HUMOROUS RESISTANCE, SATIRE AND POLITICS: A STUDY OF THE AWADH PUNCH (1877-1936) IN COLONIAL INDIA.

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the *Awadh Punch* (1877 - 1937). It examines the emergence and influence of the *Awadh Punch* in the late nineteenth century, positioning it as a crucial player in the dynamic landscape of India's vernacular press. It is an example of both native agency and ingenuity in how it managed to navigate the complexities of colonial censorship. Furthermore, this thesis explores how the periodical contributed to shaping public opinion, fostering nationalist sentiment, and articulating the complexities of the Muslim community's responses to colonial rule. In doing so, it hopes to enrich our understanding of subversive politics within the colonial context and the diversity of opinion within the Muslim public sphere. It employs the use of archival methodology and consults both literary and visual sources to draw its conclusions.

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This thesis is dedicated to Muhammad Shafiq (1953 - 2020), my father, who has been the most important influence on my life. I owe him much of my intellectual curiosity as I do countless other things which would be too numerous to list. Thank you for everything.

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My mother, Nargis, whose love for me makes everything in my life that much easier. My siblings, my friends at home. I owe all of you my sincerest gratitude.

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Introduction

This thesis is a study of the *Awadh Punch* (1877 - 1937). Published from the city of Lucknow in the heartland of Awadh, the magazine was an Urdu-language weekly satirical magazine modeled along the British *Punch*. This thesis examines the emergence and influence of the Awadh Punch in the late nineteenth century, positioning it as a crucial player in the dynamic landscape of India's vernacular press. It is an example of both native agency and ingenuity in how it managed to navigate the complexities of colonial censorship. Furthermore, this thesis explores how the periodical contributed to shaping public opinion, fostering nationalist sentiment, and articulating the complexities of the Muslim community's responses to colonial rule.

The time period I have selected to study is between 1877 - 1912, otherwise known as the 'Pehla Daur' (first period) of its lifecycle. This thirty-year period is significant due to the magazine's ownership and the broader historical context which it emcompasses. Firstly, this period represents the uninterrupted timeline of the magazine being owned and run by its original proprietor, Sajjad Hussain. In 1912, the magazine was temporarily shut down due to Hussain's failing health and then restarted under new ownership in 1915. Secondly, the latter half of the nineteenth century is a period of significant social, political, and technological change in colonial India.

The annexation of Awadh in 1856 and the Indian War of Independence in 1857 predate the *Awadh Punch,* which published its first issue in 1877. As Awadh fell into British control, there was a significant loss of Muslim political power since the region had been under their control for over three centuries. The power dynamics would shift in favor of the British even more, as the Indian

defeat in the 1857 war led to the formal establishment of British rule in India.[1] As British administrative and political control of India expanded in the latter half of the nineteenth century, so did its surveillance. However, an interesting phenomenon occurs as despite increasing censorship, this period saw a rapid expansion and development of the native vernacular press. Much of this was facilitated by developments in print technology and railways. Tandem to this is the development of a public sphere, which is fragmented along language and religious lines. Since this study focuses on a Muslim Urdu language publication, the Muslim public sphere becomes the focus of our analysis. Furthermore, there was a nascent nationalism that was beginning to brew within the Indian subcontinent. The formation of Congress in 1885 as the first Indian political party is evidence of that.

Research Questions

Keeping this historical context in mind, we see how this period presents itself as an interesting and pivotal era for understanding the various social and cultural transformations that were taking place in Indian society. Using the *Awadh Punch* as a case study, this thesis attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What is the historical context in which the *Awadh Punch* emerges in the latter half of the nineteenth century? What are the factors that contribute to its establishment and rise? How does it add to the existing fabric of public opinion within the emergent vernacular press?
- Who constitutes its primary readership? What is the materiality of the periodical? How does the satirical and visual nature of the magazine contribute to its appeal?

[1] I discuss both these events in greater detail in Chapter 3, when I explain how Muslims responded to this loss of political power.

- What is the relationship between the *Awadh Punch* and the colonial state? How does the magazine portray the colonial state?
- How does *Awadh Punch* navigate the complex landscape of increased state surveillance of the native press? What strategies does it employ to curb censorship?
- Does the increased environment of press censorship in the latter half of the nineteenth century paradoxically lead to the development of more creative forms of subversive journalism?
- How are the different segments of the Muslim community responding to the challenge of life under colonial rule? What are the key debates taking place within the Muslim public sphere and what is *Awadh Punch's* contribution to it?
- How does the *Awadh Punch* contribute to the development of nationalism?

Chapterization

To answer these research questions, I have divided my thesis into three main chapters:

Chapter 1 charts the beginnings of *Awadh Punch,* situating it in the broader historical context of print culture in Northern India. It outlines the various factors that facilitated its rise, namely the arrival of lithography, development in railway technology and the lived experience of the magazines proprietor. Furthermore, it identifies the diverse array of writers and artists without whose contributions the magazine could not have functioned. It then explores various dimensions of its existence, including its contents, circulation, readership and financing.

Chapter 2 deals with the relationship of the *Awadh Punch* with the colonial state. It first offers a broad historical context of the transformation of the colonial states' attitude towards the vernacular press, outlining the various legislative measures put in place to survey native opinion. The chapter then details how the *Awadh Punch* portrayed the colonial state and its policies, showing how

it appropriated cartoons from the British *Punch* to take on a subversive meaning not intended by the original and produced original artwork of its own to critique colonial policies. It also discusses how the magazine employs the use of satire and imitation as a strategy to curb colonial censorship.

Chapter 3 puts the *Awadh Punch* in conversation with other voices in the Muslim public sphere. In doing so, it showcases how the magazine took on an anti-colonial and nationalist point of view and debated divergent voices. It portrays the interactive nature of the public sphere and asserts that Muslim opinion was not a monolith. More broadly, it shows the magazines contribution in the development of an Indian nationalism.

The Place of Satire and Humour in Precolonial Era

As this thesis is partly an exploration of the use of humour and satire in colonial India, it is useful to briefly survey their role in the precolonial era to better understand their evolution and significance. '*Tanz o mizah'* (humour and satire) have a longstanding presence within the Urdu literary tradition. *'Hajv*' is a prominent form of literary expression within classical Urdu poetry that invokes the use of irony to ridicule or mock authority. It derives from Persian culture, within which the tradition of '*Hajv*' has been used extensively as a tool for social critique and earliest forms of it can be found in works dating back to the eleventh century.[2] Persian culture had a significant influence in shaping the Urdu language and its corresponding literary traditions.[3] The Mughal Dynasty (1526 - 1857) ruled India for several centuries, and Persian was the language of the court as well as the

[2] The 'Hajw-nama' was a poetic verse lampooning Mahmud of Ghazni (of the Ghaznavid Empire) by Abul Qasem Ferdowsi (940 - 1025) – a prominent Persian poet. For a more expansive study on the presence of 'Hajv' within the persian literary tradition, see: Javadi, Hasan. Satire in Persian literature. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988.

[3] Urdu is a language that is born out of the interaction between foreign Persian-speaking Muslims and native Hindi speaking locals of the subcontinent. It borrows much of its lexicon from Persian, as it does from Hindi. Urdu is also written in the 'Nastaliq' script, which its shares with both Persian and Arabic. I discuss the development of Urdu as a 'Muslim' language in greater detail in Chapter 3.

cultural medium. Prominent examples of the use of '*hajv*' in the later Mughal period includes works by Mir Muhammad Jafar 'Zatalli' (1659 - 1713) and Mirza Muhammad Sauda (1713 - 1781).[4]

In *'A History of Urdu Literature'* (1995), historian Muhammad Sadiq notes the task of the satirist in reference to its presence within the Urdu literary tradition, stating that:

> *"The satirist takes his stand by certain norms, or standards of conduct or behaviour, noting the deviations from them, and by laughing at these strives to give reason and common sense their rightful place in society."* [5]

Humor and satire have long been instrumental in critiquing societal and cultural norms. In this thesis, we will observe how the *Awadh Punch* continues this tradition forward in the colonial period.

A Brief History of the British Punch and It's Transnational Impact

The *Punch* or the London Charivari (1841 - 1992) was a British weekly satirical magazine founded by Henry Mayhew.[6] It was known for its satirical drawings about contemporary events and is credited with the creation of the 'political cartoon' as we understand it today. The magazine found early commercial success and featured artworks from prominent British cartoonists like John Tenniel (1820 - 1914) and John Leech (1817 - 1864).[7] In its early years, the magazine would often brazenly take a 'politically radical stance' on contemporary issues with conservative politics routinely

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[4] Both Zatalli and Sauda are prominent Urdu poets of the eighteenth century. However, their style of satire is distinct from one another. Zatalli's is known for his audacious (and often vulgar) humour, while Sauda's style is characterized for its elegance and sharp wit. For more information on specific Urdu writers in the satirical genre, see: Shamsur ur Rehman, 'A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture' in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (2003).

[5] Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature*, 3rd ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 117.

[6] Henry Mayhew (1812 - 1887) was a journalist and social reformer.

[7] Out of all the *Punch* cartoonists, Tenniel is perhaps the best represented in biographical studies (See: Sarzano, 1948; Simpson, 1994, Morris 2005). However, Leech is equally important. He was one of the earliest contributors, and it was on his suggestion that the focus of the magazine was shifted from writing to art. Layard notes how 'it was Leech who made the public look first at the pictures'. George Layard, *Shirley Brooks of Punch: His life, Letters, and Diaries* (Henry Holt, 1907), 156.

featuring as one of its most lampooned subjects.[8] However by the 1860s with the magazine growing popularity amongst the British middle-classes, it shifted to a more neutral stance on political affairs. *Punch's* enduring success can be gauged from the fact that in the genre of satirical magazines, it remains the 'longest-published journal to date' with its run spanning over a period of 160 years.[9]

Any history of the *Punch* is incomplete without mentioning its transnational impact. During its heyday, it spurred on numerous imitiations across the British colonies and beyond. Variations of the *Punch* format began appearing in cities like Cairo, Melbourne, Istanbul and most importantly for the purpose of our study, Awadh. The magazines influence even penetrated into the Far East, with the *China Punch* (1867–1868) and the *Japan Punch* (1862 to 1887) serving as two notable examples. Scully (2013) notes that the *Punch* model is an excellent example of the 'transnational potential of the comic press' as even the original publication itself was inspired by a French magazine called *La Charivari* (1832 - 1937).[10] Its transnational impact is also, in part, connected to the legacy of British colonialism as it was the Empire that 'provided for its distribution beyond Great Britian'.[11] For a comprehensive study on Asian Punches in particular, Hans Harder and Barbara Mittlers collection of essays titled *'Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair'* (2013) is an excellent resource. It demonstrates how the *Punch* was adopted and consumed in various parts of the British Empire.

Literature Review

In examining existing scholarship regarding the *Awadh Punch*, Mushir ul Hasan's *'Wit and Humour in Colonial North India'* (2007) remains the only published historical study that is focused on

[8] Hans Harder and Barbara Mittler, *Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair* (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2013), 18.
[9] Harder, Asian Punches, 1.
[10] Scully, A Comic Empire, 10.
[11] Harder, Asian, 1.

the *Awadh Punch* for the majority of its discussion.[12] Through a visual analysis of the cartoons published in the magazine, the study elucidates how humour was not just a form of entertainment, but also a potent tool for resistance and critique against the British government. In doing so, he attempts compare it to the state of cartooning in contemporary India which he believes is now becoming 'more and more contentious'.[13] His argument is similar to mine in that I also emphasize the subversive potential of humour however he does not offer a comprehensive historical context within which the magazine is emergent from nor does he offers a discussion on the magazines relationship to other voices within the Muslim public sphere. More closely alligned to the goals of my research is Ulrike Stark's *'An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India.'* (2012). Though her research is focused on the Naval Kishore Press, it none the less is illuminating in enriching my understanding about the printing world of the Urdu and the early pioneers of the craft.[14] Regarding the theme of the development of Urdu literary and print cultures, the works of Orsini (2023) and Dubrow (2018) are particularly relevant. In '*East of Delhi: Multilingual Literary Culture and World Literature'*, Francesca Orsini details the history of vernacular literary production in Northern India and its emergent print culture. In *'Cosmopolitan Dreams: The Making of Modern Urdu Literary Culture in Colonial South Asia',* Jennifer Dubrow's argument about the 'Urdu cosmopolis' being a network of readers and writers that organized themselves on the basis of language rather than religion is particularly applicable to my study of *Awadh Punch* as despite being a 'Muslim' publication, the magazine employed several Hindu writers. Additionally, she posits that

[12] I say 'majority' and not 'entirely' because in the book, Hassan admits that 'a major portion [of this book] deals with the Awadh Punch' however he also analyses the humorous writings of other North Indian writers who are not connected to the magazine in any way.

[13] Hassan, Wit and Humour, 9.

[14] Naval Kishore Press was the largest Indian owned press in the subcontinent in the nineteenth century, and published the *Awadh Akbhar* - a newspaper that was a staunch rival of the *Awadh Punch.*

periodicals transformed the public culture by providing 'an ongoing, reoccurring relationship between writers and readers.'.[15]

Regarding the usage of political cartoons as a historical archive, *Drawing the line using cartoons as historical evidence* (2009) by Marian Quartly and Richard Scully argues that cartoons are not just artistic creations, but crucial historical artefacts. Their visual form is in essence an accesible zeitgeist in ways that text is not. While it is true that they may distort the truth for the sake of humour, that characteristic is in itself useful to in the examination of political views and stereotypes. In line with this inquiry is Giarelli and Tulman's (2003) *Methodological Issues in the Use of Published Cartoons as Data* which warns against the consultation of cartoons as a standalone category, noting that if the aim is to uncover meaning then the text is a crucial part of the analysis. In my research, this is an important consideration as the text accompanying the cartoons I consult is a translation from Urdu. Therefore, it there is a need to be doubly careful when translating from the original language to preserve the original meaning. This can be tricky with satire, as the humour itself is often context-based and draws from specific cultural nuances that are liable to be lost in translation.

