

# BOOKS, LIBRARIES AND THE NAWABS OF AWADH

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Libraries have always remained essential for civilized societies as they serve as gateways to knowledge and culture. They provide resources and services that foster learning opportunities, encourage literacy and education, and aid in the development of fresh viewpoints and ideas that are essential to the development of societies. Libraries also aid in preserving an accurate record of the information developed and gathered by earlier generations. Without libraries, it would be challenging to promote human knowledge and research as well as safeguard accumulated knowledge and cultural heritage for future generations.

The Nawabs of Awadh were known to be great patrons of knowledge and learning. Most of them, from *Burhan-ul-Mulk Sa'adat Khan* (1722-1739 C.E) to [Wajid Ali Shah](#) (1847-1856 C.E) maintained their personal libraries and spent abundantly on their maintenance.

Shams-ur-Rahman Faruqi, a noted scholar and critic remarks in the introduction to *Awadh Symphony*, a comprehensive work on the cultural history of Awadh by Aslam Mahmud (Mahmud x) –

Awadh from the late eighteenth century to early twentieth century was an interlude. Lucknow as a non-descript city before Asif-ud-Daula made it his capital, leaving Faizabad soon after he became the nawab wazir in 1775 C.E. The most prominent thing in Lucknow before 1775 C.E was the *haveli* of Shaikh Abdur Rahim Bijnori who was deputed by Akbar and who built the Machchi Bhavan and the Akbari Darvaza... Asaf-ud-Daula's shift of his capital to Lucknow inaugurated an era of unparalleled prosperity, sophistication and cultural achievement.

The present paper *Books, Libraries and the Nawabs of Awadh* has been divided into two sections. The first part of the paper deals with the introduction of the art of printing and publication of books in Awadh. A brief survey of some of the important publication houses in Awadh in the initial era of publication in India has also been attempted. The second part of the paper intends to look at some of the important libraries established and maintained by the Nawabs of Awadh.

## I

The history of printing of books reminds us of the art of printing using *Lithography* technique. The word lithography means writing or designing on stone. Usually writing or designing was done on limestone tablets with the help of a steel pen; the writing was done in reverse, while the mirror images of the designs were made. A sheet of paper was pressed onto the stone by using a press or a rolling cylinder over the paper. The required number of copies was then printed. This technique was invented by Alois Senefelder in 1796 C.E in Germany. It later traveled from Europe to India through the East India Company

According to Unlike Stark, printing of books in Lucknow in Urdu, Arabic and Persian started in the year 1817 C.E when the reign of Navab Ghaziuddin Haider (r.1814-27), the *Matba-i-Sultani* (Royal Press) was set up. Printing was done through lithography. It was a process which was later adopted by many publishers throughout the country. Sources claim that between 1839 C.E and 1857 C.E at least twenty lithographic printing presses were established in Lucknow. The best publishing work was done during the period in *Matba-i-Mustafai* established in the year 185 by Haji Mustafa Khan.

In the year 1849 C.E, Syed Kmaluddin Haider alias Syed Mohammad Mir Zair (1794 C.E -1881 C.E) who was attached to the Royal Observatory offended Nawab Wajid Ali Shah on account of what he wrote on the history of Awadh. This resulted in a ban on any kind of publication in Lucknow. Books published during this period of ban printed only the name of the press without exhibiting the place of publication.

مطالعہ کتب میں مشغول رہتے ہیں اور علماء وفضلا کو اپنی صحبت میں رکھتے ہیں

A Persian traveler, Abdul Lateef Shostree, in his travelogue *Tuhfatul Aalam* makes a mention of this Royal collection of books in the following words (Shostree 349-350) –

مختصراً تین لاکھ صاف خوشخط کتابیں ہیں کہ ہر سو جلد پر ایک آدمی مقرر تھا . میں نے آصف الدولہ کے کتب خانہ میں دیکھی ہیں . عربی ، فارسی ، انگریزی ، نظم و نثر اور تاریخ و دیوان جملہ علوم و فنون کی کتابیں ان میں تھیں اور اول اور آخر خشنویسوں کے قلم سے عمدہ قطعہ تھے - ایران و ہندوستان کے اور روم و فرنگ کے مصوروں کی تصویریں بہت تھیں . علمی کتابوں کے بہت سی جلدیں نگاہ میں آئیں جو مولفین کے اپنے خط میں تھیں . میں نے کسی ایک شخص سے جس کی تحویل میں کتب خانہ تھا ، سنا کہ علمی کتب کے ساتھ سو جلدیں ایسے ہیں جو مصنفین کے قلم سے ہیں اور تیموری سلاطین کا کتب خانہ بھی زوالے سلطنت کے بعد ان کے ہاتھ لگ گیا اور حقیقت یہ ہے کہ وہ عام خزانے دہینے اور جوابرات اور سونے کے اسباب جو ان کے پاس تھے ان کے کتب خانہ کے دسویں حصے کی برابری بھی نہیں کر سکتے ہیں

