

Anjuman Taraqqi-i-Urdu as an Organ of the All-India Muslim Educational Conference 1903-1921

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The Aligarh school gave a new vigour to Urdu. The objects of the Aligarh movement were superior to those of Fort William College or Delhi College because of Aligarh's devotion to Muslim nationalism. The All-India Muslim Educational Conference also contributed a great deal towards the dissemination of Urdu language and literature from the time of its foundation. In fact, it was an instrumental part of Syed Ahmad's ideas of making Urdu the main language of communication. Syed Ahmad's companions, such as Maulana Altaf Husain Hali, Maulavi Shibli Nu'mani, Mohsinul Mulk, Maulavi Nazir Ahmad, Maulavi Zakaullah and Maulavi Waheeduddin Saleem, made speeches at its forum, adding valuable literature in its proceedings.¹ Mohsinul Mulk once said about the lectures of Maulavi Nazir Ahmad that 'if they were given in Europe or America and if the public knew the language of the speaker, thousands not only would attend the lectures but lakhs of rupees would be contributed by which a major portion of the Aligarh College could be constructed'.² A style of convincing the modern and traditionally educated audience through such speeches combined with religious fervour marked a new epoch in the history of Urdu prose. The poetry of Hali and Shibli added much enthusiasm. In fact, the Conference produced great orators of Urdu. Its meetings provided opportunities to literary people to address significant audiences.³

The Conference for the first time plunged into the Urdu-Hindi controversy when the government of Anthony Macdonnell was close to submitting to the Hindu demand to replace the Persian-script with Devanagari as the official script in the North-Western Provinces. In 1899, the Conference requested the NWP Government to preserve the *status quo* and support Urdu.⁴ When in April 1900 the Government issued a resolution allowing the use of Hindi with the Devanagari script in the courts and offices, Mohsinul Mulk, Secretary of the Conference, convened a meeting at his own residence on 2 May 1900 to decide the future line of action. A grand public meeting was held at Aligarh presided over by Nawab Lutf Ali Khan, which decided to send a memorial through a deputation.⁵ The Aligarh meeting annoyed the Lieutenant-Governor, which caused several supporters including the president to dissociate themselves from the action. The president apologized to the Lieutenant-Governor and resigned from the presidentship.⁶ Mohsin, however, ignored Macdonnell's reaction, who in return threatened to withdraw the Governor's grant for the Aligarh College.

The Governor's threat shattered the confidence of many young Modernists following the policy of loyalism with the Government. Although, Mohsin severed his connection with the Urdu Defence Association, this initiative did not stop the Conference from forming an Urdu section in 1903, known as Anjuman Tarraqi-i-Urdu. Prof. T.W. Arnold and Maulavi Shibli were entrusted with the responsibilities of president and secretary of the Anjuman, respectively, with an executive committee consisting of Maulana Hali, Munshi Zakaullah and Maulavi Nazir Ahmad. The goals before the Anjuman were: to reform Urdu by excluding words of foreign languages, to compile an Urdu dictionary, to review the Urdu text books prescribed in the syllabi of teaching institutions and to arrange the publication of an Urdu journal.⁷ It was in fact, 'the practical answer to the wrath and antagonism of Macdonnell against Urdu'.⁸ In fact, keeping in view Macdonnell's attitude towards the leaders of the community and the Urdu Defence Association, the Conference changed its strategy and decided to patronize Urdu language

and culture academically rather than making it a political issue. Thus the Anjuman Taraqqi-i-Urdu was organized. The literary activities of the Anjuman can be divided into two phases; from 1903-1911, when Aligarh was the Anjuman's headquarters, and the phase from 1912 to 1921, when Maulavi Abdul Haq shifted it to Aurangabad, where he was posted.

