

Status of Arabic Language and Literature in India: A Study

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Abstract

The Arabic language holds a significant yet often underexplored position in India, rooted in centuries of cultural, educational, and religious interactions. This paper examines the current status of Arabic language and literature in India, tracing its development from the medieval period to contemporary times. It highlights the role of madrasas, universities, and research institutions in sustaining Arabic studies and outlines the contributions of Indian scholars to Arabic literature, particularly in the fields of grammar, poetry, and Islamic sciences. Despite challenges posed by changing educational priorities, globalization, and limited job opportunities, Arabic continues to attract learners due to its religious, cultural, and diplomatic importance. The paper also explores the publication trends of Arabic literary works in India and the role of translation in bridging Arabic and Indian literatures. The analysis concludes that while Arabic language and literature face challenges in India, there remains a resilient interest and academic infrastructure that can be strengthened to preserve and advance the study of Arabic in the country.

Keywords: Arabic Language; Arabic education; Islamic education; Modern Literature.

Introduction

Arabic language and literature occupy a significant place in the cultural and intellectual history of India. The arrival of Arabic in the Indian subcontinent can be traced back to early trade relations with Arab merchants and the subsequent spread of Islam, which led to the establishment of Arabic as a language of religion, scholarship, and administration in various parts of India. Over the centuries, Arabic became a medium for religious studies, legal scholarship, and literary pursuits, contributing to the intellectual heritage of the country.

Madrasas across India have traditionally played a vital role in preserving and promoting Arabic studies, focusing on Qur'anic studies, Hadith, jurisprudence, and classical Arabic poetry and prose. Simultaneously, modern universities, such as Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and several state universities, have established Arabic departments, offering undergraduate, postgraduate, and research programs that emphasize both classical and modern Arabic literature and linguistic studies.

Arabic literature in India is diverse, with contributions ranging from religious exegesis and poetry to contemporary prose and translation work. Indian scholars have made notable contributions to Arabic grammar, rhetoric, and literary criticism, while also engaging in the translation of Arabic literary and scientific texts into regional languages, thereby enriching the broader literary landscape of India.

Despite its rich historical presence, the Arabic language in India faces challenges today, including reduced job opportunities, shifting educational priorities, and limited resources for advanced research in Arabic

literature. However, the language retains its importance due to its religious significance for a large segment of the population, its relevance for understanding Islamic scholarship, and its emerging role in diplomatic and economic relations with Arabic-speaking countries.

This study seeks to analyze the present status of Arabic language and literature in India, highlighting the institutional frameworks supporting it, the contributions of Indian scholars to Arabic literature, and the challenges and opportunities for sustaining Arabic studies in the contemporary Indian context.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the historical significance and deep-rooted presence of Arabic language and literature in India, there is a noticeable decline in its active study and practical application in contemporary times. While Arabic remains a language of religious and cultural importance for many in India, its position in academic, literary, and professional spheres faces challenges due to changing educational priorities, limited career opportunities, and insufficient modern resources for its study.

The gap between traditional madrasa-based Arabic education and modern university curricula often leads to a lack of comprehensive linguistic and literary competence among students. Additionally, there is limited documentation and critical analysis of the contributions made by Indian scholars to Arabic literature, resulting in an under appreciation of India's role in the development and preservation of Arabic literary heritage.

Furthermore, the absence of updated teaching methodologies, scarcity of quality Arabic literary publications within India, and a declining interest in pursuing Arabic studies at higher education levels raise concerns about the future sustainability of Arabic language and literature in India. These issues collectively necessitate a systematic study to assess the current status, identify the challenges, and explore the opportunities to revitalize Arabic language and literature in India.

This study aims to address these issues by examining the institutional support structures, the level of academic and literary contributions, and the practical challenges faced by students and educators in the field of Arabic in India.

Objectives of the Study

1. To trace the historical development of Arabic language and literature in India, highlighting key periods, scholars, and institutions that have contributed to its growth.
2. To examine the current status of Arabic language teaching and learning in India, with a focus on madrasas, colleges, universities, and other educational and cultural institutions.
3. To analyze the contributions of Indian scholars and writers to Arabic literature, including classical works, modern writings, and translations.
4. To identify the major challenges faced by students, teachers, and institutions in promoting Arabic language and literature in contemporary India.
5. To assess the relevance and opportunities for Arabic language in modern India in the contexts of religious studies, cultural exchange, international relations, and employment.
6. To suggest practical measures and recommendations for strengthening Arabic language education and literary research in India for future generations.

Review of Literature

Several scholars have explored the historical development, current status, and challenges faced by Arabic

language and literature in India.

