

## Rediscovering Munshi Newal Kishore (1836-1895)

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As a historian of nineteenth-century Iran, I have long been curious about the contribution of Munshi Newal Kishore Press to Persian literary and print cultures. Schooled in the nationalist historiographical tradition, which views Persian as solely the language of Iran, I was surprised to find that a large number of texts that constitute the canon of Iranian literature and culture were printed for the first time in Lucknow, India, and not in Tehran, Iran. A grant from the American Institute of Indian Studies, with additional support from Illinois State University for the academic year 1992-93, enabled me to travel to India and visit the vast collection of books published by Munshi Newal Kishore (1836-1895). The topic of my research project was *India's contribution to the formation of Iranian modernity*.

The Munshi Newal Kishore collection was divided between two of his great grand sons, Ram Kumar and Tej Kumar Bhargava, respectively founders of Ram Kumar Press and Tej Kumar Press of Lucknow. These two competitive sons of Bishan Narayan Bhargava each viewed himself as "the successor to Munshi Newal Kishore Press," and inherited a crucial component of the family belongings, including books, manuscripts, letters, and other historically significant documents. I was the first scholar that was granted unrestricted access to the collections by both sides of the family. This enabled me to recognize that Newal Kishore did not limit itself to the publication of Persian books, which exceeded the aggregate number of all texts published in Iran in the nineteenth century. As a publisher, Newal Kishore unified diverse linguistic, religious, and cultural trends that constitute the formative elements of Indian history and civilization. His approximately 5000 published titles included books in Arabic, Bengali, English, Hindi, Marathi, Panjabi, Pashto, Persian, Sanskrit, and Urdu. By establishing the first Indian scholarly press in Lucknow in 1858, Newal Kishore played a pioneering role in the national integration of India, the preservation of Indian literary cultures, and the formation of literary canons in Hindi, Persian, and Urdu. Highly respected by Muslim intellectuals of India, Pakistan, and Iran, he is an exemplary product of India's multiculturalism and Hinduism's ability to absorb, nourish, and coexist with other religious cultures.

My research trip to India coincided with the intensification of communal violence in the aftermath of the Ayodhya incident on December 6, 1992. Having experienced the outbreak of violence in Calcutta, I was advised to abandon my work at the National Library and postpone the planned visit to Varanasi, Hyderabad, and Bombay. Reluctantly, I returned to Delhi on

December 10 and waited impatiently for the political situation to improve. By the end of January, I concluded that staying in Delhi was a waste of precious research time and considered returning to the United States. During this period, I became more aware of the significance of Munshi Newal Kishore Press. Despite the informed advice of my friends, I decided to risk a trip to Lucknow. More informed colleagues suggested that with a name like Mohamad, I should abandon the idea. They argued that the descendants of Newal Kishore were active supporters of the BJP and would refuse to meet with me. A Lucknawi colleague informed me that the family's hostility towards Muslims led them to destroy all of Munshi Saheb's inventory of Persian, Urdu, and Arabic books and manuscripts and there would be nothing for me to see. Yet the enthusiasm generated by genuine respect shown for Newal Kishore by many Indian Muslims outweighed the disenchanting academic gossips.

A very devoted Muslim librarian at the Nadwat al-<sup>U</sup>lama seminary school expressed his utmost respect to the Hindu publisher by referring to him as "Munshi Newal Kishore rahmat Allāh <sup>al</sup>alayh," (the mercy of God be upon him), which is only evoked to recall the name of deceased Muslims who are revered. In another instance a bookbinder in Old Delhi, at a time when the walled city was under strict military curfew, enthusiastically told a story passed down from his great grand father who had perfected the art of book binding in Newal Kishore's workshop. Quoting his family patriarch in detail, he told me the story of how Newal Kishore had required all *daftari* workers to perform the *vuzu* (ablution) before starting their work on the binding of the Qur'an. For him, the Hindu Munshi was more of a Muslim than the Deputy Imam of Jama Masjid who was preaching communal violence. Another Muslim showed his utmost respect for Newal Kishore by arguing that the Munshi would definitely be admitted to heaven for his contribution to Islamic studies. The views of these three Indian Muslims about a Hindu in the wake of the Ayodhya incident, encouraged me to focus my research on Munshi Newal Kishore Press.