Phase I (1903-1911)

In the beginning the Anjuman attracted many members mainly due to Shibli's scholarship. Many eminent personalities like Badruddin Tyabji, Syed Ali Imam, Shah Din, Imadul Mulk, Maulavi Saeed Ahmad, Haji Muhammad Musa Datawali, and Hakim Ajmal Khan accepted 'honorary membership. Shibli initiated its work with an ambitious scheme of translations, priority being given to researches on modern philosophy, Islamic history, Arabic literature, and the history of Islamic learning, such as *Fiqh*, *Usūl* and *Tafsīr*. Research projects on various aspects of Muslim culture and civilization were also proposed.⁹ The scheme was estimated to cost at least one lakh rupees, which included the remuneration of educationists and translators. It was an ambitious scheme for an organization possessing meagre resources.¹⁰

It was decided to start with a preliminary programme of translating and compiling books on natural sciences. This was met by a discouraging response from educationists and translators. Expressing his concern over the issue, Shibli told the Conference that, when the news of the foundation of Anjuman and its translation programme was circulated in the press, many welcomed it by offering their services with so much enthusiasm that it looked as if India 'would become the second Abbasid Baghdad'; however, nobody bothered about it, when the programme was made public.¹¹ The books advertised for translation included such works as G.F. Chamber's *Story of the Solar System* and J.M. Baldwin's *Story of the Mind*.¹²

The Anjuman faced numerous other complications also in its translation programme. The major difficulty was of coining Urdu equivalents for the terminologies of different sciences.

Being a researcher, Shibli was of the opinion that knowledge of Arabic was necessary in order to coin terms. His analysis was also based on recent experience acquired during the translation of works on natural sciences. Pointing this out in the first Annual Report of the Anjuman in 1903, he said that the translations carried out by highly educated people were hopelessly substandard.¹³ This was the context in which he suggested that Aligarh College should concentrate on the education of Science and Arabic; without them European learning would not be useful for the nation.¹⁴ He was not the only person who forcefully argued for the knowledge of Arabic as an essential prerequisite for a competent translator. Much earlier, in 1869, Imadul Mulk, who strongly supported Hindi characters replacing Persian script in the law courts,¹⁵ wrote a very learned and critical treatise on this subject when the Bengal Government appointed a committee comprising the well-known physicians Dr Tytler, Dr Tamizuddin, Babu Rajendra Lal Mitter and Maulavi Kamaluddin,¹⁶ of Lucknow, to compile medical books in the vernaculars.¹⁷ Imadul Mulk proposed that words of Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and European origin, already in use in the vernacular, should be used in medical terms.¹⁸ Advising the Anjuman on the matter in 1903, he declared that the compilation of a dictionary of terms on the lines of English-Arabic dictionary, was a prerequisite for the Anjuman before undertaking the translation work from English.¹⁹ Another literary figure, Aziz Mirza was of the opinion that Anjuman should explore the possibility of acquiring an Arabic-English dictionary from Egypt, where translation work had been in progress for many years. When contacted, Jurji Zaidan, a Syrian linguist, advised that a few ordinary dictionaries apart, no significant English-Arabic dictionary of terms existed in the Arabic language.²⁰

The Anjuman was not the only body to have this experience. Delhi College, after its inception in 1825, for the first time in India, successfully tried the system of teaching modern sciences and arts through the medium of Urdu, and it was this College which formulated specific methods of coining technical terms.²¹

Fort William College, Calcutta, the Scientific Society, Aligarh, Anjuman-i-Panjab, and Oriental College, Lahore, also did useful work but did not formulate any specific rules for coining technical terms.²² Keeping this in view, the Anjuman decided to compile a dictionary, to coin Urdu terms and to compile an Urdu grammar.²³ Even before that Syed Ahmad Khan also intended to undertake the compilation of an Urdu dictionary under the auspices of the Scientific Society, and had sent four specimen pages to Garcin De Tassy,²⁴ Professor of Urdu in Paris, but the project could not make any headway because of Sir Syed's other preoccupations.²⁵ Nevertheless, some English and European authors did compile Hindustani grammars and dictionaries, such as J. Ferguson's *A Short Dictionary of the Hindostani Language* (1773), Henry Harris's *Analysis, Grammar, and Dictionary of Hindostany Language* (1771), and John Gilchrist's²⁶ *A Grammar of the Hindustani Language* (1796), in order to assist their official counterparts, administrators and commercial functionaries. But obviously these dictionaries or grammars fell far short of the advanced and modern linguistic requirements of the Urdu-speaking community in India.

