

URDU AS THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

A Case Study of the Role of the
Osmania University, Hyderabad, India

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Medium of instruction plays a vital role in the expansion of education. It was more distinctly realized in the Hyderabad State under the Nizams. Until the closing years of the second decade of the twentieth century, the state of education in the Hyderabad State was most deplorable. One of the most important causes for this backward state of education was employment of English as the medium of instruction. English was the medium of instruction not only in seats of higher learning but also in schools where poor children had to learn painfully by rote what they could have learnt without tears, had they been taught in their mother tongue. There was a terrible wastage in this inhuman process of forcing a foreign language as the medium of instruction on children of tender years.

Until the establishment of the Osmania University, there were two colleges in the Dominions—the Nizam College and the Darul Ulum Oriental College. But both the institutions had been in a declining condition. The standard of education was low and the results of the Public Examinations were very discouraging. Hardly one or two students graduated annually. In the Matriculation Examination of 1910 only two candidates passed from the whole of the State.¹ The results of F.A. Examination and Oriental Title Examinations were equally deplorable. Literacy rate was less than three percent. All the attempts of the Government for the progress of education ended in failure. In 1917, Sir Akbar Hydari, the then Secretary to the Government in the Education Department submitted a memorandum to the Nizam in which he enumerated the glaring defects of employing a foreign language as the medium of instruction and proposed the establishment of a University with

Urdu as the medium of instruction. The Nizam Mir Osman Ali Khan readily accepted the proposal and on 26 April 1917 issued a *Farman* giving orders for the inauguration of the Osmania University. In the *Farman* it was specifically mentioned that the medium of instruction of the University should be Urdu. Since sufficient books were not available in Urdu language for University instruction, a Bureau of Translation and Compilation was established with the objective of preparing books needed for different classes. When the Translation Bureau prepared enough number of books for Intermediate classes, the Osmania University College was opened on 28 August, 1919² with a staff of three Professors and ten Assistant Professors. Shortly afterwards B.A., M.A. and LL.B. classes were also opened. The Osmania Medical College and the Engineering College were established in 1927 and 1928, respectively. Thus within a decade, instruction was imparted in Urdu medium in all classes of general instruction in the University as well as in Medical and Engineering.

The Osmania University was the first University in the Subcontinent to employ an Indian language as the medium of instruction for higher studies. The promoters of the University were conscious about their difficulties. They consulted many distinguished educationists of different parts of the subcontinent as well as of England. To their satisfaction, they received support and encouragement from most of them.

The environment of the Bureau of Translation and Compilation marked the first step towards the practical realization of the whole scheme. The Bureau started its work with a staff of eight translators under the supervision of Maulavi Abdul Haq, a noted scholar and writer of Urdu. All the translators were competent scholars and had already made their mark in Urdu literature. They were given the task of compilation and translation of standard books in Urdu necessary for the courses of studies in different classes. Text books for Intermediate classes were taken first and when considerable number of books were prepared within a couple of years, it was possible to open the University College with Intermediate classes in Arts and Science. The Nizam sanctioned an adequate amount of money to meet all the expenses of the Bureau. The annual expenditure on the Bureau was more than 2.5 lakhs of rupees.³

The work entrusted to the translators was a difficult one. It was the first time that Urdu language was made a vehicle for communication of scientific ideas.⁴ In course of translation work, the translators found many technical words for which there was no equivalents in Urdu language. The Bureau with the active help of distinguished scholars and experts from different Universities formed several committees for different subjects and compiled equivalents for technical terms found in each subject. In this way, the Bureau within a period of about 30 years (1917-1946) compiled nearly 1,00,000 technical terms⁵ in various subjects and incorporated them in the translated books. By doing so, the Bureau greatly enriched the different branches of Urdu language.

