

Bibliographic Contribution of Muslims **A Brief Historical Survey**

S. M. Shafi *

Abstract

The paper is a historical survey of bibliographic contribution of Muslims. It traces history of bibliography beginning from Risala of Ibn Ishaq in listing the documents in logical order and records the contribution of important scholars, jurists and orientalist from Persia, Arabian peninsula, Turkey and India in developing the science of bibliography and the distinguished bibliographies from 11th century to 20th century.

1. Introduction

The history of bibliography runs parallel with the development of scholarship. The bibliography as a distinct field got evolved under Muslims in their heydays but unfortunately this has not attracted the attention of our present day bibliographers. The Muslim scholarship finds its roots in the Greek learning and in Persian and Indic sources. The beginning was made by Umayyads, particularly under Khalid bin Yazid, by cultivating Greek and Coptic studies on alchemy and medicine, but the accession of Abbasids gave the real impulse to such studies. Mamun (813-833 A.D) like his father, Caliph Harun Rashid, was a great patron of learning and it was under his patronage that oriental renaissance took place. There also existed keen desire to know what has been written by writers of old culture. To realize this objective, *Baitul Hikma* (House of Wisdom) was established by caliph Mamun

*Reader, Department of Library and Information Science, University of Kashmir, Srinagar.

for translating Greek, Syrian, Persian and Indian sources by scholars like Hunain bin Ishaq (808-873 A.D.) his son Ishaq and his nephew Hubaysh. The 9th century A. D., indeed has been termed by historians as the golden age for the evolution of Muslim sciences in the form of both translations and original works. Along with the influx of manuscripts a need was felt for indexing of such works with a view to make them known to others at far off places. But all such works are known in parts or have sunk entirely into oblivion. The present paper is an attempt to look into the contributions made by Muslim scholars in this direction.

2. Pioneering Attempts

The first bibliography compiled and which has survived to our day is *Risāla* of Hunain bin Ishaq.¹ This is a report on the various translations of Galen that were available during mid-ninth century. Hunain enumerates 192 titles. The list is said to be not exhaustive because Hunain wrote the work after complete loss of his library. This work was later updated by Muhammad bin Zakariyya al-Razi (known in Europe as Rhazes)². Ibn Nadim, too, reports the existence of fihrists (bibliography/ Catalogues) such as those of al-Razi, Yahyya bin Iddi A'yashi before his own *al-Fihrist*. However, from the point of bibliographical development the tenth century witnessed a number of bibliographical work, including *al-Fihrist* of Ibn Nadim. Among the distinguished names mention may be made of jurists and writers like Ibn Babawayh (923-991 A. D), Shaikh al- Mujid and Syed Murtada.³

2.1. Al-Fihrist

It is an index of Arabic books written by Arabs as well as non-Arabs composed by Abu'l Faraj Mohammad b. Ishaq well known as Ibn Abi Ya'qub an-Nadim in 988 A. D. at Constantinople (Istanbul). It is commonly called as the first bibliography to be compiled in the Muslim world. The book exists in two editions both of the year 377 A.H/987 A. D.

The book was divided into ten discourses (*maqālāt*) which were further

divided into subdivisions called sections (*funūn*) and then in each section the individual writers were grouped approximately in chronological order, followed by their biographical sketches and an enumeration of their work.⁴ The printing of this book was started as late as 1871 by G. Fliixgel, completed by Dr.J.Roedgar, Dr. Muller on the request of Fliigel's son in 1872. For the second time it was published in 1348 AH/1929 by Maktaba- Rehmania, Cairo. The English translation of this work came out in early seventies.⁵

2:2. Fihrist Tusi and Rijali Najashi

The next important work after the *al-Fihrist* of Ibn Nadim belongs to Shaikh al-Taifa Muhammad bin al-Hassan bin Ali Abu Ja'far al Tusi (385-460 A.H/955- 1061 A.D). The work popularly known as *Fihrist Tūsi* or *Fihrist Shaikh* is based, for the most part, on the material provided by *al-Fihrist* of Ibn Nadim and has added more precise details on the Shia works and writers. It contains 900 authors, both contemporaries and predecessors of the author, in the fields of Tradition, Asma-al-Rijal, Literature, Exegesis of the Qur'an, Scholastic Theology, Jurisprudence etc. The titles have been arranged by forename of their authors. It was published in 1853 at Calcutta by A. Sprenger and Moulavi Abdul Haq after necessary editing.⁶ It was also 'published from Najaf (Iraq) twice in 1926 and 1960. However, it should be made clear that Shaikh mentions of incomplete attempts of different bibliographers except of one by Ahmad bin-Hussain al-Ghazairi. Other bibliographies mentioned by Tusi are those of Murtada, Ibn Babawayh, Mujid, Qummi, Ibn Junaid Qulinia and Ibn Bata.