The debate over this issue continued within the Anjuman. Renowned scholar, Dr Abdur Rahman Bijnori²⁷ preferred 'Persian to Hindi and Urdu both in this respect' and argued that in order to avoid extremes, preference should be given to Persian words, until suitable terms were coined in Urdu.²⁸ Another point of view, which emerged later, advocated that instead of deriving terms from Arabic, Persian and Hindi derivatives should be used. 'As Hindi and Persian', wrote Maulavi Waheeduddin Saleem, an eminent scholar of Arabic, Persian and Urdu, 'both belong to Aryan group of languages and both had contributed towards the development of Urdu, they should be preferred over Arabic.'²⁹ Later, it became the basis for the decisions on similar issues which cropped up in the Translation Bureau of Jami'a Osmania, Hyderabad, in 1917. There it was decided in connection with the coining of terms, to

derive words from Arabic, Persian and Hindi, which had contributed to the composition of Urdu.³⁰ The Anjuman decided to launch both programmes simultaneously.³¹

During Shibli's secretaryship, the Anjuman published only two books. One was *Falsafah-i-Ta'lim*, a translation of Herbert Spencer's *Education: Intellectual, Moral, Physical*. The other was *Rahnumayān-i-Hind*, a translation of N.M. Dutt's *Prophets of India*.³² Ambitious to produce useful literature through translations and compilation, Anjuman's motives were two-fold: firstly, to develop Urdu linguistics, and secondly, to counter romantic literature which was causing unhealthy impact on the society. Niaz Ahmad thought that *Dil* of Maulvī Abdul Halim Sharar and *Fasāna-i-Āzad*, *Uftad-i-Jawānī*, *Chāk-i-Garēbān* and *Tirchī Nazar* of Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar and a chain of other novels were increasingly becoming a means of spoiling the characters of the young generation of the *Sharīf* families.³³ 'For people raised on Shelley, Keats and Byron', the approach of 'Victorian moralism', taught by Hali was unacceptable. This young generation, who had accepted the 'framework of western values instead of the Pan-Islamic ideal' was ambitious to make critical application of western arguments to the social and political situation in India. Therefore, a section of such people was not convinced by the advice of Hali or any other reformer because they neither satisfied their 'intellectual demands nor answered their emotional problems'.³⁴ In such context the Anjuman suggested the translations of books of English socialists and philosopher, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), obviously to counter the impact of western immoralism through western recipes. The work advocated, among other things, the pre-eminence of the individual over society and science over religion.³⁵ Spencer asserted the purpose of education to be a preparation for a full life. He put the sciences that relate to individual health and well-being at the top of scale of worthy knowledge and literature and the arts which represent the social factors in education at the bottom.³⁶

In addition to this, the Anjuman during Shibli's secretaryship selected other popular and useful works for translation, like Carlyle's³⁷ *Heroes and Heroworship*, Max Muller's *Hibbert Lectures*, in addition to *Industrial Education* by Philip Magnus and *Problems of the Future* by S. Laing, but unfortunately all of the translations received were below standard.³⁸ This disheartened Shibli. Confronted with two major problems of meagre finances and a shortage of able translators, the Anjuman lost capable services of Shibli.

