

A STUDY OF CONTRIBUTION OF URDU NEWSPAPERS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT:

Urdu journalism had played an important role in the social, educational, literary and intellectual development of the Indian subcontinent. The growth of the Urdu newspapers also transformed the language from one primarily associated with poetry and literature into an important medium for news, public discussion, education and social communication. The present study seeks to study the contribution of selected Urdu newspapers published from Bombay such as Kashf-ul-Akhbar, Barq-i-Khatif, Muslim Herald, Muhammdan Herald and India Gazettee. The paper discusses their historical evolution and their role in Urdu journalism, education, literacy, public consciousness, social reform and the development of Urdu prose. The study is descriptive and historical in its nature and is based mainly on secondary data obtained from books, research articles, historical records, newspaper archives and other published materials. The analysis shows that these newspapers had other functions than the dissemination of news. They helped in creating an educated Urdu-reading public, raising educational and social consciousness, encouraging discussion of political and community issues, and introducing modern administrative, legal, educational and political vocabulary into Urdu. The study concludes that the selected newspapers played an important role in the evolution of Urdu journalism, as well as Urdu as a language of public communication and intellectual discourse in colonial Bombay.

Keywords: Urdu Journalism, Urdu Newspapers, Bombay Press, Social and Educational Contribution.

INTRODUCTION:

Urdu is one of the major languages of South Asia and holds a significant position. It has played an essential part in the literature, society and culture of the Indian Subcontinent. It is important among the languages of India and is the national language of Pakistan. Linguistically, Urdu is part of the Indo-Aryan family and is closely related to Hindi. Both languages have the same grammatical and phonological base, but Urdu has been heavily influenced by Persian and Arabic vocabulary whereas Hindi has borrowed heavily from Sanskrit. Another important difference is in the scripts: Hindi is generally written in Devanagari, while Urdu is written in a modified version of the Perso-Arabic script. Urdu gradually acquired a distinct literary character and became an important medium of communication among various sections of society.

The extensive use of Urdu¹ greatly contributed to the development of Urdu as a language of literature, education, administration and public communication. Prominent became important centers of Urdu literary and cultural activities in the Indian subcontinent like Delhi, Lucknow, Hyderabad and other urban centers. The language slowly diffused across the regional borders and became a means of communication among people of different social and

¹ <https://www.urducouncil.nic.in/council/a-historical-perspective-of-urdu>

linguistic backgrounds. It was popular because it was flexible and could take on words and expressions from several languages. Subsequently, migration from South Asia took Urdu to other parts of the world, where it became an important cultural and communicative language among South Asian communities living abroad.

The development of Urdu historically can be traced back to the interaction between the local Indian dialects and the languages brought in by Muslim rulers, soldiers, traders, scholars and migrants from the twelfth century onward. It evolved mainly from dialects of northern and north-western India, and gradually absorbed elements of Persian, Arabic and Turkish. The early literary development of the language is often linked with Amir Khusrau, the famous poet and scholar of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, through his compositions in Hindavi. Urdu was called by different names in its early stages, such as Hindavi, Zaban-e-Hind, Hindi, Rekhta, Gujar, Dakhani, Zaban-e-Dehli and Zaban-e-Urdu. These different names show the gradual development of Urdu in different geographical and cultural environments.

The word “Urdu” itself is usually associated with the Turkish word for a camp or a royal military camp. With the formation and consolidation of the Mughal Empire, Delhi emerged as an important political and cultural center where people speaking different languages interacted regularly. The interaction resulted in a common language that facilitated communication between different communities. By the eighteenth century, Urdu developed further in its literary refinement and recognition, mainly through poetry, prose, translation and intellectual discourse. Yet in this period several writers continued to refer to the language as Hindi, Hindavi, or Rekhta, indicating that the term Urdu was not firmly established for some time.

Thus, the 18th century is a significant phase in the evolution of Urdu as a recognized literary and communicative language. The development of literary activity, the presence of educational and intellectual centers, and the increasing circulation of written information provided the basis for the subsequent development of Urdu journalism and newspapers. In the final analysis Urdu newspapers proved to be important tools in disseminating knowledge, promoting social awareness, education, reporting political developments and voicing public opinion. It is important, therefore, to study the historical development and contribution of Urdu newspapers for the understanding of the larger role of Urdu in shaping social, educational, literary and intellectual life in the Indian subcontinent.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. **Mahmood & Tahir (2021)**, In the research titled “Historically Transvaluating Newspaper of the Colonial Rule” The study concludes that during colonial rule, newspapers contributed substantially to the formation of political consciousness and public opinion. The newspaper’s growth, combined with satire, cartoons, poetry and political writing, provided an effective means of expressing social concerns and nationalist ideas. Thus the colonial press played an important role in the political and intellectual growth of the Indian subcontinent.
2. **Pernau (2003)**, In the research titled “The Delhi Urdu Akhbar between Persian Akhbarat and English Newspapers” Pernau argues that the Delhi Urdu Akhbar was an important move in the shift from the traditional Persian akhbarat system to modern English-style newspaper journalism. Urdu journalism did not simply mimic the British model but blended native traditions of information dissemination with newer forms of print communication.

