

A Study of Urdu Newspapers as Instruments of Social and Educational Development in The Early Nineteenth Century

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Abstract—Urdu newspapers played a vital part in establishing public communication, social awareness and educational thought in colonial India. The rise of Urdu journalism opened new avenues for the dissemination of information and ideas among Urdu-speaking readers. Newspapers slowly began to broaden their scope from reporting events to being forums for discussion of political, social, economic, literary and educational issues. They also helped in developing the reading habits, public opinion and spread of knowledge among the different sections of society. The present study is an effort to find out the social and educational contribution of selected Urdu newspapers especially Zamindar, Al-Hilal, Azad Punch, Gurughantal and Makhanchu. The analysis reveals that these publications contributed in different ways to political education, awareness of agrarian issues, educational reform, nationalism, humor and satire, language development and informal learning. The study concludes that Urdu newspapers were not only the sources of news but also important instruments of intellectual development, social consciousness and evolution of modern Urdu journalism.

Index Terms—Urdu Newspapers, Social Development, Educational Development, Urdu Journalism

I. INTRODUCTION

Urdu occupies an important place in the linguistic and cultural history of India and slowly evolved as an important language of public communication. The development of Urdu journalism in the first half of the nineteenth century was an important development in the history of print culture in India. It is closely associated with the inception of Urdu journalism with the publication of Jam-e-Jahan Numa from Calcutta on 27 March 1822. At this time, the growth of newspapers

gave the Urdu-speaking communities a new channel for information and wider social and intellectual discussions.

Slowly, in the early nineteenth century, Urdu newspapers¹ moved beyond simply reporting of events and became sites of public awareness and social communication. Newspapers wrote about politics, society, the economy and the problems of ordinary people. Most of the population was able to read Urdu, and the language's journalism helped connect the nascent public discussions with readers who might otherwise have remained outside the formal information channels. These early publications laid the foundations for the later involvement of the Urdu press in the discussion of social and economic problems.

Urdu newspapers also played an educational and intellectual role in fostering reading habits and spreading knowledge among the masses. Through printed news, discussions, commentaries and informative material readers were introduced to new ideas and developments outside their immediate milieu. Thus, the expansion of Urdu print culture helped spread knowledge more widely and strengthened Urdu's status as a language of communication and learning. In this sense newspapers became an informal educational medium, spreading information and awareness among a wider public.

The history of Urdu journalism further proves that the press was not confined to any particular religious or social community. The article points out that many of the nineteenth century Urdu publishers, editors and journalists were non-Muslims, which reveals the wider and plural character of Urdu print culture. With the passage of time, the Urdu newspapers emerged as

important agents of social change, public opinion and political consciousness. Hence, so as to understand the role of the emerging Urdu press in public awareness, knowledge dissemination, intellectual development and formation of an informed society in the colonial India, it is important to study Urdu Newspapers as Instruments of Social and Educational Development in Early Nineteenth Century.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Khan (1991), In the research titled “A history of Urdu journalism, 1822–1857” The study concludes that Urdu journalism developed rapidly between 1822 and 1857 and became an important medium of information and public communication. Early Urdu newspapers helped create social awareness, spread political and educational knowledge, and contributed to the growth of Urdu as a language of journalism.
2. Minault (2005), In the research titled “From akhbar to news: The development of the Urdu press in early nineteenth-century Delhi” Minault concludes that the Urdu press in early nineteenth-century Delhi transformed traditional forms of news communication into a more modern newspaper culture. Urdu newspapers gradually became important instruments for sharing information, educating readers, and introducing new social and intellectual ideas to a wider section of society.
3. Pernau (2003), In the research titled “The Delhi Urdu Akhbar: Between Persian akhbarat and English newspapers” The study concludes that Delhi Urdu Akhbar represented an important transition between traditional Persian news-writing and modern English-style journalism. It contributed to the development of public opinion by reporting political, social, and cultural matters and helped Urdu emerge as an effective language of mass communication.
4. Minault (1999), In the research titled “Delhi College and Urdu” Minault concludes that Delhi College played a significant role in developing Urdu as a language of modern education and knowledge. Through translations, publications, and educational activities, the institution made scientific and Western knowledge accessible to Urdu-speaking readers and strengthened the connection between education and Urdu print culture.

5. Pernau (2006), In the research titled “The Delhi College: Traditional elites, the colonial state, and education before 1857” The work concludes that Delhi College served as an important centre of educational and intellectual change before 1857. It brought together traditional learning and modern knowledge, promoted Urdu as an educational medium, and contributed to the wider circulation of new ideas through books, translations, and print publications.

