

# Lithographic Labor

## *Locating Muslim Artisans in the Print Economy*

### FROM SCRIBAL TREATISE TO LITHOGRAPHIC STRIKE

In 1885 Karimullah Khan, a court scribe in the small North Indian city of Rampur, compiled a series of directives explaining the role of scribes in print work. For a scribe to describe printing is unsurprising, as print in South Asian Perso-Arabic script languages—Urdu, Persian, and others—had been popularized, not through typographic letterpresses, but through lithography. Publishers relied on scribes to copy texts for lithographic print. But Karimullah Khan did not write out the directions in a printed textbook or with the support of a regional lithographic press. Instead, he compiled them in a vibrantly decorated Persian-language manuscript (figure 1), with patronage from the reigning nawab of Rampur, which, at the time, was a quasi-autonomous princely state under British colonial suzerainty. The text, in most observable ways, conformed to a long-standing Indian Persian tradition of manuscript textual production about scribal work.

Titled *Daftar-i khattāt* or *The Book of Scribes*, the text described the history and practice of *nasta'liq*, the style of script commonly used for Persian, Urdu, and several other Perso-Arabic script languages in South Asia. Early chapters described “the drawing of smooth lines” and “the preparing of margins,” topics that would not have been out of place in any Persian calligraphy treatise from the preceding centuries.<sup>1</sup> But the final chapter was titled “The Art of Print,” marking a significant departure from the earlier scribal treatises.<sup>2</sup>

In this unusual addendum, scribes learned the art of lithography. Karimullah described how to make, hold, and use a lithographic pencil—a grease crayon—to write on paper that would then be transferred to the lithographic stones. He traced



FIGURE 1. The intricately decorated first page of the *Daftar-i khattāt* of Karimullah Khan. The script is a good example of *nasta'liq* in manuscript form. (1885. Pers., no. 2454, Raza Library, Rampur, Uttar Pradesh).

this process of transference, describing how a scribe could move his text from paper to stone:

Whenever printing is required, the aforementioned [grease] pencil is taken up and used to write upon the recommended starched paper [*kāghaz-i āhārdār*]. After that, the [lithographic] stone is heated to a moderate level over the burning charcoal, and the copy paper is slightly dampened, and then the side upon which words are written is placed onto the printing stone [*sang-i munṭabī*'], until all the letters have reached the stone in reversed form. . . . The letters on the stone are then covered with an ointment of water and gum Arabic [*ṣamgh-i 'arabī*] and left for one night.<sup>3</sup>

Karimullah Khan then described the process of applying ink and oil to the stones in the morning, to transfer the text from the stones to printing paper, as well as the importance of “mirror-writing”—writing in reverse—directly on lithographic stones. This, he explained, could be used to “correct” texts after they had been transferred to the stones and before printing.<sup>4</sup> The text thus suggested that knowledge of lithography was not so different from the ability to fashion a reed pen or to form smooth lines. Karimullah portrayed lithography as part of the region’s scribal tradition, a technology that allowed scribal continuity, important for scribes who hoped to demonstrate their respectability and skill.

Half a century later, in late April 1935, lithographic press workers at several of the most prominent Muslim-owned presses in the city of Lahore walked out on strike. The workers were employed by the city’s largest Urdu-language newspaper, *Zamīndār* (The landlord), as well as at two local presses that printed Urdu, Arabic, and Persian books and periodicals: the Mansur Steam Press and the Muslim Printing Press.<sup>5</sup> Many of the striking scribes were employed as independent pieceworkers for the presses, and they demanded more consistent access to work and pay. They were joined by machine-men and other nonscribal lithographic press workers—a broad community of press *kārīgars* who complained of stagnant wages and delays in payment in the context of the global economic depression.<sup>6</sup>

The press workers’ strike attracted attention from all-India and regional unions and leftist parties. As left-leaning organizations across Punjab distributed pamphlets to the strikers and passed resolutions of support, colonial administrators assigned to monitor “dangerous associations” fretted that regional trade unions and communist groups might expand their reach to the so-called Muslim presses of urban Punjab.<sup>7</sup> While the striking workers apparently expressed limited interest in these groups, the strike did spark efforts to organize a union for *kātibs* or copyists or scribes, coordinated by the larger Punjab Press Workers’ Association.<sup>8</sup> Attempts to organize a union specifically for *kātibs* are suggestive of scribes’ continued relevance to book production, a widespread sentiment that they were taken advantage of by press managers, and social and economic distinctions that separated them from other press workers.

Karimullah Khan's *Daftar-i khattāṭ* and the strike of lithographic press workers in Lahore seem unrelated at first. After all, they were separated by fifty years and over three hundred miles. The *Daftar-i khattāṭ* was written in a small provincial city, where manuscript scribes often relied on elite princely patronage. It reflected the fact that print had not fully replaced manuscript production but had developed alongside it, with scribes engaged in both forms of production. The strike took place in a context of urban industrial print capitalism. The strikers walked out from industrialized lithographic presses—factories—that employed scores of workers, not only scribes but also machine-men, ink makers, stone wipers, book-binders, and others.

But these seemingly distinct moments were, in fact, part of a larger, shared history of lithographic labor. Muslim scribes asserted narratives about technological change in the field of book production that informed their economic and social relationships within the expanding North Indian lithographic print economy. Claiming a distinct Muslim tradition for scribal work, scribes sought to distinguish themselves from growing cadres of nonscribal lithographic workers, even as they sometimes aligned with these nonscribal press laborers during conflicts with press management. The *Daftar-i khattāṭ* and the Lahore lithographic strike reflect a connected history through which scribes and other lithographic press workers negotiated radical technological and social change within their spaces of labor.

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This book is a history of Muslim artisan communities and their engagement with technological change in colonial India. But in many ways, it is also a history of print. The rapid development of the Urdu print economy in mid-nineteenth-century India meant that religious framings of trades and technologies moved quickly across the Indian subcontinent and sometimes beyond it.<sup>9</sup> Through print, Muslim religious traditions for work were contested and reinterpreted by artisans and laborers. Although many Muslim artisans could not read or were semiliterate, new publications circulated within artisan communities through a combination of literacy and orality by the 1860s. Texts were printed with the assumption that they would be read aloud and circulated within artisans' neighborhoods and workshops, and they ultimately shaped how workers understood both their trades and their religious practices.

