

= Abdul Karim (the Munshi) =

Hafiz Mohammed Abdul Karim CIE , CVO (1863 ? 1909) (Hindi : ??? ? ?? ? ???? ? ?? ? ? ??? ???? , Urdu : ???? ???? ??? ????) , known as " the Munshi " , was an Indian Muslim attendant of Queen Victoria . He served her during the final fifteen years of her reign , gaining her maternal affection over that time .

Karim was born near Jhansi in British India , the son of a hospital assistant . In 1887 , Victoria 's Golden Jubilee year , Karim was one of two Indians selected to become servants to the Queen . Victoria came to like him a great deal and gave him the title of " Munshi " , an Urdu word often translated as " clerk " or " teacher " . Victoria appointed him her Indian Secretary , showered him with honours , and obtained a land grant for him in India .

The close platonic relationship between Karim and the Queen led to friction within the Royal Household , the other members of which felt themselves to be superior to him . The Queen insisted on taking Karim with her on her travels , which caused arguments between her and her other attendants . Following Victoria 's death in 1901 , her successor , Edward VII , returned Karim to India and ordered the confiscation and destruction of the Munshi 's correspondence with Victoria . Karim subsequently lived quietly near Agra , on the estate that Victoria had arranged for him , until his death at the age of 46 .

= = Early life = =

Karim was born into a Muslim family at Lalitpur near Jhansi in 1863 . His father , Haji Mohammed Waziruddin , was a hospital assistant stationed with the Central India Horse , a British cavalry regiment . Karim had one older brother , Abdul Aziz , and four younger sisters . He was taught Persian and Urdu privately , and as a teenager travelled across North India and into Afghanistan . Karim 's father participated in the conclusive march to Kandahar , which ended the Second Anglo @-@ Afghan War , in August 1880 . After the war , Karim 's father transferred from the Central India Horse to a civilian position at the Central Jail in Agra , while Karim worked as a vakil (" agent " or " representative ") for the Nawab of Jawara in the Agency of Agar . After three years in Agar , Karim resigned and moved to Agra , to become a vernacular clerk at the jail . His father arranged a marriage between Karim and the sister of a fellow worker .

Prisoners in the Agra jail were trained and kept employed as carpet weavers as part of their rehabilitation . In 1886 , 34 convicts travelled to London to demonstrate carpet weaving at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in South Kensington . Karim did not accompany the prisoners , but assisted Jail Superintendent John Tyler in organising the trip , and helped to select the carpets and weavers . When Queen Victoria visited the exhibition , Tyler gave her a gift of two gold bracelets , again chosen with the assistance of Karim . The Queen had a longstanding interest in her Indian territories and wished to employ some Indian servants for her Golden Jubilee . She asked Tyler to recruit two attendants who would be employed for a year . Karim was hastily coached in British manners and in the English language and sent to England , along with Mohammed Buksh . Major @-@ General Thomas Dennehy , who was about to be appointed to the Royal Household , had previously employed Buksh as a servant . It was planned that the two Indian men would initially wait at table , and learn to do other tasks .

= = Royal servant = =

After a journey by rail from Agra to Bombay and by mail steamer to Britain , Karim and Buksh arrived at Windsor Castle in June 1887 . They were put under the charge of Major @-@ General Dennehy and first served the Queen at breakfast in Frogmore House at Windsor on 23 June 1887 . The Queen described Karim in her diary for that day : " The other , much younger , is much lighter [than Buksh] , tall , and with a fine serious countenance . His father is a native doctor at Agra . They both kissed my feet . "

Five days later , the Queen noted that " The Indians always wait now and do so , so well and quietly

. " On 3 August , she wrote : " I am learning a few words of Hindustani to speak to my servants . It is a great interest to me for both the language and the people , I have naturally never come into real contact with before . " On 20 August she had some " excellent curry " made by one of the servants . By 30 August Karim was teaching her Urdu , which she used during an audience in December to greet the Maharani Chimnabai of Baroda .

Victoria took a great liking to Karim and ordered that he was to be given additional tuition in the English language . By February 1888 he had " learnt English wonderfully " according to Victoria . After he complained to the Queen that he had been a clerk in India and thus menial work as a waiter was beneath him , he was promoted to the position of " Munshi " in August 1888 . In her journal , the Queen writes that she made this change so that he would stay : " I particularly wish to retain his services as he helps me in studying Hindustani , which interests me very much , & he is very intelligent & useful . " Photographs of him waiting at table were destroyed and he became the first personal Indian clerk to the Queen . Buksh remained in the Queen 's service , but only as a khidmatgar or table servant , until his death at Windsor in 1899 .