On understanding the significance of the political cartoon in the Indian context, the works of Khanduri (2014) and Mitter (1994) are especially useful. In '*Caricaturing Culture in India: Cartoons and History in the Modern World',* Khanduri examines the role of political cartoons in India's independence movement. She makes an important argument about how political cartoons are not only derivative forms of colonial modernity imported from the metropolis, but also self-concious 'tactical' responses for subverting colonial politics. Mitter's '*Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations',* too makes a similar argument about how political cartoons in the colonial period were influential in forging a common political vocabulary that could later be

[15] Dubrow, Cosmopolitan Dreams, 14.

translated into the nationalist movements of the twentieth century. Both of their arguments are useful to how I understand the political cartoons of *Awadh Punch.* On the emergence of a public sphere in the nineteenth century, Sanjay Joshi's work titled '*Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India'* (2001) is particularly enlightening in how it showcases how the literate section of Indian society is able to yield its influence through the power of the printing press, thereby projecting themselves as the 'new middle class' and shaping the emergent public sphere.

Methodology

This thesis employs an archival research methodology. The primary sources include foremost various issues of the *Awadh Punch* published in the years between 1877 to 1912. I was able to access these archives online through rekhta.org, which has digitized copies of the magazine available open access. The website is a subsidiary of Rektha Foundation (established 2012), a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of South Asian languages and literature. I examine both literary and visual content published within the magazine. Additionally, I also consult colonial archives through the *Selections of the Vernacular Press Reports* corresponding to my period of study. For the reports corresponding to the period between 1877 to 1880, I have accessed them through archive.org. For the reports published between 1880 and 1912, I have accessed them through the South Asia Open Archives (SAOA) – an open access resource with a focus on colonial era materials.

Both my main primary sources are complimentary to one another. The *Vernacular Press Reports* were weekly compilations of material published in native newspapers, selected by a correspondent of the British government as a way to survey public opinion. I have used them as a way to gauge what the colonial government thought of the *Awadh Punch.*

Relevance to the History of the Public Sphere

I have already highlighted how my thesis aims to enrich our understanding of subversive politics within the colonial context and also the diversity of opinion within the Muslim public sphere. Here I will elaborate on one specific aspect which I believe makes the study relevant to present day subcontinent. Delhi, India is a six hour drive from Islamabad, Pakistan – the city where I have been born and raised. When thinking of Delhi, I imagine this rich, cultural landscape replete with landmarks from the by-gone dynasties of the Mughals and the Delhi Sultanate. Contemporary Delhi might be a bustling metropolitan, but the Delhi that exists in my imagination is a romanticized version. This is not because I have a penchant for nostalgia, but more so, the city in how it exists today is inaccessible to me. I only know it through history books and it is a place that I may never be able to visit in my lifetime. Despite having centuries worth of shared culture, history and language, there is a visa requirement for citizens of both countries to visit each other. Visas do not get approved on either side, nor does anyone waste their time trying. The bilateral relations of both countries have been less than ideal from the very beginning but recent years have seen signifcant escalations of tensions. Nationalism in both India and Pakistan is legitimized by 'Otherizing' the neighboring state. This process is already set in motion in the late nineteenth century, as I elaborate in my thesis. Early twentieth century sees the crystallization of this process of identity formation and growing communalism, and then the eventual separation of the two states in the 1947 *Partition*. However, in the eighteenth century there is a moment of possibility within the Muslim public sphere where both communities existing together in relative harmony is not too ludicrous. The group that constitutes the *Awadh Punch* certainly believes so. I explain in my thesis how the magazine resisted attempts to shape Muslim politics as inherently separatist, and instead advocated for a more pluralist nationalism. In the grand scheme, it does not succeed, of course. But none the less, the *Awadh Punch*

represents a moment of possibility in the nationalist history of the subcontinent when the prospect of Hindu-Muslim unity was not all in vain.

Chapter 1*:*

Awadh Punch and Print Culture in Northern India

In 1879, a correspondent for the *Awadh Punch* wrote a complaint to express his frustration at the local postal department for not delivering copies of the magazine to its subscribers. "*They are no less than dacoits, and plunders*", he laments, who instead of delivering to the right addresses, appropriate the copies for their own use.[16] At the time of writing, *Awadh Punch* had only been in publication for less than a year and yet already had gained popularity and cultural significance, as the incident portrays. This chapter explores the beginnings of the *Awadh Punch* (1877-1936), a weekly magazine that was a vernacular off-shoot of the British *Punch.* Launched in the North Indian region of Awadh, the magazine utilized satire and humor to critique and comment on the colonial administration and societal norms. This chapter aims to explain the historical context of print culture in Northern India, charting the developments in print technology and the development of an Urdu public sphere. Within colonial India, there were multiple public spheres modeled along the lines of religion and language.[17] However, in the context of Northern India, the Urdu Public sphere is what becomes the focus of our analysis. This context lays the foundational frameworks for understanding the environment from which the *Awadh Punch* emerged. Furthermore, this chapter explores the coterie of figures that made the magazine possible, i.e., its proprietors and contributors. Finally, it explores various dimensions of its existence, including its contents, circulation, readership, and financing, to further our understanding of the publication.

Print Culture in Northern India: A Historical Context

[16] *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers Published in the Panjab, North-Western Provinces, Oudh, Central Provinces and Berar*, 1878, 283.

[17] Which is to say, a separate Hindi and Urdu public sphere corresponding to Hindus and Muslims respectively. Both are shaped by their own distinct cultural milieu. For example, the Urdu public sphere has heavy Persian influences whereas Hindi has Sanskrit.

The modern printing press first arrived in India in the year 1556 through Portuguese Jesuit missionaries in Goa.[18] Its production remained limited in both its content and reception, as it generated primarily religious material to disseminate Christian doctrine amongst the local population. In contrast, The British East India Company adopted a policy of 'non-interference' concerning affairs related to religion, resulting in a complete ban on missionary activity.[19] Without this 'evangelical incentive,' it was not until 1716 that the first work in English was printed in India.[20] The Mughal court frequently interacted with the Jesuit missionaries and European scholars, so the Northern Indian rulers were bound to have been exposed to these developments in print technology. However, they showed little interest in adopting the new technology, and it wasn't until the nineteenth century that a print culture began to develop in Northern India.

Why were the Mughal rulers not keen on adopting the new technology? Christopher Bayly suggests that the highly centralized control of knowledge, alongside the emphasis on oral and manuscript culture within the Mughal administration, played a significant role. The Mughal court maintained a strong preference for traditional methods of information dissemination, such as manuscripts, which were often more visually appealing and considered more prestigious than printed texts. Furthermore, there was an already established class of copyists who maintained a monopoly on the bazaar and politically motivated hostility to the press amongst local rulers that further impeded the adoption of modern print technology.[21]

As British influence grew stronger following their victory at Plassey in 1757, it paved the way for significant changes in the socio-political landscape of India. This period marked the beginning of British colonial dominance, eventually leading to major transformations in various sectors, including the introduction of print technology. Several movable-type printing presses were established for government or private European use. After the 1813 *Charter Renewal Act* opened up India for missionary activity, several missionary presses were also established that published scripture and

[18] John Mattausch, "A 'Penury of bookes': The Printing Press and Social Change in an Indian Setting," *Journal of South Asian Studies* 19, No. 2 (1996), 59.
[19] Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), 37.
[20] Mattausch, "A penury", 59. This was Thomas Dyche's '*A Guide to the English Tongue*'.
[21] Christopher Bayly, *An Empire of Information: Political Intelligence and Social Communication in North India, 1780-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 236-238.

other Christian literature in vernacular languages.[22] In contrast, Indian-owned presses were relatively rare until the 1820s.[23] Yet these early European-owned contributed to the Indians participating in the arts of printing and publishing. Though owned and controlled by the Europeans, these presses were operated by Indian labor. It provided the launch pad through which Indian print culture would later take off with the arrival of the lithographic press.

The Democratizing Impact of the Lithographic Press

Lithography's arrival in India would forever change its literary landscape. It democratized print technology, which before was only accessible to Europeans or wealthy local elites, by lowering the barrier of entry. As a practice, lithography was invented in Germany in 1798 by Alois Senefelder (1771 - 1834).[24] The technique was introduced to England and France in the 1820s and met wide acceptance, but its use was mostly limited to reproducing music and artworks. [25] The first lithographic presses in India were owned and operated by the colonial state and primarily used for their efficiency in reproducing maps. [26] However, in the latter half of the 1830s, Indian ownership became widespread as the government eased restrictions to obtain press licenses.[27] Lithography became so popular that between 1824 and 1850, almost thrice as many works were lithographed in India than in Europe. [28]

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[22] Missionary printing was the first step in cementing the separation between Hindi and Urdu, as it followed an ideologically determined policy to address Hindus and Muslims separately. I discuss this in further detail in Chapter 3.

[23] The few exceptions to this are Indian men who either possessed great wealth or were noble born. Stark mentions the Raja of Tanjore, the Nizam of Hyderabad and Ghaziuddin Haider of Awadh as examples of Indians who owned printing press in early nineteenth century. I access this information in Stark (2009).

[24] Francesca Orsini, *The History of the Book in South Asia* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 199.

[25] Olimpiada P. Scheglova, "Lithograph Versions of Persian Manuscripts of Indian Manufacture in the Nineteenth Century," *Manuscripta Orientalia* 5, no. 1 (1999), 12.

[26] Andrew Cook, "The Beginning of Lithographic Map Printing in Calcutta," in *India, a Pageant of Prints,* ed. Pauline Rohatgi and Pheroza Godrej (Bombay, Marg Publications, 2006), 40.

[27] The Press Act of 1835 made it easier for Indians to obstain licenses for privately-owned presses. This change is credited to Charles Metcalfe, who was Governor General between the years 1835-1836. For this reason, he is known as the 'Liberator of the Indian Press'. Nazakat Hussain, "Role of Vernacular Press During British Rule In India ," *International Education and Research Journal* 3, no. 5 (May 2017), 232.

[28] Francesca Orsini, *The History of the Book in South Asia* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 90.

Lithography had several advantages over movable-type printing. The press was cheap to acquire, easy to operate and allowed for the replication of images on a mass scale. Lithography's ability to replicate images was especially useful to societies like nineteenth-century colonial India, where many could not read, enabling a form of 'visual literacy.' [29] Additionally, the lowered barriers of entry meant that it was now possible for even small-scale entrepreneurs to enter the print business. A lithographic press could be easily set up in their homes.[30] The impact of lithography reached even small towns. British bureaucrat and linguist George A. Grierson commented on the spread of this new technology:

"*A mushroom growth of smaller establishments has sprung up all over [India], and there is now scarcely a town of importance which does not possess a printing press or two. Every scribbler can now see his writing… lithographed for a few rupees, and too often he avails him of the power and the opportunity.*" [31]

This democratization of print media was a significant development, contributing to the diversity of voices in the public sphere. Sajjad Hussain's, the proprietor of Awadh Punch, foray into establishing his own lithographic press in 1876 is emblematic of this shift. Similarly, The Naval Kishore Kumar Press (established in 1858), which would become the largest Indian-owned publishing house in the subcontinent, employed the same technology. It is no wonder that the lithographic press became colloquially known as 'the people's press' as it democratized access to print.

The Muslims, particularly, displayed remarkable enthusiasm towards lithography. The press allowed for the reproduction of the *nastali'q* script (in which Persian, Arabic, and Urdu are written) – a task that was previously challenging to accomplish with the movable type. It was seen as a continuation of the manuscript tradition, due to which it gained significant cultural authority within the group.[32]

[29] Harder and Mittler, *Asian Punches,* 51.

[30] Uma Das Gupta, "The Indian Press 1870–1880: A Small World of Journalism," Modern Asian Studies 11, no. 2 (April 1977). Gupta notes how these small-scale ventures were often a one-man show (with the same person being the proprietor, editor and writer) and led a 'hand-to-mouth' existence.

[31] George Abraham Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1889), 145.

[32] Orsini, *The History of the Book in South Asia,* 200.

Furthermore, the democratizing capability of the lithographic press came at a time when Muslims in India had lost their political power after the fall of the Mughal Empire. Without these political protections, they risked losing even more ground as they were only a minority population within the subcontinent. To this end, Francis Robinson notes how the Muslims in India were much faster than other Muslim populations of the world to adopt print technology on a large scale. According to her analysis, this was a strategic response to counter the threat of colonial domination, the demographic dominance of Hindus, and Christian evangelization.[33]

The Development of an Urdu Public Sphere

In understanding the notion of the 'public sphere,' Jurgen Habermas's scholarship remains the standard. He conceptualizes the 'public sphere' as a domain where 'private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state.' [34] His conception of a public sphere developed from eighteenth-century Europe vis-à-vis coffee houses and literary societies. In the Indian context, Christopher Bayly has argued for the existence of an 'Indian ecumene': an arena of public debate or critical opinion that is characterized by the dense networks of communication spread across Indian society.[35] The agents of this ecumene are merchants, pilgrims, scholars, elites, and religious leaders. This, effectively, was the Indian version of the Habermasian 'Public Sphere' (or critical public) that predated the newspaper and printing press. It relied on both oral and written communication. With the arrival of the printing press, the public sphere that takes shape in Northern India is an evolution of this 'Indian ecumene.' The evolution of the 'public sphere' is in tandem with Benedict Anderson's idea of 'print capitalism' – relating to how mass production of printed materials in vernacular languages facilitated the spread of ideas across diverse, geographically dispersed audiences, facilitating the formation of 'imagined communities'.[36]

[33] Francis Robinson, "Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia," in *Islam in South Asia: Theory and Practice* (Manohar Publisher, 2008), 246.
[34] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bouergeois Society* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1991), 398.
[35] Bayly, *Empire*, 311.

[36] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 44-46.

In India, the public sphere that developed with the spread of print technology in the latter half of the nineteenth century is fragmented along language and religious lines – meaning that there are separate Hindi and Urdu public spheres, as there are Muslim and Hindu ones. In Northern India, the Urdu Public sphere is what then becomes the focus of our analysis. The Naval Kishore Kumar Press had a daily output of 192,000 printed pages in the year 1870, a staggering figure that showcases just how popular the business of print had become.[37] Another indication of the enthusiasm for print is that between 1870 and 1900, more than 700 Urdu newspapers were started.[38] Not all of these publications had lasting power or profitability. Therefore, profitability alone cannot explain their emergence. Instead, they represent an aspiration – a possibility of cultural and political participation through print.

[37] Stark, *Empire,* 171.
[38] Zaidi, *Making a Muslim,* 130.

