

Migrant Carpenters, Migrant Muslims

Religious and Technical Knowledge in Motion

A WOODWORKING MANUAL IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY KANPUR

Around 1910, the Islāmī Press in Kanpur released a series of Urdu-language manuals on artisan practices, attributed to the *kārkhānahdārs* (workshop owners) and *kārīgars* of the city. Among the most popular and widely promoted of these was a text on decorative woodwork. The book, titled *Lakṛī kā kām sikhānewālī kitāb* (The educational woodworking book), opened with an admission that “to write of all the types of woodwork would require too much time, and demand pages upon pages of text.” For this reason, the author explained, he had chosen to confine himself to “wondrous and strange practices that the people of Europe have invented.”¹ Over the subsequent twenty-two pages, the anonymous author showed how to emboss, lacquer, and ebonize wood, how to draft designs for woodcarving, and how to repair rotting wood, among other “wondrous practices.”² While the author attributed these practices to European invention in his introduction, in subsequent descriptions he was more circumspect, referencing both “Hindustani” and “European” models of many of the practices he described.³

The unnamed author of *Lakṛī kā kām* positioned the city of Kanpur—and more specifically its *kārkhānahs*, or workshops—as a source of authority and regional prestige to assure readers of his knowledge of the wonders of woodwork. By the turn of the twentieth century, Kanpur featured in the North Indian popular imagination as a site of steadily expanding industrial development, home to workshops employing the newest technologies and producing goods in popular, modern styles.⁴ The city was not, however, widely associated with carpentry or woodwork. Instead, it was known as a center of textile mills and tanneries, many of which had initially produced goods for the expansive colonial military and police contingents based in the city in the wake of 1857.⁵ Although Kanpur lacked a popular regional

reputation for carpentry, colonial reports and Indian newspapers noted that it was among the largest employers of carpenters in North India.⁶

Woodworkers—people who design and create wooden goods—and carpenters—those who construct, repair, and install wooden structures—flocked to Kanpur from towns across North India, adapting their skill sets for local employment. From at least the 1860s, they were drawn to the city because its textile mills, tanneries, and railway workshops relied on carpentry skills to build and repair machinery, and because they offered some of the highest wages for carpenters in the province.⁷ Many migrants in Kanpur continued to labor within these spaces for decades. But others eventually established their own small workshops in the city, contracting for state and private projects or producing items popularly associated with their hometowns.

The author of *Lakṛī kā kām*, therefore, positioned his text as a repository of the latest knowledge of woodworking associated with bustling, modern *kārkhānahs* in Kanpur. Many of the skills described in the book were, by 1900, closely associated not with Europe but with regional centers of small-scale and decorative artisanal woodworking such as Saharanpur, Bareilly, Fatehpur, and Nagina, near Bijnor. As a result of migration from these cities and towns, Kanpur became an urban center where practices were brought together by different communities of woodworkers, and where woodworkers from across North India were brought into conversation with each other. In the process, these artisans exchanged material practices and, in many cases, narratives about their religious identities.

In Kanpur, migrant carpenters and woodworkers exchanged technical knowledge and skills with a wide range of counterparts, many of whom asserted differing religious identities. But the publication history of *Lakṛī kā kām* suggests that migrant Muslim woodworkers in the city exchanged not only technical knowledge but also knowledge about how to practice their religion. *Lakṛī kā kām* was printed by the Islāmī Press, a prominent publisher of Muslim religious and educational texts in Kanpur. It printed Urdu translations of the works of the eighteenth-century theologian Shah Waliullah Dehlvi, along with mathematics and chemistry primers for Muslim-run schools, which were advertised at the end of *Lakṛī kā kām*.⁸

By publishing with the Islāmī Press, the compilers of *Lakṛī kā kām* and the other artisan manuals in the series asserted a religious propriety and Muslim social character for the practices of artisanship that they profiled. Although the author of *Lakṛī kā kām* was not named, the cover page thanked Sayyid Muhammad Abdullah, a “knowledgeable merchant of Kanpur,” for funding the compilation of the series.⁹ As the owner of the Islāmī Press, along with several other workshops in Kanpur, Muhammad Abdullah was dedicated to what he saw as the proper religious and social comportment of North Indian Muslims. Through his press, he released self-authored books that were meant to educate upwardly mobile Muslims in the region—including potential urban migrants—on topics ranging from how to perform ablutions and pray to how to dress and eat.¹⁰ Muhammad Abdullah and his press sought to contribute to the development of a community

of urban Muslim readership that cut across class and economic difference and held shared interests in the religious and the industrial.

Lakṛī kā kām is an ambiguous text. Unlike many of the other technical manuals examined in the book, neither its author nor its intended audience are made explicit in its contents. The ambiguity of *Lakṛī kā kām* means that we must consider a range of possibilities, including its potential circulation among artisans, as well as its potential use among middle-class hobbyists or consumers eager to understand the models of woodwork available. Even with these ambiguities, however, *Lakṛī kā kām* demonstrates that the migration of artisans to Kanpur in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries spurred an exchange of models of woodworking. Whether we read the text as indicative of practices that artisans hoped to learn, or of the practices current in the city and available to hobbyists and consumers, *Lakṛī kā kām* reveals that diverse regional styles of woodworking coexisted in Kanpur. The practitioners of these styles likely jostled and competed for space in the market and, in some cases, may have guarded their practices. But they also encountered each other and likely circulated practices in the city's rapidly expanding industrial workshops.

Moreover, when read in the context of the Islāmi Press, *Lakṛī kā kām* suggests that through migration, Muslim carpenters also encountered plural forms of knowledge about what it meant to be Muslim and to labor as a Muslim artisan. In many cases, as reflected in the other publications of the press, this meant that members of the consolidating Kanpuri Muslim middle class sought to define pious Muslim comportment and behavior for the new migrants. But an analysis of the neighborhoods, workshops, and factories where Muslim carpenters settled and worked also highlights alternative spaces and forms of knowledge exchange. Migrant carpenters and woodworkers maintained and expanded localized and artisan-centric narratives about how to practice both Islam and carpentry.

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This chapter asks how Muslim artisans exchanged and reoriented knowledge about their labor and their religious traditions, drawing on the experiences of migrant woodworkers and carpenters in rapidly industrializing cities of the United Provinces and Punjab. It focuses primarily on Kanpur and Lahore. Both Kanpur and Lahore were cities where carpentry and woodworking skills were in especially high demand. The rapid, late nineteenth-century growth of major workshops, factories, and mills in these cities necessitated the migration of growing numbers of carpenters, who contributed to the building and repair of wooden machines as well as to architectural woodwork and production of rail carriages. Migrant woodworkers and carpenters in Kanpur and Lahore were often beholden to emerging classes of wealthy *kārkhānahdārs* and dependent on wage labor, but growing demand for their specialized skills kept their wages high compared to other industrial laborers.¹¹ And as migrant carpenters built livelihoods in these industrial cities, some even opened independent workshops, selling wares and styles associated with their regions of origin and contributing to continuing migration from their hometowns.¹²

This chapter explores how technical and religious knowledge circulated within the artisans' adopted cities by analyzing how Muslim carpenters negotiated the economic pressures that led to migration to urban industrial centers. Migration spurred exchange between Muslim artisans from across North India and occasionally beyond. This exchange of knowledge through migration reshaped both technical practices of artisanship and Muslim religious narratives about the trade. As we saw in previous chapters, artisan religious traditions were often locally inflected. In some cases, this meant attachments to local Sufi shrines and lineages, and the assertion of a connection to the trade that emphasized localized practices and styles. In other cases, it meant that artisans claimed local Muslim pasts that contested their social marginalization by both the colonial state and Indian elites.