With neither clue nor optimism, I left for Lucknow on February 2 in search of Munshi Newal Kishore's descendants and his publication empire. The next day, after four hours of searching in the Hazrat Ganj business district that owed its growth to Munshiji, I found the names and the residence of the descendants of Newal Kishore and arranged for a meeting with Rani Lila and Ranjit Bhargava. Contrary to the pessimistic advice of my friends, they welcomed me warmly and recounted a number of Iranians who had visited them previously. The list included the late Muhammad Reza Shah who had visited Lucknow on February 25-26, 1956 and had signed Ranjit's book of autographs. Both Rani and Ranjit were well aware of Newal Kishore's contribution to the Persian language. Meher, a Parsi daughter in-law of Rani, was instrumental for publishing a list of Persian publications of the press. The portraits of Rani with Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, which adorned their living room, were indications of how Newal Kishore's fame and wealth had contributed to

the family's high political standing. Rani Lila had utilized this relationship by campaigning for the publication a commemorative stamp on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of Newal Kishore's death in 1970.

During my initial conversation with with Ranjit and Rani, I requested to visit the infamous book depot, which has been subject to scholarly speculation but had never been closely examined. My request was accepted and I was asked to return in a few days. During our conversation, Ranjit, who was in a very bad physical condition because of the death of his only son who was twenty years old, had informed me that the book collections are partly in the possession of his aunt. On the next day, with the assistance of Ram Advani, a sophisticated bookseller in Lucknow, I obtained the telephone number of Kamla Bhargava, wife of the late Tej Kumar Bhargava. I phoned her and she kindly agreed to meet with me on Sunday, February 7. The prospect of the meeting boosted my optimism. My secular colleagues were wrong in assuming that my Muslim name would be a barrier to my meeting with the family. They were in fact puzzled when I later informed them that both Rani and Kamla, political preferences aside, had unofficially adopted me as their son.

As planned, I returned to Raniji's residence on Saturday, in order to visit the book depot. After a short but valuable conversation on family history, Rani sent me down to visit the book depot, which is located below her residence. Mr. Muhammad 'Alim, the manager of the now defunct Raja Ram Kumar Press, was informed of my visit and had selected a number of books for my view. But this was not what I had in mind. I wanted to see the book depot in person. I conveyed my intentions to Mr. 'Alim, who reminded me of my own uncompromising father. He firmly refused my wishes. A co-worker informed me that he was fasting, for it was the month of Ramadan, and I should not haggle with him. I was at an impasse, but was unwilling to accept no for an answer, so I returned to Raniji and explained my situation. She personally accompanied me to the book depot and asked Mr. 'Alim not to hinder my work. This was a crucial development and I was informed that the temperamental Mr. 'Alim had a history of successfully barring access to visiting scholars who knew the value of the collection.

I was astounded at the content of the storage area. Significant titles that I had only seen mentioned in the introduction to newly edited classical texts in Iran were piled up one on top of the other. Overwhelmed with what I saw, I ran from one stack to another. To Mr. 'Alim's surprise, I climbed up to the top of book racks and began to select a copy of each book. His continuous cursing could not prevent me from a search that lasted for five hours. What brought the search to an end was not his heckling but my continuous sneezing and coughing that resulted from the unsanitary conditions. Many of the books were eaten up by worms and occasionally I ran into swarms of silverfish and other knowledge-hunting insects. I found registers of books and important



منشی نول کشور (سی۔ آئی۔ ای) مرحوم بانی مطبع اودھ اخبار لکھنؤ

Munshi Newal Kishore, 1835-1895

documents scattered haphazardly. This tomb-like depot had served the careless manager well for over fifty years as a dumping ground for old correspondences and "useless documents." My occasional grumbling about the bad conditions invited the cursing of Mr. 'Alim who had presumably never seen an individual as stubborn as himself.