A collection of approximately three lacs books and over every hundred books there was a caretaker. In other words Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula had employed around three thousand men in his royal library who received salary from the state.

During the reign of Ghaziuddin Haider (1769-1827) the first royal press was established in Lucknow which published innumerable books in Urdu, Persian and Arabic languages. Ghaziuddin haider also formed a committee the members of which were scholars and litterateurs of the time. This committee edited the famous Arabic dictionary, *Taj-ul-Lughaat*. Later the Royal Press published the same in seven volumes. Based on the experience of *Taj-ul-Lughaat*, Ghaziuddin Haider himself edited a Persian dictionary, *Haft Qulzum*. According to Dr. Springer, *Haft Qulzum* gained more popularity in Europe than in India.

Prince Sulaiman Shikoh (son of Shah Aalam II) who was the prince of Delhi shifted to Lucknow in the year 1783. He carried the rich collection of books, that he had, with him to Lucknow. This collection, after the death of Sulaiman



Shikoh in 1838 was included in the royal collection of the Nawab of Awadh. This royal collection which later came to be known as *The Royal Library of Lucknow* was plundered and destroyed in the independence mutiny of 1857

The Royal Library had a rich collection of books which included books on History, Poetry, Performing Arts, Literature and Aesthetics. The British knew the importance of this prized possession of the Nawab. In a sly and cunning manner, the first thing that the British did was to appoint Dr. Springer as a resident in Lucknow in 1847. Dr. Springer, who was an Austrian Orientalist, was given the responsibility to prepare a catalogue of the collection available in the Royal Library. Dr. Springer reached Lucknow on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1848 and stayed here till 1<sup>st</sup> January 1850.

The preface to the catalogue which Springer prepared mentions (Springer) –

لکھنؤ کا شاہی کتب خانہ پہلے اس محل میں تھا جو پرانا دولت خانہ کہلاتا تھا . یہ محل رومی دروازے اور آمنی پل کے درمیان واقع تھا . اس کتب خانہ میں روبیلہ سردار حافظ رحمت خان کا تمام علمی خزانہ بھی موجود تھا . جس میں شاہانہ اودھ اور خاص کر بادشاہ غازی الدین حیدر نے بہت اضافہ کیا تھا . شاہی کتب خانہ تین ذخیروں میں تقسیم ہو چکا تھا . ایک ذخیرہ موتی محل میں تھا اور دوسرا ذخیرہ فرح بخش محل میں تھا جس میں خود شاہ اودھ رہتے تھے . یہ ان کا ذاتی کتب خانہ تھا اور یہاں کی کتابیں بہت ہی نفیس تھیں ، تیسرا ذخیرہ ریڈیٹنٹ کی کوٹھی کے قریب توپ خانہ میں تھا . یہاں کتابوں کے تعداد بہت زیادہ تھی.

Akram Chughtai, a scholar from Pakistan, in the preface of his book *Tareekh-e-Mashghala* writes that on his return to his country, Austria, Springer carried a huge number of books from the royal collection to his homeland. Chughtai on his journey to Austria is a witness to have seen a huge collection of these books with the children of Springer in their personal library

The collection of this Royal library was lost in 1857 mutiny. The last nawab of Awadh was imprisoned and sent to Matiaburj. Awadh was divided into small states and *talukas*. The Taluqedars and Rajas of these states did maintain their personal libraries; some out of their literary

tastes and some merely as status symbol.

Soon after 1947 when these states were taken over by the Indian government and they faced acute financial crunch, the libraries of these states got deprived of the due attention and the collections were either sold off or got destroyed over a period of time. At present only the personal library of Mahmudabad State remains with some precious collections. Awadh which emerged an epicenter of power, an epitome of art, culture, literature and performing arts in 1732 saw its disintegration in 1857. With the downfall of the nawabs of Awadh a legacy came to an end. History can never overlook the role of the state of Awadh in the promotion of knowledge and learning.

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