According to Karim biographer Sushila Anand , the Queen 's own letters testify that " her discussions with the Munshi were wide @-@ ranging ? philosophical , political and practical . Both head and heart were engaged . There is no doubt that the Queen found in Abdul Karim a connection with a world that was fascinatingly alien , and a confidant who would not feed her the official line . " Karim was placed in charge of the other Indian servants and made responsible for their accounts . Victoria praised him in her letters and journal . " I am so very fond of him " she wrote , " He is so good & gentle & understanding all I want & is a real comfort to me . " She admired " her personal Indian clerk & Munshi , who is an excellent , clever , truly p [i] ous & very refined gentle man , who says , ' God ordered it ' ... God 's Orders is what they implicitly obey ! Such faith as theirs & such conscientiousness set us a gt. example . " At Balmoral Castle , the Queen 's Scottish estate , Karim was allocated the room previously occupied by John Brown , a favourite servant of the Queen 's who had died in 1883 . Despite the serious and dignified manner that Karim presented to the outside world , the Queen wrote that " he is very friendly and cheerful with the Queen 's maids and laughs and even jokes now ? and invited them to come and see all his fine things offering them fruit cake to eat " .

= = Household hostility = =

In November 1888 , Karim was given four months ' leave to return to India , during which time he visited his father . Karim wrote to Victoria that his father , who was due to retire , had hopes of a pension and that his former employer , John Tyler , was angling for promotion . As a result , throughout the first six months of 1889 , Victoria wrote to the Viceroy of India , Lord Lansdowne , demanding action on Waziruddin 's pension and Tyler 's promotion . The Viceroy was reluctant to pursue the issues because Waziruddin had told the local governor , Sir Auckland Colvin , that he desired only gratitude and also because Tyler had a reputation for tactless behaviour and bad @-@ tempered remarks .

Karim 's swift rise began to create jealousy and discontent among the members of the Royal Household , who would normally never mingle socially with Indians below the rank of prince . The Queen expected them to welcome Karim , an Indian of ordinary origin , into their midst ; they were not willing to do so . Karim , for his part , expected to be treated as an equal . When Albert Edward , Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) , hosted an entertainment for the Queen at his home in Sandringham on 26 April 1889 , Karim found he had been allocated a seat with the servants . Feeling insulted , he retired to his room . The Queen took his part , stating that he should have been seated among the Household . When the Queen attended the Braemar Games in 1890 , her son Prince Arthur , Duke of Connaught and Strathearn , approached the Queen 's private secretary Sir Henry Ponsonby in outrage after he saw the Munshi among the gentry . Ponsonby suggested that as it was " by the Queen 's order " , the Duke should approach the Queen about it . " This entirely shut him up " , noted Ponsonby .

Victoria biographer Carolly Erickson described the situation :

The rapid advancement and personal arrogance of the Munshi would inevitably have led to his unpopularity , but the fact of his race made all emotions run hotter against him . Racism was a scourge of the age ; it went hand in hand with belief in the appropriateness of Britain 's global dominion . For a dark @-@ skinned Indian to be put very nearly on a level with the queen 's white servants was all but intolerable , for him to eat at the same table as them , to share in their daily lives was viewed as an outrage . Yet the queen was determined to impose harmony on her household . Race hatred was intolerable to her , and the " dear good Munshi " deserving of nothing but respect .

When complaints were brought to her , Victoria refused to believe any negative comments about Karim . She dismissed concerns about his behaviour , deemed high @-@ handed by Household and staff , as " very wrong " . In June 1889 , Karim 's brother @-@ in @-@ law , Hourmet Ali , sold one of Victoria 's brooches to a jeweller in Windsor . She accepted Karim 's explanation that Ali had found the brooch and that it was customary in India to keep anything that one found , whereas the rest of the Household thought Ali had stolen it . In July , Karim was assigned the room previously occupied by Dr (later Sir) James Reid , Victoria 's physician , and given the use of a private sitting room .

The Queen , influenced by the Munshi , continued to write to Lord Lansdowne on the issue of Tyler 's promotion and the administration of India . She expressed reservations on the introduction of elected councils on the basis that Muslims would not win many seats because they were in the minority , and urged that Hindu feasts be re @-@ scheduled so as not to conflict with Muslim ones . Lansdowne dismissed the latter suggestion as potentially divisive , but appointed Tyler Acting Inspector General of Prisons in September 1889 .