Book production itself also underwent radical change in its organization and technologies from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The *kāriḡars* who worked at lithographic presses and produced publications about technological change negotiated shifting relationships between social status, religion, and technological knowledge. Although I have begun this book with a study of how scribes and other workers negotiated the emerging and industrializing print economy through Muslim traditions, I do not suggest that their experiences were representative of North Indian artisans more generally. On

the contrary, I show that the experiences of lithographic laborers were often exceptional. Scribes saw greater elite Muslim—and even colonial—acceptance of their religious traditions for their trade than the other communities, such as tailors and carpenters, analyzed in this book. The archival sources for print workers' histories are also more extensive than the archives for most of the other communities studied here, given their higher levels of literacy and the centrality of the written word to their understanding of their trade. Still, it seems appropriate to consider how lithographic press workers asserted Muslim pasts in the print economy, because it is through their labor that we have access to many of the traditions analyzed in subsequent chapters.<sup>10</sup>

In the last two decades, a reconsideration of South Asian print history has sparked scholarly interventions that center presses within the political and religious economies of colonial India. These works have analyzed the rise of commercial publishers as intellectual and social representatives of new Indian middle classes, as well as the role that they played in asserting and defining religious communities.<sup>11</sup> Recently, this scholarship has also turned to the question of how publishers understood and engaged with print technology, including through reference to their religious traditions. Megan Robb, for instance, has argued that the proprietors of North Indian Muslim-run presses characterized publication of books and periodicals as a "*farz*, or duty understood in religious terms."<sup>12</sup> Outside of the South Asian context, the recent work of Ahmed El Shamsy highlights the role of Arab press editors as intellectual actors, several of whom tied "modern institutions of knowledge" to classical Arab-Islamic thought.<sup>13</sup>

This chapter builds on this recent scholarship, while also positioning presses as sites of labor, asking how press laborers themselves made sense of shifting technologies of production and whether press workers developed distinct intellectual traditions surrounding their work. This is important because lithographic presses relied on the persistence of long-standing scribal communities, while also precipitating new forms of scribal training and the consolidation of nonscribal lithographic laboring cadres. My use of "artisan Islam" in this chapter centers Muslim pasts that scribes asserted as they negotiated lithographic technologies and models of training.

Lithographic press workers developed their own narratives about the relationship between religious identities and lithographic work, which were often distinct from those asserted by press owners and managers. But Muslim lithographic laborers' engagement with a Muslim tradition for printing was stratified. It reflected social and economic differences between scribes who could claim to be rooted in manuscript traditions, scribes who trained within the presses, and other lithographic laborers, including ink rollers, machine-men, and stone wipers, some of whom were illiterate. Muslim traditions for scribal work and print labor ultimately served to connect manuscript scribes of 1880s Rampur to lithographic strikers of 1930s Lahore.



### SCRIBES, BOOK WORKERS, AND THE RISE OF LITHOGRAPHY

Prior to the popularization of lithography in India after 1824, scribes and calligraphers were typically employed in three types of overlapping positions. First, scribes were employed in courtly settings, as state and personal secretaries. Second, scribes and calligraphers were employed producing manuscripts in workshops sponsored by wealthy or royal families.<sup>14</sup> In the most elite of these workshops, there were high levels of scribal differentiation, with those from the most prestigious educational lineages working as *khūshnavīses*, calligraphers producing calligraphic art and highly prized manuscripts, and larger numbers working as *kātibis* (scribes), producing most texts. In the manuscript workshops of smaller courts or noble families, however, these categories were sometimes collapsed.<sup>15</sup> Finally, scribes could find employment by offering their services to copy books, letters, and other texts for the public, usually paid by the piece. Organized into small independent workshops, these scribes were often trained by their fathers or apprenticed to another member of the trade community.

In both courtly workshops and independent operations, scribes were joined in book production by other workers, such as bookbinders, ink makers, and illustrators.<sup>16</sup> Just as independent bookbinding workshops often cluster around printing houses in India today, these aligned artisan communities historically clustered together in Indian bazaars. Scribes' traditions about scribal labor and book production—those referenced in Karimullah Khan's work—were recorded frequently in manuscript form.

In many regions of the world and in linguistic traditions in which the transition to print relied on movable type, print threatened the structures of scribal employment. But in South Asian lithographic traditions the demand for scribes expanded, and scribes learned new forms of book production. From the 1780s, European employees of the British East India Company at Fort William in Calcutta promoted typographic printing for Persian, Urdu, and other languages that used the Perso-Arabic script, as did missionaries, who hoped to use print to spread the Bible and Christianity. Representatives of the colonial state promoted typographic printing because they believed that it would lessen the Company's dependence on Indian munshis, or secretarial scribes, who acted as writers and often also as translators, communicating between the Company and Indian elites.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, much of the previous scholarship on colonial-era scribal transitions has focused on secretarial scribes and their navigation of changing modes of employment in what Bhavani Raman frames as the "colonial bureaucratic order."<sup>18</sup> But even as secretarial scribes asserted a new clerical middle-class-ness centered on the bureaucratic office, other communities of scribes retained artisanal modes of production. While some secured the patronage of local elites within large manuscript workshops, most maintained small family workshops from which they were commissioned. It was primarily these "artisanal" scribes and

calligraphers—rather than secretarial scribes, who occupied a distinct social and class status by the mid-nineteenth century—for whom lithographic labor offered a pathway to sustain their trade and skills.

The movable-type print used at Fort William never attracted large-scale readership. Instead, it was primarily used for printing language textbooks and readers to educate new Company employees. Nineteenth-century experiments in Perso-Arabic movable type overcame many of the technical challenges experienced by earlier attempts to render the script legible in type, including problems rendering letter compounds and dots.<sup>19</sup> Despite increased legibility, typography was not embraced by many Indian readers or producers of Perso-Arabic script books. On the production side, this was partially due to the high cost of obtaining and running a movable-type press in comparison to a lithographic press. It also stemmed from aesthetics, because *nast'aliq* features sloping lines and curves that early movable type was unable to reproduce.<sup>20</sup>

The spread of Perso-Arabic script print in India began in earnest after the introduction of lithography in 1824, when the British East India Company acquired lithographic presses for each of its presidencies. The trade was rapidly popularized over the subsequent two decades by cadres of private Indian publishers, who required the labor of an expanding number of scribes.<sup>21</sup> Over the following decades, Indian-owned lithographic printing houses flourished across the subcontinent.<sup>22</sup> Lithography dominated Perso-Arabic script printing to the near exclusion of typography. It was also frequently used for other Indian languages and scripts that were more easily rendered in movable type, in part because the economic barriers to entry were lower for lithographic than typographic publishers.

By the late 1860s, Indian-run lithographic printing houses not only dominated local markets but also exported books abroad to Indian diasporas and other communities who read Perso-Arabic script languages.<sup>23</sup> From its inception, lithographic printing in India was a significant site of employment for scribes, and Indian printed books mirrored their manuscript predecessors. They often included extensive colophons that identified the scribe, as well as versified chronograms to indicate the date of publication. Though this practice diminished slowly through the 1880s and 1890s, even early twentieth-century printed texts sometimes identified the scribe or scribes responsible for their composition.<sup>24</sup>

#### CLAIMING PERSIANATE SCRIBAL PASTS FOR LITHOGRAPHY

Karimullah Khan composed his scribal history in Persian, reflecting the North Indian and transregional pasts that he sought to claim for scribes as they transitioned into the print economy. The pace of the decline of Persian in nineteenth-century India is sometimes overstated, but by the mid-1880s, when Karimullah Khan wrote his treatise, printing in Urdu in North India dwarfed that in Persian.<sup>25</sup>

The British East India Company had discarded Persian as an official language in the 1830s, but the language had persisted in an official capacity for several decades in many princely states like Rampur. However, even Rampur changed its official language to Urdu in the 1870s.<sup>26</sup> Karimullah Khan asserted scribal rootedness in a specific set of traditions associated with Persian linguistic and literary practice by selecting Persian as his language of composition, rather than choosing the “vernacular” Urdu, as many other late nineteenth-century scribal treatises had done.