The migration of woodworkers and carpenters to large cities necessarily brought multiple artisan traditions of both woodwork and Islam into conversation with each other. For many carpenters, Kanpur and Lahore represented what Nile Green has termed a "religious economy" in which understandings of Islam were "changed in [their] very act of reproduction."¹³ Simultaneously, migration to Kanpur and Lahore meant that Muslim artisans encountered new middle-class urban projects of religious reform. Focusing on Bombay, Green depicts the city as a space where migration spurred a turn toward a "comfortably familiar" Islam based on a "theology of intervention" via "holy men."¹⁴ Conversely, in Lahore and Kanpur, there was flexible coproduction of multiple religious narratives and practices. Migrant carpenters learned new technical practices and material traditions that they applied in response to industrial demands; they also flexibly engaged with plural Muslim religious narratives for their trade.

Like print, migration placed Muslim artisan communities in conversation with each other, spurring Muslim artisans to assert translocal narratives of artisan Islam. Multiple artisanal and Islamic traditions intersected through widespread migration, most often from smaller provincial towns and cities to growing urban centers. Likewise, dependence on wage labor in cities such as Kanpur and Lahore meant that many Muslim carpenters and woodworkers encountered new technical expectations and new religious movements, which were often promoted to them by members of the emerging Indian Muslim capitalist classes.

After an overview of the pressures driving carpenter migration to Kanpur and Lahore, the chapter analyzes workshops, schools, and neighborhoods as sites of interactions among woodworkers. Muslim carpenters and woodworkers did not just engage with different regional or localized traditions of woodwork but also reimagined and reasserted localized inflections of their religious traditions. In its final sections, the chapter turns to the influence of the Muslim middle class and their efforts to reshape both carpentry work and artisan practices of Islam. I position these interventions as part of a wider economy of religious and material knowledge. Ultimately, I propose that the knowledge and religious narratives that migrant Muslim carpenters negotiated in Kanpur and Lahore contributed to the development of both Muslim political identities and class-based solidarities.

WHY MIGRATE? THE ECONOMIC PRESSURES OF WOODWORKING

By the turn of the twentieth century, the cities of Kanpur and Lahore were each home to over eight thousand carpenters and woodworkers.¹⁵ Neither of these cities, however, was portrayed in colonial reports as a center of a major carpentry industry, though Lahore was often praised as a home to distinctive Mughal- and Sikh-era architectural woodwork. Cities such as Bareilly and Saharanpur in the United Provinces and Jullundur and Gujrat in Punjab were known across the region for the production of wooden goods, praised in colonial reports for the fine skill of their woodworkers.¹⁶ Kanpur, in contrast, was portrayed as bereft of “traditions” of woodwork but in constant need of carpenters, while Lahore was said to boast a small number of skilled carpenters who had come to the city in earlier periods of migration. Colonial industrial reports regularly noted that demand for carpenters exceeded their numbers in these cities and that migrants therefore received relatively high wages.¹⁷

Carpenters both complicate and conform to some of the broad trends in early twentieth-century North Indian labor migration. Both before and after the First World War, migrant woodworkers and carpenters in large North Indian cities were often drawn from the artisan classes of smaller cities, towns, and *qasbahs*. This set them apart from many other migrants to urban industrial centers. As Douglas Haynes and Nikhil Rao note, prior to the 1920s, most other migrant laborers to industrializing Indian cities were drawn not from smaller cities but from “impoverished” rural “labor catchment areas.”¹⁸

In 1906, S. H. Fremantle, an Indian Civil Service official responsible for several labor department and industrial reports in the United Provinces and Bengal, summed up a popular colonial position on the causes of woodworkers’ migration in the region:

At Cawnpore, the common cry is the short supply of workers in the shops. . . . There is no doubt that the supply of mechanics in Upper India has not kept pace with the demand created by the expanded use of machinery for industrial purposes and a liberal programme of public works. In Allahabad and Lucknow where there are old established shops there is a fairly good supply of trained men, but the other towns are as badly off in this respect as Cawnpore.¹⁹

The report went on to explain that “the greatest difficulty of all” was experienced by the owners of cotton gins and presses, because “these require constant adjustment and therefore necessitate a large staff of fitters.”²⁰ The proliferation of wooden gins and presses necessitated the employment of carpenters, joiners, and woodworkers with the skills to adjust and fit the machines.²¹

In the United Provinces, some woodworkers were drawn to large cities such as Kanpur by the high demand for labor in the cities’ growing factories and workshops, both private and state run, and the relatively high wages that they could command there. At the same time, many experienced economic marginalization in the towns, *qasbahs*, and small cities of the province, further spurring migration,

informing a process that Christopher Bayly has described as the “redistribution and dislocation” of both mercantile and artisanal interests.²² A 1921 industrial report described the pressures that woodworkers across the United Provinces had faced over the previous four decades. Its report from Etah district noted that one town in the district, Marehra, had been associated with the production of “office boxes, ladies toilet cases (singardan), and qalamdars (pen cases)” throughout the nineteenth century.²³ By the turn of the twentieth century, the town’s woodworkers faced increased competition from items imported from Europe and large Indian cities, and their prices for household items were no longer competitive. The town also suffered a series of epidemics of “plague and influenza,” contributing to a broader decrease in population.²⁴ As a result of these pressures, the report explains, “Many carpenters have migrated to other places and only a few are left. . . . Even the best *mistrī* is thinking of leaving Marehra for want of work.”²⁵

Like other labor migrants, woodworkers migrated to cities such as Kanpur through the intervention of “jobbers”—intermediary recruiters—who coordinated their employment within factories. As Chitra Joshi demonstrates in the context of textile workers in the Kanpur mills, laborers’ connections with jobbers were often based on kinship networks, with locality and other social connections also spurring migration.²⁶ Moreover, within carpentry, jobber-laborer distinctions were often flexible, and laboring carpenters acted as recruiters for other individuals from their cities, towns, and kinship networks.

Despite frequent suggestions that migrants left smaller cities and towns in United Provinces for work in large cities such as Kanpur, colonial reports rarely identified urban migrants by their town of origin unless they were from outside the province. The 1906 labor report, for instance, specifically noted migrant carpenters who had arrived in the United Provinces from “Ahmedabad and Bombay.”²⁷ But census records suggest that the largest communities of migrants in large cities of the United Provinces and Punjab were likely from cities and towns within the same province, rather than recruits from across the subcontinent. This meant, in the case of Kanpur, that they moved from towns such as Marehra, Nagina, and Fatehpur, and occasionally also cities such as Bareilly and Saharanpur.²⁸

Workers from Saharanpur were especially attractive to large-scale workshop managers because Saharanpur itself boasted wagon shops and repair workshops for the North-Western Railways, which employed approximately three hundred people as of 1908.²⁹ As a result, workshop managers believed that Saharanpuri carpenters were likely to be trained in “modern” practices of carpentry. This perception was shared and promoted by colonial officials, such as J. L. Maffey, the Indian Civil Service officer who compiled a 1903 report on wood carving in the United Provinces. Maffey both praised Saharanpuri woodworkers for adapting new forms of inlay and lamented that their traditional skills were in decline because of their engagement with machines. He reinforced this narrative with a posed portrait of a Saharanpuri workshop where some artisans worked by hand but others labored with a fret-saw (see figure 7). While Maffey decried the fret-saw as an