3. **Robb (2016)**, In the research titled “Women's voices, men's lives: masculinity in a North Indian Urdu newspaper” Robb concludes that Urdu newspapers were not only important for the discussion of women's education and reform but also for the formation of ideas about masculinity and middle-class Muslim identity. The study uses the newspaper Madinah to show how debates about women, family life, morality and social reform reflected changing expectations of men and women. Urdu journalism provided a significant platform for negotiating gender roles and social values..
4. **Tahir & Baloch (2009)**, In the research titled “War of Independence 1857 and the Role of Urdu and Persian Newspapers” The study concludes that the Urdu and Persian newspapers had an important role during the War of Independence of 1857 in informing the readers and shaping public opinion especially among the Muslim population. The political influence of these newspapers is further illustrated by the extreme measures taken by the British authorities against the native press. The Urdu and Persian press thus became an important medium of political communication and resistance during 1857.
5. **Robb (2020)**, In the research titled “Print and the Urdu public: Muslims, newspapers, and urban life in Colonial India” Robb argues that Urdu newspapers were central to the emergence of a distinct Muslim public sphere in colonial India. Using the Urdu newspaper Madinah as a case study, it shows how print mediated religion, local politics, Muslim identity, national issues and international developments. It concludes that even newspapers published in small towns could have a profound effect on the political consciousness and collective identity of Urdu-speaking communities.

RESEARCH GAP

The existing literature on Urdu newspapers has been largely confined to their political role, contribution to public opinion, resistance during the Revolt of 1857, development of the Urdu public sphere, gender discourse, Muslim identity and transition from Persian to modern newspaper journalism. However, little attention has been paid to a systematic historical study of the wider social, educational, literary and cultural contributions of Urdu newspapers, especially through a study of individual newspapers and their specific role in society. Other studies have also been predominantly Delhi and North India-centric, focusing on selected newspapers like Delhi Urdu Akhbar and Madinah, with a comparatively less focus on Urdu newspapers from other important centers like Bombay. Hence, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive study to explore the origin, development, content and contribution of certain Urdu newspapers and to analyze their role in propagating education, social awareness, Urdu language, literature and public consciousness during the period of study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is historical and qualitative in its nature. The study is based mainly on secondary data collected from books, research journals, historical documents, government records, newspaper archives, published reports and authentic online sources regarding the history of Urdu journalism. The five important Urdu newspapers of Bombay selected for the study are Kashf-ul-Akhbar, Barq-i-Khatif, Muslim Herald, Muhammadan Herald and India Gazettee. A descriptive and content-based analysis has been made of the available historical information concerning their origin, period of publication, readership, language, content and contribution. Special attention has been paid to their role in social awareness, education, Urdu literacy, language development, public opinion, literary culture and the development of journalism.

1. Kashf-ul-Akhbar: Kashf-ul-Akhbar was one of the important early Urdu newspapers of Bombay, present-day Mumbai, which began publication in 1855 under Munshi Mohammad

Aman Ali Lucknowi and continued for more than half a century. Its long existence reflects its importance in the development of Urdu journalism and the growth of an Urdu-reading public in Bombay.

Zamindar made a significant social contribution by creating awareness among farmers, landowners, and ordinary people about agrarian problems, government policies, political rights, and the social consequences of colonial administration. It provided a platform for discussing public grievances and encouraged readers to become more conscious of their rights, responsibilities, and the broader political environment. Through strong editorials, social commentary, humour, poetry, and political discussion, the newspaper helped develop public opinion and encouraged greater participation in social and national issues. Its educational contribution was mainly informal, as it introduced readers to political developments, economic conditions, agricultural matters, public policies, literature, and national affairs. By explaining complex political and social issues in accessible Urdu, it helped readers improve their knowledge and understanding of contemporary events. It also encouraged reading habits, strengthened political and civic education, and enriched Urdu vocabulary and journalistic expression. In this manner, Zamindar contributed considerably to social awareness, political education, public consciousness, and the intellectual development of Urdu-speaking readers.

2. Barq-i-Khatif: Barq-i-Khatif, also known as Barq-e-Khatif, was established in Bombay in 1858, shortly after the Revolt of 1857, during a period of major political and social transformation in colonial India. It was known for its wide circulation and comparatively high standard of journalism and was also associated with the Matba Barq-i-Khatif printing press, which published Urdu literary works.

