Not a penny in your pocket and no occupation
Try hard as you can, there’s only frustration
Easier than that is this profession
Go make a racket and yell in succession:
Kaabulis and kachaalus, a fine array!
Tasty golgappaas on display!

When zarafat brought neither fame nor glory
You started printing a pointless story
That has no meaning nor gives any delight
We’re all better off if you’d simply recite:
Kaabulis and kachaalus, a fine array!
Tasty golgappaas on display!

Of poets, don’t make such a mockery
Or else you’ll regret it, now listen to me
What’s come over you, are you a fool? Who can tell?
Go and announce at the Captain’s well:
Kaabulis and kachaalus, a fine array!
Tasty golgappaas on display!

What business do you have with poetry anyway?
And don’t even talk about writing an essay!
Go peddle your wares through the town high and low
And proclaim in high pitch wherever you go:
Kaabulis and kachaalus, a fine array!
Tasty golgappaas on display!

No talent yourself, and it’s us you attack
What are you thinking, Laalah sahib? Get your senses back!
If earning four pennies is your only care
Go to the eighth day fair and declare:
Kaabulis and kachaalus, a fine array!
Tasty golgappaas on display!

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Kaabuli, Kachaalu, Golgappa: different spicy snacks generally sold on the street
Zarafat: the humor section of Avadh Akhbaar
The Captain’s well: a popular location for fairs and markets
Laalah: a term of address often used for Baniyas [merchant caste]
The eighth day fair: āthoN kā melā, or the big fair that takes place on the eighth day of Holi
Introductory Notes: This poem is from Avadh Panč, a humorous literary journal published in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Lucknow. The form of the poem is a tarjīʿ band, meaning it has a repeating end-line, with 5 stanzas in musaddas format (six lines each) of rhyme scheme aaaaa, bbbbaa, cccaa etc. The poem above derives from a longer verse-piece in Avadh Panč, in which several participants of a fictional mushā ḣirah lampoon the Panč’s main rival, Avadh Akhbār. At the time, Avadh Akhbār was riding a wave of success, due largely to the incredible popularity of a serialized “novel” called Fasāna-e Āzād that was published within it. Avadh Panč launched a series of attacks against this “novel” and Avadh Akhbār starting in 1880 and continuing through at least 1882.

The poem translated here chides Avadh Akhbār as profit-driven, concerned more with making money than the quality of its literature or journalism. Singled out for particular critique are the paper’s zarāfat, or humor, section; the “pointless story” that made it successful, or Fasāna-e Āzād; and its professed preference for natural poetry (over classical ghazal poetry). The poem insists Avadh Akhbār would be better off selling snacks on the street than trying to interfere in fine literary matters. Finally, the poem insults the paper’s proprietor, Munshi Naval Kishore, by denigrating him as a lālah, or nothing more than a profit-minded merchant.