

## Development of Arabic Studies in India

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Arabic belongs to the Semitic group of languages. Ya'rib bin Qahtan is popularly known as the father of this language. Today, it is one of the official languages of the UNO (United Nations Organisation) and is spoken by a large group of masses in Asia and Africa. During the heyday of Islamic civilization, it was the lingua franca of a vast Islamic empire and its universal language of learning. It has left much influence over the European as well as Indian languages. Besides, it is the holy language of Islam and as such it has been studied in every nook and corner of the globe as a language of a great religion and civilization.

It is worth mentioning here in this connection that, study of the Arabic language is essential from the viewpoint of socio-historical, cultural, job opportunities as well as Indo-Arab relationship.

Arabic, in India, has been taught in different ways for more than fifteen centuries. The relations between India and the Arab world date back to very ancient times, and the Arab merchants appear to have played leading part in establishing as well as strengthening commercial and cultural links between the two nations. With the advent of Islam in the Indian subcontinent, these ties of friendship became stronger than ever before, particularly, for cultural and political reasons. Several Muslim empires were established on the soil of India which lasted for more than eight centuries. India became enriched with their treasures of various sciences of knowledge, arts, culture and literatures.

It is to be remarked here that India has been one of the most well-known non-Arab states where Arabic language and literature grew, developed and flourished on a large scale. During the period of Arab rule in the Indian Territory, Arabic continued to be the official language of the government and administration



and the unrivalled medium of sacred knowledge and literary achievement. Moreover, various Arabic madrasahs and cultural institutions of higher learning under the personal guidance and scholarly interest of the Sultans were set up which produced a good number of poets, writers, Islamic thinkers, commentators of the holy Qur'an, scholars of the Hadith etc. Their noble works can be compared to any work of any great Arab scholar. Mention may be made here in this regard about the following scholars. Allamah Sighani Lahori (d. 1252), the author of the great book al-“Ubabuz-Zakhir wa al-Lubabul--Fakhir” on grammar and lexicography. Gulam Ali Azad Bilgrami (1116- 1200A.H.), who has penned many outstanding Arabic books on history and literature like "Subhatul-Marjan". Besides, he is regarded to be the greatest Indian Arabic poet and is well known as Hassanul-Hind. About 11,000 verses composed by him are the living proof of his extraordinary poetic talent. Shah Waliullah Dihlawi (1114-1176A.H.), who has produced the great book "Hujjatullahil-Balighah", on the science of Hadith. Abdul Hai al-Hasani (1286-1341A. H.), the writer of the famous book "Nuzhatul-Khawahir" on the great Indian scholars in different fields from 622 .A.D.up to the time of the author. Zainuddin bin Abdul Aziz who produced an authentic prose work entitled “Tuhfatul Mujahidin” on the struggle of the Zamorins of Calicut against the Portuguese. Siddiq Hasan Khan (1248-1307 A.H.) who besides being a poet, was a great scholar of Hadith, and authored a good number of valuable books on Arabic philology like “Abjadul-Uloom”. Muhammad ‘Ala al-Thanawi, composer of the outstanding dictionary “Kash-shaf Istilahat al-Funun” on technical terms. Abul Faid Faidi (954-1004A.H.), the author of the undotted tafsir "Sawatiul-Ilham”. Abdul Haqq Dihlawi (958-1052 A.H), the pioneer of Hadith studies in the Indian subcontinent who produced many pearls and gems in Hadith literature like “Lamatut-Tanqeeh”. Fadl Haqq Khairabadi (1212-1278 A.H.), one of the greatest Indian philosophers and



author of the famous book “al-Hadiyyatus-sayeediyyah” on wisdom literature, and so on.

Arabic as well as the religious sciences had lost their position of pride because of the disgusting aggressive educational policy of the British government. Instead of Arabic, English overnight became the medium of higher education and particularly, of secular arts and sciences. As a result, the Muslims fell behind in all aspects of life. This, of course, may be considered to be a planned strategy of Macaulay's scheme of education.