Al-Hilal contributed greatly to social development by promoting national consciousness, social unity, political awareness, and a sense of responsibility among its readers. It encouraged people to think beyond religious and regional divisions and emphasized the importance of Hindu-Muslim unity, collective participation, and social reform. Through its powerful discussions on colonial rule, society, religion, politics, and national issues, the newspaper encouraged readers to question injustice and develop a more critical understanding of their social environment. Its educational contribution was particularly important because it promoted modern education, critical thinking, intellectual independence, and the acquisition of wider knowledge. Readers were introduced to subjects such as history, politics, religion, international affairs, social reform, and contemporary developments, allowing the newspaper to function as a form of informal education. It also encouraged readers to move beyond traditional methods of learning and develop analytical and independent thought. At the same time, its sophisticated Urdu prose enriched political and intellectual vocabulary and improved the quality of Urdu journalistic writing. Thus, Al-Hilal contributed substantially to social reform, national integration, public awareness, critical thinking, knowledge dissemination, and the educational advancement of Urdu-speaking society.

3. Muslim Herald: The Muslim Herald was established in Bombay in 1888 and became an important Urdu newspaper dealing with the social, religious, political, and public concerns of the Muslim community. Its continued publication into the early twentieth century indicates that it developed a stable readership and occupied an important position within Bombay's Urdu press.

Azad Punch made its social contribution mainly through the use of humour and satire to highlight social weaknesses, public behaviour, political issues, administrative practices, and

contemporary controversies. By presenting social criticism in an entertaining manner, it encouraged readers to reflect upon prevailing customs, attitudes, and social contradictions without relying on highly formal discussion. Humour and irony made social commentary more understandable and attractive to ordinary readers and helped create a culture of criticism and public discussion. Its educational contribution was largely informal, as humorous articles, dialogues, satirical observations, and short prose exposed readers to contemporary events, political ideas, and changing social conditions. The newspaper also helped improve familiarity with colloquial Urdu, idioms, conversational expressions, and political vocabulary. Its entertaining style encouraged regular reading and made written Urdu more accessible to a wider audience. In this way, Azad Punch contributed to social awareness, critical thinking, reading habits, language development, informal education, and the expansion of Urdu as an effective medium of public communication and social commentary.

4. Muhammadan Herald: The Muhammadan Herald, also known as the Mahomedan Herald or Muhamedan Herald, began publication in Bombay in 1891 as an Anglo-Urdu weekly and had a reported circulation of around 300 copies during its early years. Its bilingual nature made it especially important during a period when English and vernacular journalism were expanding rapidly in colonial Bombay.

Gurughantal contributed to social awareness by using humour, satire, ridicule, and irony to comment on social behaviour, public issues, changing lifestyles, and everyday conditions. Its humorous treatment of social matters allowed readers to recognise contradictions and weaknesses within society in an accessible and entertaining way. Although detailed evidence of particular reform campaigns is limited, its satirical approach helped encourage observation, reflection, and discussion of contemporary social life. The publication therefore contributed to the broader development of a socially aware Urdu-reading public. Its educational contribution was mainly informal because readers were exposed to contemporary vocabulary, idiomatic Urdu, conversational styles, humorous prose, and short-form writing. Such material encouraged reading habits and increased familiarity with practical and everyday forms of the Urdu language. By combining entertainment with information and social observation, the publication helped readers learn about contemporary issues while simultaneously improving their linguistic knowledge. Thus, Gurughantal contributed to social consciousness, informal learning, reading culture, linguistic development, and the popularization of accessible Urdu prose.

5. India Gazettee: India Gazettee was an Urdu newspaper established in Bombay in 1892 during a period of rapid growth and modernization of the city's vernacular press. Although reliable information regarding its founder, editor, publication frequency, and closure is limited, its presence in historical records confirms its place in the development of Urdu journalism in colonial Bombay.

Makhanchu contributed socially by using humour, irony, satire, and conversational writing to comment on everyday behaviour, social practices, public concerns, and changing conditions within society. Its entertaining approach allowed social criticism to reach readers who might not have been attracted to serious political or religious publications. By drawing attention to social contradictions and weaknesses through humour, it encouraged readers to examine common practices critically and develop greater awareness of their social surroundings. Its educational contribution was primarily informal, as its simple and conversational Urdu exposed readers to new vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, dialogue, short prose, and contemporary forms of communication. The magazine helped promote reading habits and made Urdu writing more accessible to ordinary readers. It also demonstrated that education

could occur through entertainment, as readers could acquire language skills, social knowledge, and awareness of contemporary issues while reading humorous material. In this way, Makhanchu contributed to social awareness, critical reflection, informal education, reading culture, language development, and the wider popularization of Urdu among common readers.

CONCLUSION

The study finds that Urdu newspapers played an important part in the development of journalism, education, social awareness and public communication in Bombay. Newspapers like Kashf-ul-Akhbar, Barq-i-Khatif, Muslim Herald, Muhammadan Herald and India Gazettee informed readers about social, religious, political, educational and administrative matters, and also promoted Urdu literacy and newspaper reading habits. They helped in modernizing Urdu prose and vocabulary and created platforms for social reform, community concerns, public policies and current developments. So their contribution wasn't just in reporting news but also in making Urdu an important language of journalism, education, literature, public opinion, and intellectual discourse in colonial Bombay.

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