After completing my search I went to see Rani Lila. Seeing my white shirt blackened by the dust and excrement, she expressed her surprise over my willingness to work under such unsanitary conditions. I replied that I had learned to kiss books long before I had learned to kiss girls. As a child I was taught to pick up books and papers lying on the ground, kiss them, clean them, and returned them to the mantel. Raniji appreciated my story and agreed that preservation of their valuable collection depended upon the cleaning and reorganizing of the book depot. I volunteered to help. She accepted gladly and suggested that we start with a meeting with her three sons, Ranjit, Luv, and Kush. We met in early March and with the consensus of the family, I spent the next three months cleaning and reorganizing the vast collection of books published by Munshi Newal Kishore Press. I hired five to ten workers to help me. We chased away herds of insects that had been feeding on these books for decades. We found over one thousand document fragments carelessly dumped in a heap to be sold later as fertilizer. Among these documents were registers of published texts, bound books, lists of workers, land deeds, and scholarly correspondences. These documents, which are now stored in nine large boxes, are a valuable resource for the study of Munshi Newal Kishore Press, the most significant nineteenth century Oriental publisher.

To appreciate the significance of Newal Kishore's contribution to the preservation of India's cultural heritage--at a time when print culture was replacing manuscript culture-- it is necessary to review the impressive list of his publications. The staff of Munshi Newal Kishore Press prepared the seminal texts of medieval history such as *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, *Akbar Nāmah*, *Tārīkh-i Firishtah*, *Tārīkh al-Muta'akhhirin*, and *Rawzat al-Sāfa*. He sponsored the translation and the publication of Sanskrit classical texts including *Bhagavadgītā*, *Upaniṣads*, *R̥gveda*, *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Matsyapurāṇa*, and *Mahābhārata* into Persian and Urdu. Among his publications were eighteenth and nineteenth century Urdu and Persian texts on the Hindu religion; many have yet to be explored by scholars of Hinduism. He also published editions of the Qur'ān and printed more books on Islam than any other nineteenth century publisher. His staff edited, translated, and printed classical Qur'anic commentaries, collections of the hadith, and Islamic legal texts in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic. Modern Islamic studies is greatly indebted to Munshi Newal Kishore for the publication of the seminal texts of both Shi'i and Sunni Islam. These included works of 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlavī, Mujaddad Alf Sānī, Imām Ghazālī, 'Abd Allāh Nasafī, Ibn 'Arabī, Muhaqqiq Tūsī, 'Allāmah Majlisī, Mu'in al-Dīn Chishtī, and Qutb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār.

By publishing classical and contemporary dictionaries and literary texts, Munshi Newal Kishore contributed to the preservation and advancement of both Persian and Urdu languages. Among the dictionaries edited and published by him were *Lughāt-i Kishūrī*, *Najm al-Lughāt Karīm al-Lughāt*, and *Nasir al-Lughāt* in Urdu and *Burhān-i Qāṭi*, *Bahār-i Ajam*, *Farhang-i Jahāngīrī*, *Farhang-i Ānandrāj*, and *Haft Qulzūm* in Persian. These classic dictionaries have been reprinted frequently. His contribution to the Persian literary world also includes publication of scholarly editions of and commentaries on *Shānāmah*, *Divān-i Ḥafiz*, *Divān-i Amīr Khusraw*, *Divān-i ‘Urfi*, and the complete works of Jāmī, Sa‘dī, Anvarī, Ṣāḥib Faryabī, Ḥazīn, Bīdīl, and Ghālib. The staff of Munshi Newal Kishore Press also translated, edited, and published an impressive number of medical dictionaries and texts in Urdu, Arabic, and Persian. Many of these texts are still used as references by contemporary Unani physicians. They are essential for any serious scholarly activity in history of medical sciences in South- and South-West Asia.

