



THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BOOK TRADE IN SINDH

DR. ALLAH RAKHIO BUTT

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Dr. Allah Rakhio Butt

With special Introduction by
Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Soomro
Sitara-i-Imtiaz

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Preface by the Editor

The trade in books existed in the old world on pretty a large scale; given the size of the town & relevant region which it served. There were satisfactory arrangements, every city & town had trade centres and markets, where books were made and sold. The learned and enthusiast alike were the patrons of this trade, which continued to flourish in all periods of history. We have an interesting anecdote, where the famous scholar *Al-Maqdasi* narrated his personal experience as to how the books, were sometimes valued as rare and favorite treasures. "When living in Cardova, I frequented its market looking for a book in which I was especially interested. At last, a copy of good calligraphy and handsome binding fell into my hand. Full of joy, I began to bid for it, but time after time was outbid by another until the price offered far exceeded the proper limit. I then said to the auctioneer; 'show me this rival bidder who has raised the price beyond the proper limit.' Accordingly, he took me to a man attired in distinguished garb. Approaching him I said: 'May Allah keep our Lord the *Faqih* strong. If you have a special object in acquiring this book I will let it go, for the bidding has exceeded the limit.' His answer was, I am not a *faqih*, nor am I aware of the contents of the book. But I have just established a Library and made most of it, in order to provide myself among the notables of my town. There is still an empty space there which this book will just fill up. Seeking that it was in elegant hand and good cover, I liked it and cared not how much I paid for it. For, thanks to Allah, I am a man of means'.

The Mughals were pretty interested in books, and took keen interest not only in collecting these, but also in the books production, for that purpose they created ateliers in their palaces; there workshops comprised of various sections, and employed experts and technicians (artists) of different crafts. Akbar, the most proficient and innovative among the Mughal Kings, commissioned the translation of Persian works into Hindi, and Sanskrit work in to Persian.

Many of such works were also illustrated with the miniature paintings, not only this, he also commissioned new works on various subjects, by encouraging the authors. One of his most ambitions projects was *Tarikh Alphi*, where teams of writers were brought together, as Badayuni tells about the details of the scheme, & also about himself, being called on that team.

The production of quality books was an expensive exercise; At one time at least between 14th to early 18th centuries the condition of Thatta was the same. The rich and educated kept building their collections, and those entrusted with power cared to establish Libraries, to enable them to function well. The books from the major centers of Islamic World, were constantly sought after by the affording public. The high caliber calligraphy was available, new fonts were also being introduced in the market in Thatta, as testified by the epigraphic material available. It must have made the books quite expensive. Additionally the copying involves comparing with the authentic text, it may also ensure expenses. We have a colophon stating that the *Tafseer* by Yaqoob Charkhi was copied in the year 971 H. by one Habiba Sultan, and it was checked & corrected by her father Mufti Muhammad Qasim, who was an accomplished scholar of Thatta.¹ It shows that great care was taken in production of books, where copying was not only the act of reproducing just another copy, but it was an act of responsibility, subjected to checking by competent persons.

Makhdum Abdul Hasan, had completed his work *سراج المصلی* in the year dated by him in the chronogram² *نظم جلی عز یاب*, which gave the year 1163 H. This work he subsequently revised, (and being aware of its, already having circulated widely) he made sure to mention the fact of updating with great emphases. His corrected work was completed in the year 1169, thus to point out the differences in the revised and earlier one, he associated the year of the earlier one with the easy to remember words as *ربنا فضل* which gave the year 1163H. He at the end of his work emphasized the fact that the present work is fit enough that has to be copied, and not the earlier one with the *Madeh-e-Tarikh* of *ربنا فضل*.³ Taking clue from the emphasise by author, the copyist too, in colophone pointed out that great efforts were made to compare the manuscript , while copying (لت هذه نسخة كتبت قابلت هذه نسخه من سوده المصنف تلت مرات بجهد كثير).

The fact that emerges out of these instances is very clear that book trade was a class bound undertaking, books were costly and were serving to the affording part of population; nevertheless it flourished as more and more people were inclined to indulge in studying & collecting, in the times of peace.

A work by a Sindhi scholar named Aminuddin b. Sayed Abul Mukaram, belonging to famous family of aristocrats, and in his own right a versatile scholar from Sindh, though not dated but in all probability contemporary & in use of the family, was produced in seventeenth century; again it is clear that

1 *Catalogue of Manuscripts, in Sindh Archives*, Dr. Nabi Baksh Baloch Collection, Vol.-I compiled by Dr. Muhammad Idress Soomro, Sindh Archives, 2012, p.18

2 *Madeh-e-tarikh*, the crux of the matter, under the *abjad* reckoning gave the number 1163, that was the year of compilation.

3 *Catalogue*, p. 236

the manuscript was prepared with due care.⁴ This tradition of indulgence in preparation of books continued till the middle of 18th C, when the situation got changed, the costly books were gone out of favor.