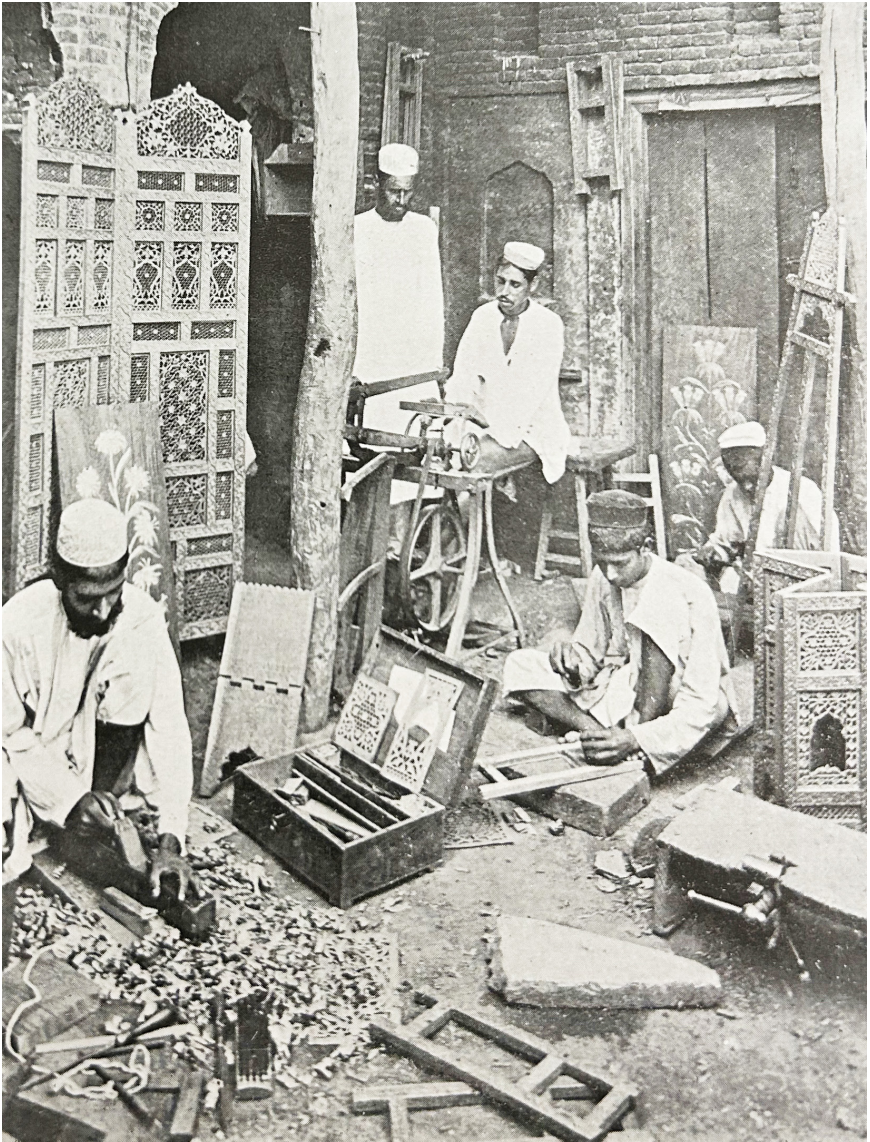


FIGURE 7. Woodworkers engaged in carving and brass inlay in Saharanpur, in J.L. Maffey, *A Monograph on Wood Carving in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1903). (© British Library Board, IOR/V/27/942/20, plate 3)

“abomination” responsible for the decline of local traditions, the reputation of Saharanpuri woodworkers for engaging with new machines and practices likely endeared these workers to recruiters.³⁰

However, Saharanpuri carpenters were also difficult to recruit to larger cities. This was due to the availability of work and high wages in their home city, as well as the proximity of Saharanpur to Roorkee, home to large public works department workshops offering high wages.³¹ In contrast, workers from the small town of Nagina faced greater local precarity and fewer local options for migration. They were regionally renowned for manufacturing and carving “tables, chests, screens, and panels.”³² But workshops were usually family run, and there were limited alternative sites of employment for woodworkers. Woodworkers and carpenters from family workshops that fell on hard times had few options besides migration if they wished to continue in their trades.³³

In contrast to Kanpur, where many migrants were drawn from towns and *qasbahs*, Lahore relied heavily on migration from midsized cities in other parts of Punjab, drawing in workers from these cities to labor in rapidly expanding railway workshops. Census reports from Lahore note the migration of artisans from Gujrat, Sialkot, and Gujranwala, three cities that were all characterized in colonial reports as home to significant carpentry traditions. As early as 1881, twenty thousand residents of Lahore *tehsil* were drawn from Sialkot alone.³⁴ While only a fraction of these migrants worked in carpentry or woodworking, industrial reports suggest that Sialkoti woodworkers were in high demand in Lahore’s railway workshops and were well regarded in carriage and wheel-making factories, both state run and private.³⁵

Because the woodworkers most frequently recruited for migration to Lahore were from midsized regional cities, many were embedded in multigenerational histories of migration. The increased demand for European-style furniture in the province with the consolidation of colonial rule after 1849 had led to a consolidation of woodworkers and carpenters in a few regional cities, particularly Gujrat, which became well known for its manufacture of wooden chairs.³⁶ Woodworkers migrated to Gujrat from nearby villages throughout the second half of the nineteenth century to join relatives and community members in the growing furniture industry. In many cases, however, a second or third generation of migrants moved from midsized cities in Punjab such as Gujrat to larger cities such as Lahore. This was spurred by a combination of factors, including community recruitment by jobbers and intermediaries, family connections, and periods of temporary economic downturn in local industries such as the furniture trade in Gujrat.³⁷ For instance, during the famine of 1896–97, many carpenters in cities including Gujrat, Sialkot, and Gujranwala were unable to sustain workshops because of decreased demand. While some secured positions as overseers in state famine relief projects, others migrated to Lahore to seek work in the city’s rapidly expanding railway workshops.³⁸

Underscoring processes of migration in both Punjab and the United Provinces is the fact that woodworkers and carpenters regularly shifted between fields within the larger trade, despite colonial claims to the contrary. British Indian monographs on industry distinguished sharply between practices of carpentry and woodworking. Their categorization and classification of subfields implied that a turner could hardly ever become an architectural woodworker and that a carpenter who made agricultural tools would never turn toward furniture or carriage manufacture.³⁹ But the growth of new trades—furniture manufacture, railway work, and new styles of architectural woodwork, for instance—belied these assumptions. Indeed, colonial administrators' own notes on the expansion and contraction of subfields within carpentry and woodworking reveal that Indian artisans moved flexibly between manufacturing practices.⁴⁰

CARPENTRY AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IN KANPUR AND LAHORE

Encounters between migrant Muslim carpenters gave rise to new understandings of their trade, their technologies, and their religious practices in Kanpur and Lahore. It is important to note that similar processes of knowledge exchange also took place among carpenters who identified as Hindu or Sikh and that religious communities often shared places of work and trade practices. The migrant carpenters who traveled to both Lahore and Kanpur identified with a variety of religious practices and beliefs. In the United Provinces, most woodworkers from Nagina, Saharanpur, and Fatehpur identified themselves in colonial census reports as Muslim, but Kanpur also drew in migrants from Bareilly and Gorakhpur, where most woodworkers identified as Hindu.⁴¹ Likewise, while most carpenters and woodworkers from Gujrat, Sialkot, and Gujranwala identified as Muslim in the colonial census, others who migrated to Lahore from Jullundur and Hoshiarpur more frequently identified as Hindu or Sikh.⁴²

These religious identities and communities were never hermetically bounded, and urbanization likely contributed to the creation of new shared spaces of religious practice as people negotiated and reimagined extant sites of veneration, memorialization, and worship.⁴³ Woodworkers and carpenters of varied religious identities exchanged technical practices in the context of new urban workshops, and they also may have exchanged knowledge about how to practice their trade piously. However, both the vernacular and colonial records present significant challenges for fully tracing potential exchanges of religious knowledge across communities.