The scribal traditions referenced in the *Daftar-i khattāt* emerged through a long period of Persian-language literary and administrative dominance in several regions of South Asia.<sup>27</sup> In North India, Persian was patronized by the Ghaznavids from the eleventh century but became the primary literary and political language of North Indian dynasties over the course of the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries.<sup>28</sup> The scribal practices associated with this linguistic space were rooted in a transregional calligraphic tradition that had developed out of Arabic but had consolidated specifically for writing Persian. Several of these practices, and specifically *nasta‘liq* script, emerged in the fifteenth century in Khorasan, the region that is today eastern Iran and western Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup>

Earlier scribal treatises on *nasta‘liq* carefully traced the evolution of the script back to Khorasan, while also emphasizing the polycentric nature of expertise in calligraphy across North India, the Deccan, Central Asia, Iran, and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>30</sup> Tracing one’s educational lineage to earlier greats from Iran or Central Asia, or even being able to produce a convincing imitation of their work, remained a mark of scribal prestige well into the twentieth century in India. Karimullah Khan sought to link the emerging lithographic work to these historical worlds of *nasta‘liq* and manuscript production. Citing his own *ustād*, famed manuscript scribe ‘Ewwaz ‘Ali Malihabadi, as the inspiration for the text, he emphasized the importance of learning “the rules of writing” from teachers “possessed of grace” in contexts “free of temptation and sin.”<sup>31</sup> In doing so, he argued for scribal social and educational exclusivity. For Karimullah Khan, a scribe could not be effective or respectable without a connection to the models of training and education associated with the transregional spheres of Perso-Arabic scribal production, regardless of whether he worked in lithographic or manuscript production.

#### BROADENING SCRIBAL CLASSES

Karimullah Khan’s *Daftar-i khattāt* was far from the only late nineteenth-century text that addressed potential lithographic scribes. Other texts operated from a very different set of assumptions about the social positionality, training, and backgrounds of scribes. They reflected the increased demand for scribal skill that accompanied the rise of large-scale lithographic workshops, and the



expansion of the trade to include scribal workers without the hereditary and educational backgrounds that Karimullah Khan valorized. For instance, in Kanpur (Cawnpore) in 1874, a scribe named Muhammad ‘Abdul Rahman had compiled his own treatise. Titled *Rail khushnavīsī* (Rail calligraphy), the text was written in Urdu, rather than Persian, and it was printed through lithography, rather than copied in a manuscript by a scribe. Most significantly, rather than addressing scribes who had learned manuscript production in princely workshops, ‘Abdul Rahman wrote for “boys” who had learned to “write, but in poor hand.”<sup>32</sup>

‘Abdul Rahman proposed a new, “easier” model of learning *nasta‘liq* for scribal work. He centered this model on an extended metaphor of the railways, in which the “ink is the engine” and “every letter is as clear and cleanly made as a railway line.”<sup>33</sup> He suggested that this model of learning scribal work could be picked up easily by boys who hoped to find *rozgār* or employment, including in the rapidly expanding lithographic presses of Kanpur. Indeed, the book was printed by Kanpur’s largest Indian-owned press, the Nizami Press, in part to improve the skill set of its potential workers.<sup>34</sup> ‘Abdul Rahman noted that the text also had the support of the British director of public education for the region, who saw it as teaching employable skills.<sup>35</sup>

Karimullah Khan wrote with the assumption that his treatise would supplement, not supplant, educational lineages that provided training for manuscript scribes. Conversely, while ‘Abdul Rahman noted his own connections to a prominent regional scribal lineage, he assumed that his readers would not have access to this model of training and that they would learn their skills primarily for press labor. He provided these boys with a basic command of scribal work that would allow them to earn “a few rupees” by producing piecework or taking up apprenticeships through the presses.<sup>36</sup> He thus contributed to the creation of a new cadre of scribes, cultivated specifically for the lithographic print economy.

Moreover, where Karimullah Khan described the mechanical processes of lithography for scribes, ‘Abdul Rahman assumed that new scribes would learn the mechanical skills of lithography within the presses. Thus he did not provide a detailed description of the technical processes of printing. He focused instead on the work that a student would do on his *waslī*, a practice pasteboard, emphasizing that repeated exercises there would lead to sufficient improvements to find work and additional training.<sup>37</sup> This reflected not only his assumption that scribes would continue to learn the trade within the presses but also the fact that within large presses like the Nizami Press, workers were increasingly specialized. While a scribe in a small press in Rampur might realistically need to know how to apply gum Arabic to lithographic stones before printing, in larger urban presses this work was done by emerging cadres of nonscribal laborers who were often trained in specific, differentiated technical practices. Even as ‘Abdul Rahman sought to expand the potential scribal labor force to boys without the prestigious training

preferred by Karimullah Khan, he also suggested a more circumscribed role for them within the presses.

#### SCRIBAL KNOWLEDGE AS MUSLIM KNOWLEDGE

Despite significant differences in the assumed class and social positionalities of their audiences, both *Daftar-i khattāt* and *Rail khushnavīsī* are notable because they tied scribal work to a Muslim religious identity and practice. It is important to note here that scribes working in Persian, Urdu, and other languages that used Perso-Arabic script had historically been drawn from multiple religious communities. The Mughal court, its successor states, and regional elites regularly patronized Hindu caste and community groups that were seen as “scribal” in nature, most notably *kayasthas*, including for Persian and Urdu manuscripts. Members of these communities continued to secure employment as producers of *nasta‘līq* and other Perso-Arabic scripts through the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Until the early nineteenth century, non-Muslim scribes were often featured in Persian scribal treatises as potential models of scribal work.

Among the most prominent North Indian, Persian-language scribal treatises authored in the period immediately preceding the rise of lithographic print was the *Tazkirah-yi khūshnavīsān* (Compendium of calligraphers). It was composed in 1824 by Ghulam Muhammad Dehlvi, a scribe based in Lucknow, and it provided advice on how to undertake scribal work and detailed biographies of prominent scribes.<sup>39</sup> Dehlvi’s 1824 treatise profiled several *kayastha* scribes and calligraphers, portraying them as rooted in the same educational milieu as prominent Muslim scribes. It portrayed a world of scribal production and training that, while having a Muslim-majority, was religiously plural.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, Dehlvi’s work—like many scribal treatises that preceded it—asserted that the history of Perso-Arabic scribal work was essentially an Islamic one and that the precepts of writing had been first revealed by God to the first prophet, Adam.<sup>41</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, there was an increased erasure of non-Muslim scribes from scribal treatises, accompanied by a renewed and expanded assertion of Islam as a source of a shared scribal past. This shift suggests that the importance of Muslim religious identity among scribes increased in the age of print. As earlier forms of training and patronage ruptured, scribes emphasized Islam as a factor that distinguished their trade, drawing on new articulations of artisan Islam that made space for multiple spaces of training. This shift was especially pronounced in texts such as the *Rail khushnavīsī*, which did not assume that scribes had access to prestigious educational lineages and prominent *ustāds* but instead assumed that they learned scribal work from texts and in the presses.