- **Historical Contributions:** Scholars like M. G. Husain (1976) and A. S. Bazmee Ansari (1989) have documented the deep-rooted presence of Arabic in India, tracing it back to the advent of Islam and its institutionalization through madrasas and Sufi khanqahs. The inclusion of Arabic in the curricula of Islamic institutions and its use as a scholarly language during the medieval period established a strong literary and linguistic foundation.
- **Arabic in Academic Institutions:** Research by Prof. S. A. Rahman (2004) highlights that Arabic is taught in several Indian universities, including Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and various state universities, where structured programs (UG, PG, and research levels) exist. However, scholars like Mohammad Anas (2018) argue that despite its presence, Arabic faces declining enrollment trends due to limited job opportunities outside religious or teaching sectors.
- **Literary Contributions:** Studies on Arabic literature in India indicate significant scholarly contributions, particularly in poetry, grammar, rhetoric, and Islamic jurisprudence. Works by Indian scholars such as Shah Waliullah and Azad Bilgrami have been subjects of analysis in various doctoral theses, showing the intellectual richness of Indo-Arabic literature.
- **Arabic and Employment Opportunities:** Research by Javed Alam (2020) indicates that while the knowledge of Arabic opens avenues in translation, media, and Gulf employment markets, the scope remains underutilized due to a lack of policy-level promotion and modern curriculum reforms.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the current status of Arabic language and literature in India, exploring its historical background, present condition in academic institutions, challenges, and prospects for its development.

Discussion

Arabic is one of the top most branches of Semitic languages that played a leading role in all aspects of modern human society. This language witnessed many ups and downs during its long history, like many other major languages of the World, such as Sanskrit, Persian, French, Chinese and other living languages of the globe. In recent time, Arabic is one of the six official languages of the United Nations Organization (UNO). Besides these, Arabic is the official language of more than twenty –three countries of the world and in the Middle East around 422 million people speak it as their first language. Many more people can also understand it as a second language, since it is so widely spoken language throughout the world.

It is known by the study of the history of Indo-Arabic literature, That Indian writers have a great contribution to the field of Arabic language and literature. They paid remarkable attention to the Arabic studies and played a tremendous role in its development. India has been one of the well-known non-Arab countries where Arabic language and literature grew and developed more than any other non-Arab countries in the world.

India is one of the few countries that have been enjoying close commercial and cultural links with the Arab world since the dawn of history till today. In India, teaching and learning of Islamic teachings have played a very vital role for the promotion and development of Arabic language and literature. This language entered the Indian subcontinent for several centuries before the emergence of the light of Islam in various costal parts of the western and southern India during the middle of the seventh century A.D.

Arabic language was one of the important foreign languages from the beginning of Arab era in Sind province until the ending of first half of the nineteenth century, when Bahadur Shah Zafar was exiled to Myanmar (Burma), in 1857 A.D., but because of the use of the Persian language Arabic language did not obtain the status of mother tongue in any part of India throughout the long Islamic period. However, it sometimes ranked as an official language in some western coastal regions of India.

It is undeniable that, a new and an influential era of Arabic language and literature had started in India since the establishment of the first independent Islamic government in Sind under the leadership of Muhammad bin Qasim al-Thaqafi in the first half of the 8th century A.D. Arabic language and literature had remained one of the most important subjects in Islamic educational curricula in every Islamic era, and Muslims were needed to learn this language in order to understand the noble Qur'an and Prophet's Hadith (traditions).

Indo-Arabic literature has a rich tradition of writings because, India gave birth to a large number of skilled persons of Arabic language and literature whose noble works can be compared to any great Arab scholars and writers such as Sheikh Abd al-Haq Dehlavi, author of Lam'at al-Tanqih (لمعات التنقيح), Molla Mahmoud of Jaunpur, author of Al-Shams al-Bazighah (الشمس البازغة), Muhibullah of Bihar, author of Musallam al-thubut (مسلم الثبوت), Muhammad Murtadha of Bilgram, author of Taj al-Urus (تاج العروس) in 10 volumes, Muhammad Ali al-Thawi, author of Kash'shafu Istalahat al-Funun (كشف اصطلاحات الفنون), Abu al-Faiz Faidi, author of Sawati-ul-Ilham (سواطع الإلهام), Shah Wali-Ullah Dehlawi, author of Hujjatullahil Balighah (حجة الله البالغة), Siddiq Hassan Khan, author of Abjad al-Ulum (أبجد العلوم) in three volumes, Ghulam Ali Azad of Bilgram, author of Sabhatul Marjan Fi Athar-e- Hindustan (سبحة المرجان في آثار هندوستان), Fadl Haq of Khairabad, author of Al-Hikmah al-Sa'diyyah (الحكمة السعيدية), Abd al-Hai al-Hasani, author of Al-Elam Biman Fi Tarikh al-Hindi minal Alam (الإعلام بمن في تاريخ الهند من الأعلام), Abd al-Rahman, of Mubarakpur author of Tuhfatu al-Ahwazi (تحفة الأحوازي), Ubaidullah of Mubarakpur, author of Mira'at al-Mafatih (مراعاة المفاتيح), Abd-ul-Aziz al-Maimani, author of Abu al-A'la-e- wa Ma Ilaihi (أبو العلاء وما إليه), Hamid Uddin al-Farahi, author of Al-Im'an (الإيمان), Khalil Ahmad of Saharanpur, author of Bazlal Zuhud (بذل الجهد) in 20 volumes, Anwar Shah of Kashmir author of Faid-ul-Bari (فيض الباري) in 4 volumes, Sayyed Abul Hasan Ali al-Hasani Nadwi, writer of world famous book Ma Dha Khasir al-A'alamo Bi-Inhitat al-Muslimin (ماذا خسر العالم بإحطاط المسلمين) and so on.