Shibli left the Anjuman in the words of his successor, Maulavi Habibur Rahman Khan Sherwani, 'due to cowardliness and disheartenment'.³⁹ In fact, the Conference had not sufficient funds to support Shibli's huge translation programme. However, he left a solid programme of translations, though not a solid foundation for the Anjuman. Consequently, the Anjuman suffered a lot. In 1906-07 the number of the members decreased from 400 to 13 because of the lack of interest in the activities of the Anjuman.⁴⁰

Habibur Rahman Khan Sherwani succeeded Shibli briefly as secretary and met the same fate. Then Aziz Mirza was entrusted with the charge of Anjuman. He had just retired from the Nizam's government after completing his tenure of service. Taking over in 1909, he planned to work on the compilation of an Urdu dictionary. He was encouraged by a businessman, Haji Mulla Daud of Rangoon (Burma) who promised to give him Rs. 3,000 for the work.⁴¹ He succeeded in publishing a list of terms as guidelines for further work on the dictionary.⁴² But due to his engagement as secretary of Muslim League in Lucknow, and subsequently on account of his death, the entire plan collapsed. Maulavi Abdul Haq, then Inspector of Schools in Aurangabad, was appointed Secretary.

Between 1903 and 1912, the Anjuman succeeded in publishing only seven books⁴³ which was a poor performance. Worth mentioning among these was *Education* by Herbert Spencer, *History of Civilization* by Thomas Henry Buckle (1821-1862), a renowned British historian of the nineteenth century, and the translation of *Fauz al-Asghar* (a work on philosophy),

entitled *Al-Qaul al-Azhar*. All three books, had been selected by the Anjuman during Arnold's and Shibli's tenure of office, and represented the trend of the period. These works on natural sciences and of philosophical nature reflected the desire amongst the intellectuals to divert educated young people towards the discoveries of modern sciences and to illustrate the latter's superiority over arts and social sciences. At this juncture, when the state's policy of higher education continuously remained under criticism by the higher authorities themselves in the context of political and social changes, the system of education in India was revolving around memorization. Buckle's argument of man's story 'as a record of struggle between obscurantism and enlightenment, suppression and freedom, deadening orthodoxy and stimulating skepticism'⁴⁴ was gaining ground in India too through western educated people's participation in politics. The Anjuman's contribution through these publications, was in harmony with modern trends.

Phase II (1912-1921)

The Urdu section of the Conference began to thrive after 1912, when Maulavi Abdul Haq took over its charge. Like his predecessors, he 'got an old box, tied with ropes, and a register with a few finished manuscripts:' obviously he accepted the charge very reluctantly.⁴⁵ Financially bankrupt, the Anjuman no longer received its grant from the Conference, which any way in the words of the new Secretary, had not been 'even sufficient for the annual correspondence of the Anjuman'. This grant was 'never given' or seldom given.⁴⁶ From 1908 to 1912, all the resources were reserved for the Muslim University movement. Aftab Ahmad Khan himself was helpless, when he complained in his reports submitted during the period.⁴⁷ A western oriented literary figure, Sayyid Sajjad Haider lamented over the Conference's attitude towards the Anjuman in respect of its finances.⁴⁸ 'The Conference is not a state', Aftab responded vigorously, 'it had a savings of Rs. 30,000, but Muslim University fund bankrupted it'.⁴⁹ Justice Shah Din also

criticized the 'unresponsive and unsystematic condition of the Anjuman'.⁵⁰ He urged the Conference to activate its Urdu section, by compiling a complete dictionary of Urdu terminology like that of Hindi in view of the harm done to the cause of Urdu in Bihar and UP.⁵¹

During these days, Muslims were suffering humiliations at the hands of the government to considerable extent. The annulment of the Partition of Bengal and the Secretary of State's refusal to grant a charter for an autonomous Muslim University were major blows to Muslim interest. Both the shocks received by Muslims strengthened the interests of Hindu community; one from the undoing of the Muslim dominated province of East Bengal and the other from the acceptance by the Hindus of a charter for Benares Hindu University on government terms. Under these circumstances, the policy of loyalism seemed without profit.

