *Ghalib, 1797–1869: Life and Letters* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 220.

⁷⁴Kāzīm ‘Alī Khān, “Ghālib aur Munshī Navalkishōr,” *Nayā Daur*, Vol. 35, Nos. 8–9 (1980), p. 140.

⁷⁵Russell and Islam, p. 295.

deserves to be explored in greater detail. *AA* also had a foreign correspondent in London and counted among its regular contributors the eminent Orientalist scholar and linguist Edward Henry Palmer (1840–82). Palmer, a Fellow at St. John's College, Cambridge, not only had an excellent command of Arabic and Persian, but was fluent in Urdu to a degree that he himself composed poetry. He contributed articles and poetical pieces to *AA* from the early 1860s.⁷⁶

Finally, and although it falls outside the time frame of this paper, a claim frequently raised in Urdu sources shall be addressed here, since it concerns no less famous a literary personality than Munshi Premchand. The claim that Premchand was counted among the paper's editors in the twentieth century is not supported by any of the standard biographies on him. In 1914 Premchand actually declined an offer to join the editors of *AA*. The busy professionalism reigning in the press office of a daily newspaper did not suit his disposition. As he explained to his friend Dayānarāyan Nigam:

Here, even though I am a slave, I have a lot of freedom, for I have no boss sitting on my head nor am I answerable to anybody. That's why I feel free. And I shudder to think of the daily office routine of ten-to-five, with constant mental exertion, and a paper to be published daily. I don't think I can do it. My literary work here is like a pastime; it would then become a profession.⁷⁷

Premchand, however, did become associated with the NKP much later, when he was appointed editor of the influential Hindi literary journal *Mādhurī* in 1927. In this position, he may well have contributed occasional pieces to *AA*.

⁷⁶It is not clear whether Palmer himself served as a semi-official correspondent to *AA*. A notice appearing in the *AA* of 22 August 1871 may well have been a form of self-praise: "The English Correspondent of the 'Oudh Akhbar' had bestowed great praise on the poetry of Mr. Edward Palmer ... He writes that Mr. Palmer composes excellent and delectable verses in Qasaid which have extorted praise from the Arabic poets." Quoted in Ram Babu Saksena, *European and Indo-European Poets of Urdu & Persian* (Lucknow: Newul Kishore Press, 1941), p. 316. For Palmer, see also Garcin de Tassy, 1864, pp. 245–6.

⁷⁷Amrit Rai, *Premchand: His Life and Times*, trans. from the Hindi by Harish Trivedi (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 90.

Conclusion

This paper, while giving a preliminary overview of the rich material contained in *AA*, could only hint at some of the issues raised by the study of the most influential and widely-read Urdu newspaper in nineteenth-century colonial India. *AA* merits much closer analysis for it offers a prime example of how, under the impact of colonialism, modern informational culture took shape in the Urdu public sphere, while at the same time the forum for literature and literary discourse expanded into a new medium that was available to the general public across various regions and communities. As pointed out by M. Asaduddin, in engaging in an “intellectual-cultural-literary encounter” between East and West, periodicals and papers like *AA* had a wider bearing on colonial society, in that they became “a vibrant and contested site for negotiating the terms of colonial modernity.”⁷⁸ Perhaps one of the most fascinating points of investigation in this context is provided by the ongoing dialogue that *AA* kept up with its readers and subscribers. Official patronage notwithstanding, in order to not only survive but flourish in the volatile and highly competitive arena of nineteenth-century Urdu journalism *AA* was heavily dependent on the goodwill and support of its readers. To exercise its role as a representative and mediator of public opinion, *AA* had to listen closely to their voice. □

⁷⁸Asaduddin, p. 82.