To the Household 's surprise and concern , during Victoria 's stay at Balmoral in September 1889 , she and Karim stayed for one night at a remote house on the estate , Glassalt Shiel at Loch Muick . Victoria had often been there with Brown and after his death had sworn never to stay there again . In early 1890 , Karim fell ill with an inflamed boil on his neck and Victoria instructed Reid , her physician , to attend to Karim . She wrote to Reid expressing her anxiety and explaining that she felt responsible for the welfare of her Indian servants because they were so far from their own land . Reid performed an operation to open and drain the swelling , after which Karim recovered . Reid wrote on 1 March 1890 that the Queen was " visiting Abdul twice daily , in his room taking Hindustani lessons , signing her boxes , examining his neck , smoothing his pillows , etc . "

= = Land grant and family matters = =

In 1890 , the Queen had Karim 's portrait painted by Heinrich von Angeli . According to the Queen , von Angeli was keen to paint Karim as he had never painted an Indian before and " was so struck with his handsome face and colouring " . On 11 July 1890 , she wrote to Lansdowne , and the Secretary of State for India Lord Cross , for " a grant of land to her really exemplary and excellent young Munshi , Hafiz Abdul Karim " . The ageing Queen did not trust her relatives and the Royal Household to look after the Munshi after she was gone , and so sought to secure his future . Lansdowne replied that grants of land were given only to soldiers , and then only in cases of long and meritorious service . Nevertheless , the Viceroy agreed to find a grant for Karim that would provide about 600 rupees annually , the same amount that an old soldier could expect after performing exceptionally . Victoria wrote to Lansdowne repeatedly between July and October , pressuring him on the land grant . Apart from wasteland , there was little government @-@ controlled land near Agra ; thus Lansdowne was having trouble finding a suitable plot . On 30 October , the Munshi left Balmoral for four months ' leave in India , travelling on the same ship as Lady Lansdowne . On the same day , Lord Lansdowne telegraphed the Queen to let her know that a grant of land in the suburbs of Agra had been arranged . Lansdowne made a point of informing the Queen :

... quite recently one of the men who at the peril of his life , and under a withering fire helped to blow up the Kashmiri Gate of Delhi in the Mutiny , received , on his retirement from the service , a grant of land yielding only Rs 250 for life . Abdul Karim , at the age of 26 , had received a perpetual

grant of land representing an income of more than double that amount in recognition of his services as a member of your Majesty 's Household .

Lansdowne visited Agra in November 1890 . He and the Munshi met , and Lansdowne arranged for Karim to be seated with the viceregal staff during a durbar . Lansdowne met both the Munshi and Waziruddin privately , and Lady Lansdowne met his wife and mother @-@ in @-@ law , who were smuggled into the Viceroy 's camp in secrecy to comply with rules of purdah .

In 1891 , after Karim 's return to Britain , he asked Reid to send his father a large quantity of medicinal compounds , which included strychnine , chloral hydrate , morphine , and many other poisons . Reid calculated that the amount requested was " amply sufficient to kill 12 @,@ 000 to 15 @,@ 000 full grown men or an enormously large number of children " and consequently refused . Instead , Reid persuaded the Queen that the chemicals should be obtained at her expense by the appropriate authorities in India . In June 1892 , Waziruddin visited Britain and stayed at both Balmoral and Windsor Castles . He retired in 1893 and in the New Year Honours 1894 he was rewarded , to Victoria 's satisfaction , with the title of Khan Bahadur , which Lansdowne noted was " one which under ordinary circumstances the Doctor [could] not have ventured to expect " .

In May 1892 , the Munshi returned to India on six months ' leave ; on his return , his wife and mother @-@ in @-@ law accompanied him . Both women were shrouded from head to foot and travelled in railway compartments with drawn curtains . Victoria wrote , " the two Indian ladies ... who are , I believe , the first Mohammedan purdah ladies who ever came over ... keep their custom of complete seclusion and of being entirely covered when they go out , except for the holes for their eyes . " As a woman , Victoria saw them without veils . The Munshi and his family were housed in cottages at Windsor , Balmoral and Osborne , the Queen 's retreat on the Isle of Wight . Victoria visited regularly , usually bringing her female guests , including the Empress of Russia and the Princess of Wales , to meet the Munshi 's female relatives . One visitor , Marie Mallet , the Queen 's maid @-@ in @-@ waiting and wife of civil servant Bernard Mallet , recorded :

I have just been to see the Munshi 's wife (by Royal Command) . She is fat and not uncomely , a delicate shade of chocolate and gorgeously attired , rings on her fingers , rings on her nose , a pocket mirror set in turquoises on her thumb and every feasible part of her person hung with chains and bracelets and ear @-@ rings , a rose @-@ pink veil on her head bordered with heavy gold and splendid silk and satin swathings round her person . She speaks English in a limited manner ... "

Dr Reid never saw Mrs Karim unveiled , though he claimed that whenever he was called to examine her , a different tongue was protruded from behind the veil for his inspection .