As I explored in the introduction to this book, colonial administrators often dismissed Muslim artisans as not Muslim at all because of overlaps with Hindu spaces and practices of worship. We must be wary, therefore, of colonial claims of so-called syncretic practices that dismiss practitioners' own understandings of their traditions, particularly because, in their own publications, Muslim artisans

often defended their practices as reflective of an Islamic orthodoxy.⁴⁴ Likewise, many contemporary Urdu publications aimed at artisans—such as, potentially, *Lakṛī kā kām*—were sponsored by members of the Muslim middle class who were invested in promoting what they saw as normative Muslim practices among laboring communities. Given these limitations, this chapter maintains a narrower focus on knowledge production among Muslim carpenters while noting, when possible, instances of engagement beyond a Muslim religious or social space.

LOCALIZING ISLAM AND CARPENTRY IN NORTH INDIA

The cities and towns that provided many of the migrants for the urban industrial projects of Kanpur and Lahore were home to distinct Muslim traditions that centered woodworking and carpentry. In a few cases, these traditions were shared across South Asian geographies. For instance, just as blacksmiths sometimes asserted a connection to Prophet Dawud, and tailors to Prophet Idris, Indian Muslim carpenters and woodworkers occasionally laid claim to a prophetic past. In the case of woodworkers, references most frequently invoked Nuh (Noah), with an emphasis on the idea that God revealed carpentry skills to Nuh to enable him to build a wooden ark capable of surviving the great flood. As was the case with blacksmiths and their association with Dawud, association with Nuh was one of the few forms of Muslim woodworker community identity that the colonial state recognized.⁴⁵

The practice of tracing carpentry and woodwork to Nuh was also recognized and even promoted by Indian elites, both Muslim and non-Muslim. *Yādgar-i Bahāduri* (Memoir of Bahadur), an 1834 North Indian Persian compendium of regional histories that included descriptions of artisan trades, traced carpentry to Nuh. Its author, Bahadur Singh, a Kayastha, wrote in Lucknow during the reigns of the nawabs Ghaziuddin Haidar (1818–27) and Nasiruddin Haidar (1827–37). In his notes on carpentry and woodworking, Bahadur Singh noted the widespread belief that God had revealed carpentry skills to Nuh and argued that specific practices associated with Nuh were protected and transmitted by the carpentry “masters of Egypt.”⁴⁶

Middle-class and elite Indian interest in the relationship between Nuh and woodwork continued well into the twentieth century.⁴⁷ By the 1920s, prophetic histories provided a model to valorize artisanship and industry as members of the Muslim middle class increasingly positioned themselves as potential industrialists interested in scientific and material change.⁴⁸ Members of the middle class sought to appropriate and reorient artisan claims on a prophetic tradition to a greater degree than other—often localized—narratives about the Muslim pasts of artisan trades.

However, for carpenters and woodworkers in North Indian towns and small cities, other narratives were often more relevant to their day-to-day practice and social positionality. Many of these narratives were local, focused on specific technical or material practices and regional traditions, including attachments to regional

shrines and Sufi lineages. As Hussain Ahmad Khan has noted, in the towns of central Punjab many carpenters professed an attachment to the Chishti Sufi Sheikh Bahauddin (d. 1628), who had reportedly “wandered the Punjab and other parts of India, head[ing] a group of carpenters.”⁴⁹

In other contexts, such as the town of Marehra, carpenters claimed connections to local shrines, not only as spaces of Muslim piety, but also as centers for the economic growth of their trade. Marehra is a major center of pilgrimage because it hosts seven sacred tombs, the most notable of which is that of Sayyid Shah Barkatullah Marehrvi, the founder of the Qadri-Barakati *silsilah*.⁵⁰ As Brannon Ingram has shown, mass pilgrimage to Sufi shrines expanded following the construction of new railway lines in the North-Western Provinces. In the case of the ‘*urs* of Sayyid Shah Barkatullah, Ingram notes, “Custodians of the shrine would advertise the event up and down the railway route and string lights from the station to the shrine.”⁵¹

The expansion of these annual events in the mid-nineteenth century brought worshippers and celebrants—both Hindu and Muslim—from across the region to the shrine, and they also became important commercial events for the artisans of Marehra. In addition to woodworkers, the ‘*urs* of Sayyid Shah Barkatullah Marehrvi attracted glass bangle-makers from the town and district. Both groups built a regional reputation for handiwork in part by selling their goods to the attendees of the ‘*urs*.⁵² The carving work of the Marehrvi carpenters, along with their skill in making wooden trinkets that travelers could take with them, meant that they became important economic and social participants in the ‘*urs*. While the carpenters of Marehra did not trace their trade to Sayyid Shah Barkatullah or other members of the Qadri-Barakati *silsilah*, they became prominent figures at the ‘*urs*. Their material and religious relationships with the shrine became intertwined, with the ‘*urs* providing both economic and spiritual benefit.

Other local traditions centered forms of descent from prominent regional ancestors who were cited as the source of skills in woodwork. For instance, the woodcarvers of Nagina maintained a community tradition that they were the descendants of Muslim artisans from Multan who had been brought to Nagina as arms manufacturers for the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.⁵³ Having developed skills in intricately carving the wooden handles of knives and guns, they shifted to decorative woodwork as the regional market for weapons declined.

In Nagina, as across North India, association with a history of arms manufacture, particularly for the Mughal Empire, commanded a degree of prestige among nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Muslims. A connection with arms manufacturing sometimes allowed artisans to ascend in the caste-like social hierarchies explored in chapters 1 to 3, as they were considered more likely to be of Mughal—largely Central Asian—descent and to have accompanied the empire’s armies across the Hindu Kush mountains. But even when Muslim weaponsmiths did not claim Mughal descent and accompanying status, their claims to patronage

from former regional Muslim dynasties afforded them a degree of social prestige beyond that available to most artisans. As a result, for carpenters from Nagina, claims on a weaponsmithing past assured improved social positionality vis-à-vis other local Muslim artisan communities.

Reflecting the association between carpenters' claims on a past of weapons manufacture and Muslim social identity, Hafiz Muhammad Rahmatullah, a member of the Sufi Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi *silsilah* from Nagina, published a text on weapons and styles of fighting in 1904. Titled *Islāmi akhārā* (The Islamic arena) and published in Bijnor, the text argued that methods of fighting and styles of weapons had long Islamic lineages, passed down from *ustād* to *murīd*.⁵⁴ Though not written on behalf of the Muslim carpenters of Nagina, the text reflected their local social milieu in which a weaponsmithing past provided social status.⁵⁵ For a woodworker in Nagina, social, religious, and economic capital were bound together with this assertion of a distinct Muslim past for their trade and localized community.

MIGRATION AND KNOWLEDGE AMONG WOODWORKERS IN KANPUR AND LAHORE

When they migrated to major cities such as Kanpur or Lahore, Muslim carpenters brought with them these distinct religious and social associations, as well as material and technical knowledge. As a compilation of technical knowledge that drew its authority from the workshops of Kanpur, *Lakrī kā kām* suggests the types of exchanges that took place among Muslim migrant carpenters there. I first explore how and why artisans exchanged material and technical knowledge, and then ask whether Muslim religious traditions also circulated among migrant carpenters.