The Indian Muslim scholars, therefore, took farsighted attempt to establish Arabic and Islamic cultural learning centres across the country, with a view to reviving the glorious position of Arab Islamic culture. And thus, an oriental university in the Punjab, an oriental Department at Aligarh, Darul Uloom Deoband, Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama. etc. came into existence. Each of these institutions took great pains in countering the Christian challenges. Besides, they were able to give birth a new spirit in cultural as well as modern studies to a considerable extent. Consequently, Arabic language and literature, today, has been one of the important subjects of learning.

It is to be mentioned here that the Nadwis (scholars produced by Nadwa) took utmost care in order to bringing out the Arabic language from the corner of obscurity and stagnation and proved with potency and lively activity that Arabic is a living language having bright prospects. They are still on their noble efforts in enriching and developing Arabic language and Islamic culture in India.

In the twentieth century, India has produced a good number of literary figures and writers who got world wide fame and their literary products are similar to that of the great Arab litterateurs. For instance, Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (1914-1999 A.D), the author of the world famous book "Islam and the World", Abdul Aziz Maimoni (1888-1978A.D.) who formerly held the chair of Arabic in the



universities of Aligarh and Karachi and since long has been recognized as one of the greatest living authorities on Arabic language and literature, Hamidud-din al-Farahi (1280-1349A.H), who has written the famous tafsir "al-Imaan Fi Aqsamil-Quran" and so many others. These writers were greatly influenced by modern Arabic literature and its various art forms. Apart from that, they were impressed by western literatures. Some modern styles and themes like criticism, politics, etc., therefore, are visible in their popular writings. They are also followed by some later modern writers in these aspects to some extent.

The scholars and writers who have been teaching in the modern colleges and universities have taken part mainly in translation. We note that a number of valuable works have been translated from Sanskrit, English, Urdu, etc. into Arabic by them. Likewise, they have translated hundreds of short stories, plays, novels as well as social, cultural, political and religious scholarly essays from English, Hindi and many other Indian languages into Arabic. In this way, the modern university teachers have played a great role in enriching Arabic literature and Islamic culture which can never be ignored. Some of the writers who have earned high popularity in contemporary universities through their erudite treatises are Dr. Abdul Halim Nadwi, Dr. Zubair Ahmad Faruqi, Dr. Masud Rahman Khan, Dr. Md. Rashid Nadwi. Dr. Shafiq Ahmad Khan Nadwi and Dr. Aslam al-Islahi.

On the other hand, the scholars of the religious institutions have occupied leading position in compiling and producing books purely in Arabic on Islamic as well as various literary topics. Here mention may be made the names of Anowar Shah Kashmiri(1292-1352A.H), the author of the most authentic book on Hadith literature "Faidul Bari", Wahiduzzaman Kairanwi (1929-1996 A.D), the writer of the book "al-Qira-atul -Wadihah", Rabi Hasan Nadwi (b. 1929 A.D), the present Rector of Nadwa and the author of the outstanding book "al-Adabul Arabi Baina



‘Ardin wa Naqdin". and so on. In reality, they have devoted themselves exclusively to the study of religious sciences and to the cultivation of high standard Arabic.

It is significant to note here in this context that like all other non-Arab states, in India too, the holy Qur'an has been one of the greatest factors which participated in developing the Arabic language, widening its scopes and strengthening its basic elements. The Muslims assumed the study of Arabic with great importance in order to appreciating the teachings of the divinely messages of the Qur'an.

The most prominent madrasahs and Islamic learning centres which have been playing leading part in enriching Arabic literature and Islamic culture throughout the country are (a) Darul Uloom Deoband. (b) Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow. (c) Jamiah Salafiyyah Benares. (d) Madrasatul Islah and Madrasatul Falah, Azamgarh. (e) Jamiah Islamiyyah, Mubarakpur. (f) Darul Uloom Baskandi, etc.