Munshi Sajjad Hussain and his group of Awadh Punchis

Figure 1 Portrait of Sajjad Hussain.
Source: rekhta.org[39]

Sajjad Hussain (1856 - 1915) was born in Kakori, a town near Lucknow. Belonging to a typical service gentry household, his father was a Deputy collector in the British government service, and his uncle, Fida Hussain Khan was one of the most prominent lawyers in Lucknow.[40] Sajjad grew up in a time when Northern India was experiencing a period of great political change as the local populace adjusted to life under colonialism. Born in the same year that the British annexed Awadh, he witnessed firsthand how the prestige of the traditional nobility was progressively eclipsed by British bureaucracy. Between the years of 1868 and 1874, Sajjad attended the prestigious Canning College (est. 1864) in Lucknow.[41] Sajjad's time at Canning College was significant for two reasons. Firstly, it was here that he was first exposed to the British *Punch* and other seriocomic papers of its kind. Second, he made friends with other like-minded students who would later become regular contributors to his magazine. Sajjad did not complete his education at Canning College – something

[39] "All Writings of Munshi Sajjad Hussain," Rekhta, accessed June 2, 2024, https://www.rekhta.org/authors/munshi-sajjad-hussain/all.
[40] Mushirul Hasan, *Wit and Humour in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2009), 35.
[41] Hasan, *Wit*, 35.

which he had in common with many other vernacular authors and publishers of his time. [42] He left to pursue a career as an Urdu teacher and *munshi* (scribe) in the army. His brief stint as a teacher was only a means to an end, as after only two years in service, he resigned from his role to return to Lucknow and set up a lithographic press of his own. Thus marked the beginning *of Awadh Punch*, which published its first issue in January 1877. Sajjad remained the proprietor and editor of the magazine until 1912, after which the magazine was temporarily shut down due to Sajjad's failing health. The thirty-five years (from 1877 to 1912) under Sajjad's ownership are known as the magazine's first period (*pehla daur*) and are focus of my analysis. Sajjad died from a stroke in 1915 in Lucknow. In 1916, the magazine was bought and restarted by Hakeem Mumtaz Hussain, continuing its publication until 1938.

By the close of the 19th century, the *Punch*-style vernacular papers had become a widespread phenomenon in India, with over seventy such publications emerging from more than a dozen cities throughout the country.[43] But Hussain's *Awadh Punch* was the first such Urdu publication and arguably the most influential. No publication is a one-man army; it thrives on the collective effort and collaboration of the team behind it – and the *Awadh Punch* was no exception. One of Hussain's most important contributions to the magazine, which became a crucial element behind its success, was that he was able to bring together a group of *Punchis* to contribute to the magazine. Hussain did not have a wealthy aristocratic background or lucrative ties with the colonial government. He was a middle-class, modest-scale print entrepreneur who self-financed his efforts to build a magazine from scratch.[44] What he did have in his arsenal, however, was a "charming and intensely attractive personality" – an asset that Urdu literary critic Ram Babu Saksena dubs as a reason why he was able to band together a devoted group of writers for his magazine.[45]

[42] Mahadev Govind Ranade, "A Note on the Growth of Marathi Literature," Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society 10 (1902). The author notes how 'for one reason or the other, vernacular authors and publishers were mostly individuals who had not passed through the rigors of a full English education or were school dropouts'.

[43] Hassan, *Wit*, 2.

[44] A notable disadvantage compared to some of his contemporaries who enjoyed the benefit of colonial patronage for their publications.

[45] Jennifer Dubrow, "*Cosmopolitan dreams: The making of modern Urdu literary culture in colonial South Asia*" (University of Hawaii Press, 2018), 17.

Javala Prasad "Barq" (born 1863) and Tribhuvan Nath Sapru "Hijr" (1853 - 1892), both lawyers by profession, had met Hussain at Canning College and became some of the magazine's early contributors. Both of them were Hindus, which demonstrates how the Awadh Punch was not just a 'Muslim' newspaper but rather a cosmopolitan one. For some, the magazine served as a launchpad into their writing careers – like Akbar Illahbadi (1846 - 1941), who would enjoy a lucrative career as a satirist and poet of serious consideration. Or Ratan Nath Sarshar (1846 - 1903), who would be scouted by the competitor newspaper *Awadh Akbar* for an editorship position, a move that would ignite a long-standing rivalry between the two publications.[46] Amongst the artists who contributed to the publication, little is known except two recurring artists: Ganga Sahai "Shauq" and Lal Bahadur "Musawwar." In the initial years of the magazine, the creative process was a blend of personal camaraderie and professional discourse. The contributors would often meet in informal settings as a "gathering of friends" where in their discussion of contemporary affairs, each would compete to be "wittier than the next." [47]

Presenting the 'Awadh Punch' – Title Page

Figure 2 Title Page, Awadh Punch, 1877 to 1878.

Figure 3 Title Page, Awadh Punch, 1878 to 1891

[46] I discuss this rivalry between both publications in greater detail in Chapter 3.
[47] Dubrow, *Cosmopolitan,* 18.

Figure 2 shows the cover page of the first issue, featuring an early rendition of Mr. Awadh Punch as a central figure with two angel-like beings flanked on either of his shoulders. The angel-like beings are likely a reference to Raqib and Atib, who in South Asian Islamic culture refer to recording angels that accompany each individual for the duration of their lives, sitting on their shoulders and recording their deeds. On the cover, they hold banners that read 'Volume number 1'. Mr. Awadh Punch's hat features the name of the magazine in English and the date of the issue. The figures' lips and tongues are shaped in Urdu script, forming the words '*ya Lateef*', translating to 'one that jests or has humor.' The magazine's tagline 'Life is Pleasure' features in English on the figure's belt, and the figure holds up two placards, each detailing the terms of the subscription and the publisher's notice. The cover corresponds to the first year of the magazine's publication, with simplistic art styles and caricatures that had yet to develop fully. It was not until the addition of Ganga Sahai (alias 'Shauq') that the magazine developed a cover that it would use for the remainder of the nineteenth century. As seen in Figure 3, this cover page depicts a scene of diverse characters gathered around a table, with Mr. Awadh Punch prominently positioned at the head of the table. His guests include an Englishman, an Awadh Nawab, a Sikh, a Parsi, and a Bengali, all portrayed in stereotypical or traditional attire (i.e., the bowler hat for the Englishman and the turban for the Sikh). Ganga Sahai's updated depiction of Mr. Awadh Punch closely resembles its English counterpart. While the specific details of Mr. Punch varied depending on the artist, the template of a sharp, hook-nosed face with a sly grin remained his most distinguishing characteristic, a feature notably adopted in the updated cover illustration. Furthermore, we see stylistic similarities in the font used to write the magazine's name between the cover for *Awadh Punch* and the original *Punch* (See Figure 4). What differs is that instead of plain letters, *Awadh Punch* uses Indian figures bent out in yogic shapes, adding a uniquely Indian spin which has been referred to as 'Tenniel with Eastern flavoring'.[48]

[48] In *British Cartoonists, Caricaturists, and Comic Artists* (London: William Collins, 1942), David Low describes the cartoons featured in Indian Punches as "suggestive of Tenniel with Eastern Flavouring". As I have already briefly elaborated in the Introduction, Tenniel was the Chief Cartoonist at *Punch* and is the best represented in biographical studies out of all the *Punch* cartoonists.

Figure 4 Side by side comparison of cover for Punch and Awadh Punch.

The depiction of an Indian Mr. Punch sitting at the head of the table (a position typically reserved for the host) with both the colonizer and the colonized as his guests can be read as a visual depiction of Mary Louise Pratt's 'contact zone.' [49] Pratt defines the contact zones as the 'space' in which geographically and historically separated peoples come into contact to establish relations that typically involve asymmetrical power dynamics between the two groups. It is within these contact zones that a process of 'transculturation' takes place. Transculturation is not the imposition of one culture onto the other but rather based on mutual exchange and agency. A localized Mr. Punch is an example of this transcultural process, where a cultural figure originating in Britain is transformed into an Indian character. The agency lies in the fact that at Mr. Awadh Punch's table, both the colonizer and the colonized get an equal seat. This is in contrast to depictions of Indians in the British *Punch*, where the former were largely portrayed as subordinate and racially inferior to the English.

[49] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).

Contents of the Awadh Punch

The *Awadh Punch* was a literary journal and newspaper, a characteristic similar to other Urdu journals of the time. The newspaper section of the magazine contained both local and telegraph news. In the initial years of its publication, the magazine extensively covered the Russo-Turkish war (1877-1878), overtly expressing its support for Turkey as the Ottoman Empire was seen as the 'last spark of Muslim glory.' [50] Scholars have noted how newspapers played a tremendous role in mobilizing Indian Muslim support for the war, as many Indian volunteers went to join the Turkish Army. Locally, some news topics covered included the southern Indian famine (1876 - 1878), colonial taxation policy, and the rise of military expenditures. However, the periodical was much more than just a source of news. Each issue contained at least two full pages of political cartoons, caricaturing a wide range of subjects from the colonial state, local Indian and international leaders.[51] Besides publishing new cartoons, the *Awadh Punch* also repurposed images from the *British Punch*. However, the re-print of these cartoons was strategic and acted as a counter-narrative to the British narrative.[52]

Figure 5 Published in Punch, 1889. Angel of Peace Extends Olive Branch with Hand on Sword.

Figure 6 Republished in Awadh Punch, 1903. The 'olive' branch is titled 'civilization' (tehzeen) and the sword is titled 'ruse' (makrani).

[50] Eve Tignol, *Grief and the Shaping of Muslim Communities in North India, c. 1857–1940s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 67

[51] Some common subjects included Benjamin Disreali, Indian leaders, nation-states. I discuss the contents of these cartoons in greater detail in Chapter 2.

[52] Once again, I expand on this in Chapter 2.

Each issue contained a section dedicated to poetry that was largely political in nature.[53] The political use of poetry was a new literary trend that had emerged in the Urdu literary sphere due to the loss of Muslim power under colonial rule. This poetry was utilized not only to express dissent and political perspectives but also to engage in debates and respond to other publications, showcasing the medium's interactive nature. The magazine frequently used both the 'Open Letter' and 'Dialogue' formats. The 'Open Letters' were written by the proprietor himself, using the style to address personalities like Nizam of Hyderabad, Gladstone, and Queen Victoria. The 'Dialogue' (Mukalma) format was frequently used for political commentary, where the intended message would be conveyed via a conversation between two characters. This format complimented the strong oral tradition in Indian society, lending itself well for narration in front of an audience through which it opened itself to a larger audience via communal reading practices.

Circulation and Readership

The *Awadh Punch* had a weekly circulation of 230 copies per week when it started in 1877. It contained eight folio-sized pages in lithographed Urdu, which were increased to twelve within a year of its running. Each copy cost four annas, making it accessible to the average reader – its affordability being a deliberate consideration by the magazine's proprietor, who maintained that his publication was not elitist.[54] Additionally, it was not uncommon for newspapers to have 'higher and lower rates for the rich and the poor' – a distinction left to the discretion of the newspaper's owners.[55] In comparison, the *Awadh Akhbar* had a similar rate of 4.5 annas per issue – though it went as high as 7.5 for subscribers from the noble and gentry classes.[56] The reading public received the magazine well, judging from the dramatic growth of its circulation figures within its first years of inception. By the end of 1882, *Awadh Punch* had a circulation of 600 copies — rivaling the most

[53] A segment titled 'Political Ghazal' was recurring in several issues, for example.
[54] Hassan, Wit, 30.
[55] Uma Das Gupta, "The Indian Press 1870–1880: A Small World of Journalism," *Modern Asian Studies* 11, no. 2 (April 1977), 220.
[56] Ulrike Stark, "Politics, Public Issues and the Promotion of Urdu Literature: Avadh Akhbar, the First Urdu Daily in Northern India," *Annual of Urdu Studies* 18 (2003), 73. The article provides a yearly rate however I have deduced the per copy rate myself by dividing the total cost with the number of copies published each year.

popular paper in Lucknow, the *Awadh Akbar*, which for the same year had a circulation of 719 copies. It is worth noting that the latter received patronage from the colonial state, where 90 copies of each issue were bought by the government to be circulated in offices and schools. The table below shows a comparison of circulation figures of the two papers from 1877 to 1891.[57]

Month and Year of Publication	Circulation of Awadh Punch	Circulation of Awadh Akbar
April, 1877	230	700 (50 taken by government)
December, 1878	400	810 (90 taken by government)
September, 1879	320	719 (90 taken by government)
February, 1881	411	638 (90 taken by government)
February, 1882	600	719 (90 taken by government)
Aug, 1883	450	610 (90 taken by government)
April, 1884	450	610 (90 taken by government)
April, 1890	424	540 (90 taken by government)
March, 1891	400	540 (90 taken by government)

The circulation numbers were relatively modest compared to the magazine's British counterpart, which had a weekly circulation of 50,000 copies during the same period.[58] Scholars like David Levylfeld have pointed out this fact, stating that it would be an exaggeration to refer to the North Indian media landscape as 'print capitalism' owing to the small circulation of newspapers.[59]

[57] Figures are compiled from *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers Published in the Panjab, North-Western Provinces, Oudh, Central Provinces and Berar,* 1877-1891. https://jstor.org/stable/saoa.crl.24992138.
[58] Henry J. Miller, "John Leech and the Shaping of the Victorian Cartoon: The Context of Respectability," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 42, no. 3 (2009), 267.
[59] David Lelyveld, "Sir Sayyid's Public Sphere: Urdu Print and Oratory in Nineteenth Century India," *Cracow Indological Studies* 11 (2009), 107.