In 1892 , the Munshi 's name began to appear in the Court Circular among the names of officials accompanying the Queen on her annual March trip to the French Riviera . As usual , Victoria spent Christmas 1892 at Osborne House , where the Munshi , as he had in previous years , participated in tableaux vivants arranged as entertainment . The following year , during Victoria 's annual holiday in continental Europe , he was presented to King Umberto I of Italy . In the words of a contemporary newspaper account , " The King did not understand why this magnificent and imposing Hindoo should have been formally presented to him . The popular idea in Italy is that the Munshi is a captive Indian prince , who is taken about by the Queen as an outward and visible sign of Her Majesty 's supremacy in the East . "

By 1893 , Victoria was sending notes to Karim signed in Urdu . She often signed off her letters to Karim as " your affectionate mother , VRI " or " your truly devoted and fond loving mother , VRI " .

= = Travels and Diamond Jubilee = =

The Munshi was perceived to have taken advantage of his position as the Queen 's favourite , and to have risen above his status as a menial clerk , causing resentment in the court . On a journey through Italy , he published an advertisement in the Florence Gazette stating that " [h] e is belonging to a good and highly respectful famiely [sic] " . Karim refused to travel with the other Indians and appropriated the maid 's bathroom for his exclusive use . On a visit to Coburg , he refused to attend the marriage of Victoria 's granddaughter Princess Victoria Melita of Saxe @-@ Coburg and Gotha , because her father , Victoria 's son Alfred , Duke of Saxe @-@ Coburg and

Gotha , assigned him a seat in the gallery with the servants . Confronted by the opposition of her family and retainers , the Queen defended her favourite . She wrote to her private secretary Sir Henry Ponsonby : " to make out that the poor good Munshi is so low is really outrageous & in a country like England quite out of place ... She has known 2 Archbishops who were sons respectively of a Butcher & a Grocer ... Abdul 's father saw good & honourable service as a Dr & he [Karim] feels cut to the heart at being thus spoken of . "

Lord Lansdowne 's term of office ended in 1894 , and he was replaced by Lord Elgin . Ponsonby 's son Frederick was Elgin 's aide @-@ de @-@ camp in India for a short time before being appointed an equerry to Victoria . Victoria asked Frederick to visit Waziruddin , the " surgeon @-@ general " at Agra . On his return to Britain , Frederick told Victoria that Waziruddin " was not the surgeon @-@ general but only the apothecary at the jail " , which Victoria " stoutly denied " saying Frederick " must have seen the wrong man " . To " mark her displeasure " , Victoria did not invite Frederick to dinner for a year .

At Christmas 1894 , the Munshi sent Lord Elgin a sentimental greetings card , which to Victoria 's dismay went unacknowledged . Through Frederick Ponsonby , she complained to Elgin , who replied that he did " not imagine that any acknowledgement was necessary , or that the Queen would expect him to send one " , pointing out " how impossible it would be for an Indian Viceroy to enter into correspondence of this kind " .

Frederick wrote to Elgin in January 1895 that Karim was deeply unpopular in the Household , and that he occupied " very much the same position as John Brown used to " . Princesses Louise and Beatrice , Prince Henry of Battenberg , Prime Minister Lord Rosebery , and Secretary of State for India Henry Fowler had all raised concerns about Karim with the Queen , who " refused to listen to what they had to say but was very angry , so as you see the Munshi is a sort of pet , like a dog or cat which the Queen will not willingly give up " . Elgin was warned by both Ponsonby and the India Office that the Queen gave his letters to the Munshi to read , and that consequently his correspondence to her should not be of a confidential nature . Victoria 's advisors feared Karim 's association with Rafiuddin Ahmed , an Indian political activist resident in London who was connected to the Muslim Patriotic League . They suspected that Ahmed extracted confidential information from Karim to pass onto the Amir of Afghanistan , Abdur Rahman Khan . There is no indication that these fears were well @-@ founded , or that the Munshi was ever indiscreet .