The establishment of the Osmania University with Urdu as the medium of instruction was unquestionably the most notable event in the educational history of Hyderabad State. The courses of the University became very popular and the number of students increased steadily. The ever increasing stream of students seeking higher education outside the State dwindled down. With the increase in the number of students, it was felt necessary to establish new Colleges. The city College and the Aurangabad College were established in 1922-23.⁶ Within the next eight years the Medical College, the Engineering College, Teachers Training College, Girls College, the Osmania University College for women and the Gulburga College were also established. During the succeeding years some more Colleges were established. From the very beginning the Nizam College was under the jurisdiction of the Madras University. From an educational point of view it was highly undesirable that a body situated about 400 miles away from the capital of the State should exercise any control over the educational system of the State. In 1946-47 it was affiliated to the Osmania University with specific provision to continue English as the medium of instruction. The Mahbub College established at Secunderabad also adopted English as the medium of instruction. All other colleges including the Engineering College, Medical College, Agriculture College, and Veterinary College followed Urdu as the medium of instruction. In 1947-48 there were 17 colleges with 6,261 pupils.⁷

Progress in the Secondary and primary education was equally significant. In 1920-21 the curriculum for the Secondary and Primary education was revised and adjusted to the new needs. Medium of instruction at the Primary stage was made Urdu. In

1939—40 a five years programme was taken in hand for the expansion of Primary education. Under this programme Primary Schools were established in all villages with a population of one thousand or more and most of the Local Fund schools were converted into Government Schools. In 1947 compulsory Primary education was introduced in ten selected areas on an experimental basis. During the first year of its introduction more than 73% of children⁸ under 6—8 years of age were brought under the compulsory education scheme.

English was made a compulsory subject in all Secondary Schools and the old distinction of Anglo-vernacular and Vernacular Schools disappeared. High Schools were classified into two categories: the English High Schools and the Osmania High Schools. The former as before would continue to follow the Madras University course of studies and prepare students for the High School Leaving Certificate Examination, and the latter would prepare for the Matriculation Examination of the Osmania University.⁹ The courses of the Osmania Matriculation became very popular and most of the Schools followed these courses. In 1939 a Scheme called the Revised Scheme was sanctioned and within a period of five years 1939—1943, all Secondary Schools were brought under the control of the Board of Secondary Education and the High School Leaving Certificate Board was abolished. Revised and uniform syllabi were introduced in all classes and Urdu was made the medium of instruction in all schools. However, there were certain schools which prepared students for the Local Cambridge Examination. The medium of instruction in these schools was English. In 1948 there were 115 High Schools with 55,437 pupils. Among these 110 Schools followed the Urdu medium of instruction while only five schools followed the English medium.

It becomes clear from the aforesaid discussion that selection of Urdu as the medium of instruction proved very successful for the progress of education. Before the establishment of the Osmania University, there was no remarkable progress of education and there were only two Colleges for the development of higher education. But neither of them showed any remarkable sign of progress. In spite of an average annual expenditure of more than one lakh of rupees on the Nizam College between 1910—1917, not more than two students were graduated annually. During these seven years

only 44 candidates passed the Intermediate Examination and only 40 candidates passed the Oriental Title Examinations from the Darul Ulum Oriental College. But immediately after the establishment of the Osmania University with Urdu as the medium of instruction a dynamic change was observed in the field of higher education. In the first Matriculation Examination under the Osmania University held in 1918, as many as 633 candidates appeared.¹⁰ This was the first occasion in the history of education of Hyderabad State when such a large number of candidates appeared in the Matriculation Examination. In the first Intermediate Examination under the Osmania University held in 1920-21 as many as 62 candidates passed. In the first B.A. Examination held in 1922-23, 73 candidates passed. In the Intermediate Examination of that year 145 candidates passed.¹¹ The results of the subsequent years were still more satisfactory. It is to be noted here that the standard of education as well as of examination under the Osmania University was in no way inferior to that of other Indian Universities. Like the Collegiate education, progress in Secondary and Primary education was also equally significant. Progress in different stages of education before and after the establishment of the Osmania University can be seen from the following table.