However, Lelyveld's critique is based on a Western-centric model of media consumption that assumes high literacy rates, individual media consumption, and a society with a relatively free press environment – none of which applied to nineteenth-century colonial India.
To understand the impact of publications like *Awadh Punch*, a different framework must be adopted that accounts for distinct contextual differences. Foremost, the vernacular press operated in a time of strict colonial censorship, where the state kept a close watch on what was being published. In *Making a Muslim,* Akbar Zaidi writes how print capitalism that emerges from a society with a "dominating, controlling and obtrusive colonial power is bound to have different characteristics.[60] Furthermore, literacy rates in India were relatively low.[61] The colonial period saw an increase in literacy, especially with the emergence of an educated middle class, but it was still modest compared to British society at the time. Despite this, the influence of *Awadh Punch* extended well beyond the literate minority due to a pre-existing oral tradition of consuming information through communal readership practices. It was common practice for those who could read to gather in local chai-khanas (tea houses), bazaars, village gatherings, or other public places in a practice colloquially known as 'adda-bazi.' [62]. For publications like *Awadh Punch,* whose short-form humorous content and dialogue format made it an excellent candidate for narration, the circulation figures then did not accurately reflect its audience, which would have been far greater in numbers.[63] A similar argument is extended by Christopher Bayley, who posits that India was a 'literacy aware society' where both the elites and masses used written media in 'complex and creative ways to reinforce oral culture and debate.[64] One aspect of this 'literacy awareness' was respect for the printed word, where printed materials were held in high esteem and therefore treated as an authority.[65]

Awadh Punch's appealed to diverse sections of the society. An idea of who its subscribers were can be gauged from the 'List of Receipts*' (Rasid e Zar)* that appear in certain issues. Despite its

[60] S. Akbar Zaidi, *Making a Muslim: Reading Publics and Contesting Identities in Nineteenth-Century North India* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 127.
[61] The 1891 Census reveals that only a tenth of the Indian population was literate at the turn of the twentieth century. However, it is worth commenting here that considering India's large population, this number would still amount to around an estimated 15 million.
[62] Megan Eaton Robb, *Print and the Urdu Public: Muslims, Newspapers, and Urban Life in Colonial India* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 10.
[63] Several scholars have written about actual readership being much larger (by thousands more) than what official circulation figures suggest. See Metcalf (2014), Dubrow (2020), Bayly (1966).
[64] Bayly, *Empire*, 180.
[65] Zaidi, *Making A Muslim,* 18.

origins as a 'Muslim-run' newspaper, the *Awadh Punch* was widely read by Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, demonstrating its broad appeal across different religious communities. This set the newspaper apart from other publications that only targeted the *'Muslim Qaum'* (Muslim Nation) as its demographic audience, underscoring its larger goal of fostering Hindu-Muslim unity. Its subscribers included the rural and urban elite and the educated middle classes of Northern India, encompassing a diverse group ranging from nawabs and taluqdars to educators and government officials.

Distribution and Financing

Awadh Punch relied on the colonial postal system for its distribution, as did the rest of the vernacular publications of the time. The establishment of new railway lines (such as the Awadh-Rohilkand Railway in 1872) made it possible for the residents of even small towns to subscribe to such publications. These railway lines were initially used to move troops and laborers but eventually opened up to transporting commodities like newspapers. This infrastructure significantly broadened the dissemination of publications like the *Awadh Punch*, extending their influence beyond traditional pre-colonial literary and cultural hubs such as Lucknow and Delhi.[66] Even cities like Lahore, almost a thousand kilometers from Lucknow, became key points in its distribution network. The incident mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, where copies of the magazine were reportedly stolen in Lahore, underscores the magazine's popularity and the high demand for its content even in distant cities.

The *Awadh Punch* was an independent publication that did not rely on colonial subsidy to run itself. It was something it prided itself on, proudly proclaiming it on the title page of each issue with the words 'Awadh Punch is free and witty' (*Azad o zarif hai Awadh Punch*). Each issue contained at least one page of advertisements, which, in conjunction with the subscription costs, would be a source of revenue for the paper. In this manner, it differed from many other Urdu publications that relied on direct or indirect support from the government. The most common form of colonial patronage came in the form of fixed government purchases, which kept many newspapers 'in public

[66] Dubrow, *Cosmopolitan,* 8.

print afloat'.[67] The trade-off of receiving such support was significant. For instance, a tenth of the copies of *Awadh Akhbar* were purchased by the colonial state, but in turn, the paper could seldom criticize the government as to not 'bite the hand that feeds.'[68] That the *Awadh Punch* remained independent throughout its run is indicative of the anti-colonial values it upheld.

In this chapter, I have tried to show how the *Awadh Punch* emerged in the late nineteenth century, adding to a burgeoning Urdu Public sphere. Multiple factors, like the arrival of lithography, the development of railway lines, the proprietor's experiences growing up in colonial India, and the transnational influence of the British *Punch,* converge to create the *Awadh Punch.* The magazine quickly became a success, warmly received by a diverse audience that appreciated its satirical content, highlighting a robust local market for satire.

[67] Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia, *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 20

[68] I note this figure in the Table above.

Chapter 2

From Indifference to Control: The Colonial State and the Awadh Punch

The latter half of the 1870s saw a profusion of vernacular *Punch*-style magazines, with over 70 circulating only in Urdu – though *Awadh Punch* leads the charge as the most influential. The British, once dismissive of the Indian sense of humor, now found themselves as lampooned subjects within these periodicals. In this chapter, I will discuss how the colonial state, which was initially dismissive of the vernacular press, grew increasingly paranoid in the latter half of the nineteenth century, leading to a climate of strict press censorship. Furthermore, I examine in detail the *Awadh Punchs'* portrayal of the colonial state, analyzing both its visual and literary elements. The *Punch* format, though imported, takes on a life of its own in Northern India, where imitation and satire are strategic responses to a censorious state. Using the *Awadh Punch* as a case study, I will try to argue about how restrictive censorship led to the development of creative forms that sought to evade it.

Rising Apprehensions: The Colonial State and Its Relationship with the Vernacular Press

The British initially viewed the emergence of the vernacular press with cautious interest. It was to be expected, as they had always closely monitored the in and out-flows of native communications even

before the advent of the vernacular press. In the early nineteenth century, Native 'daks'[69] were viewed with great suspicion and watched closely. They were out-lawed entirely in 1830, and a new postal act in 1837 granted the British sole rights to convey correspondence, imposing heavy fines on those using alternative services.[70] However, this was more financially motivated rather than strictly for surveillance purposes – as it allowed the British to 'maximize revenues from postage and duty stamps'.[71] During this same period, the vernacular press was only in its early stages and viewed as mostly benign by the British.

This would change entirely after the War of Independence of 1857. After 1857, the British began viewing the natives with great suspicion. Several scholars have argued that the Indian Rebellion of 1857 occurred in part due to the British failure in intelligence gathering.[72] Having learned their lesson the first time, the British realized the importance of 'knowing' their subjects. The war drastically changed colonial logistics, as ethnography was made a key tool in gaining knowledge about the natives. In line with this reasoning, the first All India Census was held in 1871. It had become clear to the colonial state that the 'lack of Empirical knowledge about Indian society was dangerous'.[73] Nevertheless, ethnography revealed just a fragment of the entire picture. What

[69] The 'dak' system was the indigenous postal system that preceded the British. It relied on runners, private couriers and relays stations to convey messages and parcels across India.

[70] Mark Frost, "Imperial Citizenship or Else: Liberal Ideals and the Indian Unmaking of Empire, 1890–1919," in *Liberal Ideals and the Politics of Decolonisation",* ed. Harshan Kumarasingham (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021), 33-35.

[71] Bayly, *Empire,* 319.

[72] John Kayes (1890), widely regarded as the unofficial historian of the East India Company, wrote how the revolt was a result of an "acute failure in intelligence gathering and analysis". More recently, Bayly (1996), Stokes (1978), Mukherjee (1984) have drawn similar conclusions. Particularly, the latter pointed out how British intelligence was based only on superficial understandings of Indian society, which was a major reason they were not able to detect the widespread nature of the rebellion.

[73] Henry Schwarz, *Constructing the Criminal Tribe in Colonial India: Acting like a Thief* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 9.

they needed even more was a way to gauge native opinion. And there was no better way to do it than directly from the source, via the vernacular press.

Therefore, as the vernacular press expanded in the second of the nineteenth century, the British were faced with a paradoxical situation. On one hand, they wanted to control native opinion to prevent sedition, yet they could not exert too much control because they needed to remain informed about local sentiments. The importance of the maintenance of this particular balance can be gauged from a statement by the Director of Public Opinion:

"The naturalness of the Native Press forms its chief value to the state as an indication of public sentiment, so long as it is carefully watched and judiciously fathomed." [74]

As more and more native publications sprang up across the Indian subcontinent, the British became well aware that the native "editorial power [was] increasing." [75] The vernacular press had become, in effect, the unofficial spokesperson of the native public. From 1864 onwards, the British-Indian government kept a close eye on the contents of the vernacular press and a detailed record was registered in the weekly *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers Published in the Punjab and the North West Provinces.* A key role in this surveillance practice was played by the native reporter, who acted as an intermediary and translator between the government and the vernacular press.[76]

The first major legislation regarding the vernacular press directly came in 1867 in the form of *The Press and Registration of Books Act.*[77] The act decreed all published material, including both books and periodicals, must be registered with the state. Furthermore, they must also include clearly the names of their printers, publishers and date of publication. In case of non-compliance, the publishers would be awarded hefty penalties. Then, in 1870, Section 124a was added to the Indian

74 Director Public Instruction to Govt (1870). Qouted in Bayly, *Empire,* 341.
75 Bayly, *Empire,* 330.
76 Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras* (Raniket, Bangalore: Permanent Black ; Distributed by Orient Blackswan, 2010), 230.
77 Nazakat, *Role,* 262.

Penal Code, which made 'disaffection' a crime punishable by fines and imprisonment. Disaffection was loosely defined as 'hatred for the government.'[78] Disaffection was different from the already existing Sedition Law, as it broadened the scope of criminalization from not just the text itself but the feelings that it stirred up – thereby essentially establishing 'sovereignty over the colonial subject from within.'[79]

However, the government's most stringent censorship came in 1867 with the *Vernacular Press Act.*[80] It was passed by conservative Viceroy Robert Lytton. Under the act, the government could revoke the license of any newspaper that published material considered seditious or likely to incite rebellion against British rule. It allowed for the confiscation of printing equipment and gave the government the authority to issue search warrants and enter anyone's home without a court order. Furthermore, Magistrates were empowered to ask any publisher to give assurance that they would not write anything against British Rule. Interestingly, the Vernacular Press Act was only in effect for four years before it was repealed in 1892 by the Liberal Viceroy, Rippon. However, this was only temporary, as in 1908 and 1910, the passage of the *Indian Newspaper Act* and the *Indian Press Act* reintroduced much of what the *Vernacular Press Act* was trying to accomplish.

What the rapid passage of censorship laws shows is increasing colonial anxieties about its own image within the Indian population. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the main challenge to the colonial state was not the threat of a physical uprising. The British Raj had more than enough resources to quash such an event if it were to happen. The real battle, then, occurred between the pages of the printed press – one of public opinion. To this end, the British government did much to install their own 'mouthpieces' within the vernacular press. By offering patronage in the

78 Nazakat, *Role,* 261.
79 Tanya Agathocleous, *Disaffected: Emotion, Sedition, and Colonial Law in the Anglosphere* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 27.
80 Nazakat, *Vernacular,* 234.

form of state subscriptions to newspapers and small salaries for editors, the colonial state effectively bought out praise from certain vernacular newspapers. In Northern India, there is no better example of this than the *Awadh Akbbar*.[81] However, public opinion back in England in support of the Empire was important, too. The difference of opinion between the Tory and Liberal Viceroys, as seen in the reversal of the *Vernacular Press Act*, shows us that there existed key differences within British society itself when it came to India. Although the legitimacy of colonial rule itself was not in question, there was significant debate on the methods of governance between the political factions in Britain. Conservatives like Lord Lytton advocated for a paternalistic approach, emphasizing control and rigid oversight, whereas Liberals 'aimed to secure British-Raj on the consent of the Western-educated'.[82] Back in the metropole, the legitimacy of the Empire was justified through the logic of the 'civilizing mission,' which centered on the perceived 'Otherness' of Indians compared to the British. This 'Otherness' was reinforced by various stereotypes, with publications like *The Punch* playing a significant role in creating and popularizing these stereotypes.

The British Punch and Its Depiction of Indians: Constructing the Other

The *Punch* popularized the medium of political cartoons, ushering in a new kind of visual culture in Victorian England – one that employed the use of image and text together in a way that had never before been done on such a wide scale.[83] The term 'political cartoon' itself was a creation

[81] The newspaper was a loyalist and wrote in favour of the government. I discuss the *Awadh Akhbar* in greater detail in Chapter 3.
[82] Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 139.
[83] Patrick Leary, *The Punch Brotherhood: Table Talk and Print Culture in Mid-Victorian London* (London: The British Library, 2010), 35.

of John Leech – one of the prominent cartoonists at the *Punch*. The magazine considered itself as the 'voice of the middle class,' simultaneously shaping and reflecting their opinions.[84]
Taking on the dual role of shaping and reflecting Victorian middle-class values, the publication not only influenced public attitudes and societal norms but also mirrored its readership's existing beliefs and aspirations.

Most significantly, *Punch* cartoons helped shape the British imagination about India – the crown jewel of the British Empire at a time when the nation's imperial domination was its zenith. The East India Company's victory in the 1757 Battle of Plassey laid the early foundations for British rule in India, and it did not take long for the company to expand its control over vast territories, amassing wealth and influencing regional politics. Until this time, the British public's imagination of India remained rather limited. What they knew mostly came from young Britons who worked for the Company, sending back letters to their home country detailing their adventures in India. These letters were often accompanied by small paintings on ivory or mica (the historical counterpart of a post-card), produced by Indian artists under British guidance.[85] The imagery was restricted to romanticized depictions of India's natural landscapes or exoticized portrayals of its grandiose temples and palaces. It wasn't until after 1857 that India featured more prominently in the British imagination, though the construction was far from positive. Political cartoons, such as those published by the *Punch,* became the most "powerful and consistent mediums for representing overseas politics" – a significant aesthetic apparatus of colonial domination.[86]

[84] Leary, *The Punch*, 1.
[85] Narayani Gupta, "Pictorializing the 'Mutiny' of 1857" in *Traces of india: Photography, architecture, and the politics of representation, 1850-1900,* ed. Maria Pelizzari and Julia Ballerini (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003), 218.
[86] Saidul Haque, "Cartooning the Colony, Empowering the Empire: A Study of Punch Cartoons," melow.in, accessed April 20, 2024, https://melow.in/public/uploads/article/2.pdf.

Figure 7 'The British Lions Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger' Punch, August 1857.