The most famous colleges in which Arabic language and literature have been taught are numerous in number located in various parts of the country.

Now let's cast a glance in the leading Indian universities which have been contributing much in various ways in the development of the Arabic language and literature to a large extent. Calcutta University established in 1857 A.D. Arabic study in this university was started from its very inception and it got new impetus since 1916 A.D. presently, the Department of Arabic and Persian has been taking utmost care in teaching Arabic with special attention in modern and functional Arabic.

Madras University established in 1857 A.D. Arabic was included in its offering courses in 1927 A. D. and was taught under the Department of Islamic studies which contained Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages. In these days, Here, Arabic is being taught in various levels of learning like M.A., M.Lit., Ph.D. and certificate courses.



Aligarh Muslim University which was founded by Sayed Ahmad Khan as a college in 1875 A.D. and was recognized as a university in 1920 A.D. It has been offering courses on Arabic language and literature since its very inception through the orientalist. This university has a remarkable contribution in the development of Arabic literature in the Indian subcontinent. In addition to teaching, its concerned Department has been publishing a large number of Arabic books, journals, newspapers, magazines, etc. Some of them have already gained much popularity in the Arab world.

Bombay University established in 1857 A.D. In this university too, Arabic language and literature has been taught in different stages of learning including doctorate.

Jamia Milliyah Islamiyah established in 1920. Although Arabic was introduced in its course list at the very beginning yet the Department of Arabic came into existence in 1982 A.D. Here, different courses on Arabic language and literature are offered in different standards of education including B.A., M.A., M.Phil. and Ph.D alongwith certificate and diploma courses in modern Arabic.

Besides the above mentioned universities, in this connection, it needs mention of Delhi University, Lucknow University, Usmaniyyah University, Benares Hindu University, Allahabad University, Kerala University, Kashmir University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Gauhati University, Assam University etc.

History of Arabic studies in Assam dates back to the pre-colonial period. It is significant to note that Arabic, in this region, has been taught in almost all stages of formal education, in addition to the private madrasahs of higher Islamic learning. The number of Arabic learners especially, in schools, colleges and universities, is the highest in comparison to other states of the country. But unfortunately, due to the prevalent defective syllabi and want of proper methodology in teaching, the output in Arabic studies in north-east India has not been satisfactory at all. Modern



facilities of language teaching and modernization of the syllabi, therefore, are the urgent need of the hour.

After the discovery of oil in most of the Arab states, Arabic studies throughout the world got a new impetus because of the political, cultural, strategic and economic importance of this region. India, too, did not lag behind in this respect. Besides the government, tens of thousands of the people irrespective caste and creed, devoted attention in gaining knowledge in Arabic. At the same time, Arabic was included as one of the important curricular subjects in the syllabi of various educational institutions including university . Above all, some special Arabic learning centres were set up across the country with a view to preparing students for availing the growing job opportunity in the Arab world. In fact, millions of Indians are working in different fields in various Arab states and are sending a huge amount of money to their motherland. Significantly enough that these people have been playing an important role in the growth of Indian economy, culture and foreign policy and thus in bringing the two nations closer to each other.

So far as the prospects of Arabic language are concerned, now-a-days, in addition to the Arab land, there are many job opportunities in non Arab countries as well. In India, for example, an increasing number of scopes for the Arabic learners have been created in various private and government educational institutions, radio, television, internet, journalism, tourism, translation, different multinational companies and in the offices of the intelligence bureaus in addition to the Arab embassies situated in New Delhi.

In summing up, it can safely be asserted that the future of the Arabic language in India is very bright. In fact, its study is going to be raised to a desirable status in various regions of the country. Significantly enough that, in the 20th and the current centuries, the literary as well as scholarly products of the Indian literary figures and writers have increased in such a degree that it is not possible for one to



take all these works into account despite its being restricted in modern literary genres like drama, novel and short story.

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