**Number of Recognized Educational Institutions
with pupils in 1917-18 and 1947-48.**

Grades of Institutions	1917-18		1947-48	
	Institutions	Pupils	Institutions	Pupils
Colleges	2	260	15	6,261
High Schools	24	7,316	115	55,437
Middle Schools/ Lower Secondary Schools.	87	18,323	191	58,200
Primary Schools	3,091	1,55,045	6,300	3,97,668
Special Schools	20	2,043	437	18,306
Vocation and Technical Schools	—	—	31	2,003
TOTAL:	3,224	1,82,987	7,089	5,37,875

Sources:

Report on Public Instruction in H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions for 1917–18, p. 13; *Report Nazm wa Nasaq Sirishta-i Ta'limat-i 'Ammā for 1947–48*, pp. 150–65. *Report Nazm wa Nasaq Sirishta-i Ta'limat-i San'ati for 1947–48*, pp. 2, 34–38 and *Osmania University Administration Report for the Period Oct. 1948 – March 1949*, pp. 66–67 (Annexure–G).

It is noteworthy that the rate of progress in higher education was more rapid than in case of Primary education. While the number of Primary Schools rose from 3091 with 1,55,045 pupils in 1917–18 to 6,300 with 3,97,668 pupils in 1947–48, an increase of 110.25% in the number of schools and 156.5% in the number of pupils. The number of High Schools rose from 24 with 7,316 pupils in 1917–18 to 115 with 55,437 pupils in 1947–48, an increase of 375% in the number of Schools and 657.7% in the number of pupils. The number of Colleges rose from 2 with 260 pupils in 1917–18 to 15 with 6,261 pupils in 1947–48 – an increase of 650% in the number of Colleges and 237.7% in the number of pupils. The rate of rapid progress in the case of higher education became possible largely due to the adoption of Urdu as the medium of instruction.

It may be mentioned here that in spite of such rapid progress, the Hyderabad State was educationally far behind the neighbouring British Indian territories. Several reasons were responsible for this backwardness of education. Firstly, the Government of the Nizam took up the task of education of the people at a much later period. In 1850's when three Universities were established in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, the Nizam's Government established the first school for the general education of the people. Secondly, the *Jagir* Areas, which constituted about one third of the total areas of the State, were educationally much backward. Till the end of the rule of the Nizam there were no Colleges in the *Jagir* Areas. For the education of girls there was neither any High School nor any lower Secondary School. There were only 4 High Schools and 23 Lower Secondary Schools for boys. Besides these, there were 149 Primary Schools, 130 for boys and only 19 for girls. Thirdly, a considerable proportion of the population consisted of nomadic people having no permanent settlement. Progress of education among these people was very slow. Fourthly, private efforts for the progress of educa-

tion were much less in the State. Most of the educational institutions of all grades were maintained by the Government alone. As for example, out of 115 High Schools in 1947-48, 74 were maintained by the Government, 33 were aided Schools, while only 8 were maintained by all other private organizations.¹²

In spite of all these hurdles, progress of education especially in Secondary and Collegiate education, was comparatively rapid. This was mainly because of selection of Urdu as the medium of instruction. In fact, Hyderabad was a multilingual State having four major languages — Urdu, Marathi, Telugu and Canarese. The financial resources of the Government at that time were not enough to maintain four Universities in four mediums of instruction as was very aptly pointed out by Sir Akbar Hydari.¹³ Urdu was the official language of the Government. Though it was not the mother tongue of the majority of the population, yet in comparison with English, it was definitely easier for the students. It was the only language understood throughout the State and was in vogue among the higher and middle classes. Almost all literate persons could speak and write Urdu.¹⁴

The selection of Urdu as the medium of instruction and the extraordinary contribution rendered by the Osmania University were hailed by many eminent linguists, scientists and educationists who visited the University from time to time. Among others Nawab 'Imadul Mulk, Sir Michael Sadler, Sir Mohammad Iqbal, Dr. A.H. Machenzie, Dr. Sir Shah Mohammad Sulaiman, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Sir Samuel Runganandhan, Sir Maurice Gwyer, Sir C.R. Ramaswami Aiyer, Sir Ardeshir Rustamji Dalal, Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar and Sir C V. Raman highly praised the achievements of the Osmania University.

