

The Urdu Research Centre, Hyderabad: A Souvenir

**A brochure with four Urdu essays, published in the late 1980s
Paraphrased and translated by Omar Qureshi**

***An Introduction to the Urdu Research Centre* By the Trustees of the Centre**

The first essay briefly describes the contents of the Urdu Research Centre and encourages people to use the library. The article also makes an appeal for preservation of the collection.

***Voh Makainik Sahib (The Mechanic)* An interview of Mr. Muhammad Abdus Samad Khan by Raza Ali Abidi broadcast on the British Broadcasting Corporation's Urdu Service in 1975**

Mr. Raza Ali Abidi visited Hyderabad for an interview of Mr. Abdus Samad Khan at the Urdu Research Centre. The interview proper is preceded by a brief introduction in which Mr. Abidi ruminates on the scenic Hyderabad skyline and describes its streets and alleys.

Abdus Samad Khan, mechanic and book collector, takes the interviewer on a tour of his library. Mr. Abidi has just arrived in Hyderabad where it is raining, and he contrasts this magical atmosphere with the run down condition of the neighborhood, where in a dilapidated building there is a room containing most of the Urdu Research Centre collection. He describes the collection as quite large, neatly shelved and containing magazines, documents, manuscripts, and heavy, thick, bound volumes. This is followed by a brief personal history of the "Urdu mechanic." The author writes that Abdus Samad Khan is a motor mechanic by profession but by calling he is a lover of books. Six days a week he repaired cars and on the seventh day, the holiday, he would go to various places trying to buy magazines and books for his collection. Eventually, Abdus Samad Khan closed his car garage and turned his book collection into a research centre open to all with an interest in research and reading. Mr. Abidi states that in only about ten to twelve years [by 1975], the collection has come to consist of 7,000 books, 32,000 magazines, 500 manuscripts, 200 travelogues, 250 to 300 *tazkirahs*, 50 dictionaries, and numerous pamphlets. Many students and researchers are benefiting from this book collection but,

he goes on to say, this story is not quite as trouble-free as it seems. To elaborate, Mr. Abidi shifts to Abdus Samad Khan's own description of his collection. The balance of the article is a quotation from Abdus Samad Khan as he takes Mr. Abidi through his research collection:

Here are about three-and-a-half-thousand women's magazines. And over here are about 250 Urdu books of humor. After that there is drama and books on the theater. Below that there are ancient *dastans*. Probably no one has as large a collection of *dastans* as this. On that side are religious books; here, history and there, the *tazkirahs*. Again, nobody probably has as big a collection of *tazkirahs* either. The total quantity is about 275. Over here are various magazines. They have been shelved wherever space could be found. Then this cupboard is reserved for biographies of the Prophet and other biographies and autobiographies. On that side are books by ancient *ghazal* poets, or anthologies of their poetry. And on this side are poets writing *nazms*, *masnavis*, *dastans*, and so forth. Most of these belong to the nineteenth century and are in manuscript form. For example, these 28 manuscripts belong to Chiragh Ali. In the same manner, here is a whole file of the Nizam of Hyderabad's poetry, written in his own hand, which used to be sent from "King Kothi" to his *ustad* Jaleel for corrections and then published in newspapers. Then there is a file containing Kishan Prashad's poetry which has been corrected by Haidar Yar Jang and Ziya Yar Jang. Similarly, other cupboards are filled with manuscripts, not all of which have been examined yet. Now here are magazines for which I have made separate files. For example, *Nigar* has a separate file, and I have the complete set, from 1922 until the present date. In the same manner, I also have the Urdu journal from Aurangabad called *Urdu*, which was later published from Pakistan. I have the complete file from 1956 onwards. Here there is whole collection of books on Ghalib, and over there, on Iqbal. There are about 125 special issues by various magazines on Ghalib. There are nearly the same number of magazines which published special issues on Iqbal. This special corner of the room is devoted to books that have been autographed by their authors. There are also several interesting statements written below the autographs. Over there are books on criticism, research, reference, and various reports. For example, this is the Muslim Educational Conference Report of 1890-1904, the complete reports. In the same manner, reports from Aligarh and the speeches at Aligarh are also collected here. Over there are travelogues and here, catalogs. I believe I have most of the catalogs of all Indian and Pakistani book collections.

Here are the manuscripts. On the top they are all in Urdu, below that, in Persian, and underneath that, in Arabic. And over here, these three cupboards are full of miscellaneous magazines. This is rubbish that I have not been able to clear up yet. There are too many magazines. I have only been able to make a list of about 22,000 issues. I believe you will find one or two copies of all the important nineteenth-century magazines in this collection. Some of these are not available anywhere else. I have over five years of issues for the magazine called *Tahzib ul-*

Akhlaq, brought out by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Similarly, I have the complete files of Maulana Azad's *al-Hilal* and *al-Balagh*. There is also a complete set of *Zamana* magazine which no one else has.