The British Lion's Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger (Figure 7) was one of the first and most prominent political cartoons in response to the Indian War of Independence. It was drawn by Tenniel, who was by then the Chief cartoonist at *Punch* and featured as a two-page spread.[87] The anthropomorphic drawing depicts a fallen woman protecting her child from a vicious Bengal Tiger. The British Lion, placed at a higher vantage point (read as a position of power) is depicted lunging at the Tiger. It paints a story of victimhood and vengeance all at once, as the task of the British Lion is to avenge the deaths of British civilians at the hands of the Bengal Tiger. The imagery is intended to convey the British response to the uprising, portraying it as a justified and necessary act of retribution against a barbaric and savage enemy.

[87] Shirley Brooks (one of the journalists at Punch) had suggested the idea, which was then illustrated by John Tenniel. By the nineteenth century, England's association with the symbol of a lion had become long entrenched, most significantly being featured on the English Royal Coat of Arms. The Punch frequently used the lion as a symbol to describe imperial Britian. The Bengal Tiger was native to India and the emblem of Tipu Sultan. It is useful noting here that depicting the lion and tiger together in single scene is not entirely an original conception by Tenniel, borrowed from an already existing set of iconography that had entered Victorian era Britain with the fourth Anglo-Indian Mysore war of 1799 through Tipu Sultan.

The grip that the cartoon had on the British public's imagination was immense. It had come at a critical stage in Britain's relationship with its colony, as never before had a rebellion of this magnitude been faced by the colonial state in the region. It affirmed Victorian anxieties caused by the news coming in from the colony, inspiring the exact kind of nationalistic pride required at home for the Empire to continue its workings abroad. In doing so, it achieves the task of translating news "into a metaphor for every fear associated with the mutiny, which shows how a political cartoon construct, as well as rely on, collective discourse." [88]

The success translated directly to better business for the Punch, as there was a "sudden increase in circulation that year".[89] It was clear that there was a demand for colonial content and the Punch proprietors were quick to capitalize on the opportunity as the cartoon was expanded into an entire 'Mutiny Series' in the subsequent issues. From then on, colonial India became a regular subject of cartoons featured in the Punch. These cartoons served to legitimize the British Empire by otherizing Indians in the public imagination of British people. By depicting Indians as the 'Other,' these images reinforced stereotypes and justified the civilizing mission, portraying British rule as a benevolent and necessary force.

Reclaiming the Narrative:
The Carnivalesque Reappropriations of British Cartoons

[88] Anna Matei, "Women and the Indian Mutiny: Framing The Mutiny in a Punch Cartoon and a Lucknow Diary, Anna Matei | Open.Conted.Ox.Ac.Uk," https://open.conted.ox.ac.uk/, accessed April 25, 2024. <https://open.conted.ox.ac.uk/resources/documents/women-and-indian-mutiny-framing-mutiny-punch-cartoon-and-lucknow-diary-anna>.

[89] George Somes Layard, *A Great Punch Editor: Being the Life, Letters, and Diaries of Shirley Brooks (*London: Sir Isaac Pitman, 1907), 300.

In addition to publishing original cartoons, the Awadh Punch sometimes refurbished cartoons featured in its British counterpart. However, this republication was not a mere act of imitation or copying – it was an intentional inversion of meaning. In *Rabelais and His World (1968),* Mikhael Bakhtin puts forth the idea of the 'carnivalesque' – a literary mode that subverts the assumptions of the dominant style through humor.[90] Carnivalesque imagery, then, temporarily subverts established hierarchies and transforms the meaning into something that the original had never intended. The republished cartoons in the Awadh Punch are an example of Bakthin's carnivalesque imagery in how it takes images that previously upheld established narratives of colonial domination and capsizes their original meaning.

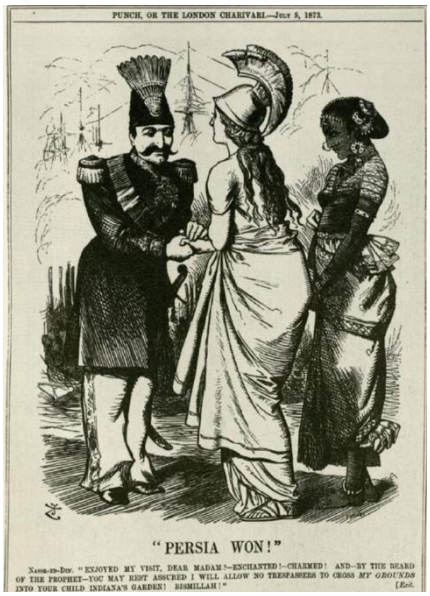

Figure 8 'Persia Won!'
Nazim ud Din: Enjoyed my visit, dear Madam. Enchanted!
Charmed! And by the beard of the Prophet,
you may rest assured I will allow no
trespassers to cross my grounds in Indiana's garden. Bismillah!
Published in The Punch, 1873.

[90] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1968).

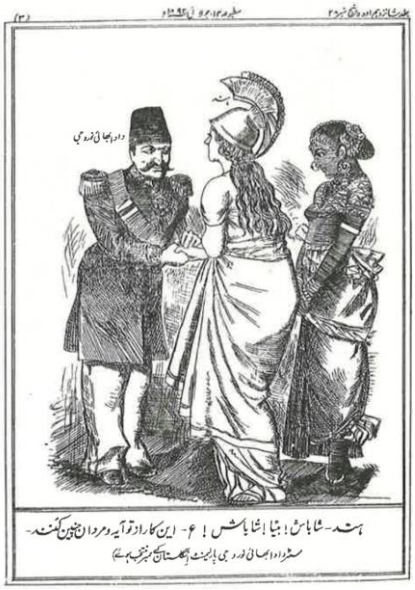

Figure 9 : Hind: Great work, son! You've done it.
Mr. Dadabhai Naraoji is a member of the English Parliament.
Published in Awadh Punch. July, 1892

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For example, Figure 2 is a cartoon published *in The Punch* that shows the ruler of Persia assuring The British Empire that he will not let anyone trespass into India. India is portrayed as a young woman standing behind the British Empire, head slightly bowed and hands folded. Her body language is submissive, and she is shown as a possession of the Empire. In *Awadh Punch's* reproduction, Figure 2, we see that the relationship has inverted. The British Empire now represents 'Hind', and the man is Dadabhai Naraoji. India is transformed into a proud mother, congratulating her son for his achievement. The juxtaposition of India as a passive possession and as a proud mother is stark. In the latter, a sense of dignity is restored to the character, and she is given a voice.

Figure 10 Published in Punch, 1889.
Angel of Peace Extends Olive Branch with Hand on Sword.

Figure 11 Republished in Awadh Punch, 1903.

Another example is Figure 10, which first appeared in *The Punch* showcasing the Angel of Peace extending an olive branch whilst simultaneously preparing to strike with a sword if all goes awry. In Awadh Punch's rendition (Figure 11), the image instead depicts the hypocrisy of the logic of the civilizing mission. The 'olive' branch is titled civilization, while the sword is titled 'ruse'. The caption is an Urdu idiom about someone who pretends to be your friend but is actually an enemy in disguise. Once again, the meaning of the original cartoon is inverted and the reader is invited to think about the true intentions of the civilizing mission. Is it truly to impart European values onto a Barbaric other, or is it a clever excuse to exploit the country's resources?

Figure 12 'Charge of the wolves, plea of the rulers'. Awadh Punch, 1888.

Figure 12 shows a cartoon that is not an exact copy, but is heavily inspired by Tenniel's '*Attack of the British Lion on the Bengal Tiger*'. It shows a pack of wolves trying to attack a woman holding a child while a pair of men step forward to protect them. The wolves here are meant to represent the woes brought on by colonial rule, and the men are Indian rulers. The imagery of Tenniel's original cartoon is carnalized, as now it is the Indian natives who are victimized and need protection from the colonial aggressor. Just as in Bakthin's analysis of the medieval carnival established hierarchies were overturned; in *Awadh Punch's* reproduction the original meaning is

subverted. It also showcases native agency, and ingenuity, as the *Awadh Punch* responded directly to its colonial counterpart. In that sense, it can be viewed as a 'dialogue', another element of Baktin's carnivalesque.

Original Cartoons

Despite its reputation as a humorous magazine, the *Awadh Punch* commented on serious topics. It critiqued British colonial policies, exposing their inefficiencies and exploitative nature. Additionally, the *Awadh Punch* played a crucial role in fostering political awareness and nationalism by encouraging readers to question colonial authority and unite against oppression. By blending humor with serious commentary, the magazine not only entertained but also educated and mobilized its audience, making significant contributions to the intellectual and political landscape of colonial India. I will examine how the magazine tackled three important topics through its visual discourse, namely: famine, the drain of wealth and nationalism.

The Great Famine

The Southern Indian Famine of 1876-1878, also known as the Great Famine, was one of the most catastrophic famines in Indian history that claimed an estimated 5.5 million lives. While the immediate cause of the famine was the failure of the monsoon rains, the sheer scale of devastation that it brought was entirely avoidable, caused by callous imperial policy and inadequate relief efforts. The British imposed high land revenue taxes on Indian farmers, demanding cash payments regardless of harvest outcomes, which left farmers with no financial cushioning to fall back on.[91]

[91] In the pre-British system, the land tax was allowed to vary with the size of the actual crop harvested. Additionally, while it was calculated in money, it was not uncommon for it to be collected in kind (non-monetary assets).

The rigidity of this tax collection persisted, even during the famine years. Additionally, British policies encouraged the cultivation of cash crops (like cotton, opium, and indigo) for export, reducing the land available for food crops and increasing the population's vulnerability to food shortages. Despite the local food scarcity, regular grain export to Britain continued, which only exacerbated an already precarious situation.

Not surprisingly, the famine featured as an oft-occuring topic within the pages of the *Awadh Punch*. Figure 13 shows John Bull, a personification of the British nation and the Indian Famine, shown as a ghoul or spirit-like creature, engaged in a game of dice. The famine outplays Britain, winning the game. In the background stands a woman holding a cornucopia with one hand and clutching her chest with the other. In both Roman and Greek mythology, the cornucopia is a symbol of abundance and nourishment, also known as the 'horn of plenty.' This cartoon depicts the failure of the British government to correctly deal with the famine. The aghast mannerisms of the woman highlight the fact that it was not the availability of food that caused millions to die out from the famine, but rather the incorrect moves taken by the British government.

British colonial policies in response to the famine were governed by a Malthusian logic of helping only those who would be useful subjects. For example, in Mysore, where the effects of the famine were felt most strongly, relief funds were instead channeled into high-priority development projects. Only those that qualified as "able-bodied accustomed to earth-work" were given wages in return for their labor.[92] This meant that the large majority that did not qualify – and therefore needed the assistance the most – were left at the mercy of either the 'charitable public' or the few

See: Amiya Kumar Bagchi, "Land Tax, Property Rights and Peasant Insecurity in Colonial India," The Journal of Peasant Studies 20, no. 1 (1992), 2-6.

[92] Ira Klein, "When the Rains Failed: Famine, Relief, and Mortality in British India," The Indian Economic & Social History Review 21, no. 2 (1984), 196.

relief kitchens that were set up in the region. Huge mobs overwhelmed these kitchens, which could not keep up with the demand for such a multitude. Even if they managed to get the bare subsistence ration, "it was not uncommon to see people die in the act of eating it, or see them unable from weakness and sickness to eat the whole." [93]

Figure 13 Famine and British India British Government:
Teen kanay (Three Ones)
Famine: Pou Bara (A Twelve).
Published in Awadh Punch, 8th October 1896.

The government's rationale was that its duty to save people from starvation could not be performed if it "involved an expenditure beyond the power of the country to bear." [94] It did only the bare minimum, as depicted in a cartoon published in July of 1893. The image shows a scene of a British Government representative offering a glass of clean water to a weeping mother and her children. A grim reaper with a scythe waits in the wings to strike, signifying their looming death from starvation. Similarly, Figure 14 paints an equally grim picture, showcasing how instead of wheat, India now grows skulls.

[93] Charles Elliot, *'Report on the Famine in Mysore'.* Qouted in Klein, "When the Rains", 196.
[94] Klein, "Rains", 194.

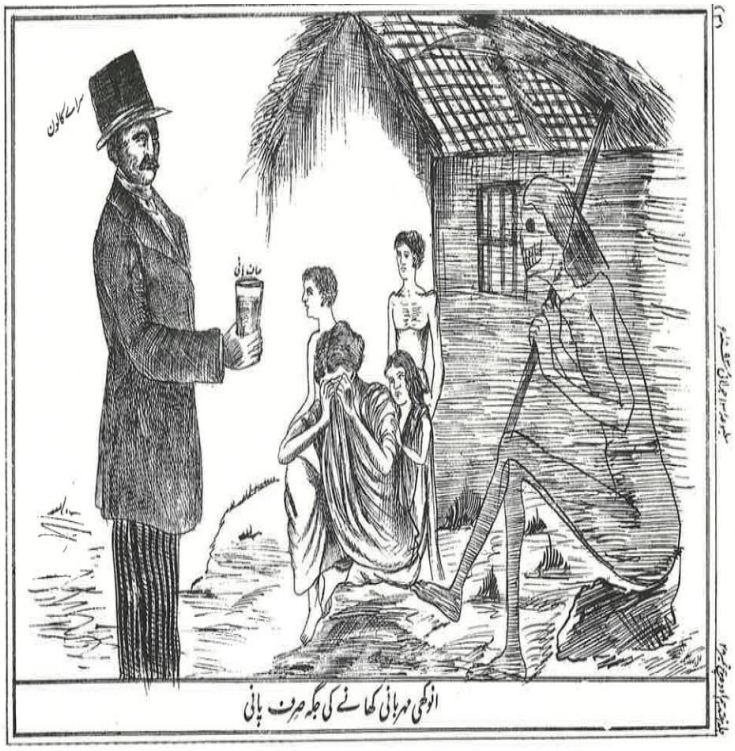

Figure 14 'Unusual generosity, water instead of food'.
Awadh Punch, July, 1893.

Figure 15 'New variety, we know produce skulls instead of wheat'
Awadh Punch, September, 1893

For a government that was so keen on not expanding its budget allocation for famine relief, lest it not overburden the state resources, it displayed no such reluctance a year after the famine ended. The military budget was significantly expanded to cater to the Afghan War (1878-1880). The use of Indian revenue to fund its wars, and the misappropriation of the Famine Relief Fund were not lost on Awadh Punch.

