

Status Of Arabic Language And Literature In India With Special Reference To Assam

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Abstract

Arabic has a deep-rooted association with India. It was taught in school, College, University and Madrassas and a source of higher learning. It gives its vocabulary to enrich India's principal languages and its script was adopted by Urdu, Sindhi and Kashmiri. Several centers of learning will emphasis on classical and theological were founded in various places in India as well as North Eastern Region also.

The relation of Arabic with the Indians was very close from the down of the 7th century A.D. they carried on the business together in the Malabar coast. For commercial purposes the marchants of the coastal places of the Arabian Sea, used learn Arabic. On the other hand, Muhammad bin Qasim laid the foundation of the Muslim empire in India by conquering Sind in 712 A.D. Since then, Arabic, being the religious language, become very popular the Muslim rulers and their subjects up to the days of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last emperor of the Mughal dynasty (1857 A.D.) the continued to be studied in the British and the post British periods allover the India including NE Assam.

Arabic, belonging the Semitic group of languages, had come in to existence since the early part of the 6th century A.D. It has assumed considerable importance in recent times due to the emergence soverign Arab states, controlling the vast natural resources. Realising the influence of the Arab states in the world scenario, the Indian government has taken keen interest in the Arab affairs and also in Arabic language right after the independence. Since a few decades back a good number of Universities in India have been offering Arabic at graduate and post graduate levels and research facilities are also available to a limited extent.

The state Assam lies in the North East corner of the India. It covers an area of 53.226 sq. Miles, lying between 22 and 28 degree north latitude and between 89 and 97 degree of east longitude.

Description of the study area:

Of all the countries that have ever been under a Muslim Government, India (With the exception of the Western Provinces of Sind, Multan and Baluchistan) and Turkey in Europe are among the few that have not been ruled by Arabs or by some Arabic speaking people. Not only that but India also, on account her geographical position, could not enjoy such facilities for coming into direct contact with Arabian civilization and the centres of Arabic learning as were possible for other countries, e.g., Persia and Transoxania in the east, and Northern Africa in the west. Sind was annexed by the Arabs as early as the end of the first century of the Hijra, and it remained in their possession for some time, until Mu'tamid (265-279 A.H.) conferred the government of this province upon Yaqubn. Layth, the founder of the Saffarid House; after his death two Muslim kingdoms of Arabs rose up on these Indian frontiers. But their intellectual activities nothing is known.

Moreover the Muslim population in India has always formed a small minority, and the strong forces of the rival literatures have always been active. Hence the Arabic literature produced in India is meager, as compared with the Persian literature of this country.

But in spite of all this geographical and political disadvantage, Arabic could not be neglected by the Indian Muslim, seeing that it was the language in which their holy scriptures had been written and was the key to the invaluable treasures of Islamic learning. How far India has served the cause of this language is the subject matter of this Seminar.

Arabic composition and compilation in India commenced just a little before the time when the general Tide of Arabic activities all over the countries in which they had accomplished wonders, had already begun to subside and many branches of Arabic literature had ripened to such an extent that no fresh contribution to them could be expected. For instance; the Qur'anic works and writings of Hadeeth and Fiqh, had become so numerous that any original work on the subject matter contained in them remained hardly possible, at least from the stand point of a Muslim. Other departments of literature, such as philosophy, scholastic theology, mathematics, medicine and sciences, though over capable of original contributions, had become stagnant for lack of originality on the part of the scholars concerned, and what had been achieved in these domains by the early thinkers was merely being commented on again and again, instead of receiving additions from the labours of succeeding generations of the learned.

It is curious that, generally speaking, there is little or no difference between the Arabic works produced in India and those of the contemporary writers of other countries. The reason is not far to seek. It is due to Taqlid, carried on blindly in India as elsewhere in the Muslim world. As long as the Muslim world had not fallen victim to this great hindrance to the advancement of learning it achieved wonders in every branch of human study; but after it had been overtake by Taqlid, all its progressive activities ceased. As far as Arabic literature and Arabian culture are concerned, Muslims achieved what they did achieve before the Mongal invasion, which, by the destruction of the Caliphate, made Persia free for ever from acknowledging an Arab ruler even nominally and checked that strong current of progress and development which characterized the

literature and culture of the past. Then followed an age of mere imitation and compilation. Though there was no paucity of crude scholars and literary activities showed no sign of diminution, yet, with a few exceptions, no originality can be pointed out in the works of the later periods. The whole Muslim world became the slave of Taqlid; and in every branch of learning the Mutakhhiran became blind followers of the Mutaqaddimun. The decisions of the predecessor were accepted as final solutions of every problem, and thus the learning of the Muslim world became so systematized and uniform that no violation, however healthy and beneficial, was possible.

The conditions of the Muslims of India were ever worse. Other countries had their times of thinking; but in India Muslim literary activities began at a time when the Muslim world outside India had already fallen into the slough of Taqlid, and the Muslim scholars of India consequently regarded Arabic learning with such awe that they could not shake off the bondage of Taqlid. They had no wish to deviate from the following of the Mutaqaddimun or invent anything new; e.g., when Faydi wrote his commentary, entitled *Sawati-al-Ilham* the orthodox theologians raised an objection that to write a commentary in such a style devoid of dotted letters, was an innovation; to which the shrewd commentator replied that the very fast creed of Islam is devoid of dotted letters. They were so afraid of innovations that even in secular literature; they only slavishly imitated and vehemently supported their views. Commentating was felt to be what the case demanded, and constituted the pious office of the custodian of the learning which previous generations had bequeathed.