By articulating a shared Muslim past for scribal work, authors like ‘Abdul Rahman sought to tie together lithographic scribes from multiple social and economic backgrounds. Invoking the Quran to claim a Muslim nature for scribal work,

‘Abdul Rahman’s introduction explained that the work of men is in the hands of God. He cited, for instance, God’s protection of the ark of the Prophet Nuh (Noah), quoting the thirty-sixth surah (*ya-sin*), “We carried their seed in the loaded Ark, and we have made similar things for them to ride in.”<sup>42</sup> Further emphasizing God’s influence over the “hands of men,” he suggested that the ways in which scribes piously carried out their work reflected the will of God. And he reminded his readers of sayings associated with prominent figures in Islamic history. Citing a saying attributed to ‘Ali—the Prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law—he noted that “what cannot be completely attained, should not be completely let go,” suggesting that while scribes might not be able to perfect their knowledge, they must nonetheless pursue it.<sup>43</sup> In centering figures like ‘Ali as sources of inspiration for potential scribes, he suggested that the correct practice of scribal work was dependent on one’s knowledge of Islam and a shared Muslim past.

Perhaps most importantly, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scribal manuals like the *Rail khushnavīsī*—those aimed at expanded scribal communities—reoriented the extant scribal tradition of the revelation of script and writing to the Prophet Adam. Earlier scribal treatises like the *Taṣkirah-yi khūshnavīsān* claimed that God’s revelation of writing to Adam had been passed down from *ustād* to *murīd* through long, unbroken chains of scribal education.<sup>44</sup> But this narrative was less resonant among scribes trained in, or for, lithographic presses who lacked access to prestigious scribal lineages.

In the *Rail khushnavīsī*, ‘Abdul Rahman celebrated God’s revelation of printing to Adam but claimed that boys could learn to write in a pious way that reflected the divine and prophetic nature of writing without access to a scribal lineage.<sup>45</sup> Scribal skills learned through textbooks, and improved through presswork, he suggested, were just as likely to be pious and reflective of God’s intentions for the written word. As I show in chapters 3 and 4, this narrative reflected a renewed celebration of the prophetic revelation of artisan trades in the late nineteenth century, which often emphasized the importance of learning to practice the trade in the manner revealed to a prophet, whether through an unbroken lineage of training or not.

The broadening of the social and educational backgrounds of scribal workers—spurred by the demand for scribal labor at lithographic presses—thus contributed to an increased emphasis on scribal work as rooted in an explicitly, and exclusively, Muslim tradition. Lithographic presses in the late nineteenth century recruited scribes from the prestigious educational lineages that were highlighted by Karimullah Khan, and these scribes with prestigious training were the most likely to be named in the colophons of late nineteenth-century lithographs. But by the mid-1870s, the larger presses in cities such as Lucknow, Lahore, and Kanpur relied on scores of scribes, many of whom were drawn from the families of nonscribal Muslim artisan communities and learned scribal work in the context of the presses.

These large presses released dizzying arrays of daily and weekly periodicals, pamphlets, poetry collections, religious literature, political treatises, histories,

technical manuals, textbooks, and popular fiction. Their demand for scribal labor was not fully met by regional scribal lineages, and as suggested by the Nizami Press's commissioning of *Rail khushnavīsī*, they increasingly sought to train potential lithographic scribes themselves. The creation of these new cadres of lithographic scribes spurred the search for new sources of authority and social distinction. Given that many could no longer claim connection to prestigious scribal lineages, scribes instead argued that the Muslim traditions of scribal labor distinguished them from other types of workers, and they emphasized the Muslim piety of their work as a source of social identity and trade cohesion.

### LITHOGRAPHIC LABOR BEYOND SCRIBAL WORK

Within the presses, however, scribes were also joined by nonscribal laborers. By the turn of the twentieth century, the largest lithographic presses on the subcontinent employed several hundred workers. Ulrike Stark estimates that by 1890 the Naval Kishore Press employed over nine hundred people at its Lucknow press alone, in addition to several hundred others at its branch operations in Lahore, Kanpur, and the princely state of Kapurthala.<sup>46</sup> This number decreased significantly after 1895 because the press became one of the earliest in North India to adopt steam-powered printing, decreasing its manual labor demands (figure 2).<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, this number shows that presses in urban North India were among the cities' most significant private industrial employers and had the largest factories.

The Naval Kishore Press maintained both typographic and lithographic units for various scripts, although most of their book and periodical production—and almost all print production in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic—was lithographic.<sup>48</sup> In the lithographic department, print workers included generalized machine-men, as well as stone wipers, ink rollers, and even lithographic ink makers. The lithographic department of the Naval Kishore Press also employed some in-house scribes and calligraphers, but many other independent scribes did piecework for the press.<sup>49</sup> Piecework was often more well remunerated than directly employed wage labor, and it allowed the most prominent scribes to maintain independent workshops, continuing their role in the manuscript economy. But it was also often inconsistent and financially unstable, particularly for the new cadres of scribes who worked and trained primarily in the presses and lacked rootedness in prestigious workshops.

Most lithographic presses in North India, however, never reached anywhere near the scale of the Naval Kishore Press or its large-scale, urban competitors. Many presses were small, family- or individual-run enterprises, based in towns, small cities, and *qasbahs*.<sup>50</sup> In Rampur, for instance, the most prominent private press of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the Ḥusani Press, which released the state's only weekly periodical. The Ḥusani Press was founded in 1866 and was likely Karimullah Khan's point of reference for lithographic