The interviewer then asks Samad Sahib, the mechanic, about how and when he thought of setting up his library, assuming that the book collecting began about eight to ten years ago. But Abdus replies that actually he has been collecting books since he was in class two or three at Jamia Milia Islamia in Delhi, and that he still has the books in his collection that were either given as prizes or which he bought during that time. In other words, he saved his books throughout his schooling, and since then he has consistently saved and collected books. Samad Sahib then informs the interviewer that David Matthews came to Hyderabad from London two years ago and subsequently suggested that the book collection be turned into a research centre so common people would benefit from it. But Abdus Samad says he is now sick and tired of the Urdu Research Centre and will probably close it down soon. In response to Mr. Abidi's query about the reasons for his disappointment with administering the Urdu Research Centre Abdus Samad says that this work has become almost intolerable for him. "For example, take these old manuscripts. If I try to preserve them, I will have to spend about 30,000 to 40,000 rupees. My personal budget also has its own problems. I buy books even at the expense of eating, for instance. If I am preparing to eat and I see a book I need to buy, I will probably forego the meal and buy that book. But similarly, by having spent so much on buying the books, I don't have enough money to be able to keep them safe or to preserve them."

Mr. Abidi is skeptical that Abdus Samad, the mechanic, can contemplate parting with books he has affectionately and diligently collected. Abdus Samad responds that, "it's very difficult here because nobody is interested. The names of very famous people are on the committee of this research centre. But regrettably, for two years, no one has even come and asked how the Centre is doing. The biggest problem is photocopies. People ask me to send them photocopies from Indian educational institutions and from Pakistan. I receive a lot of letters, and with God's grace we have been able to fill all these requests."

"Purely for the pleasure of God?" suggests the interviewer. Abdus Samad laughs and replies, "For God or for the satisfaction of my calling, but now I am tired." Mr. Abidi then states that eventually Abdus Samad revealed the real reason for his frustration with the Centre: "My major complaint is that the literary circles here are not prepared to look at me as more than a motor mechanic. You will think it very strange that teachers send their boys to me for research and they acquire all their research materials from me. Yet when they talk about me they say 'oh, he's just a mechanic, what does he know about the few books he has collected.' I am greatly distressed by this attitude."

Mr. Abidi ends the interview by wishing that the Urdu Research Centre will have a long and prosperous future. Nevertheless, the interviewer notes that he is a bit apprehensive.

Some Apprehension **By Dr. Hasanuddin Ahmad**

The third article is concerned with the preservation of the Urdu Research Centre. Dr. Hasanuddin Ahmad refers to the interview by the BBC correspondent and says that since that radio program the book collection has been moved several times to different places in Hyderabad. There were also negotiations going on with the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library to move the collection permanently to Patna. After Abdus Samad Khan retired as a mechanic, he spent a few years in Hyderabad but then left Hyderabad for Calcutta taking a job at the Calcutta Marion Engineering Company. During this time the collection was moved from Hyderabad to 24 Parganas, just outside Calcutta.

Abdus Samad started collecting these books in 1965. Yet, it was only after the BBC interview, ten years later, that Abdus Samad realized the importance of his achievement. Dr. Hasanuddin Ahmad, in Delhi at the time, also recognized the value of the collection when he heard the radio interview. Dr. Ahmad traveled to meet Abdus Samad in Hyderabad. During their conversation Abdus Samad expressed regret that Dr. Ahmad, a Hyderabadi, had to be introduced to his own city through the BBC, but he was also hopeful that at least now his book collection might be protected. Abdus Samad regretted that even after the radio interview people did not really care about what he had accomplished and eventually the book collection left Hyderabad.

At the end of the article the author expresses his surprise that people continued to ignore the collection even after the BBC interview and were unimpressed by the amazing amount and quality of the books and magazines that are part of the Urdu Research Centre. In middle of July 1987, negotiations again took place with Dr. Abid Raza Bedar of the Khuda Bakhsh Library. And this proved historic. Much activity ensued. On November 30, 1987, the collection returned to Hyderabad, the Urdu Research Centre was reopened, and a new phase began for the Centre. The Urdu Research Centre had become a living book collection again.

The Movement for Preserving Libraries **By Dr. Hasanuddin Ahmad**

The last article is a history of various book collections in India, before and after Independence. It is not specifically concerned with the Urdu Research Centre in Hyderabad.