Research Gap:

Most of the existing studies have concentrated on the historical trajectory of Urdu journalism, the emergence of Urdu press in Delhi and role of institutions such as Delhi College in the promotion of Urdu education and print culture. These studies emphasize the role of Urdu newspapers in the propagation of information, public opinion, and educational awareness, but there has been little attention to a systematic study of the role of early Urdu newspapers as instruments of social and educational development. Also, there is a lack of integrated studies on their role in the propagation of literacy, social reform, modern knowledge and public awareness. Thus, the present study seeks to address this gap by examining the broader social and educational role of Urdu newspapers in the early nineteenth century.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is historical in nature and based mainly on secondary data. Data has been collected from books, research articles, historical studies, newspaper records, scholarly publications, archival material and other reliable sources on the development of Urdu journalism. The selected Urdu newspapers have been analyzed with reference to their historical background, social contribution, educational role, political awareness, literary influence and contribution in the development of Urdu language and journalism. The information collected has been qualitatively analyzed through descriptive and interpretative analysis.

1. Zamindar

Zamindar was a prominent Urdu newspaper founded by Maulvi Sirajuddin Ahmad and later developed into an influential daily under the editorship of Maulana

Zafar Ali Khan. The newspaper initially focused on the problems and grievances of farmers, landowners, and agricultural communities, particularly those affected by the policies of the Punjab Canal Colonies. With the passage of time, its coverage expanded to include political developments, colonial policies, Muslim political affairs, nationalism, agrarian rights, literature, and Urdu poetry. Through editorials, political commentary, humorous writing, literary material, and nationalist discussions, Zamindar established itself as an important platform of Urdu journalism and public communication.

The social and educational contribution of Zamindar was particularly important in creating awareness among farmers, landowners, and ordinary Urdu-speaking readers about their social, economic, and political conditions. By discussing agrarian problems, government policies, public rights, political developments, and national issues, the newspaper helped readers understand matters that directly affected their lives and encouraged them to develop informed opinions. It provided a voice to agricultural communities and drew public attention to their grievances, thereby contributing to greater social and political consciousness. Educationally, the newspaper functioned as an important source of informal learning by regularly exposing readers to political knowledge, economic issues, civic rights, literature, poetry, and contemporary affairs. Its editorials encouraged critical thinking and helped readers understand the relationship between government policies and social conditions. The use of accessible Urdu also strengthened reading habits and expanded political and social vocabulary among readers. Thus, Zamindar contributed significantly to social awareness, political education, civic consciousness, intellectual development, and the wider dissemination of knowledge through Urdu journalism.

2. Al-Hilal

Al-Hilal was an influential Urdu weekly founded by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in Calcutta in 1912. The newspaper combined political, religious, educational, literary, and nationalist ideas and became well known for its strong criticism of British colonial policies. It addressed Indian political developments, national issues, religious thought, international affairs, education, and social reform. Under Azad's editorship, Al-Hilal developed a powerful and eloquent

journalistic style that gave Urdu journalism greater intellectual and political depth. Its articles and editorials also contributed to the modernization of Urdu prose and the development of a richer political and social vocabulary.

The social and educational contribution of Al-Hilal was extensive because it encouraged political awakening, national consciousness, social reform, and unity among different communities. The newspaper emphasized Hindu-Muslim unity and encouraged readers to think in terms of broader national interests rather than narrow social or religious divisions. It stimulated discussion on social responsibility, colonial injustice, national development, and the need for collective participation in public life. Educationally, Al-Hilal strongly advocated intellectual development, modern learning, critical thinking, and educational reform. Maulana Azad used the newspaper to question outdated methods of education and encouraged readers to acquire wider knowledge of history, politics, religion, society, and international affairs. The newspaper therefore served as a form of informal education for readers who may not have had access to advanced formal learning. Its sophisticated yet persuasive Urdu prose also enriched readers' vocabulary and improved their exposure to modern political and intellectual concepts. In this way, Al-Hilal contributed greatly to social reform, communal harmony, political education, intellectual growth, modern learning, and the development of an informed Urdu-reading public.

3. Azad Punch

Azad Punch was a weekly Urdu-language humorous and satirical newspaper published from Bombay and circulated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It differed from conventional serious newspapers by using humour, satire, irony, dialogue, and witty commentary to discuss contemporary social, political, literary, and linguistic issues. Its entertaining style made it an important part of the developing satirical tradition of Urdu journalism in Bombay. Through humorous prose and commentary, the publication provided an alternative form of journalism that combined entertainment with observations on contemporary public life.