The repeated raids to loot the treasures, and to collect the 'revenue dues', the tax collectors did particularly rob the people of their book collections. It is on record that Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhora lamented the looting of his rich book collection, in wake of the Nadir Shah's foray.

The condition with respect to the private books collections did not improve, as the subsequent to Nadir, Ahmed Shah Abdali continued to exact unnaturally high revenue, & its realization was practically impossible; thus the default. It resulted in coarse means employed by those, who were commissioned to collect revenue books were also valued as money, and were taken away. This unfortunate situation prompted a new phenomenon.

The demand of books shot up, due to the unnatural drain out of books to Afghanistan. The copy writers fell much short of the demand, those, who were employed to meet the demand, amateur and lesser educated found it prudent to produce books. This stop gap arrangement resulted in quick rendering thus, we saw emergence of books written in Nastaleeq & Shikast (خطہ نستعلیق و شکستہ), that can be associated with the desire of students & scholars to replenish the gone collections.

Generally, in South Asia books got copied for fulfilling the demand of intending readers. A vast number of individual desired variety of works on diverse subjects. These copies were necessarily handwritten, as the printing came very late to South Asia. The students were normally involved in copying the standard texts, in fulfilling the academic requirements as well the works on demand, of patrons and teachers.

For religious works even accomplished persons used to copy these, in hope of salvage and in expectancy of good standing in after life. One can come across multiple times this inscription after the completion of a book, when it stands alone or is the part of colophon:

هر که خواند دعای طمع دارم
زانکه من بنده گنہگارم

These books, in all probability were produced for placing in teaching establishment and mosques. Thousands of colophons do express this spirit that can be said to be behind copying of the books, but it was not always the desire of well being only, the students needed money to support their stay, away from homes, they did it, even on small payments, hence the informal trade.

4 *Catalogue*, p.479

We have some clue to the prices some of the manuscripts/books could fetch, [one can talk about the trade value some typical manuscripts] my have [There were workshops where the illustrated and illuminated books/manuscripts were produced for sale, besides these were those volumes prepared for the specific patron besides keeping in view the general demand; the popular works were prepared; these were subsequently traded. The collectors of books were keenly following the production. They often instructed the Sahafs (binders) to get the required works prepared, as could be seen from the case study of Lahore.

The market was flourishing in Lahore & Kashmir, during the late 18th & early 19th centuries. The bindings were selected and were ordered; this was clearly required by the wealthier classes of society. Dr. Ahmed Nabi Khan has very ably referred to the process of book production, and its circulation;⁵ It provides a general overview of the rich tradition of Book production in the Islamic World, however for looking into the book trade in the areas of present Pakistan, we have to look elsewhere.

The formal book production in Lahore is associated with Mohammad Bakhsh Sahaf, who had more than fifty calligraphers & copyist, who continually copied books, to meet the demand, he himself was binder of good caliber; he is said to have made quite a fortune. Subsequently more book production homes emerged, Chiraguddin, Faqareullah Sidhu, Illahi Bakhsh Shaikh are just a few to mention.⁶

Books were sold in various ways, but in Sindh there were not many ways of trade in written works, generally it was done by the copyists. The literate were mostly interested in practicing calligraphy to develop good hand. Traditionally the youth were obliged to acquire good hand, as it was one of highly desirable skills, which was respected in society. Practicing writing required copying, and most popular works, which attracted the copyist were Quran, in Arabic, and in Persian *Gulistan* of Saadi, *Pandnameh* of Attar, and *Dewan* of Hafiz were highly sorted after. Besides these the students were assigned other manuscripts, by their teachers to copy, for which the students were paid some stipend, or they received some gifts, like garments. The teachers normally were approached by the customers for certain works, which they would also either do in gratia, or on some payment.

With the inception of printing in South Asia, things changed, as for as the trade in Sindhi, Urdu and Gujrati works are concerned. On the other hand the situation with regards to Arabic and Persian works, remained more or less same till today, exceptions are the most popular works, like religious texts, and those books, which are prescribed by the educational programs are

5 Dr. Ahmed Nabi Khan, *Art of the Islamic Books*,

6 Vardah Shehzadi, *Qisa Nashran-e-Lahore Ka*, Nigarshat, Lahore , 2020, p.14

printed. All other Persian and Arabic printed books are coming from Iran, Librarian, Egypt and Syria.

It was the Government's drive for educating officials & students in Sindhi language, during the mid 19th Century that augmented printing of the books, those were assured of sale, as those were prescribed as study material.

There could be no better reference to *books* and *book production*, in the nineteenth century in Sindh than Dr. Allah Rakhi Butt's PhD Dissertation, which he submitted to the University of Wales, UK. This important work was not available for long time, realizing this Dr. N A Baloch Institute of Heritage Research decided to make it available for the interested public. There is hardly doubting the fact that the study deal with an important aspect of our social history. The only obstacle was to adapt the dissertation for presenting in book form.