Moreover, Islam has never fettered itself under geographical boundaries, as some Muslim scholar has very aptly remarked that as here in no English, Mathematics, German Astronomy or French chemistry, so there is no Turkish, Arabian, Persian or Indian Islam. And so it is no wonder that there should be little or no difference between the Arabic literature produced outside India and that produced in India. The Hanifi Fiqh of India, for instance, is the same as that of any other country. The *fatawa* 'Alamgiri, composed here is as reliable and authentic in Egypt as it is in India. The same is the case with Indian commentaries of Hadeeth and the Quran. Slight differences, corresponding to the ancient custom and usages of a country find no place in the books of Fiqh, and are only to be found in the legal statutes of the state, if there are any such. *Fatawa* for the settlement of new problems are always based upon the old authorities who are common to all Muslim countries. India has produced many books entitled *Fatawa*, the most important being *Fatawa "Alamgiri"* The great Indian work on *Usul-i-Fiqh*, the *Muslim al Thabut* by Muhibb Allah Bihari is given a place, second only to the early standard works.

As regards Hadeeth, the only work left for the later generations was to arrange them in different ways and to compose commentaries upon them. India has performed both these tasks. Works such as *Kanz al-Ummal*, *Lamat Tanqih* and *Musawwa* are of this type.

As to the Quranic literature, the Prophet had forbidden his followers to comment upon any Quranic verse without reference to Hadeeth; and so Hadeeth is inevitable for Tafsir also. After the authoritative collections of Hadeeth had been made, there was no special demand for original

commentaries. People, however, went on writing them; but the sources are the same. India produced two commentaries that are entirely original as far as their style is concerned; one is Swati al Ilham in which dotted letters have been throughout avoided, and the other is Jubba Shaghab in which dotted letters only have been used.

As regards scholastic theology one may say that this field is so vast that there will always be some scope for original work; but this branch of learning after a time became so stagnant that nothing new outside India was achieved. In India, however, Shah Ullah Allah wrote Hujjat Allah al-Baligha, which, if not entirely original, contains a considerable amount of originality, and its merits have been duly recognized by Muslim scholars in other countries also.

As regards history, belles-lettres, and poetry, India has not achieved much in these branches of Arabic literature, as compared with other countries, and the reasons are obvious. Arabic was never spoken in India, and the language of the Muslim rulers was Persian. Yet Ghulam Ali Azad was no mean poet, and he left behind seven *Dewans* in Arabic, possessed of distinguished characteristics, and has shown some originality in his poetry.

Arabic being altogether a foreign language in India, Indian Muslims have naturally taken greater pains in elucidating the linguistic difficulties of Arabic literature than the people of any Arabic speaking country. Notes and glosses written by English books are, from the standpoint of an Indian student, not useful as those written by Indian authors.

North East comprises of seven states of India namely, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. People of diverse religious faiths and cultures speaking different languages live in this region. Assam is the biggest and most prominent state of the North East. Different ethnic groups live here speak different languages. From among the states of North Eastern Region only Assam has got the scope of learning Arabic in almost all the stages of education. In fact Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit come in the category of classical languages and these are taught as optional subjects in the schools, colleges and universities of Assam. In this state Arabic languages had sprang out through the Muslim rulers and Saints. Muslim preachers and Sufi saints gave much importance in producing Assamese literature in the light of Arabic literature. For example, the great Saint like Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavdeva had used Arabic and Persian words in composing Bargeet, while Zaikir-Zaaris and Marthiyas were composed by famous Muslim Sufi Azan Fakir in light of Vaishnava.

The Muslim world considered Arabic as the most sacred language because the language of the Holy Quran. In addition to religious point of view Arabic has got immense value in the field of language and literature. Other than the Muslim scholars, a large number of Arabic literary works have been done by the European scholars and orient lists.

Conclusion:

Moreover, the Nadwa College has produced a crop of Arabic writers and scholars who have earned a name for their literary endeavors in the Arab countries. It is not possible indeed, for an impartial critic to overlook the services of the Nadwa scholars and writers while taking stock of the various intellectual and literary movements of the modern Islamic World. As writers they have evolved a style of their own representing a most pleasant blending of literary charm with the vitality and radiance of faith, and classical chastity and maturity with the spontaneity and freshness of modern literature.

English became the official language of the country even before the turn of the century and was the medium of higher education, mass communication and commerce. As a result of the dominance of English, Indians remained largely unacquainted with developments in other foreign languages and thus Arabic was also eclipsed.

Sporadic attempts were made to translate modern Arabic books into Indian languages but it is ironical that while Tagore has become a household name with the Arabs, modern Arab writers have not been properly introduced to India. As Arabic studies in recent years have been attracting increasing numbers of students all over India we have been forced to draw largely on books and materials produced abroad for our understanding of Arab culture and literature.

In the light of this context, the University Grants Commission entrusted us with the task of preparing a study on modern Arabic literature under the supervision of Prof. S. Maqbul Ahmed to serve both as a ready reference to the advanced student and be of interest to the laymen as well. In order to reach the majority of Indian readers it was proposed that the book be written in English.

This survey highlights two-thirds of 20th century Arabic literature to 1967, a date which heralds a change of mood in Arab writing. The period thereafter is too close to afford an objective study of contemporary literature and has not been investigated. Writers from Syria, the Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt are included as well as those who settled in the United States. It was not possible to encompass a range of writers from the entire Arab world in one volume. The Palestinian writers, who form a distinct and powerful group of their own, have been detailed for a later study. The authors reviewed in this book are nevertheless fairly representative of modern Arabic literature.

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