Indian Muslims gave much important towards Arabic language and literature throughout the ages, in the field of teaching, learning and writings, thus Indian libraries are full of Arabic books and prosperous with the literary and educational remembrances which have been left by them. The indo-Arabic writings are not limited to Islamic education and literature only but the writers also gave importance towards political, social, historical, economical and cultural writings, along with the modern philosophy. As for the modern Arabic journalism, there are dozens of magazines, newspapers and periodicals issued in India in which the topics published related to different subjects about modern literature, current social issues and knowledgeable topics having importance in human life.

Thus because of the political, economical, social and cultural importance of Arabic language, Indian universities also introduced the Arabic language study in their courses, among them the Jawaharlal Nehru University, University of Delhi, Banaras Hindu University, English and Foreign Languages University: Hyderabad, Jamia Millia Islamia: New Delhi, Aligarh Muslim University, University of Calicut, Osmania University: Hyderabad, University of Kashmir, Gauhati University, Assam University: Silchar and many more. The Arabic language arrived in the northeastern region of India when the religion Islam arrived here during the attachment of this region to the Delhi Sultanate, in 1303 A.D. Since that day the Arabic

language is read and taught here in the religious institutions and also in govt. schools, colleges and Universities. All of those institutions are playing a vital role towards the development of Arabic language and literature in the region. Many students have done and also are doing their research works in the Arabic departments of Gauhati University, Cotton University and Assam University:Silchar. Some Arabic books about history, literature and grammar have been written by the assamese people. A yearly magazine Al-Shuruq Al-Hind is issued by the Department of Arabic, Assam University: Silchar.

Suggestion

- **Curriculum Modernization:**

Update Arabic syllabi in universities and madrasas to include contemporary Arabic literature, media Arabic, and spoken skills alongside classical texts. Integrate Arabic computing, translation technology, and digital resources into the curriculum to enhance employability.

- **Teacher Training and Capacity Building:**

Organize regular workshops and refresher courses for Arabic teachers to adopt modern teaching methods and learner-centered approaches. Encourage teachers to develop multimedia and digital content for Arabic learning.

- **Increase Institutional Support:**

Universities should increase the number of seats in Arabic departments where demand exists. Encourage the establishment of research centers focusing on Arabic studies to foster scholarly output and translations.

- **Promote Employment-Oriented Arabic Education:**

Link Arabic learning with translation, tourism, international business, media, and diplomatic services to attract more students. Collaborate with Gulf-based companies, embassies, and translation agencies to provide internships for Arabic students

Conclusion

The study on the status of Arabic language and literature in India reveals that Arabic holds a significant historical, cultural, and educational position in the country. Its roots can be traced to the early arrival of Islam in India, and over centuries, Arabic has flourished in religious, scholarly, and literary domains, contributing to the intellectual heritage of Indian society.

Despite its rich legacy, the present status of Arabic faces challenges, including outdated curricula, limited employment opportunities, and insufficient integration with technology and modern educational practices. While Arabic is taught in many universities and madrasas across India, enrollment in Arabic programs is gradually declining due to perceived limitations in career prospects and lack of awareness among the younger generation about the utility of Arabic beyond religious contexts.

However, there are opportunities to revitalize Arabic language and literature in India by modernizing curricula, linking Arabic learning with translation, media, and Gulf employment markets, and leveraging technology for teaching and research. Government and institutional support, along with community engagement, can further strengthen Arabic studies, making them relevant to contemporary needs while preserving their cultural and scholarly essence.

In conclusion, Arabic language and literature in India stand at a crossroads, where strategic interventions, policy support, and innovative teaching practices can help preserve this rich heritage while aligning it with modern educational and professional needs. A balanced approach focusing on tradition and modernity will ensure that Arabic continues to contribute to India's multicultural fabric and educational landscape.

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