As the readers know that the requirements of an academic research work are a bit different, and the candidates have to adhere to a set format to fulfill the protocol for obtaining the Doctor of Philosophy, thus the work had to undergo certain degree of editorship. I hope the readers shall find the book as an interesting work of research, and easy to refer to the relevant data.

Dr. Allah Rakhi Butt was an outstanding scholar having a life-long relationship with the books; it seems to have caught his fancy from an early age, which led him to develop interest in publications, libraries and collections. He was prolific writer and did contribute regularly to the periodicals, newspapers, mainly on the subject that remained his lifelong passion. His books on the subject of "*History of Libraries in Sindh*", "*History of Sindhi Periodicals*," "*Printing & Publications in Sindh*" and another recent work "*Historical Review of Printed Books in Sindhi Language (1819-1930)*" are remarkable for their in-depth research. Understandably noticing his abilities his services were required on various committees, where he made able and informed participation. He contributed articles to the *Encyclopedia Sindhiana*; he served well and pretty long as the faculty of Sindh University, in the Department of Library Science. He passed away, after leading an active life, in 2016.

Present work is story of the book trade in Sindh from the coming of the British in 1843 to the end of the nineteenth century. It begins with an overview of the educational and cultural aspects of the country during the first half of the century, before the advent of the press and the introduction of modern system of education. The modernisation of the country in general, and the printing, publishing and bookselling businesses in particular is brought under focus.

The introduction and Chapter 2 discuss the founding and individual history of European-owned newspapers and periodicals; the matter is dealt in a very interesting manner; it is followed by not less important segment of Indian-

owned newspapers and periodicals, issued in all major languages spoken in the province. These periodicals were suspected of promoting dissent thus, the legislation was brought in to have some control over the printing. The discussion on growth of professionalism in writing and publishing books in English and vernacular languages is done with a relish that is the hallmark of the author, particularly the role played by government patronage, the Church Mission Society programmes and the achievements of the indigenous publishers in this field.

All governments have been mindful of the press in their respective domains, the relationships, both friendly and hostile, as referred earlier, between the government and the press is attended with care. The technical problems of printing, including some aspects of book design, are required better understanding, author has come up very well to handle these aspects.

It brings the matter to the main area of focus that is bookselling activities on the part of Europeans, Parsis, Christian missionaries, government and indigenous booksellers. The important information is given in appendices, which include the first academic attempt to chart the total output of English and vernacular language books, published in Sindh from 1851 to 1900; additionally some other related information can be found on this area of gainful activity of printing books, periodicals, its production and trade.

The author has included lists of published books during the period 1851 to 1900, relevant to Sindh. It is a valuable addition to the information on the subject. As the author has obtained this information, from the lists compiled officially, it has missed on many titles. As a good number of printers & publishers did not feel obliged to comply with the conditions of *Press and Registration of Books Act 1867*, as the law subsequently burdened the printers to deliver a copy free of cost. Besides, some of the publications may incur adverse reaction, due to their views, therefore the printers simply ignored sending these for official count. But this lacuna has been addressed somewhat, by the same author, in his other work, which is also published by Dr. N.A. Baloch Institute of Heritage Research recently.

This edition also includes a special Introduction by Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Soomro, in which relevant information is shared with the readers. Besides Dr. Soomro has critically analyzed the role played by British; Napier's policies harmed the status of Sindh & undermined its economy. It adds relevant background information to the nineteenth century & economy of Sindh.

Dr. N.A. Baloch Institute of Heritage Research is devoted to promote the studies in the field of physical heritage, history, oriental studies, historical documents, archaeology and preservation of monuments. Through its promotional activities it ensures that the gap existing in between the researchers (budding and seniors), and opportunities for support and patronage for research work is filled. These objectives can be fulfilled through the financial support as well as by providing the platform for publications. It is the reason that despite

financial constraint the Institute has been able to continue its publication program. It has also awarded fellowship grants, Scholarship Grants to MPhil/PhD students, Research Grants to Independent Scholars. One of the activities of the Institute is to disburse Dr. Baloch Award, on the best work, in the fields, which fall in the sphere of the Institutes, objectives.

The Institute is indebted to Mr. Kaleem Butt, son of the author, Dr. Allah Rakhio Butt for providing the manuscript of the thesis, for its publication, under the Institute's program of making quality research work available to public. The images on the pages 152, 153, 154 & 155 are taken from the historic collection of original in the Institute of Sindhology, University of Sindh Jamshoro, for which thanks are due to it

The Institute has also published another work by Dr. Allah Rakhio Butt in Sindhi along with this publication, which reviews in detail the publication of the Sindhi Books from 1819 to the 1930. Readers will like this work being a path breaking study, enriching the research in the field of spreading the knowledge through publication, and its economics in the formative years of modern Sindhi society.

Kaleemullah Lashari, PhD, SI.