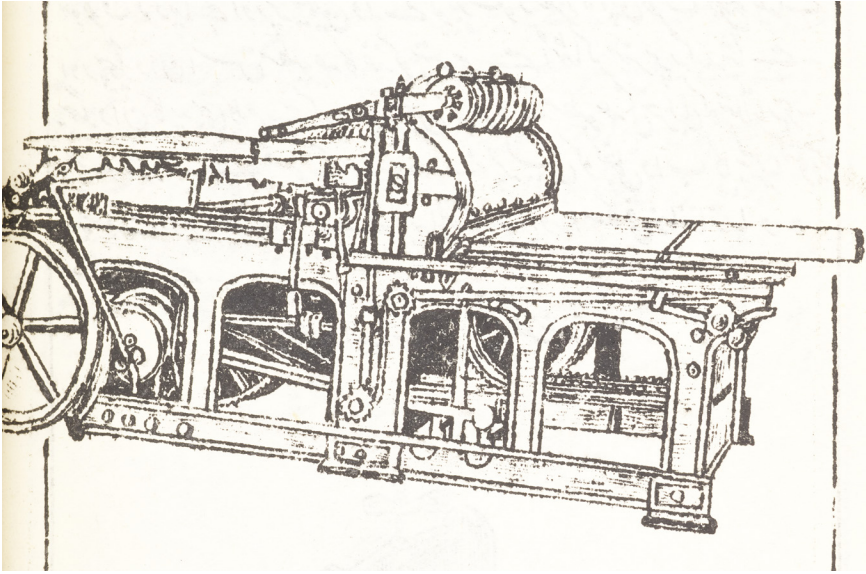


FIGURE 2. Sketch of a steam-powered lithographic press from a 1909 compendium of technologies and trades. Muḥammad Rafī' Rīzvi, *Makhzan al-fawāyid* (Moradabad: Maṭba' al-'ulūm, 1909). (© British Library Board, Urdu.D.570, p. 122)

technologies and practices along with the state lithographic press. By 1911 the Ḥusānī Press was owned and managed by four brothers—the sons of its founder—and employed four permanent laborers. These laborers were described in a colonial report as “illiterate and employed for mechanical work only.”<sup>51</sup> The press’s scribal labor demands were met entirely by pieceworkers, suggesting that the precarity of scribal employment that sometimes characterized large presses in major cities extended to their smaller, more provincial counterparts.<sup>52</sup>

In both cases, scribes usually earned higher pay than other lithographic workers. Although wage reports lack detail, reports on the administration of factory regulations in the United Provinces—which included notes on presses that employed more than fifty people—suggest that between 1900 and 1910, skilled machine-men—often blacksmiths by training—usually earned eight to twelve rupees per month in the presses, and “unskilled” press laborers, including stone wipers and paper carriers, likely earned about two to four rupees per month.<sup>53</sup> Scribes employed directly by the presses earned about fourteen to sixteen rupees per month, though the fact that most were employed as pieceworkers means that these wages tell us little.<sup>54</sup> The most prestigious scribes—those with access to the lineages praised by Karimullah Khan—could earn up to a rupee per day, though most earned about half that, and many struggled to secure consistent work throughout the month.<sup>55</sup>



As in the case of scribes, nonscribal lithographic laborers were not uniformly Muslim. At North Indian private presses, whether managed by Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, or Christians, the labor force was always religiously heterogeneous. Nonetheless, by the late nineteenth century, press labor was often popularly associated with Muslims. At both lithographic and typographic presses in major North Indian cities including Lahore, Lucknow, Allahabad, and Kanpur, press laborers were majority Muslim. At the United Provinces Government Press, which undertook primarily typographic but also some lithographic work, Muslims made up nearly 70 percent of the over one thousand press laborers.<sup>56</sup> Detailed records about the employees of privately run presses, even the large-scale presses, are rare, but references to “Muhammadan” press workers at both state and private presses abound in the colonial archive and English press.<sup>57</sup> They paint a picture of a growing industrial field that was never exclusively the domain of Muslims but was widely viewed as an appropriate and appealing trade for Muslim boys. Print work, both scribal and otherwise, was framed as an attractive and relatively well-paid form of labor for the sons of Muslim artisans, especially blacksmiths and others perceived to have mechanical skill, who pursued work as press-based machine-men.<sup>58</sup>

#### THE BOOKBINDERS’ STORY

The records of colonial-era lithographic presses suggest that the primary distinction in book production was between scribes—with their long-standing claims on a tradition for their trade—and new cadres of “mechanical” workers who lacked such traditions and accompanying status. However, several other communities of book workers also sustained traditions for their trades that referenced manuscript production while adapting to the economic and industrial realities of the emerging print economy. Prior to the rise of print, writing on other types of book labor was more limited, though textual evidence suggests the religious, cultural, and technical traditions that circulated among workers such as bookbinders and ink makers. For instance, the *Risālah-yi jild sāzī* (Treatise on bookbinding), a Persian-language manuscript composed in India around the early nineteenth century by Sayyid Yusuf Hussain, was a versified treatise advising bookbinders on the moral and practical dictates of their trade. In an opening section titled “The Reason for the Existence of Binding,” the manual tied the trade to the production and protection of the Quran. It narrated the story of the Prophet Muhammad’s companion and the third caliph, Usman bin Affan, and his compilation of a written Quran after he noted differences in its oral circulation, and then explained that to leave the Quran unbound would show a lack of reverence and a failure to protect its words.<sup>59</sup>

As with scribes, bookbinders’ knowledge was rooted in the transregional exchange of technical practices. Manuscript copies of the *Risālah-yi jild sāzī*

were produced and circulated not only across North and South India but also in Iran. Indeed, most of the recent academic attention to the text has come from Iran and scholars of the wider Persianate world.<sup>60</sup> Unlike scribes, bookbinders do not seem to have maintained extensive written records of their educational lineages and claims on transregional educational descent. The *Risālah-yi jild sāzi* noted the role of Sufi *pīrs*, guides/saints, in protecting and passing on the knowledge of the trade and praised *ustāds* who taught the trade to apprentices. But unlike contemporary scribal treatises, it did not blend a telling of lineages with its descriptions of work, focusing instead on explaining techniques in a versified manual format. This likely reflected the nature of bookbinding, in which apprentices learned the trade through practice under the guidance of master binders, but one's status in the trade was less dependent on the ability to claim illustrious lineages of training.

At the same time, aside from the fact that they possessed a preprint written tradition for their trade, bookbinders shared at least one other important characteristic with scribes: they often performed piecework for the presses, rather than securing wage-based employment within them. William Hoey, the tax commissioner in Lucknow who compiled an 1880 compendium on trades and manufactures in that city, characterized bookbinders primarily as independent artisans, many of whom maintained their own workshops from which they were commissioned by presses or individuals. According to Hoey, given the cost of materials—pasteboard, sheepskin, marble paper, thread, and paste—and the amount of time required for work, an independent Lucknavi bookbinder could usually earn a profit of nine annas over two days.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, while government agencies and presses usually employed bookbinders directly, they too occasionally had books bound through independent workshops, and they often recruited bookbinders as pieceworkers rather than wage employees.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, in the case of the largest presses, which doubled as stationers, bookbinders were sometimes required to purchase the materials and tools of their trade from the presses. The Naval Kishore Press, for instance, sold the cloth for bookbinding.<sup>63</sup> Bookbinders' dependence on presses for piecework, combined with their need to purchase materials up front, suggests that it is possible they went into debt to their employers, highlighting the economic precarity of their trade in the print economy.

#### PRESSES AS SITES OF LABOR

The industrialization of presses, the dangers inherent in the work, and the sense that the wages offered by press managers were insufficient for the cost of urban living meant that by the early twentieth century, printing was a trade known for management-labor conflicts and strikes. The earliest efforts by press workers to agitate for improved wages and working conditions took place in government presses. Government presses relied on typography for most of their production in English,

but they primarily used lithography for Urdu from the 1850s through the 1940s. The government press strikes of the early twentieth century were characterized by demands—especially among pieceworkers, a group that often included both lithographic scribes and bookbinders—for improved pay, forms of leave, and limitations on the fluctuations in the amount of work offered or assigned.<sup>64</sup> These strikes also pushed the administrators of government presses to investigate alternative sources of press labor.