Among the first practices described in *Lakrī kā kām* is how to ebonize, or chemically darken a light-colored wood to make it appear more like black ebony.⁵⁶ Ebony carving was, by the late nineteenth century, closely associated with Nagina, but Maffey's 1903 report on wood carving noted that the high price of natural ebony, which was imported from the Central Provinces, limited the profitability of the trade.⁵⁷ As a result, Maffey lamented, carpenters from Nagina sometimes used alternative woods unless they were carving a commissioned ebony project, and he featured a posed photograph titled "Nagina 'ebony' carving," suggesting that most of the wood was not in fact ebony (see figure 8).⁵⁸ Alternative materials included rosewood (*shisham*) and sandalwood, which were sometimes colored to resemble ebony. *Lakrī kā kām* provided a "recipe" for ebonizing these alternative woods, explaining how to create a dye from madder (*majīth*), oak nuts (*māzū*), copperas (*hīrā kasis*), and fungal rust (*zangār*). Prepared over the course of three days, the dye would allow carpenters to make "ordinary" woods appear "as dark as ebony."⁵⁹



FIGURE 8. “Ebony” woodcarvers in Nagina, featured in J. L. Maffey, *A Monograph on Wood Carving in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1903). (© British Library Board, IOR/V/27/942/20, plate 7)

As Eugenia Lean notes in her study of “vernacular industrialism” in early twentieth-century Chinese cosmetics production, workers who had “long produced” materials and goods described in technical manuals “may not have had much need” for such texts.⁶⁰ A woodworker trained in Nagina almost certainly did not require *Lakṛī kā kām* to learn a recipe for ebonizing wood. Upon migrating to Kanpur, however, he may have been expected to expand his repertoire of work. Whether this expansion of technical knowledge was achieved in conversation with other woodworkers or through texts such as *Lakṛī kā kām*, it reflected the circulation of knowledge within a context of urban migration.

For many migrant woodworkers, the first step in expanding one’s repertoire of work was learning skills to secure wage labor repairing wooden machinery in private factories and mills, or in the railways and public works. Colonial reports that characterized carpentry and woodworking as inflexible trades expressed skepticism that artisans from small towns with specialized woodworking traditions were well suited to this type of industrialized labor. But even these reports admitted that specialized carvers or toymakers often also engaged in turning, in furniture manufacture, or in tool repair.⁶¹ Artisans’ knowledge of woodworking and carpentry

often went beyond the specific practices for which they were renowned, and in periods of economic pressure it was these broader skill sets that enabled both a diversification of the trade and migration to large urban centers such as Kanpur.

Moreover, when migrant woodworkers and carpenters in Kanpur founded their own workshops, they were expected to sell goods that reflected not only specific practices of their hometowns but also a wider range of decorative styles that were in demand among urban consumers. Woodworking families who specialized in a specific style of work before migration expanded to other practices to succeed in a market that was less explicitly associated with specific localized styles, a process suggested by *Lakṛī kā kām*, with its description of varied regional and global styles and practices.⁶² A woodworker from Nagina, for instance, might depend on the regional reputation of his hometown in ebony work to secure consumers for an independent workshop in Kanpur. But in the context of Kanpur, consumers would have also expected him to be proficient in practices such as lacquering and polishing—practices also described in detail in *Lakṛī kā kām*.⁶³ While some migrants to the city may have specialized in this work before their migration, others likely built on knowledge that they exchanged in contexts of wage labor.

For a migrant woodworker or carpenter, the situation was somewhat different in Lahore. In Kanpur, privately owned factories demanded the highest number of woodworkers and carpenters by the turn of the century, with railway and public works workshops supplementing this demand. In Lahore, by contrast, demand for woodworkers and carpenters was driven foremost by railway workshops. These were first established near the Lahore Junction station after the construction of the city's railway lines in 1860.⁶⁴ In 1904, the city's railway labor demands expanded, as colonial railway administrators founded additional workshops in Mughalpura, located approximately four kilometers to the east of Lahore Junction. Mughalpura became the site for the manufacture and repair of coaches and wagons for the North-Western Railways, a project that required hundreds of additional carpenters and woodworkers.⁶⁵

Migrant carpenters to Lahore were therefore expected to be competent in practices ranging from fitting, joining, and sawing to polishing, sanding, and painting. Those who worked to build, expand, and maintain the city's stations were also expected to know practices of decorative architectural woodwork, such as fretwork. By the 1910s, the state emphasized the importance of new electrical tools for carpentry, especially for coach and carriage builders, and carpenters at Mughalpura were expected to become proficient with electric-powered circle saws and other tools.⁶⁶

As was the case in Kanpur, migrant carpenters and woodworkers may have arrived in Lahore with several of these skills, while learning others on the job likely from other laborers in the workshop. Lack of familiarity with the technologies and materials used in railway workshops—particularly after the expansion of the use of electrical tools—could be dangerous. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, most workplace injuries and deaths reported in Lahore took place at the railway workshops,

both those located near the city station and those at Mughalpura. In 1922, 233 injuries occurred within the railway workshops at Mughalpura, making up over 70 percent of reported factory injuries in Punjab that year.⁶⁷ While most injuries were categorized as “minor,” the next year, in 1923, the state factory act report noted that at Mughalpura, “a carpenter, whilst fixing a facie board to a coach, fell from its roof and sustained a fractured skull, as a result of which he died.”⁶⁸

Given the threats posed by railway labor for carpenters, the exchange of technical and material knowledge in the workplace was central not only to wage earning but also to physical survival. Knowledge about different practices of work circulated within workshops as well as in the neighborhoods where workers settled, through networks of migration and even jobber-laborer relationships. Moreover, as I argue in chapter 2, many of the so-called industrial arts did not conform to colonial assertions that Indian artisans were obsessed with secrecy and protecting trade knowledge. This was especially true for fields such as woodworking, carpentry, blacksmithing, and other trades that were in high demand in urban centers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There were, of course, specific styles associated with regional cities and towns that a woodworker may have been loath to reveal if they secured him customers in a privately run workshop in Kanpur or Lahore. But in many other cases, the fact that demand for workers exceeded the number of skilled carpenters in major cities meant that migrants could earn higher pay by combining regional practices. Because many migrants initially focused on building and repairing wooden machinery for mills, tanneries, and railways, they had incentives to exchange knowledge that could enable the mutual improvement of wages and conditions.

MUSLIM SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND REMAKING OF COMMUNITIES AFTER MIGRATION

Lakṛī kā kām can thus be read as reflective of an urban context where migrant carpenters and woodworkers from different localities circulated technical practices and knowledge. This exchange occurred through the development of new neighborhoods, workshops, and other spaces of both socialization and labor where carpenters from different regions encountered each other in an industrializing city. Within these spaces, did carpenters exchange only information about how to carry out physical and technical processes? Or might these forms of association have also contributed to the circulation of religious modes of being, knowing, and asserting status?

In Lahore, new settlements around the Mughalpura workshops became centers where migrant carpenters and other artisans exchanged knowledge about how to be a pious Muslim. The railway administration had purchased the land around Mughalpura in the 1880s, establishing worker colonies and residences there well before the new carriage workshops opened in 1904. As Laura Bear notes, colonial railway administrators were initially reluctant to build housing colonies for Indian

railway workers, though Europeans and Eurasians were housed through many railway projects from the 1860s. But the settlement of large numbers of Indian workers around the workshops convinced these administrators to construct small huts and basic housing for other Indian laborers by the 1890s.⁶⁹ As early as 1892, Mughalpura was home to approximately four thousand men who labored in the railway workshops, and this number expanded further after the establishment of the carriage workshops.⁷⁰ The influx of workers in Mughalpura spurred new forms of religious association and knowledge exchange between Muslim carpenters who had migrated from other regions of the province.