We may quote here the remarks of Dr. C.R. Reddy the founder and first Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University:

In pride and fullness of heart as an educationist I beg to congratulate the Sovereign, the Government and the Dominions on the success achieved by the Osmania University. To be the first to recognize an Indian Language as a fit medium for University culture and to have made the University founded on that principle a centre of modern research, these are the accomplishments for which India must be eternally grateful to the Dominions. . . the Osmania University was making no local but an all India contribution of the highest and most fundamental value to our culture.¹⁵

Among the Indian languages it was Urdu that absorbed the largest quantum of Islamic thoughts and ideas. Besides adoption of Arabic script, it has also absorbed thousands of Islamic technical terms in its vocabulary. For centuries, Urdu literature was used as a vehicle for dissemination of Islamic thought and Ideas. Naturally, when it was made the medium of instruction in the Osmania University Islamic ideas greatly influenced the students, and in course of time, the society at large. Respect for Islamic culture and way of life immensely increased among the people. It was seen that the alumni of the Osmania University professed a greater respect for Islamic culture. They could keep themselves aloof from the darker influences of Western culture and blind imitation of everything Western was not liked by them. The influence of Osmania was not confined to the region. It expanded and spread over a larger part of the Subcontinent.

The alumni of the Osmania published an immensely large number of papers, journals and periodicals. Through such writings they preached and promoted Islamic teachings. They established many associations, organizations, reading rooms and libraries. By 1920 a few dozens of such associations and organizations were established.¹⁶ Subsequently, many new journals and periodicals were produced diffusing Islamic thought and teachings through this language. Several socio-religious movements were also started. Ittehadul Muslemin, an organization, launched a movement for converting the Nizam's Dominions into an Islamic State. Initially, the primary motive of this movement was to establish the sovereignty of Almighty Allah in the region. However, in course of time, the movement lost its original force due to changed political circumstances.

The Hyderabad State is no more. After the Indian occupation of the State it was divided into three parts and was included in the States of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. But the Islamic culture that developed in the region through the cultivation of Urdu literature has left an indelible mark on the life of the people of this region.

NOTES

1. *Report on the Administration of H.H. The Nizam's Dominions for the two Years 1320F and 1321F. [1910—11 and 1911—12 A.D.]* Hyderabad, 1914, p. 69.
2. *Report on the Public Instruction in H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions for the Year 1328F. (1918—19 A.D.)*, Hyderabad, 1920, p. 3.

3. *The Osmania University*, a paper read by H.A. Ansari, Registrar, Osmania University at the Meeting of the All India Muslim Educational Conference held at Lahore in December, 1932, Hyderabad, 1932, p. 6.
4. *Report on the Administration of H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions for the year 1331 F. (1921—22 A.D.)*, Companion Volume, Hyderabad, 1925, p. 125.
5. *Literary Services of the Compilation and Translation Bureau, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1917—1946*, Osmania University Press, 1946, Preface, p. 2.
6. *Report on the Public Instruction in H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions for the year 1332 F. (1922—23 A.D.)*, Hyderabad, 1924, p. 17.
7. *Osmania University Administration Report, 1948—49* Osmania University Press, n.d., pp. 66—67.
8. *Report Nazm wa Nasaq Sirish-ta-i Ta'limat-i 'Ammā for the year 1336F. (1946—47 A.D.)*, Hyderabad, n.d., p. 81.
9. *Report on the Public Instruction in H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions for the Year 1330F. (1920—21 A.D.)*, Hyderabad, 1924, p. 17.
10. *Report on the Administration of H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions for the Year 1327 F. (1917—18 A.D.)*, Hyderabad, 1919, p. 36.
11. *Report on the Public Instruction of H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions for 1332F. (1922—23 A.D.)*, p. 18.
12. *Report Nazm wa Nasaq Sirish-ta-i Ta'limat-i 'Ammā for 1357F (1947—48)*, Hyderabad, n.d., pp. 150—55.
13. *The Star* (Lucknow), Monday, January 19, 1931, News Report on the speech of Sir Akbar Hydari at the Caxton Hall, London.
14. *The Osmania University* — a paper read by H.A. Ansari, Registrar, Osmania University at the All-Asia Educational Conference and All-India Muslim Educational Conference held at Benaras in 1930, Hyderabad, n.d., pp. 2—4.
15. *Convocation Address by C.R. Reddy*, Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University, Hyderabad, 1938, pp. 10 f.
16. Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Social History of an Indian Caste — the Kayasths of Hyderabad*, Delhi, 1978, p. 149.