For instance, following a large-scale strike at the government presses in Calcutta in 1905, colonial administrators sought to curtail the influence of press workers while also mitigating the effects of potential strikes on their government printing. To do so, they developed lithographic and typographic training schemes and programs in regional jails, not only in Bengal, but across the subcontinent.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, jail administrators had sought to secure income by developing printing as a jail industry as early as the 1840s, and jail printing had previously been heralded as a more affordable source of printing by the state. In Lahore, the city's courts moved all their vernacular lithographic printing to the Lahore Central Jail in 1895.<sup>66</sup> Reflecting the fact that both lithography and typography were physically demanding processes for workers, within Indian prisons they were categorized as “hard labor,” alongside assignments such as “pounding bricks,” “stone quarrying,” and “road making,” for able-bodied convicts.<sup>67</sup>

Likewise, for many nonscribal “mechanical” laborers outside of prisons, press work was dangerous, sometimes even deadly. For instance, at the Public Printing Press of Lahore in 1924, a “boy, while helping a machine-man repair a belt, was wrapped around the main shaft, with the result that his left arm and both legs were fractured.” Transported to the hospital, he died later the same day.<sup>68</sup> The colonial notice of the boy's death in the annual factory report from Punjab was reflective of the widespread use of child labor in industrialized presses. The physical dangers presented by press work were cited as a complaint against management by some striking press laborers throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, though they were usually portrayed as secondary to disputes over wages.<sup>69</sup>

#### PRESS PROPRIETORS AND NARRATIVES OF MUSLIM LITHOGRAPHIC LABOR

In response to rising agitation among press workers for improved wages and conditions from the early twentieth century, press proprietors increasingly sought to intervene in workers' narratives about the relationship between Islam and press work. Muslim press owners especially sought to engender forms of religious solidarity between their workers and management, sometimes even by co-opting and reorienting the language used by scribal communities and asserting a connection between Muslim piety and press labor for their workers.

Some proprietors—including Munshi Mahbub 'Alam, who was the owner of one of the most prominent presses of turn-of-the-century Lahore—turned toward

transregional models of Muslim piety in press labor, which they attempted to inculcate into their workers. Mahbub 'Alam owned and managed the Khādim al-Ṭa'lim (Servant of Education) Press, which published several artisan and industrial manuals. The Khādim al-Ṭa'lim Press and Mahbub 'Alam were also well known throughout Punjab for the publication of a popular weekly and daily newspaper titled *Paisah Akhbār* (Penny paper). Born into a landholding family in Gujranwala District, Mahbub 'Alam began publishing from there around 1886, before moving himself and his press to Lahore in 1889. As its name suggested, the *Paisah Akhbār* was known for its low price. At its peak, just before the First World War, it had a daily circulation of approximately three thousand copies, with its weekly edition printing more than nine thousand copies.<sup>70</sup> These numbers made it among the most widely circulated vernacular weekly papers in Punjab in the period before the First World War.

Mahbub 'Alam, like many other prominent publishers of North India, sought to develop a workforce that was well educated in lithographic work. He imagined this workforce as formed of pious, diligent, modern Muslims, and his publications reflect his efforts to find models for this ideal Muslim workforce beyond those in India. In 1908, he published a 970-page Urdu-language travelogue—portions of which had previously been serialized in his newspaper—chronicling his journey to the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900, and his subsequent travels across Europe, Egypt, and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>71</sup> Throughout the travelogue, Mahbub 'Alam expressed interest in the state of the press in the cities that he visited—from Vienna to Damascus—but he devoted the most energy to this topic during his stays in Istanbul and Cairo. This showed that those cities, and especially Cairo, were centers of consolidating transregional print industries, from which books and knowledge circulated through Muslim scholarly worlds, as well as broader political networks of Arabic readers.<sup>72</sup> Mahbub 'Alam found a flourishing print culture, reliant upon engaged editors and what he saw as a well-trained, Muslim print labor force.<sup>73</sup>

Most impressed by Cairo, he wrote, “In comparison to India, there is a more developed tradition of printing and selling books.” He observed that several presses, particularly those dedicated to religious texts, produced books that “exceeded the quality of those found in Europe.” And he emphasized the high level of education among the proprietors of the city’s newspapers, and the quality of the laborers that they employed, though he noted that lithography had fallen out of favor in the city, typography replacing it.<sup>74</sup> The more rapid transition to movable type in Istanbul and Cairo was due in part to state support and patronage for typographic presses, as well as limitations on private presses that may have chosen to use lithography for financial reasons.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, aesthetic considerations were different than in India, as producers of Arabic books and newspapers—and sometimes those in Ottoman Turkish—often used the *naskh* style of the script, rather than *nasta'liq*. *Naskh* is straighter and more angular than *nasta'liq* and does not feature the same sloping lines.<sup>76</sup> While early attempts at producing typographic *naskh*

faced similar technical challenges as seen with *nasta'liq*, by the early twentieth century, improvements in the aesthetics of the typographic *naskh* script meant that many readers of Arabic embraced typed text.

Despite the differences in form and style of book production, Mahbub 'Alam took away several lessons from the Cairo presses, including the importance of "good education" for "Muslim youths," who might seek employment in the presses. Describing a conversation with the editor of *al-Mu'ayyid* (The restorer)—which, he mused, "might be the largest newspaper by Muslims in the world"—he noted that elementary education was widespread among young Egyptian Muslims and that "most are hardworking." He was cautioned by his interlocuters, however, that when "Muslim boys worked for the British or the French" before joining the presses, they were liable to develop bad habits, including "drinking and laziness."<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, Mahbub 'Alam left both Cairo and Istanbul with the impression that "the presses here are of higher quality than in India," as reflected by their large numbers of educated and industrious Muslim employees.<sup>78</sup>

Muslim educationalists also engaged with efforts of press proprietors such as Mahbub 'Alam to develop a modern and pious Muslim workforce modeled on an idealized understanding of the industrial training of Muslim boys in places like Cairo and Istanbul. A 1914 report of the All-India Muslim Education Conference in Aligarh included scribal work and lithography in its discussion of "industrial" education for Muslims. A resolution passed at the conference that year encouraged "every Muslim workshop owner" to open up a "training class" to spur industrial education and employment opportunities, especially among working-class urban Muslims.<sup>79</sup> Presses were among the workshops and factories expected to undertake this endeavor.<sup>80</sup> For Mahbub 'Alam and the educationalists of the Aligarh-based conference, training productive press workers would reflect a wider success of wealthy Muslims in conditioning poorer boys to be simultaneously pious and knowledgeable about modern industrial technologies and practices.