To meet the religious needs of the laborers in Mughalpura, small mosques, temples, gurudwaras, and churches were erected within and around workshop complexes. In 1909, as railway administrators sought to expand the marshaling yard in Mughalpura, they noted that a mosque used by laborers and residents stood on the newly acquired land. Following an inquiry, which demonstrated that the mosque was in regular use, railway administrators concluded that the only way to avoid conflict with the workers was to design the marshaling yard around the mosque.⁷¹ While specific actions that laborers at Mughalpura took to protect the mosque are not recorded, the state fear of violence suggests that the workers may have successfully communicated discontent, or perhaps that railway administrators were aware of other instances of protest and conflict. In either case, for migrant carpenters in Lahore, religious spaces within the railway settlements and workshops and their accompanying mosques likely contributed to what Naveeda Khan characterized as “experimentation,” “striving,” and “Muslim becoming.”⁷²

Khan, in her study of post-Partition Lahore, emphasizes the actions that Lahori Muslims take as they lay claim to, or assert ownership over, local mosques, often for a specific community or *maslak* or pathway within Sunni Islam.⁷³ These claims are laid under “the shadow of the state,” as worshippers work to prove the legitimacy of mosques that they have constructed on lands that are often marked for other purposes. Contemporary practices of state negotiation and efforts to demonstrate the legitimacy of a place of worship echo the experiences of carpenters and other laborers who worked in the railway workshops and worshipped in the marshaling yard mosque. Despite—or perhaps because of—their employment through a state project, these workers were able to negotiate under the “shadow of the state,” even sparking a colonial reconsideration of railway design plans.⁷⁴

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL SCHOOLS AS SITES OF MUSLIM EXCHANGE

In addition to workshops, residential settlements, and mosques, other spaces where members of woodworking families from various regional backgrounds exchanged knowledge and engaged in projects of “Muslim becoming” included colonial technical and industrial schools. Most artisans in colonial India were trained through family structures and apprenticeships.⁷⁵ But in both Kanpur and Lahore, the late

nineteenth century saw a rapid expansion in formal industrial educational institutions. These institutions sought to reorient woodworking and carpentry training to the aims and preferences of the state. Nonetheless, they unintentionally provided spaces where migrant Muslim artisans—or their sons—exchanged both religious and technical knowledge with each other.

Overwhelmingly, scholarship on state-led artisan education in Lahore has focused on the Mayo School of Art (established 1875) and the projects of John Lockwood Kipling, including his engagement with the Arts and Crafts Movement. Much of this scholarship notes Kipling's interest in recruiting members of artisan communities to the school, as well as the fact that so-called hereditary craftsmen approached the school practically, often sending their sons for a year or two before withdrawing them and putting them to work.⁷⁶ But for a far larger number of woodworkers in Lahore, exposure to state-sponsored education was through the city's Railway Technical School, founded in 1889, not through the Mayo School.

Scholars have positioned the Railway Technical School as reflective of the type of training received by Anglo-Indian families who worked for the railways.⁷⁷ But in practice, annual reports show that students were overwhelmingly from Muslim artisan backgrounds, with few Anglo-Indian students. As of 1900, nearly 90 percent of enrolled students—299 out of 334—were Muslim.⁷⁸ This is an important distinction because students educated at the Railway Technical School were among the literate artisans who wrote and circulated the types of periodicals and manuals that argued for a shared social identity for *kārigars*. As I show in chapter 5, the contributions of these individuals to laboring identities, and the degree to which their engagement with Islam may have shaped those contributions, have often been understated.

In the early twentieth century, carpentry was by far the most popular course of study at the Railway Technical School. The year 1904 saw a significant growth in the student body, from 382 to 441 students. Of these, 75 percent, or 331 students, were enrolled in the carpentry program, with the remainder primarily studying metalsmithing. Predominantly Muslim, overwhelmingly from artisan families, with most students focused on carpentry and woodwork, the school was a key center for the education of the sons of Muslim carpenters and woodworkers who had migrated to Lahore to work for state projects.

The Railway Technical School also hosted small evening classes, primarily aimed at “apprentices and illiterate artisans” working within the railways but open to other working artisans in the city as well.⁷⁹ As was the case with the day students, most of the evening students identified as Muslim; in 1900, the student body was 85 percent Muslim. Classes met three times a week for two hours each, although colonial reports noted that attendance was sometimes sporadic.⁸⁰ The evening classes are especially notable because they did not focus primarily on carpentry or other artisan trades. Instead, artisans who already worked in these trades used the evening classes to learn basic literacy, math skills, and sometimes drawing.

Despite colonial administrative emphasis on the 3 Rs (reading, writing, arithmetic) and drawing at the Railway Technical School evening classes, it is likely that carpenters and other artisans also used the classes as a community space.⁸¹ Aside from a few unusual instances, night schools provided limited access to improved wages or status in the industrial workplace.⁸² They reflected, instead, the efforts of workers to access knowledge and community, a process that was especially important for migrants who may have lacked access to other forms of local community in urban Lahore. Railway workers seem to have chosen to attend to pursue what Tobias Higbie, in the American context, has termed “networks of other learners, communities, [and] organizational cultures” of “self-education.”⁸³ The Railway Technical School and its evening classes were bound up in the railway administration’s efforts to teach or coerce ways of laboring that conformed to their expectations of modern carpenters and woodworkers. Nonetheless, voluntary participation, especially in the evening classes, suggests that carpenters and woodworkers repurposed this educational space to exchange knowledge that they found relevant to their own lives and work.

In both Kanpur and Lahore, projects of “Muslim becoming” and claims on religious infrastructure thus grew in tandem with the exchange of technical knowledge in spaces such as the Railway Technical School. As woodworkers and carpenters congregated in new workshops, new spaces of worship, and new centers of education, they exchanged narratives about the pious nature of their work. These exchanges and encounters encouraged carpenters and woodworkers to emphasize certain traditions about their trades over others.

REORIENTING LOCAL TRADITIONS

Assertions of the divine revelation of carpentry to Nuh, for instance, may have contributed to a consolidation of shared Muslim identities in the workshops and factories, as this narrative did not assume connections to shrines or saintly lineages associated with specific localities. *Asrār al-ṣanʿat* (Secrets of industry)—a 1927 Urdu compendium of artisan trades and practices authored by ʿAlimuddin Nairang Hashmi, a state employee of princely Bhopal—proclaimed in one of its concluding verses that “the great carpenter [*najjār*] Nuh cultivated a new sweetness in industry.”⁸⁴ It positioned Nuh alongside Adam, who “cultivated the ḥalal trades” as a progenitor of artisanal knowledge within prophetic tradition.

Hashmi’s book was not aimed exclusively at artisans, and its multiple potential audiences highlight the fact that artisan traditions about prophetic forebearers for trades also circulated among other Muslims in the early twentieth century. Hashmi was born into an elite Muslim family in Bareilly and had secured work and income as a state adviser in the quasi-autonomous state of Bhopal. The *Asrār al-ṣanʿat* was partially aimed at members of his own class: Muslim elites who might aspire to direct or to patronize modern industrial workers. His lengthy and extensively illustrated compendium, which cost a rupee, was more expensive than

most artisan manuals and profiled a wide range of trades. It was likely most useful to aspiring industrialists who hoped to learn enough about various trades to employ artisans. However, Hashmi did anticipate at least some artisan readers; his introduction noted that the compendium hoped to teach carpentry, woodworking, and blacksmithing to *kārīgars* who lacked *rozgār* (employment) and sought to secure it in the growing cities of North India.⁸⁵

The verses referencing Nuh suggest that by the mid-1920s, the revelation of carpentry to Nuh held multiple resonances for varied audiences. It provided a means for valorizing artisanship and industry for members of the Muslim middle class as they sought to socially justify their turn toward industrial production in the colonial capitalist economy.⁸⁶ For artisans and laborers, however, it provided a site for shared social and religious identity and a means of asserting a Muslim character for their trade that did not depend on shared descent or attachment to shared local shrines or Sufi lineages.

