

AQEEL COLLECTION: Specification and Prominence

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A brief note on the history of *AQEEL COLLECTION*

I have so many interests in my life, but reading books has been permanent and consistent. Right from the time, when I started noticing and understanding my surroundings I found my father (Saiyyad Zameeruddin) as an avid book reader. My mother (Aziza Banu) shared this hobby, but to a lesser extent. My father had his interest mostly in history. He had also a penchant for writing and often did it. His notes and anthologies just in written form survived too. My mother's interest was in Urdu fiction and she penned some short-stories as well. These stories, though not published, provided me with the earliest reading and writing delight. My life began under the influence and inspiration from pen, paper, and book which in my opinion are the basic cultural necessities.

I enjoyed this all while I was just four or five and we were still in Haiderabad Deccan's historic city Udger (near Bidar), where my father was employed and posted. We had some land in a nearby small town called Lony. Our family, including my elder brother (Syed Mohiuddin Nisar) left all these behind, migrated to Pakistan and settled in Karachi in 1953.

It was a long and drawn struggle in the new homeland and my brother and I had to wait to be in a state of self-sufficiency in our lives. The only thing that continued despite all these hardships was habit of book reading. One Ana (four paisas = .4 Rupee) libraries thrived in those days, where one could borrow a book for one Ana a day. These were lifeline for the book lovers. These libraries mostly provided novels and collections of short stories, but sometimes they provided books on religion, historical topics and other non-fiction literature. These libraries competed with each other to attract more readers and hence carried books according to the readers' tastes. It was the time when my favourite reading was literary short stories and novels. I nearly read all the fiction based on old, modern, and contemporary literature. I read greatest Urdu classics of the time: *Tilsm-e Hosh Ruba* and *Daastaan Amir Hamza* but also got the chance to read books on various other genres too.

My elder brother had slightly better resources than me, so he started buying fiction of his interest. Ibn-e Safi was the most read writer of the time and a favourite of my brother as well. He bought all the novels by Ibn-e Safi and started buying all the popular fiction of the time, some standard some sub-standard, available at cheap prices. It was a windfall for me and I had the opportunity to read every type of literature available. I read or rather 'swallowed' all the books collected by my brother with fervor and intense love for reading.

In my early days at the high school, lady luck provided me good friends who shared my

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passion for reading. This provided ample opportunities to attend the literary sittings with my friends who could be termed as intelligent because of their good taste and unbridled love for good reading. Those were good times and teachers were sincere, affectionate, and kind. One of such teacher was Iqtidar Ahmad Akbar who had interest and inclination towards literature. He was a poet too and used to arrange poetic and critique sessions for his school students after school timings and invited us to attend and join in discussions. He encouraged us to bring our creative writings and engage ourselves in literary criticism and to speak our minds. Such sessions were trainings that polished my literary taste and increased the love for knowledge. He also lent his personal books on literature and criticism to us. This practice helped me in graduating from simple short stories and literature to comparatively solid and quality literary and academic books. It was beginning of the realization about the standard literature and a sense was developed about the selection of good books that could be beneficial to my intellectual pursuit for knowledge and studies. This resulted in me reading in my school days all the available modern and old creative literature written by the distinguished writers, poets and critics. Later I started to write on the literary topics that appeared in my school's magazine and a few long essays in the newspapers. Then it dawned to me that I should myself buy the books that I read. I knew that in this way I could read the book in time and repeat again. This was beginning of my love affair for buying and collecting the books.

This longing for the books remained with me assuming an insane proportion. It was in the sixties. My pocket allowance was so meager that I could not buy any book. However, I started saving two Anas given to me to commute in the buses, to and from school. So, instead of riding bus, I walked to school to save this amount for books. New books were beyond my finances so I began searching for them in second-hand book shops, venders, and the rag sellers. Old books were available in large quantities and they were cheap. Sometimes good books could be bought for one rupee only. It depended how clever or innocent the bookseller is. I have purchased rarer and expensive books in three or four rupees in that period. One or two manuscripts, which were in good shape, and looked to me as if they were printed, were bought in one or two rupees but sometimes I had to pay thousands to acquire some precious books. A time came when perhaps there was no bookseller in the city who did not know me or respected my desire. The booksellers knew my deep interest for the rare and precious books and they would reserve such books for me alone. It would have been exceptional when I was not roaming the streets of the city in search of some good books, disregarding my thirst or hunger. Never cared about food or drinks in the never ending craze for the books, and life went on like an academic hermit. Financial crunch and contentment became my habit and I never cared about other entertainments or interests in life.