#### LITHOGRAPHIC LABOR AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY PRESS STRIKES

The efforts of Mahbub 'Alam and other press proprietors to educate modern, moral, Muslim press workers does not seem to have engendered the hoped-for religious or social solidarity between management and labor in the context of Muslim-run presses. On the contrary, while Muslim industrialists sought to make use of press workers' religious traditions to undercut the emergence of class-based social identities, artisan and worker traditions remained distinct from those promulgated by the middle class. These traditions may have ultimately informed the emergence of organization and agitation for improved working conditions and pay among lithographic laborers.



Press strikes remained a major concern for both government and private presses throughout the 1910s and 1920s. For the most part, strikes at private, Indian-run presses were short-term agitations, usually organized without the formal backing of a union, often around a specific demand such as a wage increase. They often went largely unremarked in the colonial record, noted only in broad lists of strikes that had occurred within a given year.<sup>81</sup> In other cases, agitations among press workers, especially at smaller presses, were not categorized by the state as strikes at all. Instead, they were characterized as localized conflicts between workers' efforts to earn wages that matched the increasing costliness of life in North Indian cities and publishers' efforts to earn profits in a challenging economic environment. Nonetheless, the records of the 1910s and 1920s suggest a period in which private presses, like their government counterparts, were periodically shut down by conflicts over wages and treatment of workers.

By 1920, local Indian-run presses were engaged in tense showdowns with their "calligraphists" (scribes), machine-men, and printers over wages, and some reports portrayed the strikes as successful in improving the economic conditions of the workers.<sup>82</sup> In March of that year, for instance, the Indian director of Intelligence reported:

The vernacular presses in Lahore, which had to face a strike of calligraphists, and a threatened strike of machine-men and printers, have given in to the calligraphists and machine-men. The wages of the latter have been increased by 25 percent, and of the former by 30 percent. The calligraphists are, however, still dissatisfied, for they wanted a raise of 100 percent. It is generally believed that they will get what they want. They only have to improve and consolidate their organization, and the owners of the vernacular papers will find it difficult to resist their demands.<sup>83</sup>

This report suggests a degree of shared struggles between scribes and other lithographic laborers, such as machine-men, while also revealing the widening economic and social distinctions between the groups. The higher level of organization among scribes reflects the fact that they continued to assert that they were a distinct category of press workers with a Muslim religious tradition, past, and piety that set them apart from other book producers. To an extent, this was not unique. Many other press workers were drawn from extant Muslim artisan communities. Even when members of these communities participated in wage labor in industrialized factories—including the presses—they often maintained both social and professional ties to familial or community workshops. Colonial industrial reports, such as a report on iron and steel work authored by the Anglo-Irish Indian Civil Service officer W.E. J. Dobbs in 1907, portrayed a marked divide between modern industrial laborers and the "traditional" independent artisan.<sup>84</sup> But as chapter 2 shows, artisans moved flexibly between different sites of labor, and their religious traditions for their work circulated with them.

As a result, many of the Muslim artisans who engaged in lithographic labor likely participated in the circulation of Muslim traditions for familial trades such as metalsmithing and carpentry. These included a religious tradition for blacksmiths that tied their labor to the Prophet Dawud and claimed that the ability to work with iron had been revealed to him by God, based on a reference to the thirty-fourth surah of the Quran: “We [God] softened iron for him [Dawud].”<sup>85</sup> Just as scribes relied on an Islamic idiom to assert a continuity for their trade after its incorporation into increasingly industrialized presses, it is likely that metalsmiths and other artisans also turned to the religious traditions of their familial or community trades to make sense of their role in the presses. These traditions are explored in chapters 2 and 5; it is important to note here that they circulated not only within workshops maintained by metalsmiths or other artisans themselves but also in a wide range of factories, including the various presses.

Assertions of community and social distinction based on religious traditions for their trades did not necessarily prevent scribal and nonscribal press workers from creating forms of solidarity within the presses. For many lithographic workers, the rising urban cost of living of the 1920s, followed by the economic depression of the 1930s and the accompanying stagnation in wages, meant that new forms of solidarity within the presses became vital to securing their livelihoods. To understand the contours and limitations of these solidarities, I return now to the Lahore lithographic strike of 1935. I explore the ways in which the social context of the lithographic presses in the city shaped press workers’ efforts to improve their wages and working conditions.

#### LITHOGRAPHIC LABOR AND THE LAHORE PRESS STRIKES OF 1935

The Khādim al-Ṭaʿlīm Press and its *Paisah Akhbār* had receded in prominence in Lahore in the years following the First World War. They were replaced by new Urdu-language daily newspapers and large-scale presses. Among the most prominent of these was the *Zamīndār*, a popular daily newspaper that had a daily circulation of approximately 7,500 copies in 1935.<sup>86</sup> To a greater degree than the *Paisah Akhbār* before it, the *Zamīndār* aroused the frequent consternation of Lahore’s colonial administration. In intelligence reports, it was characterized as a “troublesome pan-Islamic paper” with an “attitude of antagonism” toward the government, and administrators expressed regular concern about its high level of popularity among Muslim readers. Zafar ‘Ali Khan, the proprietor of the paper, was repeatedly arrested throughout the 1920s. He was accused of “inciting feelings of enmity” between Hindus and Muslims. He was also routinely surveilled for his promotion of Khilafat movement (1919–24) agitations, which advocated for the authority of the Ottoman caliph in the wake of the First World War and allied with the Indian National Congress in its calls for independence.<sup>87</sup>

The contributions of Zafar ‘Ali Khan and the *Zamīndār* to the development of the Urdu press in Punjab have received significant scholarly attention, especially among historians of Pakistan.<sup>88</sup> Usually unremarked, however, is the fact that throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the *Zamīndār* was also rocked by a series of strikes among its press workers. In his publications, Zafar ‘Ali Khan sometimes broadly aligned himself with the causes of Indian labor, even delivering lectures in support of striking workers during the large-scale Lahore railway strike of 1920.<sup>89</sup> However, as Ahmad Azhar points out, Zafar ‘Ali Khan’s relationship with labor agitation was always complicated. He aligned with striking workers when he thought they might contribute to the weakening of the local colonial political regime, but also occasionally expressed disdain for workers’ demands for higher wages. In one significant speech, he cautioned Muslim workers that seeking “bread, at the cost of forsaking God, could only be a source of shame and ill-fortune.”<sup>90</sup>

Unlike the *Paisah Akhbār*, which had been printed at the associated Khādim al-Ṭā‘īm Press throughout its run, the *Zamīndār* rolled off various presses throughout the city, in part because, beginning in 1913, Zafar ‘Ali Khan’s own presses were repeatedly confiscated.<sup>91</sup> For much of the 1920s, the newspaper was printed at the Muslim Printing Press, and in the 1930s, at the Mansur Steam Press.<sup>92</sup> A cadre of scribes employed as pieceworkers moved between the presses that produced the newspaper, while other laborers, both scribal and nonscribal, were brought on by the presses themselves. In April-May 1935, scribes associated with the *Zamīndār* paper, as well as scribes and other laborers employed by both the Muslim Printing Press and the Mansur Steam Press, all engaged in strikes, suggesting the mobility of workers between the two presses and the paper.