Conversely, emphasis on descent from prominent or especially skilled forebears, such as those claimed by woodworkers of Nagina, may have become more exclusionary, especially if they were asserted by artisans seeking to establish independent workshops. Migrant artisans experienced social exclusion in part because, as Kanpur expanded, middle-class Muslims who claimed *ashrāf* lineages became more engaged in asserting that status and in contesting the perceived fabrications of others. Soheb Niazi argues in a study of Amroha that “genealogy functioned as a tool to establish and legitimize social hierarchies.”⁸⁷ From the 1890s, periodicals printed in Kanpur and sponsored by local merchants sought to define the prominent Muslim lineages of the city’s residents. One monthly periodical, the *Tuhfah-yi Muḥammadiyah* (Gift of Muhammad), sponsored by the merchant Muhammad Sayyid, routinely profiled prominent local Muslims and highlighted their lineages and forms of *ashrāf* descent.⁸⁸

Artisans were never included in these discussions, as they were assumed to be from familial backgrounds lacking in prestige and status. Nonetheless, for migrant carpenters like those from Nagina—who based their claims of expertise on a narrative of a prestigious Muslim past and community descent from Mughal-era weaponsmiths—this context likely shaped their engagement with potential customers and other residents of the city. Association with an elite Muslim past likely helped distinguish these workers in a market crowded with migrant woodworkers, where genealogy and lineage provided powerful markers of inclusion and status.

Regardless of whether Muslim artisan traditions about carpentry and woodwork became more capacious or more exclusionary, they were reshaped through encounters with other Muslim carpenters and woodworkers in periods of intense migration to industrializing cities. At the same time, the entrenchment of carpenters and woodworkers in new workshops, neighborhoods, schools, and places of worship also meant that middle-class religious organizations targeted these communities and sought to reorient their practices.

MIDDLE-CLASS KNOWLEDGE AND THE REMAKING OF ARTISAN PRACTICES

The colonial state sought to reorient carpenter labor and education to suit its industrial demands in the late nineteenth century. Simultaneously, newly founded Muslim *anjumans*, or civic associations, sought to intervene in both industrial training and religious education. C. Ryan Perkins argues that members of new *anjumans* conceptualized “volunteerism” as “part and parcel of a modern sharif Muslim identity in the post-1857 period.”⁸⁹ In this context, industrial education was framed as a form of community uplift, a means of improving the status of Muslims within India by teaching poor and working-class children to be pious Muslims and disciplined workers. For some members of these groups, such as Muhammad Abdullah, the sponsor of *Lakṛī kā kām*, educating carpenters and woodworkers may have offered economic benefits, as they employed these laborers in their workshops.⁹⁰ For many other members of the Muslim middle class, however, charitable giving to industrial education offered an opportunity to reshape the religious, social, and material practices of their poor and laboring coreligionists.

As migration and industrialization led to the congregation of large numbers of Muslim workers in urban centers like Lahore and Kanpur, members of the Muslim *anjumans* debated the best ways to “uplift” laborers and their children. By this, they meant disciplining laborers’ religious practices, which middle-class Muslims often characterized as unduly influenced by Hindu traditions.⁹¹ They also sought to provide economic uplift for Muslim laborers, arguing that this would increase the respectability and influence of the Muslim *qaum* (community).⁹²

Large *anjumans* in both Lahore and Kanpur settled on the foundation of charitable orphanage-industrial schools as one of their most important investments. The schools were partially created in response to Christian missionary institutions aimed at orphans and the urban poor, which likewise emphasized industrial training as part of their conversion efforts. By the 1880s, both Hindu and Muslim educational and reformist organizations sought to counter Christian influence by training poor children and orphans in trades. Carpentry was among the most promoted trades at these schools, as it was seen as a consistent path to a stable livelihood, but also one that required less investment in materials and space than trades such as blacksmithing.⁹³

In Lahore, the most prominent orphanage-industrial school was sponsored by the Anjuman-i ḥimāyat-i Islām (Association for the Defense of Islam, or AHI), an organization founded in Lahore in 1884 with an initial membership of over nine hundred people.⁹⁴ Its members emphasized their commitment to charity and industrial training that inculcated “correct” Muslim practices and behaviors in workers. The group opened its first orphanage-industrial school in Lahore in 1887. Similarly, beginning in 1894, the members of the Anjuman-i Islāmiyah (Islamic Association) of Kanpur raised funds and support for a local *yatimkhānah*, or orphanage, which also functioned as an industrial school and workshop. In both

cases, woodworking training was the most significant form of boys' industrial education at the schools, and both schools developed internal carpentry workshops to make the schools partially self-sustaining by selling goods produced by pupils. To this end, the schools, like their Christian and Hindu counterparts, were sites of coerced labor, where poor boys were compelled to work for the benefit of the institutions but rarely received more than nominal income from the items that they produced.⁹⁵

Moreover, while these schools sought to create new models for what it meant to be a pious, disciplined, and modern Muslim carpenter, their influence over the laboring lives of woodworking communities remained limited. The Anjuman-i Islāmiyah orphanage in Kanpur educated only twenty-six boys and seven girls as of 1913, and only the boys were trained in carpentry. The AHI orphanage was larger, with approximately 220 boys and 15 girls as of 1913, but only about half of the boys trained in carpentry.⁹⁶ Its larger numbers reflected the policy of the state of Punjab of sending the indigent or orphaned Muslim children to orphanage-charitable schools run by Muslim *anjumans*, which took on increased importance during the First World War.⁹⁷ Both institutions also grew in the 1920s and 1930s as they increasingly sought to attract potential carpentry students who were not indigent or orphaned. By 1934, the institution of the Anjuman-i Islāmiyah of Kanpur was recognized by the state administration as primarily a carpentry school for both orphans and others, and received state grants-in-aid for carpentry education.⁹⁸ But far larger numbers of youths were trained in carpentry at home, in apprenticeships, or through state-run schools.

The orphanage-industrial schools are important both because they were centers of carpentry training and because they reflected broader efforts by elite and middle-class Muslims to reorient how artisans practiced their faith and their trades. One founder of a small orphanage-industrial school who published a treatise on the subject through a Kanpuri press in 1918 explained that his aim was to provide both "material education" (*ta'lim-i māddī*) and "religious education" (*ta'lim-i dīnī*).⁹⁹ The author, a descendant of the prominent Naqshbandi Sufi saint Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624), founded an orphanage that taught carpentry near the shrine of his ancestor and sought to improve the quality of religious and industrial training in orphanages across India.¹⁰⁰ He lamented that wealthy Muslims assumed that poor boys "did not require high levels of religious education," asserting to the contrary that if the "Muslim *qaum*" hoped to advance in India, even "the poorest orphan" needed a full education in his faith.¹⁰¹

Most carpenters did not encounter these projects of religious education and ideals of material and spiritual uplift in orphanage-industrial schools. Nonetheless, they were an important part of the religious economy that migrant carpenter communities inhabited and negotiated in cities such as Kanpur and Lahore. The influence of these ideals is reflected in texts such as *Lakṛī kā kām*. While profiling the decorative woodworking practices current in Kanpur's workshops, the author

and publisher assumed that their urban Muslim readership shared religious and industrial interests across class boundaries. The publishers of technical manuals imagined a Muslim readership composed of both members of the industrial middle class and artisans themselves, all of whom they positioned as committed to the social uplift of the *qaum*.