The utility of the Anjuman was acknowledged from all quarters of the community. Its quest for identity received currency under Maulavi Abdul Haq who secured a chance of prominence through this organization.⁵² He succeeded in obtaining financial assistance from the Nizam's government by nominating him as the patron of the Anjuman. In 1914 the Nizam initially gave a grant of Rs. 1,200 annually, which in 1916 was increased to Rs. 5,000.⁵³ Again in 1917, the Nizam granted Rs. 3,000, for a period of three years in order to prepare the Urdu Encyclopedia.⁵⁴

In addition, Maulavi Abdul Haq extended the scope of the Anjuman by opening branches at various places and enlarging the membership. Branches were opened in Lucknow, Bhopal, Cawnpore, Karachi besides Aurangabad which was the headquarters of the Secretary himself. From 1914, he envisaged a publication programme for the Urdu dictionary, Urdu primers and translating books. Not less than nine text books entitled *Dars-i-Osmania* were prepared and printed on the request of Hyderabad State, where Persian had been replaced by Urdu as State language since 1884. Later these primers were placed in the syllabuses of Bhopal and Hyderabad States and in the

schools of Bombay and CP.⁵⁵ The Anjuman succeeded in publishing *Usul-i-Wad'-i-İstilahāt-i-İlmiyyah*, containing 1,500 words.⁵⁶ The Anjuman prepared a comprehensive list of Urdu books, included in the curricula of Universities in India, with the aim of improving their standard through literary criticism and review.⁵⁷

The Conference never interfered in the affairs of the Anjuman, and it functioned independently from its inception. Except for Maulavi Habibur Rahman Khan Sherwani, all its Secretaries looked after its affairs from their own residences or from the places of their posting. But after 1916, when the Anjuman grew financially stronger, its annual reports were submitted regularly until 1921 in its annual meeting as a section during the Conference sessions. The relations between the Anjuman and the Conference remained cordial. They were rarely disturbed, with one notable exception when the Anjuman received an invitation from Lucknow in 1916. According to the constitution of the Anjuman, it was bound to hold its meeting in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Conference. But Maulavi Abdul Haq thought it necessary to hold a separate meeting in view of the size of the gathering as well as to make it an effective organization. It was generally presumed that the Anjuman was ambitious to supersede its parent organization. 'Although there were many reasons', said Maulavi Abdul Haq, 'for Aftab Ahmad Khan, the secretary, to feel otherwise, his balanced nature prevented him from becoming furious'.⁵⁸ At this juncture, he urged mutual confidence between the two organizations in pursuit of their larger aims. This led to the institution of an advisory body (*Majlis-i-Shūrā*) to decide crucial matters which otherwise proved impossible to settle through correspondence.⁵⁹

During the years 1913 to 1921, the Anjuman published several books on science, Urdu language and other subjects.⁶⁰ Besides, the Conference established its *Shu'ba-i-Talif wa Tarjuma*, with Professor Rashid Ahmad Siddiqui of Aligarh, as its secretary in 1922, which published many books on the

personalities of the Conference, such as *Hayat-i-Mohsin*, *Viqar-i-Hayat*, and *Khutbat-i-'Āliya*.⁶¹ A Sales Depot was also established in 1926 where the publications of the Anjuman, Jami'a Millia, Delhi, and Dārul Musannifin, Azamgarh, were made available. Maulavi Muhammad Amin Marahravi, toured different cities to introduce these books, as its sale agent.⁶² But the Conference failed to earn sufficient income from the books due to 'the change in the literary taste of the people', according to its report of 1931.⁶³ The political turmoil caused by the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1921-22, under the impact of Khilafat agitations, also affected the educational and literary business of the Anjuman.

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18. *Ibid.*
19. Imadul Mulk to Shibli, dated 24 August 1903. Report Anjuman Taraqqi-i-Urdu for August/September 1903, in *Baqiyat-i-Shibli*, *op.cit.*, pp.94-95.
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21. Abdul Haque, *Memorandum on Scientific Terminology*, p.1.
22. *Ibid.*, p.13.
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