During the Queen 's annual holiday in the French Riviera , in March 1895 , the local newspapers ran articles on Le Munchy , secrétaire indien and le professeur de la Reine , which according to Frederick Ponsonby were instigated by Karim . In the Queen 's 1895 Birthday Honours that May , Karim was appointed a Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire (CIE) , despite the opposition of both Rosebery and Fowler . Tyler was astonished by Karim 's elevation when he visited England the following month .

After the United Kingdom general election , 1895 , Rosebery and Fowler were replaced by Lord Salisbury and Lord George Hamilton respectively . Hamilton thought Karim was not as dangerous as some supposed but that he was " a stupid man , and on that account he may become a tool in the hands of other men . " In early 1896 , Karim returned to India on six months ' leave , and Hamilton and Elgin placed him under " unobtrusive " surveillance . They dared not be too obvious lest the Munshi notice and complain to the Queen . Despite fears that Karim might meet with hostile agents , his visit home appears to have been uneventful .

He left Bombay for Britain in August 1896 , bringing with him his young nephew , Mohammed Abdul Rashid . Karim had no children of his own . Victoria had arranged for a female doctor to examine the Munshi 's wife in December 1893 , as the couple had been trying to conceive without success . By 1897 , according to Reid , Karim had gonorrhea .

In March 1897 as members of the Household prepared to depart for Cimiez for the Queen 's annual visit , they insisted that Karim not accompany the royal party , and decided to resign if he did so . When Harriet Phipps , one of the Queen 's maids of honour , informed her of the collective decision , the Queen swept the contents of her desk onto the floor in a fury . The Household backed down , but the holiday was marred by increased resentment and rows between the Household and Victoria . She thought their distrust and dislike of Karim was motivated by " race prejudice " and jealousy .

When Rafiuddin Ahmed joined Karim in Cimiez , the Household forced him to leave , which Victoria thought " disgraceful " , and she asked the prime minister to issue an apology to Ahmed , explaining he was only excluded because he had written articles in newspapers and pressmen were not permitted . Ponsonby wrote in late April , " [the Munshi] happens to be a thoroughly stupid and uneducated man , and his one idea in life seems to be to do nothing and to eat as much as he can . " Reid warned the Queen that her attachment to Karim had led to questions about her sanity , and Hamilton telegraphed to Elgin requesting information on the Munshi and his family in an effort to discredit him . On receiving Elgin 's reply that they were " Respectable and trustworthy ... but position of family humble " , Hamilton concluded " the Munshi has done nothing to my knowledge which is reprehensible or deserving of official stricture ... enquiries wd not be right , unless they were in connection with some definite statement or accusation . " He did , however , authorise further investigation of the " Mohamedan intriguer named Rafiuddin " . Nothing was ever proven against Ahmed , who later became a Bombay government official and was knighted in 1932 . The effect of the row , in Hamilton 's words , was " to put him [the Munshi] more into his humble place , and his influence will not be the same in the future " .

After the distress of 1897 , Victoria sought to reassure the Munshi . " I have in my Testamentary arrangements secured your comfort , " she wrote to him , " and have constantly thought of you well . The long letter I enclose which was written nearly a month ago is entirely and solely my own idea , not a human being will ever know of it or what you answer me . If you can 't read it I will help you and then burn it at once . " She told Reid the squabbles placed her and the Munshi under strain , which he replied was unlikely in the latter 's case " judging from his robust appearance and undiminished stoutness " . Lord Salisbury told Reid he thought it unlikely in her case too , and that she secretly enjoyed the arguments because they were " the only form of excitement she can have " .

Reid seems to have joined with the other Household members in complaining about the Munshi , for the Queen wrote to him , " I thought you stood between me and them , but now I feel that you chime in with the rest . " In 1899 , members of the Household again insisted that Karim not accompany the royal party when the Queen took her annual holiday at Cimiez . The Queen duly had Karim remain at Windsor , then when the party had settled into the Excelsior Regina hotel , wired Karim to come and join them .

= = Later life = =

In late 1898 Karim 's purchase of a parcel of land adjacent to his earlier grant was finalised ; he had become a wealthy man . Reid claimed in his diary that he had challenged Karim over his financial dealings : " You have told the Queen that in India no receipts are given for money , and therefore you ought not to give any to Sir F Edwards [Keeper of the Privy Purse] . This is a lie and means that you wish to cheat the Queen . " The Munshi told the Queen he would provide receipts in answer to the allegations , and Victoria wrote to Reid dismissing the accusations , calling them " shameful " .