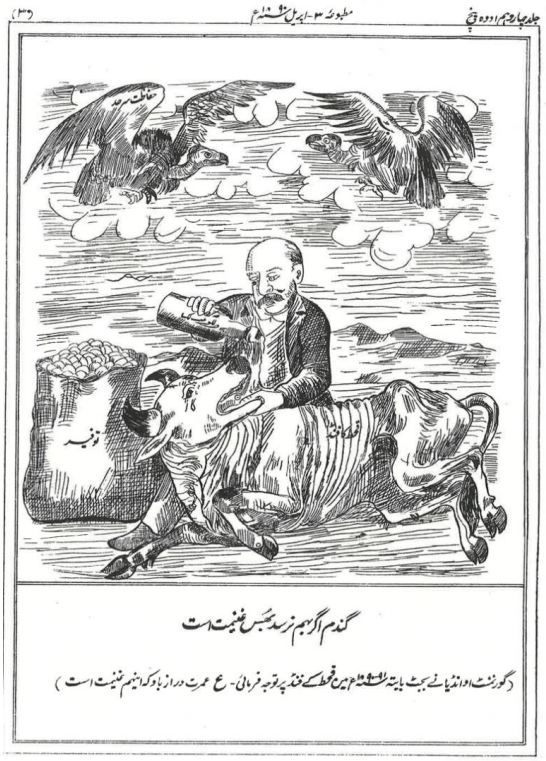

Figure 16 Published in Awadh Punch, 11th September 1890.

Figure 17 Published in Awadh Punch, April, 1892.

Figure 17 shows John Bull slicing up a portion of meat, each half titled 'Famine Fund' and 'Tax Money' respectively. Below the table, a pack of hungry dogs awaits to be fed, each representing different aspects of colonial spending like the Afghan war or development projects. Similarly, Figure 16 shows Viceroy Petty-Fitzmaurice feeding an emaciated cow, which represents the Famine Fund. Above them, two vultures circle the air, titled 'Defense of State' and Batta (a special allowance for British officers serving in India). The cow is likely at its dying breath, and the vultures are waiting to prey on it. Both these cartoons convey a similar message: the resources that should have been allotted to the Indian public for famine relief were instead misappropriated for other expenditures. The heavy symbolism of death (vultures, emaciated cow) adds another layer of macabre imagery to the message.

'Drain of Wealth'

The 'Drain of Wealth' refers to the systematic and continuous transfer of resources, wealth, and capital from colonial India to Britain during the British colonial period. The term was first coined at the beginning of the twentieth century by Dadabhai Naoroji, who was one of the founding members of the Congress.[95] The mechanisms for the drain were manifold. Key mechanisms of this wealth drain included the export of valuable raw materials and agricultural products at low prices, the imposition of heavy land revenue taxes, and the repatriation of profits from British-owned enterprises in India to Britain.[96] Additionally, substantial funds were used to pay for 'Home Charges'. These included the cost of maintaining the Secretary of State's office, civil and military charges, interest on public debt, and pension to British civil and military officers. This outflow of wealth was compounded by unfavorable trade policies that stifled Indian industries and forced India to rely on British manufactured goods, contributing to deindustrialization. Other methods included war indemnities and both official and non-official gifts to the state. The British economy was able to benefit directly from this excess of wealth obtained from the Indian colony.[97]

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[95] Naoroji was one of the first Indian leaders to systematically critique British Indian economic policies in India. *'Poverty and Un-British Rule in India'* (1901) is where he conceptualizes the idea of the 'drain of wealth', using meticulous statistical evidence to support his argument. His ideas had a great role in shaping the nationalist thought, laying the intellectual foundation for future independence leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

[96] Holden Furber, *John Company at work: A study of European expansion in India in the late eighteenth century* (Harvard University Press, 1948), 304.
For the goods purchased using Indian revenue that were exported to England, India saw no benefit to these exports, as there existed no equivalent import in exchange.

[97] One big way that the British economy benefited was to pay off the nations foreign debt. For example, after the Seven Years War, British foreign debt had acrued up to 25 million pounds. However, after their conquest of Bengal, a significant portion of wealth was transferred over to India (Some scholars estimate a transfer of 100 million pounds between 1757 to 1780). By the start of the century, Britain had transformed into a 'creditor' nation from a 'debtor' nation for the first time in its recent history. The wealth accrued from the colonies helped the nation fight other wars, too, without racking up any debt (e.g. the Napoleanic Wars, the Afghan War).

Figure 18 'British Festivity and Indian Eid'
Published in Awadh Punch, December 1892

Figure 19 'Easy pickings'
Published in Awadh Punch, July 1896.

One of the major demands of Congress was economic reform. It was the recognition that India was not developing due to it being poor, but rather due to the exploitative economic policies of the colonial government. Being a Pro-Congress magazine, the Awadh Punch commented quite frequently on the issue of wealth being drained. Figure 18 depicts an English government official sitting across the table from the British Empire, a wine glass in hand. The platter of food between them is titled 'Indian Wealth.' As the caption suggests, they are enjoying a feast over the spoils of

India's wealth. Mr. Punch is shown in the background, patting the English leader on the back. Similarly, Figure 19 shows a wolf in military clothing hiding behind a bush to attack an unsuspecting baby goat, representing India. It is captioned 'Easy pickings'. Both these cartoon depict India as something to be 'preyed' or 'feasted' on, setting up the exploitative relationship between a colonizer and a colony.

Nationalism and Anti-colonialism

Indian nationalism was still in the process of development at the end of the nineteenth century. The creation of the Congress was the first step in its early articulation. Periodicals, especially one like *Awadh Punch* who heavily endorsed the Congress and its ideas played a role in shaping this developing nationalism. If to be a nationalist is to aspire the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, then the first step is to recognize the injustice that is being done to you.[98] The magazine did much to point out these injustices. Sometimes, it was a direct call-out, as the one in Figure 20 where the reader is clearly being told that their rights are being denied by the English. Other times, the magazine posed a rhetorical question, as in Figure 22, to get the audience to think for themselves. What does it matter, really, if Indian rights are being denied? It is a subtle call to action and seeks to awaken the nationalist spirit within its readers. Figure 21 shows Mother India confronting England directly. Behind her, the helpless segment of the society hide. The caption to this cartoon is a verse from an Urdu poet, and it is used to address the colonizer directly, demanding an explanation for his actions. The use of poetic verses as captions for cartoons was commonly

[98] I borrow my defination of a nationalist from: Anthony, D. Smith. "Nationalism: Theory, ideology, history." Blackwell Oxford, (2001).

done by the magazine and is an example of how it was able to blend together traditional forms (poetry) with modern ones

Figure 14: 'Our beloved Englishmen, trampling over our rights.'

Published 10 December 1893

Figure 20 'Our beloved Enlglishmen, trampling our rights'
Published in Awadh Punch, December 1983.

Figure 21 'Listen, what is your story? What do the forces of the world tell you?'
Published in Awadh Punch, June 1891.

Figure 22 'The rulers Tyranny: Whether you are bored, or subdued. Does it matter? Published in Awadh Punch, May 1892.

The magazine's politics were not only limited to India, as it also addressed the broader issue of British colonization abroad. 'The Scramble for Africa' was a recurring theme, as we can see in Figure 17 where European nations are portrayed overlooking a pair of African natives, captioned 'A forced conflict'. Similarly, in Figure 18, an African native is seen trying to fight off an octopus, representing European civilization. Both images portray the presence of a foreign power as an imposition, and therefore can be seen to have anti-colonial elements to its imagery. It is a way to show solidarity with the other colonized of the world, and shows the magazine's transnational scope.

Figure 23 'Africa and civilization of Europe' Published in Awadh Punch, June 1898.

Figure 24 'A forced conflict'
Published in Awadh Punch, April 1894.

Evading Colonial Censorship Through Imitation and Satire

That the *Awadh Punch* was critical of the colonial state is blatant, as we have seen from the examples already cited above. However, its status as a humorous publication did not automatically insulate it against the climate of censorship that was prevalent towards the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Towards the turn of the century, the colonial state had already begun to take special note of the satirical press. A government correspondent was noted in the Vernacular Press Reports advising the vernacular press to proceed cautiously when reporting about the government. He further elaborated that:

> *"All the liberty that the editors enjoy depends on the will of the Government. If an editor acts against the wishes of the Government, he will be dubbed a rebel and relegated to jail… The Government*

cherishes paternal affection for its people and has raised them to its own level by spreading English education among them…. If the natives claim perfect equality with Englishmen, they claim what is simply preposterous. The native press cannot possibly be allowed the same freedom which is enjoyed by the English press. If any native editors labor such a hallucination and are rash in their writing, they will simply court their rain."[99]

Then, again in 1910, after the passage of the Indian Press Act, a native correspondent was tasked to specifically track down the social background, family genealogy, professional links, and politics of the various editors and proprietors of vernacular *Punch's.*[100] While the *Awadh Punch* appeared within these reports, nothing was ever proven against it to charge it with sedition. How, then, was the magazine able to curb censorship?

The magazine's approach to defending itself against sedition charges can be illustrated through its response to *The Englishman* (A British-owned Indian newspaper). The newspaper objected to the *Awadh Punch* referring to Lord George Hamilton, then Secretary of State, as 'Lord George Shajlam.'[101] The word 'Shaljam' in Urdu means 'turnip' in the literal sense. However, it was most likely employed in its colloquial expression about someone being 'dull-witted or slow.' In response to the objection, the *Awadh Punch* published a supplement in its issue on 2nd September 1897. In the supplement, the editor defends itself as follows:

"The Englishman thought that in the expression Lord George Shalgham used in the article, the Secretary of State for India himself was insulted by being called by the name of Shalgham or turnip. But no such thing was done at all. The writer of the article used the expression to designate the turnip, grown from the seed supplied by Lord George Hamilton, by his Lordship's name, just as a park is called Victoria Park after Her Majesty's name. But even if the Oudh Punch were really guilty of having applied an offensive expression to the Secretary of State, it should have been accused of defamation and not sedition. It is a pity indeed that the Englishman should go about accusing a comic paper of impertinence and sedition while it itself was so very injudicious and impertinent as to call the earthquake which occurred about the time of the Diamond Jubilee of Her Most Gracious Majesty to be the "Jubilee Earthquake." The writer is glad to learn from the Englishman that Lord George Hamilton is not a Scotch but an Irishman, that is to say, belongs to a merry and humorous people and so better fitted to appreciate humor than the Scotch editor of that

[99] *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers Published in the Panjab, North-Western Provinces, Oudh, Central Provinces and Berar,* 1897, 639.
[100] This collection of data fell into the larger colonial logic of ethnography. It was a way of 'knowing' its subjects.
[101] Shaljam is the Urdu word for turnip.

Anglo-Indian paper. The Oudh Punch is published in Urdu to be read and understood by Urdu-knowing men, and the editor does not see any insult whatsoever in the article in question."[102]

The editor first clarifies the intent behind the word, framing its usage as benign by drawing an analogy to naming 'Victoria Park' after Queen Victoria. Just as it is not an insult to name a park after a monarch, it is not derogatory to designate the Secretary of State with the title 'Lord George Shalgham.' It is not to be read as offensive but as a harmless joke. He appeals to the British humourous sensibilities of Lord Hamilton, who is 'better fitted to appreciate humor than the Scotch editor' of The Englishman. The editor then highlights the irony in the Englishman's criticism, noting that the newspaper itself had engaged in similar naming practices with the "Jubilee Earthquake."

But perhaps the strongest defense is *Awadh Punch*'s contextualization of the word within the rich and nuanced landscape of Urdu humor— something that is lost upon a foreigner and can only be understood by its intended Urdu-speaking audience. In doing so, it draws a binary between the native and the foreigner — adding an automatic layer of protection against being labeled as seditious. Satire on its own is an effective means of subversion as its humourous elements obfuscate its critical intent. When that satire is presented in a language foreign to those who it targets, another layer of obfuscation is added. That which gets lost in translations affords the *Awadh Punch* sufficient plausible deniability to defend itself against any objections of malicious intent.

Another strategy employed by the magazine in its efforts to curb censorship was imitation. The editors at *Awadh Punch* always maintained that their magazine was a humble imitation of the original. By self-consciously identifying itself as an imitation, the magazine made itself appear innocuous. After all, how could they be subject to censorship when they were merely replicating the

[102] *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers Published in the Panjab, North-Western Provinces, Oudh, Central Provinces and Berar*, 1897, 573.

art of political cartooning and satire – something they had learned from their colonial masters? This strategy was particularly effective against the logic of liberal imperialism, which had become the dominant justification for the British Empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[103] Under this model of liberal imperialism, the end goal was to reshape Indian society in the image of Britain. Imitation, then, is something to appreciate rather than chastise. If the *Awadh Punch* was doing simply what had been done by its colonial predecessors at the *Punch,* then it means the goals of liberal imperialism have been accomplished. An example of this strategy can be seen in how another Urdu newspaper, the *Agra Abkhar,* defended the *Awadh Punch* regarding suspicions about its seditious content.[104] The newspaper noted:

> *"The truth is that we are condemned for writing what we had learned from our tutors. The correspondent of the Oudh Akhbar has at times written articles condemning the Urdu comic paper (the Oudh Punch).... Thousands of articles, like the extracts from the writings from the vernacular newspapers laid before the legislative council, have already been published in the English papers of India and England . . . In these circumstances, it would have been proper to chastise the tutor and not to punish and reprove the innocent pupil."* [105]

Through this comment, we see how the relationship between the colony and the metropole is reduced to that of a student and teacher. In this scenario, imitating the teacher becomes an 'innocent' act and an aspiration rather than a transgression.

In conclusion, I have explored the transformation of the colonial state's attitude towards the vernacular press, from initial dismissal to growing paranoia, culminating in strict press censorship in

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[103] Duncan Bell, *Victorian visions of global order: Empire and international relations in Nineteenth-Century political thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 55.

[104] The *Agra Akbhar* was an Urdu weekly whose politics about colonial rule aligned with that of the *Awadh Punch.* In this instance, the newspaper defends the *Awadh Punch* against attacks levied by the *Awadh Akbhar* (a prominent newspaper who had its loyalty firmly with the government). In Chapter 3, I discuss more about the specific rivalry between *Awadh Punch* and *Awadh Akhbar*.