The imagination of a shared Muslim identity, education, and commitment to the social and economic uplift of Muslims is implicit in *Lakṛī kā kām*, accessible primarily through its publication history. In other technical manuals that addressed woodworking and carpentry, however, it is far more explicit. The *Asrār al-ṣanʿat*, the 1927 manual that referenced Nuh's influence on carpentry, was published in Agra but circulated across North Indian cities. Its introduction positioned "industry and trade" as central values of the Muslim *qaum* in North India. It admonished Muslims who lacked interest in artisanship, asserting that God had created man and in turn had given him the powers of industry and material creation.¹⁰² By tying industriousness in artisan trades—including carpentry and metalworking—to Muslim piety and belief, the author emphasized the values that members of the *anjumans* sought to inculcate in both their own class and communities of laboring-class Muslims.

The *Asrār al-ṣanʿat* integrated these moral assertions about industriousness with practical tips on topics ranging from how to design wooden trunks and chairs to how to prepare and apply lacquers. As noted earlier, the *Asrār al-ṣanʿat* explicitly addressed *kārīgars* in its introduction but may have been too expensive or unfocused to reach a wide working-class audience. Still, even if it was not widely read in workshops, artisans may have encountered its expectations and narratives from their managers and workshop owners. Both *Asrār al-ṣanʿat* and *Lakṛī kā kām* reflect the integration of middle-class ideals of Muslim industriousness with technical and material knowledge in texts that at least partially addressed woodworkers and other artisans.

Elite-led charities and social reformist movements sometimes also sought to reorient laboring family and marital practices alongside their efforts to inculcate new forms of Muslim industriousness. As noted earlier, new residential settlements contributed to the remaking of workers' religious and social communities, including through familial and neighborhood relationships. Some male migrant laborers in early twentieth-century India maintained families in their home regions, where their wives continued to engage in agricultural and household labor.¹⁰³ Colonial policy makers fretted that labor recruitment—of both men and women—from rural regions would weaken bonds of marriage among poor Indians, particularly Muslims, whom they characterized as being prone to "transient" marriage customs.¹⁰⁴ In response, some Muslim social reformers sought to empower Muslim men to economically sustain a family, while simultaneously promoting middle-class ideals of gendered respectability to women from laboring communities, often through *ajumans* such as the AHI.¹⁰⁵

In the case of many carpenters and woodworkers, relatively higher wages in comparison to most other industrial migrant laborers often enabled them to bring families to the city or to identify marriage prospects among their larger endogenous networks. Women and girls in these families thus encountered shifting urban socioreligious norms surrounding their public presence and labor, including the efforts of Muslim reformist *anjumans* to promote their own concepts of gendered respectability. The creation of consolidated settlements of workers and their families provided new sites for the intervention of social reformers in local debates about familial and marital comportment. While organizations such as the AHI focused much of their internal debate about Muslim women's education on the propriety of formal education for elite women, they also explicitly claimed to attempt to change the perspectives of "*ajlāf* [laboring class] men."¹⁰⁶ Through educational programs and social outreach—including industrial schools aimed at both men and women—these middle-class social reformers sought to remake norms of marriage and women's economic participation in new artisan urban settlements. The AHI, for instance, promoted crafts education for the wives, daughters, and widows of artisans, arguing that "it is only ignorance that has made women incapable," even as they also encouraged women to work primarily within the home to maintain consolidating urban norms of social respectability.¹⁰⁷

MIGRATION, KNOWLEDGE, AND EMERGING SOCIAL SOLIDARITIES

While middle-class visions for Muslim artisanship are often the most well attested in the archive, they formed only one part of a broader exchange of technical, religious, and material knowledge among migrant carpenters and woodworkers. In the wake of migration to Lahore and Kanpur, Muslim carpenters exchanged, debated, and reasserted their technical knowledge and relationship with Islam in urban workshops, places of worship, and educational contexts. As Thomas Chambers has argued in his ethnographic study of Saharanpuri woodworkers and twenty-first-century migration, "Various forms of continuity persist within both the material and the imagined," even when "migrations create shifts" in the self-assertions of migrants.¹⁰⁸ In the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century migration, this meant that forms of technical and religious continuity interpenetrated reimagined and redefined practices, including those that were shaped by middle-class movements or colonial demands on production.

The knowledge, skills, and religious narratives that Muslim artisans negotiated in large cities such as Kanpur and Lucknow contributed to the consolidation of both Muslim political solidarities and class-based identities. Through the exchange of these forms of knowledge and skill, migrant Muslim carpenters and other artisans built new communities and urban social identities, which they engaged for a range of political purposes. In Kanpur, for instance, the lead-up to the 1913

Machchli Bazaar Masjid massacre suggests that Muslim elites and members of the middle class saw a degree of success in their efforts to engage with Muslim workers. In 1913, the Kanpur Municipal Board decided to demolish the perimeter and *wuzū* (ablutions) area of the Machchli Bazaar Mosque to widen a roadway.¹⁰⁹ The mosque was a site of worship for many of the city's laboring-class Muslims, especially workers in textiles and leather, but also groups such as carpenters and blacksmiths who maintained machinery in the mills and tanneries.¹¹⁰ On August 3, 1913, thousands of Muslims from across class communities marched to the mosque, symbolically restoring it by piling up bricks over the demolished area. In response, the magistrate of Kanpur ordered the police to open fire on the protesters, resulting in at least sixteen deaths, with twenty-eight others reported injured.¹¹¹

Sana Haroon argues that Muslim agitation for the Machchli Bazaar Masjid was not simply a reflection of "instrumentalist" efforts among elite Muslim political actors who sought to promote anticolonial agitation within their community. Instead, the Muslims who protested the demolition of the mosque's perimeter and exterior spaces asserted social and spiritual connections to the building and its surroundings.¹¹² But despite the cross-class nature of the protests, Muslim laborers were excluded from negotiations with the colonial state in the wake of the massacre. Some colonial administrators attempted to "appease" the "respectable Muslims" of Kanpur, but they evoked the involvement of urban workers in the events to characterize these groups as "fanatical."¹¹³ Likewise, Muslim lawyers rallied behind the most prominent arrested Muslim activists—members of the middle class—while sidelining the popular nature of the protest. Even when elite and laboring-class Muslims participated in the same forms of mass organization, state and elite response to each group differed significantly, contributing to an ongoing sense of social difference and alienation among migrant laboring communities.

And indeed, Muslim laborers sometimes resisted the efforts of elite and middle-class Muslims to co-opt or reorient their forms of protest, for instance during the 1920 Railway Strike in Lahore. Ahmad Azhar notes that Muslim participants in this large-scale labor agitation made recourse to their religion by emphasizing the "poverty" of the Prophet Muhammad's early companions.¹¹⁴ This language explicitly limited the space and influence for middle-class Muslim industrialists, some of whom sought to reorient the strikers toward participation in the ongoing Khilafat movement and critiqued the strikers for protesting for "bread" rather than "God."¹¹⁵

In chapters 5 and 6, I expand my analysis of the ways in which the exchange of artisan knowledge and religious narratives spurred new solidarities and forms of social and political organization. Likewise, I ask how labor within colonial infrastructure—such as the railway workshops in Lahore—presented specific challenges for Muslim artisans who sought to assert Muslim pasts and traditions for their technologies and practices of production. In these spaces, I argue, Muslim

artisans expanded the technical and religious traditions that they circulated through migration and print. Some Muslim artisan communities engaged with colonial technologies—such as the steam engine—as a way of building new social and economic solidarities in a context that diminished their technical authority. Simultaneously, others positioned new materials—such as the new plasters preferred by the British Indian public works—within long-standing artisan traditions of Muslim piety and practice. Chapters 5 and 6 elucidate the plurality of Muslim artisan responses to the technologies that they encountered through employment on state projects.