Karim asked Victoria for the title of " Nawab " , the Indian equivalent of a peer , and to appoint him a Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire (KCIE) , which would make him " Sir Abdul Karim " . A horrified Elgin suggested instead that she make Karim a Member of the Royal Victorian Order (MVO) , which was in her personal gift , bestowed no title , and would have little political implication in India . Privy Purse Sir Fleetwood Edwards and Prime Minister Lord Salisbury advised against even the lower honour . Nevertheless in 1899 , on the occasion of her 80th birthday , Victoria appointed Karim a commander of the order (CVO) , a rank intermediate between member and knight .

The Munshi returned to India in November 1899 for a year . Waziruddin , described as " a courtly old gentleman " by Lord Curzon , Elgin 's replacement as Viceroy , died in June 1900 . By the time Karim returned to Britain in November 1900 Victoria had visibly aged , and her health was failing . Within three months she was dead .

After Victoria 's death , her son , Edward VII , dismissed the Munshi and his relations from court and

had them sent back to India . However , Edward did allow the Munshi to be the last to view Victoria 's body before her casket was closed , and to be part of her funeral procession . Almost all of the correspondence between Victoria and Karim was burned on Edward 's orders . Lady Curzon wrote on 9 August 1901 @,@

Charlotte Knollys told me that the Munshi bogie which had frightened all the household at Windsor for many years had proved a ridiculous farce , as the poor man had not only given up all his letters but even the photos signed by Queen and had returned to India like a whipped hound . All the Indian servants have gone back so now there is no Oriental picture & queerness at Court .

In 1905 ? 06 , George , Prince of Wales , visited India and wrote to the King from Agra , " In the evening we saw the Munshi . He has not grown more beautiful and is getting fat . I must say he was most civil and humble and really pleased to see us . He wore his C.V.O. which I had no idea he had got . I am told he lives quietly here and gives no trouble at all . "

The Munshi died at his home , Karim Lodge , on his estate in Agra in 1909 . He was survived by two wives , and was interred in a pagoda @-@ like mausoleum in the Panchkuin Kabaristan cemetery in Agra beside his father .

On the instructions of Edward VII , the Commissioner of Agra , W. H. Cobb , visited Karim Lodge to retrieve any remaining correspondence between the Munshi and the Queen or her Household , which was confiscated and sent to the King . The Viceroy (by then Lord Minto) , Lieutenant @-@ Governor John Hewitt , and India Office civil servants disapproved of the seizure , and recommended that the letters be returned . Eventually the King returned four , on condition that they would be sent back to him on the death of the Munshi 's first wife .

= = Legacy = =

As the Munshi had had no children , his nephews and grandnephews inherited his wealth and properties . The Munshi 's family continued to reside in Agra until Indian independence and the partition of India in August 1947 , after which they emigrated to Pakistan . The estate , including Karim Lodge , was confiscated by the Indian government and distributed among Hindu refugees from Pakistan . Half of Karim Lodge was subsequently divided into two individual residences , with the remaining half becoming a nursing home and doctor 's office .

Until the publication of Frederick Ponsonby 's memoirs in 1951 , there was little biographical material on the Munshi . Scholarly examination of his life and relationship with Victoria began around the 1960s , focusing on the Munshi as " an illustration of race and class prejudice in Victorian England " . Mary Lutyens , in editing the diary of her grandmother Edith (wife of Lord Lytton , Viceroy of India 1876 ? 80) , concluded , " Though one can understand that the Munshi was disliked , as favourites nearly always are ... One cannot help feeling that the repugnance with which he was regarded by the Household was based mostly on snobbery and colour prejudice . " Elizabeth Longford wrote , " Abdul Karim stirred once more that same royal imagination which had magnified the virtues of John Brown ... Nevertheless , [it] insinuated into her confidence an inferior person , while it increased the nation 's dizzy infatuation with an inferior dream , the dream of Colonial Empire . "

Historians agree with the suspicions of her Household that the Munshi influenced the Queen 's opinions on Indian issues , biasing her against Hindus and favouring Muslims . But suspicions that he passed secrets to Rafiuddin Ahmed are discounted . Victoria asserted that " no political papers of any kind are ever in the Munshi 's hands , even in her presence . He only helps her to read words which she cannot read or merely ordinary submissions on warrants for signature . He does not read English fluently enough to be able to read anything of importance . " Consequently , it is thought unlikely that he could have influenced the government 's Indian policy or provided useful information to Muslim activists .