Munshi Newal Kishore was well connected to the intellectuals and statesmen of his era. He was a founding member of the Indian National Congress and in recognition of his educational endeavors had received the titles of C.I.E and the "Kaiser-e-Hind." He corresponded with and visited the poet Ghālib, the reformist Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, Nawāb Turāb ‘Alī Sālār Jang of Hyderabad, Rāja Amīr Hasan Khān of Mahmudabad, Nawāb Kalb ‘Alī Khān of Rampur, and Amīr ‘Abd al-Rahmān, the King of Afghanistan. He founded the famous Urdu daily "Oudh Akhbar," (1858), the English weekly "Oudh Review," and northern India's oldest paper mill (1871), The Upper India Paper Mills. As a publisher of books from all corners of the Asian world, he corresponded with writers, poets, and intellectuals of South-, Central-, and South-East Asia.

A trace of Munshi Newal Kishore's impressive legacy is the large number of lithographic plates in the possession of Kamla Bhargava, the owner of Tej Kumar Press. Under the directorship of Kamla Bhargava, the Tej Kumar Press still publishes in both Hindi and Urdu. Kamlaji has an active interest in the preservation of the family's legacy; she was very supportive of my research. She took me on a tour of the old publishing house and showed me the old machines and equipment. The piles of lithographic plates, in the court yard of the press, are an important trace of publishing industry in India. She gave me an unlimited access to the family collection and in exchange I helped her to reorganize and identify the books in their collection. There are a number of first impressions with extensive editorial notes and corrections in her possession. These texts reveal that some of Munshi Newal Kishore's publications had been printed earlier by another press. Approximately one hundred book contracts signed by leading Indian authors, currently in the possession of Muhammad ‘Alim, are of great significance to the study of the legal aspects of the print industry in India.

While working in the Tej Kumar Press, I came across a number of Urdu and Hindi manuscripts hidden in the middle of book bundles intended for sold to vendors. I uncovered Urdu manuscripts packed among Hindi bundles and Hindi manuscripts packed among Urdu book bundles. This may reveal a technique used by the staff of the press to smuggle manuscripts purchased by Munshi Newal Kishore and his son Parag Narayan Bhargava. The manuscripts printed by the press are easily identified; they include a distinct title page and a concluding publication statement, *Khatimat al-tab'*, which identifies the author, editor, scribe, and the year of publication. Kamlaji's book collection also includes a large number of Orientalist works and catalogues of printing equipments available for sale in Europe. It seemed to me that Munshi Newal Kishore Press kept up with the new printing technology and had purchased the equipment scattered in different parts of Bhargava estates.

My work in both Ram Kumar and Tej Kumar book depots aroused the curiosity of the family and the Indian government. Both sides of the family had come to believe that I must have been related to Munshi Newal Kishore in my previous life. Nita Bhargava Dube--a daughter of Kamalji and a supporter of my research who is working on a novel on Newal Kishore--convinced herself that I was related to Munshiji's Muslim lover. Kamlaji and her other daughter Smita Patvardhan believed that I must have owed something to Newal Kishore in my previous life. Rani Lila, in one of our earlier meetings, told me that she believed that we were related in a previous life. She became convinced when she discovered that we were both born on May 24. According to the family, there were no other possible explanations for an Iranian history professor--who was willing to work in unsanitary conditions for three months along with a team of laborers in order to preserve the legacy of a man who had died approximately hundred years earlier--coming to Lucknow at a time that they had begun the plan to demolish the old buildings built by Munshi Newal Kishore.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) believed otherwise. In February, after my second visit to Lucknow, colleagues and friends in Lucknow informed me that they had been visited by the police who were conducting an investigation on me. The police were concerned with the reoccurrence of the tragedy in Bombay and were taking precautionary measures to prevent it. My Iranian birth also sparked their interest. Why would an Iranian national want to visit frequently with a family sympathetic to BJP? They searched for a possible connection between Iran and BJP through me, a radical secularist who had been living in exile since the Revolution. It then occurred to me that I might have been under police observation since my first visit to Lucknow. On one occasion, I was visited by a Dr. A. P. Singh who introduced himself as a retired professor and scholar of the independence movement in India. His odd pattern of questioning had appeared to me very similar to classical spy movies. I saw "Dr. A. P. Singh" for the second time in Newal Kishore Estate

questioning one of the laborers with whom I had worked. Both Raniji and Kamlaji had been visited by CBI agents. Raniji, who is a leading political figure in Lucknow, had called Mr. Bakhshi, UP's Muslim Minister of Home Affairs and sought an explanation for his agents harassment of me. It seemed rather paradoxical that Raniji, the person whom a colleague had identified as a BJP supporter and had been suspected of hostility towards Muslims, had taken a firm stand to stop the police harassment of me.