One of the most quoted bibliographical work is Asma' ur Rijal Najashi (Shaikh Ahmad bin Ali an- Najashi d. 465.A.H/1063 A. D.) composed more or less at the same time when *Fihrist Tūsi* was written. It covers 1226 authors and one chapter has been devoted to each name while the final chapter contains Kuniyyas only. However, it is limited to authors responsible for contribution on Shi'ite literature. It was published by Sheikh Ali Mehlati in 1371 A. H/1898-1900 and later published in 1337 A. H/ 1918 A. D. at Tehran by Markaz-e-Nashr-e

Ketab.

Another surviving bibliography of this period is the bibliography of Muhammad bin Zakariyya al-Razi (d.922 A. D.) by Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (973-1048A.D.). The book was published in Latin translation in 1936 at Paris.⁷

3. The Eleventh and the Twelfth Century Contributions

The eleventh and the twelfth centuries are particularly important for the spread of Muslim sciences in Europe, but about the bibliographical achievements of this period we have meager information. However, there are few important works which seek our attention:

- a). Two important works from Persia primarily based on *Fihrist Tūsi*. These are *Ma'ālim al'ulamā'* and *Asmā' Mashāyikh al-Shi'a wa-Musanāfin* by Muhammad Rashid al-Din ibn Ali Ibn Shahr- aashub Mazandarani (d 1192 A.D) and Muntakhab al-Din Babuya Qumi.
- b) *Firhist al Kutub wa al- Taleef* of Ibn Khayr al-Ishbih (1100-1179 A. D) speaks of Moorish interest in the subject. It included 1400 works of both Spanish and oriental origin on the Qur'anic sciences and literature etc. The work has been published at Sarogosse by Francisws Codera and J. Ribera Tarrago as the IXth and Xth volumes of Bibliotheca Arabica Hasponica under the title "Index Libroruim ..."⁸

4. The 13th Century to 18th Century Contributions

The 13th century brought a blow to Muslim learning. However, few attempts were made from Persia, Turkey towards preserving this treasure of knowledge and culture by bringing out many bibliographies. It may be noted that in Persia, *Fihrist Tūsi* had still influence and paved way for some useful works. Mention may be made of *Idohu'l Ishtibah* (Elucidation of Confusion) by Hassan Ibn Mutahhar ali Hilli (1250-1326 A.D), *Amalu 'l-Amil fi'ulamai Jabal-Amil* (the Hoper's hope on the Doctors of Mount Amil) by Muhammad ibn Hasan ibn Ali- Al Hurr al-Amili (b.1523) and *Lu'Luatu 'l Bahrayn* (Pearl of Bahrain) of Sheikh

Yusuf bin Ahmad-al- Bahraini (d. 1793/94).

The Ottoman contribution seems to have its beginning in the bibliography entitled *Miftahu'l Sa'adat wa Misbahal Siyadat* compiled by Ahmad bin Mustafa bin Khalil (1495-15610), famous by name of Tashkapruzadeh.⁹ The books have been arranged under broad subjects. It was translated into Turkish by the author's son Kamaluddin. It was published in Hyderabad (India) during 1328-1356A.H in three volumes.

The most celebrated bibliography, called *Kashfal Zunūn* was compiled in seventeenth century by Mustafa bin Abdullah (1608-1657) popularly known as Haji Khaliji. He spent twenty years on its compilation and includes 25000 Arabic, Persian and Turkish works of 9500 authors either seen by the author himself in public libraries of Istanbul or found in books of traditions or bookshops of Halab. It was completed later by six persons as the author's death took place while preparing the manuscript. The author preferred title instead of author as main entry. This was quite a different approach in contradiction with earlier practices and supplements from Istanbul. It was later published in Latin translation by G. Flugel in seven volumes from 1835 to 1858 A .D. Later it was published in Egypt by Maktaba-e-Bolaq, followed by Astana in 13 A.H. with Hasan Hilmi Afandi as its editor. The latest publication is from Istanbul with supplements in 1945 A. D. incorporating 12000 titles not included in earlier editions.¹⁰

5. The 19th century and the 20th Century Contributions

- a) In India Maulana Sayyid I'jaz Hussein Kantoori (1825-70) compiled *Kashafu'l Hujūb wal Astār'an Asmāil Kutub Wa'l-Asfār* (Removal of Veils and curtains from the Names of Books and Treatises). This bibliography includes 3414 Shiah books arranged by their title. The editor, Muhammad Hidayat Husein, discovered the manuscript in Bankipore Patna library and encouraged by Sir Denison Ross and prepared the text for publication at the expense of Asiatic society of Bengal.¹¹

In the 20th century few significant works have been published. Some

prominent ones are listed below:

- a). *Qamoosu 'l Kutub* (Directory of Urdu Books) is the most prominent work as it attempts to bring together all the books published in Urdu language alphabetically author wise. A few volumes have been published.¹² In India *Wadhahati Kitābiyāt* (Descriptive Bibliography) was compiled by Gopichand Narang and Muzaffar Hanafi in three volumes giving descriptive information about Urdu language books.¹³
- b). *Az-zaria ila Tasānīfal Shi'ah* (Bibliography of Shi'ite Literary works). It is a compilation of both published and unpublished works in Arabia and Persian Languages of Shi'a authors. The work was started by Late Aga Bozorg Tehrani and continued by his son Ali Naqi Monzavi¹⁴. By 1995, 32 volumes were out. It is arranged by their title, giving complete history and mentioning libraries for unpublished works. However few attempts were made in Pakistan to cover books on Islam as well. One prominent attempt is of Jameel Ahmad Rizvi in compiling bibliography of Urdu ,Arabic and Persian languages, besides titles in European languages¹⁵. In India Abdul Hay-al Husnee of Nadwatu al-Ulama ,Lucknow took the scholarly job of compiling contributions of Muslim scholars entitled *Nuzhatul Khawatir*, a multi-volume publication.¹⁶
- c). The monumental work *World Bibliography of Translations of the Holy Qur'an Printed Translations 1515-1980*, compiled under auspices of IRCICA has attempted to bring all translations of Holy Quran in different languages under bibliographical discipline.¹⁷

Conclusion

It may be noted from the discussion that Muslims had always a passion for compiling a list of each and every contribution for obvious reasons. The tradition continued throughout their intellectual history and, therefore, it is presumed that early bibliographies played a vital role in the process of transmission of Muslim scholarship to Latin Christendom.

The Methods adopted by Muslim bibliographers in collecting, organizing and describing bibliographical data reflect some of the characteristics of our present day bibliographical practices. The subject arrangement was commonly adopted for organizations of lists which lead us to ponder for tracing the roots of Cataloguing and Bibliography afresh.

References

1. Hunain Ibn Ishaq, *Hunain ibn Ishaq uber die Syrischen und Arabischen Galen-uberseizungen. Zum ersten mal herausegeben und ubersetzt Von G.Bergstrasser* (Leipzig,1925).
2. Included in *Bergstrassers Neue materialien Zu Hunain ibn Ishaga's Galen bibliogranhie* (Leipzig,1932).
3. According to Abdur Razzaq Mohiuddin in *Adabu'l Murtaḍā min Sīrat wa Asār* (Egypt, 1937: pp 131, 164-67) a list of writings of Sayyid Murtada was prepared in 417A.H. by his pupil Abdul Hasan Muḥammad bin Muhammad Barvi. This bibliography is available in the library of Astan Qudse-e-Razvi, Mashhad, Iran.
4. Ibn Nadim, *al Fihrist*. translated into Urdu by Maulana Mohammad Ishaque Bhatti (Lahore, Idara-e-Saqafati-Islamia, 1949).
5. Bayard Dodge, ed., *The Fihrist of Ibn -Nadīm : A Tenth Century Survey of Muslim culture* (NewYork,1970).
6. A, Sprenger, Abdul Haq and Ghulam Qadir eds. *Tūsy's list of Shiah Books and Alam al Hoda's Notes on Shiah Bibliography* .(Calcutta, 1855).
7. Biruni, *Epitre de Biruni Contentant Le Repertoire des Ouvrages de Muhammad bin Zakariya ar-Razi* (Paris, 1936).
8. Ibn Khayral al-Ishbili, *Index Libroruim de Diversis Scientiarum*, 1894-95.
9. Refer Afshar, Iraj. *A Bibliography of Bibliographies on Iranian Studies*. Iranica I, 1973, P.75.
10. *Kasf-el-Zunn Zeyli Izah ...Ismail Pasha Baghdadai*,ed. (Istanbul, 1945).
11. P'jaz Hussein Kantoori, *Kashaful Hujūb wal Astar'an Asmāil Kutub wa'l Asfār or The bibliography of Shi'a Literature* edited by M Hidayat Hussein (Calcutta,1935).
12. Abdul Huq (Molvi). *Qamūsul Kutub*.(Urdu) (Karachi, Anjumane-Taraqqie-Urdu, 1961).2V also.
13. Gopichand Narang, and Hanafī, Muzzafar *Wadhāhati Kitābiyāt (Descriptive Catalogue)*, (Delhi, Taraqi Urdu Bureau) 3 vols.
14. Agha Bozarg Tehrani, *Bibliography of Shi'ate Literary Works, (Az Zaria ila Tasanif- ash Shi'a)*. 32 vols. in progress. (continued by his son Monzavi).
15. Jameel Ahmad Rizvi, *Fihrist Kitābiyati Islam (Bibliography of Islamic Books)* Lahore , urdu Academy .1983. 2vols).
16. Abdul Hay Al-Hasnaee, *Nuzhatul Khawātir*.Lucknow, Al-Muktabatul Nadwiyah.M.V.
17. Ismet Binark & Halit Eren. *World Bibliography of Translations of the Meanings of Holy Qur'ān- Printed Translations 1515-1980*, (Istanbul, IRCICA, 1986).