The social contribution of Azad Punch was mainly associated with its use of satire as a means of

highlighting social weaknesses, public behaviour, political practices, and contradictions within society. Humour and irony allowed the newspaper to criticize social customs and contemporary issues in a manner that was attractive and understandable to ordinary readers. Such writing encouraged readers to examine everyday practices critically and helped create greater awareness of social and political developments. Its educational contribution was largely informal, as readers acquired knowledge through entertaining articles, dialogues, observations, and humorous commentary. The newspaper encouraged reading habits and introduced readers to contemporary ideas, current events, political expressions, and changing social conditions. Its use of colloquial Urdu, idioms, conversational expressions, and humorous prose also contributed to language learning and enriched the vocabulary of readers. By presenting knowledge in an accessible and entertaining form, Azad Punch helped promote social awareness, critical thinking, informal education, reading culture, and the development of accessible Urdu journalistic language.

4. Gurughantal

Gurughantal was an Urdu humorous and satirical publication that began publication in Bombay in 1904. It formed part of the growing tradition of humorous Urdu journalism in the city and used satire, ridicule, irony, and entertaining prose to comment on contemporary matters. Rather than concentrating exclusively on serious political or religious discussions, the publication presented social observations and public issues through humour. Although detailed historical evidence regarding its individual campaigns and specific reform activities is limited, Gurughantal contributed to the diversification of Urdu journalism and strengthened the presence of satirical writing in Bombay's Urdu press.

The social contribution of Gurughantal lay in its ability to draw attention to social conditions, public behaviour, changing lifestyles, and everyday problems through humour and satire. By presenting weaknesses and contradictions within society in an entertaining form, it encouraged readers to reflect on contemporary social practices and public concerns. Satirical writing also made social criticism more accessible to ordinary readers and created space for discussion of issues that might otherwise have appeared too serious or formal. Educationally, Gurughantal contributed mainly

through informal learning. Its readers were exposed to contemporary vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, conversational Urdu, humorous prose, and short-form writing. Such exposure helped develop familiarity with practical forms of the Urdu language and encouraged regular reading habits. The publication therefore provided both entertainment and learning, allowing readers to improve their linguistic knowledge while becoming more aware of contemporary social matters. In this manner, Gurughantal contributed to social awareness, informal education, language development, reading culture, and the popularization of Urdu prose among a wider readership.

5. Makhanchu

Makhanchu was an Urdu humorous and satirical magazine that began publication in Bombay in 1905. It contributed to the growing diversity of Urdu journalism by offering readers an alternative to newspapers primarily concerned with serious political, religious, or administrative matters. The magazine used humour, irony, satire, conversational language, and short-form prose to present contemporary issues in an entertaining manner. Its style reflected the increasing popularity of humorous and satirical journalism and demonstrated the flexibility of Urdu as a language capable of expressing everyday observations as well as serious public commentary.

The social contribution of Makhanchu was mainly reflected in its humorous and critical treatment of contemporary social practices, public behaviour, and everyday issues. By using satire to draw attention to contradictions and weaknesses within society, the magazine encouraged readers to look critically at their surroundings while remaining engaged through entertainment. Its accessible approach helped social commentary reach a broader readership and contributed to the development of public awareness. Educationally, Makhanchu functioned as a source of informal learning by exposing readers to conversational Urdu, idiomatic expressions, new vocabulary, dialogue, irony, and concise prose. The entertaining nature of its content encouraged reading habits and helped ordinary readers become more familiar with written Urdu. It also demonstrated that learning could take place through humorous literature, as readers could simultaneously develop language skills and gain awareness of contemporary social conditions. Therefore, Makhanchu contributed to

social consciousness, critical reflection, informal education, language development, reading habits, and the wider popularization of Urdu journalistic expression.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Urdu newspapers played a significant role in promoting social awareness, education, political consciousness, and intellectual development among their readers. Newspapers such as Zamindar and Al-Hilal contributed to political education, nationalism, social reform, and educational thought, while satirical publications such as Azad Punch, Gurughantal, and Makhanchu encouraged social criticism, reading habits, informal learning, and the development of conversational and journalistic Urdu. Collectively, these publications strengthened Urdu as a language of public communication and demonstrated the important role of the press in shaping an informed and socially aware society.

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