Colonial reports did not note the outcome of the April-May 1935 lithographic strike. Indeed, colonial administrators seemed largely unconcerned about the frequent strikes among the workers at private, Indian-owned lithographic presses, except insofar as these strikes provided an opportunity for the expansion of regional and all-Indian trade unions. While these administrators saw labor as a potential threat and Muslim political and social identity as existing threats, they also posed a false dichotomy between laboring and Muslim identities. The so-called Muslim press was treated as synonymous with the interests of middle-class proprietors such as Zafar ‘Ali Khan. It was seen as a threat because of its potential to spur forms of transregional political association and attachment to alternative authorities that undermined the British Empire.

Muslim press workers were subsumed within this state discourse of the threat posed by (often elite) Muslim political action. Their distinct economic and political interests and forms of labor agitation were ignored, except in the rare cases—like the Lahore press strike—when prominent leftist groups asserted solidarity with them. State reports in the wake of the Khilafat movement suggested that Muslim workers’ primary allegiances were to their coreligionists, including their managers, and that any “threat” they posed to the state or status quo was rooted in their

Muslim-ness, not their laboring identities. In doing so, these reports overlooked the potential for workers' Muslim traditions to contribute to class-based solidarities and agitations against management.

Still, in the 1930s, lithographic labor strikes were occasionally the subjects of colonial correspondence when they attracted support from leftist political organizations and unions. M.G. Hallett, then secretary for the Home Department, was concerned about the spread of communist ideology within regional unions. He compiled extensive police reports on the activities of the Punjab Press Workers' Association, which held a meeting that year in Amritsar. They expressed concern that this union, founded in 1928, was influenced by the regional leaders of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha (Youth Society of India), a leftist organization founded by the prominent revolutionary Bhagat Singh before his execution in 1931.<sup>93</sup> During the 1935 union meeting in Amritsar, members passed resolutions in support of the striking workers. Police reports fretted, moreover, that Punjab press strikes might be influenced by an aspiring all-India union, the Lal Baita (Red Flag) Press Union. Founded in Bombay in 1934, the union was accused of "bring[ing] about lightning strikes in printing presses without any justification," though the same police reports admitted that its influence seemed to be geographically limited.<sup>94</sup>

Despite efforts from the Punjab Press Workers' Association to engage the striking lithographic laborers, colonial administrative concern about the spread of well-organized trade unionism in the lithographic presses was usually misplaced. Labor agitation among the workers at Urdu-language presses was characterized by short-term small-scale agitations in the 1920s and 1930s rather than popular participation in large, all-India, or regional unions. The lithographic workers' lack of enthusiasm for all-India and regional unions reflected what Dipesh Chakrabarty has framed as a central "paradox" of labor organization and agitation in colonial India. Despite high levels of worker militancy and frequent strikes, most workers did not join unions, and the unions they did join were often "unstable," meaning they formed and collapsed from year to year.<sup>95</sup>

However, at least one new union did emerge from the Lahore lithographic strikes, suggesting the continued hierarchies of labor within the presses. The *kātibs'* union, specifically for scribes, was formed under the auspices of the Punjab Press Workers' Association. Though small, its presence suggested a wider recognition of scribes' claims to social and laboring distinctiveness. Indeed, scribal strikes and labor organization remained a feature of the Urdu print economy even after the gradual popular shift to typography beginning in the mid-twentieth century. In 1989, the *New York Times* featured a short article on the lithographic scribes of Delhi, titled "Calling Strike, Urdu Scribes Sheathe Pens."<sup>96</sup> Over fifty years after the Lahore lithographic strike, and more than a century after Karimullah Khan composed the *Daftar-i khattāt*, the small number of remaining Indian Urdu scribes

continued to argue for their community's social distinctiveness and to agitate for improved wages and conditions.

. . .

Did the shifting assertions about the Muslim nature of scribal work matter for the striking lithographic workers of Lahore? The broader form of this question—the degree to which artisan Islam informed trade-based, and even class-based identities—underscores several of the subsequent chapters in this book. In the case of lithographic workers, and especially scribes, artisan Islam mattered but not necessarily in the ways we might expect. Contrary to the hopes of press proprietors like Zafar ‘Ali Khan and Mahbub ‘Alam, shared Muslim identity did not seem to create a significant level of solidarity between Muslim press proprietors and their primarily Muslim labor force. Instead, narratives of a Muslim tradition for scribes expanded the potential social and educational backgrounds from which scribes were drawn, even as they also drew boundaries around the traditions of their work, excluding nonscribal lithographic laborers. Though lithographic scribes agitated against press management in conjunction with nonscribal labor cadres, they also argued that their skill and its rootedness in a Muslim tradition of textual production set them apart from other press workers. In an increasingly industrialized lithographic context, where a diminishing percentage of scribes could claim prestigious lineages of training, a shared connection to a distinctly scribal Muslim tradition created a new space for scribes to assert the bonds and boundaries of their trade.

Unlike many of the other Muslim traditions of work that are analyzed in this book, scribal claims on a Muslim tradition were often acknowledged and accepted by other Muslims in the region. When the 1824 *Taḏkirah-yi khūshnavīsān* was published in 1910—unusually, through movable type—by the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, it included an extensive introduction by Muhammad Hidayat Husain, a Persian professor at Calcutta's Presidency College. Hidayat Husain embraced the text's claims on an Islamic prophetic tradition for scribes. Arabic script, he reiterated, was created and perfected through prophetic intervention, beginning with Adam and Idris.<sup>97</sup> Likewise, he claimed that proper knowledge of the script was circulated by early Muslims in the generations following the Prophet Muhammad's death.<sup>98</sup>

In a similar way, trade union organizers in Lahore seem to have recognized scribes' claims on distinctiveness within the presses. In calling for a union for *kātibs*, the leaders of the Punjab Press Workers' Association characterized scribes as a distinct class of workers. This could be interpreted as recognition of their economic distinctiveness, given that many—though not all—lithographic scribes were pieceworkers. But other lithographic press workers were sometimes also employed or paid by the piece. Even if the organizers of the Punjab Press Workers'



Association had limited interest in the Muslim traditions of scribes, they recognized the boundaries of the trade, which scribes had asserted for themselves through Islam.

Ultimately, then, scribes' claims on the Muslim nature of their work shaped their social identities and forms of solidarity and collaboration within the emerging hierarchies of labor in lithographic presses. Hierarchies between scribes who could claim prestigious educational lineages and those who had trained primarily within the presses persisted well into the twentieth century. But the artisan Islam of scribes offered a narrative of connection and a social bond between lithographic scribes, creating a trade-based identity through which forms of agitation for improved pay and working conditions were eventually organized. In the subsequent chapter, we will examine a narrative of connection and social bonds centered on a specific technology—electroplating—to ask how Muslim artisan communities subverted middle-class and elite claims, not only on the economy, but on scientific and technical knowledge.