During my research in Lucknow I became aware of the significance of Munshi Newal Kishore as a symbol of communal harmony in India. With the cooperation of my colleague Alison Sky, a New York based artist and the co-founder of SITE/Architects, Artists and Designers, we planned for a book exhibition highlighting Munshi Newal Kishore's contribution to the national integration of India. We failed to gain support from governmental officials in Lucknow and Delhi but Mr. Akbar Sobout, the director of the Persian Research Center in Delhi, showed great interest. Following my suggestion, he arranged for the dedication of the ninth annual conference of All India Persian Teachers' refresher Persian courses to Munshi Newal Kishore. He then invited me to organize the book exhibition at Iran Culture House in Delhi. After much hesitation in cooperating with an agency connected to the Islamic Republic, Sky and I decided to go ahead with the book exhibition. To preserve our autonomy we named the exhibition "Unity in Diversity: the Legacy of Munshi Newal Kishore Press," held May 20-30, 1993.

Preparation of the exhibition was not without controversies. Some staff members of Iran Culture House viewed the exhibition as a clear sign of cooperation between the Islamic Republic and the government of the United States of America. They viewed both Sky and I as agents of the American government; scholarly independence was an alien thought to them. What bothered them the most was Sky's appearance on the site of Iran Culture House; she refused to wear the Islamic veil. They also found it unacceptable to see an American woman issuing orders to Iranian men, including an art historian who usually organized these exhibitions. In response to agitators, Mr. Sobout requested that I work without Sky. He argued that this would neutralize the agitators who were using Sky as an excuse for advancing their political agenda. Outraged, I told him that we could solve the problem by moving the exhibition elsewhere. I began pulling down the exhibition, due to open in a couple of days. Mr. Sobout reneged, encouraged us to continue our work and promised to keep the opposition at bay. We did. But in response we invited some Indian and American women friends to the opening of the exhibition. A mixture of over ten Iranian clerics and twenty-five unveiled women mingling in their midst created a surreal situation and a new crisis.

The Iranian ambassador, attending the exhibition, viewed this as a cultural embarrassment and demanded an explanation from the Cultural Consulate who



had seen the political advantage of organizing an exhibition commemorating a Hindu publisher at the height of Muslim-Hindu tension. The threat of pulling down the exhibition and organizing a press conference in response to the demand that no unveiled women appear at the exhibition, enabled us to subdue the demands for uniformity during an event celebrating cultural diversity.

To preserve the legacy of Munshi Newal Kishore, I initiated a proposal for the establishing a library in his name. This was welcomed by a number of institutions including the Doon School. Luvraj Kumar, the chair of the board of directors of the Doon School, proposed to establish a Munshi Newal Kishore Collection in a section of the School's newly built library. Dr. A. R. Bedar, the Director of Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library, Patna, proposed that a Munshi Newal Kishore library should be established in an Muslim institution such as Jama'a Milliyya Islamiyya or the Hamdard Institute in Delhi. The Cultural Consulate of the Islamic Republic of Iran is also studying the possibility of naming its library after Munshi Newal Kishore. There is also a proposal for the establishment of a Munshi Newal Kishore Library on Bhargava Estate.

On another front, I am cooperating with Professor C. M. Naim of the University of Chicago in organizing a conference on the centennial of Munshi Newal Kishore's death in 1995. I hope that these efforts will encourage researchers to reevaluate Munshiji's contribution to India's multiculturalism and generate interests in the study of Indo-Persian cultural formations. By microfilming a large collection of book published by Munshi Newal Kishore Press, which was in part given to me as a gift by Rani Lila and Kamla Bhargava, I hope to make accessible to scholars the textual materials for such works.