[105] Quoted in: Ritu Gairola Khanduri, *Caricaturing Culture in India: Cartoons and History in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 61.

the latter half of the nineteenth century. By examining the *Awadh Punch's* portrayal of the colonial state, it becomes evident how the Punch format, though initially imported, was ingeniously adapted in Northern India. Here, imitation and satire emerged as strategic responses to an increasingly censorious regime. The *Awadh Punch* serves as a compelling case study illustrating how restrictive censorship can stimulate the development of creative forms designed to evade it. Through its sharp wit and satirical commentary, the *Awadh* Punch not only provided a critical view of colonial rule but also fostered a sense of national identity and resistance. This chapter also underscores the paradoxical effect of colonial censorship: while intended to suppress dissent, it inadvertently spurred a vibrant, subversive press that articulated the aspirations and frustrations of the colonized populace. In doing so, the *Awadh Punch* and similar vernacular publications played a crucial role in the cultural and political discourse of the time, laying the groundwork for future movements towards independence.

Chapter 3

Divergences Within the Muslim Public Sphere

The first All India Census was completed in 1872. The results showed that an estimated 50 million Muslims resided in the region, constituting a minority at 20% of the total population but by no means a modest figure. In examining South Asian history, it is common to observe the prominent presence of Hindus and Muslims as two major groups, often presumed to represent distinct interests. This distinction was the basis upon which Pakistan was created. The *Two Nation Theory* was a political ideology articulated at the beginning of the twentieth century that posited that Hindus and Muslims could not exist in a single nation-state as they represented two separate religious, cultural, and social identities.[106] The concept gained significant traction during the Indian independence movement, especially in the lead-up to the partition of British India in 1947, and culminated in the partition of the subcontinent into two countries: India for Hindus and Pakistan for Muslims. In this framework, the dominant narrative assumes the 'consolidation of communal solidarity among Muslims'.[107] However, asserting that a population of 50 million was a monolithic entity would be simplistic. In this chapter, I intend to argue against this dominant narrative by examining the diversity of opinions that existed within the Muslim public sphere in the nineteenth century. For that purpose, I will put the *Awadh Punch* in conversation with *Aligarh School* and the *Awadh Akbbar*. The *Aligarh School* was a reformist school of thought emergent in the second half of the nineteenth century while the *Awadh Akbbar* was a popular loyalist newspaper in Lucknow. The main challenge that actors in this Muslim public sphere were responding to in the late nineteenth

[106] Ayesha Jalal, "The Creation of Pakistan," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, November 20, 2017.
[107] Jones, Justin Rhys, *The Shi'a Muslims of the United Provinces of India, c 1890-1940* (University of Cambridge, 2011), 9.

century was life under colonialism, to which each one had different responses to as we will see in this chapter.

Urdu as the Language of the Muslim Public Sphere

Since the discussion in this chapter revolves around the Muslim public sphere, it is useful to first provide a context to how Urdu ends up becoming its representative language. Earlier in this thesis, I have noted how the public sphere that develops in the nineteenth century is one that is fragmented along religious and language-based lines. The Urdu language was born in the streets and bazaars of Northern India. Similar to Hindi in its spoken form but written in Persian-Arabic script, the language was created from the interaction between Persian-speaking Muslims and Hindi speaking natives during the Mughal era. While Persian remained the official language of the Mughal court, Urdu became the language of everyday use for communication between different communities, making it the defacto lingua franca.[108] Between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, Hindustani, Hindavi, Lahori and Urdu were names used for the language. However, after the formal cessation of Mughal rule in 1857, the name Urdu gained currency. Geographically, Urdu speakers were spread across Northern India (including the United Provinces, Bihar, and Delhi), the Hyderabad State, and regions in the Deccan Plateau – all Muslim-majority areas. Cities like Lucknow, Delhi, and Lahore were important centers of Urdu literary and cultural activities.

[108] Belkacem Belmekki, "From a Lingua Franca to a Communal Language: The Islamicization of Urdu in British India," *Revista de Antropología y Sociología : Virajes* 24, no. 1 (December 16, 2021), 286.

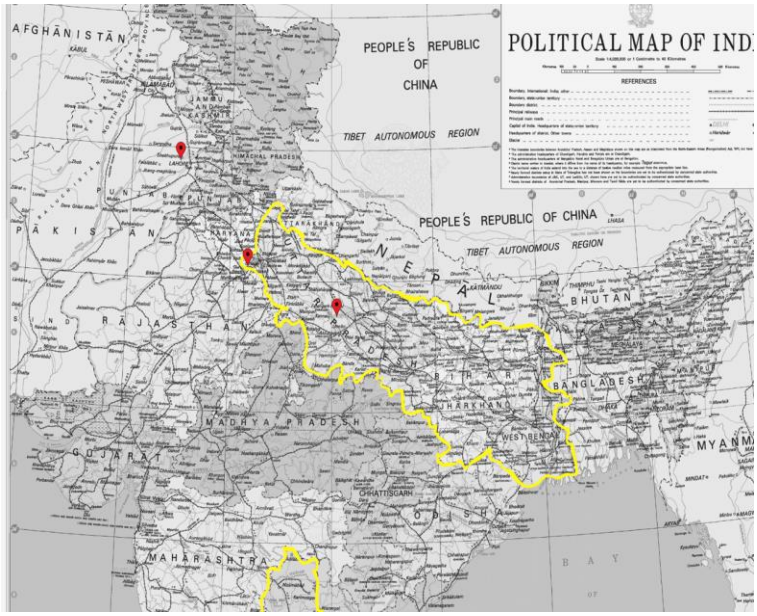

Figure 25 Political map of India with Urdu speaking regions highlighted. [109]

While it is true that Urdu flourished in regions where Muslim populations were most concentrated, it was not uncommon nor abnormal to find Hindu writers publishing their works in Urdu. This would soon change, as the language quickly began to be redefined along religious lines in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This was partly due to the British policy of 'Divide and Rule' which followed an ideologically determined strategy to address Hindus and Muslims separately as two distinct polities.[110] Urdu became associated with Muslims, whereas Hindi became associated with Hindus despite the two languages being mutually intelligible to both speakers. This divide only deepened in the twentieth century and reached its pinnacle with the creation of Pakistan – a country created for Muslims that adopted Urdu as its national language.

This linguistic bifurcation illustrates how language and religion are interconnected in shaping nationalist sentiment. Much scholarship has already been devoted to studying this link (see:

[109] 1. "India Map and Satellite Image," geology, accessed June 5, 2024, https://geology.com/world/india-satellite-image.shtml.
[110] Aziz Rahman, Mohsin Ali, and Saad Kahn, "The British Art of Colonialism in India: Subjugation and Division," *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 2018, 4-5.

Anderson (1991), Gellner (1986), Chatterjee (1993). Anderson's theory of imagined communities elucidates how language serves as a foundational element in constructing collective identities within nation-states. The profusion of an Urdu print culture, facilitated by the developments in the vernacular press, fostered a sense of shared belonging to a Muslim community among individuals who were otherwise separated by distance. Gellner (1986) further emphasizes the symbolic power of language in shaping collective consciousness and mobilizing political support. The evolution of Urdu from a language of cultural exchange to a marker of Muslim identity reflects the politicization of language along religious lines. As Urdu became associated with Muslims and Hindi with Hindus, linguistic differences were increasingly framed within the context of religious division. Moreover, the redefinition of Urdu and Hindi along religious lines reflects broader identity construction and boundary-making processes within nationalist discourse. As Chatterjee (1993) argues, nationalist movements employ linguistic and religious symbols as means of legitimizing political claims and asserting cultural distinctiveness. The adoption of Urdu as Pakistan's national language can, therefore, be read as the final stage of the development of Muslim nationalism, whereby the choice of language represents a deliberate assertion of Muslim identity and distinctiveness.

Fall of a Muslim Empire and Its Aftermath

Awadh was annexed by the British in 1856, ending centuries worth of Muslim rule in the region and bringing it directly under the control of the colonial state. The annexation was rejected by the local populace and is regarded as one of the reasons that led to the outbreak of the Indian Revolt of 1857.[111] Delhi became a major center of activity early in the uprising, serving as the main rebel

[111] Historians have differed in their descriptions of the events of 1857, reflecting different perspectives and interpretations of the event. South Asian historians, politicians and nationalists prefer the term 'First War of Indian Independence', framing it as a precursor to India's independence from the British and emphasizing its anti-colonial dimensions. 'The Indian Mutiny' was a term first propagated by the British, and continues to be used by historians.

headquarters. In response, the British launched a siege operation in June of 1857. After months of intense fighting, British troops entered Delhi on the 14th of September. The scene that unfolded thereafter was pure chaos, with the official orders stating the troops to 'shoot every soul.'[112] Thousands lost their lives, and nearly half the population was displaced to the city's outskirts.[113] The fall of Delhi was a significant blow to the rebels, but it would take another six months of fighting for the British to crush the resistance and formally establish the British Raj completely. The annexation of Awadh and the subsequent fall of Delhi were landmark events that forever changed the political and literary landscape of Northern India. Delhi and Lucknow, who were considered the London and Paris of their milieu, had fallen under British control.[114] The two great centers of Muslim high culture and arts were now in disarray as their inhabitants learned to adjust under new leadership.

With time, two distinct and opposing responses emerged within the Muslim public sphere: loyalist or anti-colonial. The loyalist view emphasized collaboration with the government, seeing it as an opportunity to exalt their own status. Or, more simply, it was more advantageous to agree with the government than go against it. The anti-colonial view valued self-determination, and any foreign control was seen as an imposition rather than an opportunity. As periodicals became the main form of public debate in the late nineteenth century, these opposing views would be expressed and contested through the literary public sphere.[115]

Such a framing implies a refusal to obey orders and frames the event as negative. The Indian Revolt of 1857 is a neutral phrasing that does not emphasize either aspects.

[112] William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 42.

[113] Rakhshanda Jalil, *Liking Progress, Loving Change: A Literary History of the Progressive Writers' Movement in Urdu* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9.

[114] Jalil, *Liking,* 14.

[115] Dubrow, *Cosmopolitan,* 33.

Aligarh Congress Controversy

The Aligarh School was in line with the aims of the Aligarh Movement, a significant educational and sociopolitical reform movement that emerged after the events of 1857. The movement was started by Syed Ahmed Khan, and among its notable members included Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali, Shibli Nomani, and Allama Iqbal. Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali (1837 – 1914) was a renowned Urdu poet and maintained close association with the movements founder. Shibli Nomani (1857 – 1914) was an Islamic scholar and writer. His most notable works included a comprehensive biography of the Prophet Muhammad, which is considered one of the earliest and most authoritative biographies of the Prophet in the Urdu language. Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877 – 1938) was a poet, philosopher, and politician. He advocated for the establishment of a separate Muslim state and remained at the forefront of the nationalist movement. The founder of the Aligarh School was a staunch loyalist. During the Revolt, Syed Ahmed Khan was able to win favor with the British government by deceiving Muslim rebels and reporting intelligence to the British.[116] In his view, the rebellion was no more than an act of 'ingratitude' by the Indians against the good government the English had provided.[117] He advocated for English education, through which he believed that Muslims could improve their position in society as it allowed them access to various bureaucratic and administrative positions within the colonial state. In 1888, he was knighted by the British government for his contributions to education and social reform in India. On the contrary, the writers of Awadh Punch were openly critical of British colonialism.[118]

[116] Shamim Akhtar, "Aligarh and Muslim Politics," in Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol. 78 (Indian History Congress, 2017), 23.
[117] Akhtar, "Aligarh", 23.
[118] I have already discussed the various figures that populated the literary landscape of the *Awadh Punch,* and also discussed the magazines portrayal of the British government earlier in this thesis. Therefore, I do not think it is necessary to repeat it again.

One way that this difference of opinion becomes visible is through the Aligarh-Congress Controversy. The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 to represent Indian interests as India's first modern political party.[119] It advocated for greater Indian participation in legislative bodies and administrative reforms. While most of its early leaders were Hindu, Congress was open to members of all communities and did not limit its membership along religious or communal lines. Between 1876 to 1879, the party worked to extend its influence in the Northern states, of which Awadh was a part of. It launched several recruitment campaigns and successfully recruited members from the Northern Indian elite.[120] The party's growing influence in the region was a cause of concern for both the British and the Aligarh School. While the Congress maintained that it was loyal to British rule, it actively challenged imperial control by calling for greater Indian representation in government and for the Civil Services Exams to be held in India rather than London.[121] Additionally, a growing Congress presence in the region threatened the *Aligarh School* as it competed with their political influence in the region.

As a consequence, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan initiated an anti-Congress campaign on the recommendation of Theodore Beck.[122] While the British government did not directly involve itself in these anti-Congress campaigns, the fact that Sir Syed was awarded knighthood within four days of his aggressive anti-Congress speech at Lucknow serves as circumstantial evidence for their covert encouragement.[123]

[119] Richard Sisson and Stanley Wolpert, Congress and Indian Nationalism the Pre-Independence Phase (Berkeley: University of California Press, 3.

[120] Amales Tripathi, Indian National Congress and the Struggle for Freedom, 1885-1947 (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2014), 13.

[121] The demand for Civil Service Examinations to be held in India was first put forward in 1884 by future Congress leader, Surendranath Banerjea at a lecture in Aligarh. At the time, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan expressed his agreement but would later go on to change his stance.

[122] Theodore Beck was a British civil servant who was considered as one of Sir Syed's mentors.

[123] Akhtar, "Aligarh", 763.

The *Awadh Punch* routinely published in favour of Congress. Figure X is a cartoon showing the magazines position on the issue. Titled 'The Battle between Good and Evil', the cartoons depicts the anti-Congress lobby as a snake trying to constrict Mother India however, she defends herself by squeezing the snakes neck and keeping it at an arms length. Through the cartoon, the *Awadh Punch* is relaying the message that the Aligarh School's anti-Congress movement is a deceptive snake whose real intent is to keep India from progressing.

Figure 26 'Battle Between Good and Evil'
Published in Awadh Punch, May 1890.

Poetry As A Political Weapon

The importance of poetry in the Muslim culture of Northern India cannot be overstated. During the Mughal era, poets were seen to have an exalted status and regarded with great respect.[124] Poetry permeated society through oral traditions, with poets reciting their works in public gatherings, royal courts, and religious assemblies. Later, as a print culture developed in the nineteenth century, poetry found a place in newspapers and pamphlets. After 1857, the poetry that

[124] For a more expanded study on the place of poetry within the Mughal court, see: John Richards, The Mughal Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

emerged from the Muslim public sphere had a distinctly political character. It was recited at political conferences, on which Aligarh writer Hali commented that it "provided an atmosphere to these conferences with which Muslims are naturally familiar".[125] The *Aligarh School* employed the use of *sher e ashob* poetry for furthering its own political agenda. *Sher e ashob* (the city of sorrow) was a genre of Urdu classical poetry that centered around themes of social, cultural, and religious decay.[126] The *sher e ashob* genre was characterized by emotive language deployed to evoke a sense of loss for a forgone glorious Muslim past.

One of the most prominent *ashobs* of the nineteenth century was written by Aligarh writer, Altaf Hussain Hali. It was a thirty-four-page poem titled *Shikwah-e-Hind* (Complaint to India) that blamed the country for the loss of Muslim prestige.

In the poem, Hali forges a separation between the Indian nation and Muslim culture. He notes that 'as long as we were not called Indians, we had a certain distinctiveness, however, you [Hindustan] have ruined us.' [127] By delineating 'Indian' as a category distinct to Muslims, the poem tries to cultivate a sense of communal unity amongst the Muslim *Ashraf*, which was threatened to fragment as more and more of its members joined the Congress.[128] It received an enthusiastic response from the Muslim *ashraf* and spurred many imitations as similar *ashobs* began to appear in newspapers across Northern India.

Awadh Punch opposed the Aligarh School's attempts to create a political community whose foundations relied on the separation of the Muslim community from the larger Indian nation. To

[125] Eve Tignol, *Grief and the Shaping of Muslim Communities in North India, c. 1857–1940s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 95.
[126] Carla R. Petievich, "Poetry of the Declining Mughals: The 'Shahr Āshob'," Journal of South Asian Literature 25, no. 1 (1990), 100.
[127] Tignol, *Grief,* 87.
[128] The Muslim *Ashraf* class was comprised of the nobility, and later the educated middle classes.

counter the narrative perpetuated by the Aligarh School, the magazine began to publish its own poetry targeting them. For instance, Akbar Illahbadi published the following verse:

"Yesterday, I came across some shameless banians.
Upon seeing them, I covered myself in my self-respect
When asked, what makes you cover from them?
I replied that even being around them makes one dimmer." [129]

In this verse, the author refers to the *Aligarh School* as 'banians.' The word 'banian' literally translates to merchant classes, which in the nineteenth century was used to describe those Indian merchants who enjoyed a significant rise in both their financial standing and influence due to their collaboration with the colonial government. In this context, however, it means "sell-out." The implication here is that one must guard themselves with self-respect when confronted with the ideas of the Aligarh School. This makes sense when we consider how the *Awadh Punch* frequently described the Aligarh School as 'Nechri' (lowly) who had lost their own self-respect by showing loyalty or 'selling out' to the colonial government.[130]

In another verse, the *Awadh Punch* attempts to use the same tactics as the Aligarh School by appealing to the Muslim nation as a unit. However, instead of lamenting the lost glory of old times, it offers a forward-looking approach:

"We are an enlightened nation, akin to a firefly
Though darkness lurks in the periphery
But why not make ourselves notorious for fighting back?
For we are imbued with a new light (or passion)."[131]

[129] Quoted in: Gul Ahmed, "Moulana Altaf Hussain Hali and Owdh Punch," *Rekhta* 5 (January 5, 2022): 152–74. The article is in Urdu, and the translation of the verse is my own.
[130] The term 'Nechri' is defined as new religion invented by Sir Syed Ahmed himself. The adherents of this religion are defined by their slavery to the British. The word itself is likely derived from the Urdu word 'Nechaar' meaning 'lowly'. Awadh Punch, Lucknow, 10 August 1880.
[131] Quoted in: Gul Ahmed, "Moulana Altaf Hussain Hali and Owdh Punch," *Rekhta* 5 (January 5, 2022): 152–74. The article is in Urdu, and the translation of the verse is my own.

Here, the 'darkness' can be interpreted to mean either colonization or the threat of the *Aligarh School's* divisive ideas. But despite any challenges that may occur, the verse urges its readers to imbue themselves with the spirit of resistance. In doing so, it provides a forward-looking counter-narrative to the *shahr-e-ashob* verses of the *Aligarh School.* The use of poetry by both sides illustrates how the art form was politicized to advance their respective agendas.

Hindu-Muslim Unity versus Muslim Separatism: The Development of a Nationalist Discourse

Indian nationalism was still in its infancy in the late nineteenth century. The demand for independence had not yet been fully articulated in the form we would later see in the twentieth century. The role of the vernacular press was a key precursor to this development. Christopher Bayley writes, 'It is difficult to imagine the emergence and spread of mature nationalism without the prior spread of the printing press and the newspaper.'[132] Within the nationalist discourse in the Muslim public sphere, the two competing ideas were that of a unified pluralist India or a separate Muslim nation.

*Awadh Punch e*mphasized Hindu-Muslim unity. Despite being a 'Muslim' newspaper, it refrained from taking positions that could be interpreted as either Pro-Muslim or anti-Hindu. In a time when it was unusual for an Urdu newspaper to cover Hindu events, Awadh Punch stood out by featuring numerous articles on Holi and Divali.[133] Similarly, Figure X shows a cartoon published in the magazine where Mr. Awadh Punch is seen greeting Holi, portrayed by an Indian woman carrying a dried husk above her head.

[132] Bayly, *Empire,* 242.
[133] Awadh Punch, Lucknow, August and September issues, 1880.

Figure 27 'Mr Awadh Punch meets Holi'
Published in Awadh Punch, March 1891.

Another way it fostered inclusivity for Hindus and Sikhs was by using the Gregorian calendar date on its front page, whereby, in contrast, others of its kind featured the Islamic (*Hijri*) calendar date instead.[134] The magazine's regard for inclusivity was reflected in its readership, as it was subscribed by Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims alike.[135]

The words 'Awadh Punch is witty and free' (*Awadh Punch azad o zarif hai*) featured on the title page of each issue truly captured its cosmopolitan nature as it did not tie itself down to any religion or school. In a similar analysis, Jennifer Dubrow claims that the magazine was part of an 'Urdu Cosmopolis' comprised of a network of readers and writers who identified themselves based on language rather than religion.[136] Furthermore, *Awadh Punch* was decidedly Pro-Congress, with its proprietor joining the party early on in 1877.[137]

[134] S. Akbar Zaidi, *Making a Muslim: Reading Publics and Contesting Identities in Nineteenth-Century North India* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 164.
[135] Lists of Subscribers *(Rasid e Zar)* appear in several issues of the *Awadh Punch.*
[136] Dubrow,*Cosmopolitan,* 7.
[137] Ali Javad Zaidi, *A History of Urdu Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2017), 253.

On the contrary, the *Aligarh School* was increasingly separatist in their narrative. Hesitant to criticize the British for Muslim downfall, the blame was instead transferred to the land itself. An early example of this narrative can be found in the lecture of Mohsin ul Mulk's (a strong advocate of the Aligarh School) speech in 1873. Addressing an audience of students, he claimed that the true cause of Muslim decline is "the adoption of India as a homeland and forsaking of their original homes." [138] Hali's 'Complaint to Hind' followed this same narrative, as I have already illustrated above. In a sense, this response can be read as a self-defense mechanism by the Muslim *ashraf*. While it was true that British rule in India usurped centuries of Muslim dominance in the region, Muslim *ashraf* such as those belonging to the Aligarh School still benefited from the outcome. They could maintain their privileged status by pandering to the colonial state.[139] A United India would mean that they would be reduced to a minority and, therefore lose their privileged status, as Hindus far outnumbered Muslims in areas outside of Northern India. The *Awadh Punch* group did not hesitate to point out the inherent hypocrisy of the separatist argument. The use of *ashob* poetry to paint the imagery of Muslim decline was seen as manipulative and opportunistic. This sentiment was aptly conveyed by Akbar Allahbadi of the *Awadh Punch* group:

> *Our leaders, lamenting the nation's plight, share feasts with those in command;*
> *Yet, for all their supposed distress, their belts don't loosen at hand.*[140]

The *Awadh Punch*'s emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity and its rejection of communal divisions reflected a commitment to pluralism and coexistence, which its diverse audience is a testament to. It actively resisted attempts made by other voices within the Muslim public sphere to forge a political

138 Tignol, "Grief", 97.
139 One benefit of being in the good graces of the British was higher probability of enlistment in various government positions, which then was considered a highly lucrative career path.
140 Qouted in Tignol, *Grief*, 93.

identity based on religion alone. In doing so, it played its part in shaping a more inclusive and tolerant vision of Indian nationalism.

Literary Rivals: Awadh Punch's Relationships with the Awadh Akbhar

One of the most prominent rivalries within the vernacular press of Lucknow was one between the *Awadh Punch* and the *Awadh Akbhar*. So frequently did the two publications squabble that even a government reporter noted:

> *"The Oudh Punch is at enmity with the Oudh Akhbar; therefore, neither of them loses an opportunity to have a fling with the other. The Oudh Punch is more explicit and outspoken in its attacks upon its contemporary. It usually calls the Oudh Akhbar the Banian Akhbar in contempt."*[141]

' Banian' is used in the same vein as it was about the *Aligarh School* to mean sell-out. The rivalry between both newspapers was foremost an ideological one. Where the *Awadh Punch* was vocal about its anti-colonial and nationalist politics, the *Awadh Akbar* was the opposite. The magazine's politics were characterized by a loyalty to the government, writing in support of its policies.[142] British support for the magazine had been present since its beginnings, as its proprietor, Naval Kishore, had set up his printing press with the government's help. For the remainder of the magazine's lifespan, it continued to receive patronage from the government through its purchase of fixed copies for each issue. This was a strategic investment for the colonial state, as financial support translated directly into positive reporting. The state's approval for the paper can be gauged from a statement from an official report in 1881:

[141] *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers Published in the Panjab, North-Western Provinces, Oudh, Central Provinces and Berar*, 1879, 260.
[142] Stark, *Empire*, 368.

"Of the Oudh papers, the best is the Oudh Akbhar. This paper is, however, slightly timid in time and rarely ventures to advocate strongly any important measures till they are satisfisfied that they are likely to find favour with Government." [143]

Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar (1846 - 1902) had been one of the earliest contributors to *Awadh Punch*, writing a satirical weekly column. But he would leave the magazine to instead work for the rival publication in 1879. His departure only worsened the rivalry between both magazines, as he was hired precisely because Nawal Kishore wanted 'a capable man to reply to the Awadh Punch'.[144] At the rival publication, Sharshar began writing a humorous column called 'Zarafat' (Wit). The Awadh Punch interpreted this as an attempt by its rival to capitalize on the audience it had built.

In July 1880, only a few months after Sharshar had joined the rival magazine, the *Awadh Punch* published an article titled '*Banian Akhbar ki Dhajiyan'* (The Shreds of Baniya Akhbar). It noted:

"Awadh Akbhar's use of 'wit' in this cultured manner, though hard to understand, is still worth noting. Upon seeing the title 'zarafat' (wit), one thinks it will present us with something funny, which would give us joy. But you do not see any 'zarafat' (wit), never mind 'latafat' (subtlety). All you see is a forced expression of culture and 'danishmandi ki iqtiza' (pseudo-intellectualism). They call it wit but end up writing a short story."[145]

The quoted excerpt is a call-out by the *Awadh Punch,* or perhaps even a subtle warning to remind its contemporary that while it can bribe its writers to join them (once again echoing the sentiment of 'sell-out'), it cannot purchase a sense of humor. The *Awadh Akhbar* attempts to be witty and sound intellectual, but ultimately, it fails on both fronts.

In conclusion, I have tried to demonstrate how the Muslim public sphere of the late nineteenth century is populated by a diversity of voices and that Muslim responses to colonial rule

[143] Quoted in Stark, *Empire,* 368.

[144] Firoz Husain, "Life and Works of Ratan Nath Sarshar" (dissertation, ProQuest, 2017), 13.

[145] *Awadh Punch* (July, 1880). I should note here that I first encountered this article inside Dubrow (2018) but my translation and interpretation differs slightly in how it appears in the book. For instance, what she translates as 'force of knowledge', I (as a native speaker of Urdu) translate as pseudo-intellectualism. Furthermore, she uses a slightly longer excerpt of the article to demonstrate the debates about Urdu literary forms and their proper usage whereas I limit my analysis to the rivalry.

are varied. The *Awadh Punch* is characterized by an anti-colonial stance and dedication to pluralism. *Awadh Akbbar* and *Aligarh School* are loyalists, with the latter actively promoting a separatist narrative of Muslim nationalism. This realization is particularly poignant as it enriches our understanding of the Muslim public sphere. There is no such thing as a monolithic 'Muslim' opinion; rather, there is contradiction and debate.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have tried to show the multifaceted evolution of the *Awadh Punch.* The rich satire and sharp debate within its pages contributed to the development of an Urdu public sphere in colonial Northern India. Numerous factors converged to make the emergence of *Awadh Punch* possible, including the advent of lithography, the expansion of railway lines, the lived experiences of its proprietor under colonial rule, and the transnational influence of the British *Punch*. The success of the *Awadh Punch* underscores the presence of a vibrant market for satire in colonial India, demonstrating how creative expression thrived even under oppressive conditions.

Furthermore, his thesis enriches our understanding of subversive politics within the colonial context in India. The rise of *Awadh Punch* coincides with the increasing press censorship measures by the British government in India. By examining the *Awadh Punch's* portrayal of the colonial state, it becomes evident how the Punch format, though initially imported, was ingeniously adapted in Northern India. Here, imitation and satire emerged as strategic responses to an increasingly censorious regime. The *Awadh Punch* serves as a compelling case study illustrating how restrictive censorship can stimulate the development of creative forms designed to evade it.

This thesis is also useful in enriching our understanding of the Muslim public sphere in colonial North India. Through the various debates and dialogue that the publication was engaging with its contemporaries, we see the diversity of opinions within the Muslim public sphere. It is also significant as through the *Awadh Punch;* we witness a moment in Indian history when the idea of a pluralist nationalism was not too ludicrous. In the present-day subcontinent, this is a difficult thing to envision but then that is precisely the task of examining history – drawing lessons for the present-day.

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