It was good to be employed but most of my salary was spent on the purchase of the books. Sometimes I spent on books more than the monthly income allowed me to. This

audacity continued freely because even when I was unemployed, my parents had no objection to my lavish spending on the books. They were rather pleased to see my love for the books and my *findings*. I was still facing the monetary constraint after my marriage but my wife (Fareesa Aqeel) accepted and tolerated this habit of mine without any complaint. She proved to be a great help when she started cleaning and taking care of the books. This continues till date. She even ventured in the realm of listing the books but could not complete it because of her responsibilities towards other affairs of home and the speed at which the books were increasing was too much to cope up with. My parents would read the books with avid interest. My father even repaired the old and crumpled books with spiritual zeal. My mother picked the mantle after the death of my father and she does it even to date in her enough old age.

My craving for books increased and I started purchasing books of my interest whenever I visited other cities. Networking with people with the same taste encouraged me to ask for the books and they came pouring in from other parts of Pakistan and India. Booksellers began visiting my house with rare books making it easier for me to get quality books at home. I always brought back books after my travels inland or from abroad. I had the chance to live in foreign countries and availed this opportunity to visit all the important libraries that were stacked with the material on oriental subjects. I visited every renowned book shop, which was known for having rare books. I strived and toiled to get the photocopies of the books. In this way I collected a treasure of the finest books by getting their micro films or photocopies from important libraries of Europe and the United States of America. I paid enormous amounts for these and I think no one in India or Pakistan has any personal rich collection like mine. In the meantime, I also concentrated on the reference and other books that could help me in my study and research work. My interest and curiosity centered on obtaining the photocopies of such rare materials. I had this notion that these research materials are not available in Pakistan so they should be with me. It resulted in collection of a good number of such books in my library that became richer, important and novelty in personal collections in Pakistan. My library became a focal point for the researchers and scholars who came to use it for their research since these books and other materials were not available in Pakistan. It rather gave me pleasure in helping people not only in Karachi but other Pakistani cities and even from foreign countries who contacted me for a particular item and I would oblige them with the photocopies of the required material.

Then I realized that I have a large collection of the books in my library and it is used by all and sundry, but what will happen to it after my death. I have a small family and they might not have the resources to maintain this collection in future. What will be the fate of my collection? What it should be? This thought had a sort of national hue as well but I did not try to act in a hurry about the library. I had many possibilities on which I could have pondered. I thought that I might not have sufficient resources to maintain the library properly. I could

have given it to some institution or some library where it could have been preserved. Or it could have been merged in some big library. I knew that the future of the personal libraries and book collections was dark in the world, even in the most developed parts of the world.

I considered all the options and thought it would best to give my books to the Kyoto University, Japan. This decision was based on a lofty objective. While I was deliberating about the future and sustenance of my library, I received an attractive and reliable offer from Kyoto University through the good self of my Japanese friend and colleague Professor So Yamane of Osaka University to relocate my library at Kyoto University. Why not consider this offer which was very reasonable? I thought and I did.

My Connection with Japan:

My close relationship with Japan spans more than four decades. I taught Urdu to Japanese students in Pakistan and had educational cooperation with the Japanese teachers and scholars who would come to Pakistan for educational research activities. It was more cemented after I joined Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in 1993 and remained there for seven years. Later I had three stints in 2004, 2007 and 2008 with three other universities as Visiting Professor and Research fellow. This further affiliations strengthened my relationship with the Japanese universities.

I had observed the interest of the Japanese scholars in the study of Islam, Pakistan and South Asia during my stay in Japan and I wrote several articles in Urdu magazines and news papers that collected in my book '*Mashriq-e Tabaan*': *Japan Mein Islam, Pakistan aor Urdu Zubaan Ka Muta'l'aa* ('Shining East': Studies on Islam, Pakistan and Urdu Language in Japan; Purab Academy, Islamabad, 2010) about this interest.

My friends and students were shocked by this decision and they did not mince their words while expressing their reservation by asking why I did not keep my library in Karachi or anywhere else in Pakistan. My answer was simple. I reminded them that the Japanese have interests in the South Asian languages including Urdu language and literature, and our history and culture, national and political movements and biographies, but they could not find the proper material in Japan to satisfy their scholarly pursuit. I thought that if my collection is shifted there the Japanese scholars would be able to advance their studies in the above fields.

I have a soft corner in my heart for the Kyoto University for umpteen reasons. It is ranked as one of the best universities in Japan and in the World. It has the honour of having five Nobel Prize laureates on its roll, which is a rare example in Asia. Its importance in my eyes has further increased because studies and researches on Islamic studies have increased considerably last years. Its two faculties: *Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies* and *Islamic Area Studies* have excelled in their fields and have competent and sincere teachers and scholars. I had the honour of being associated with the former faculty as a Research

Fellow in 2008. I thought that despite its distinguished place in the field of Islamic studies Kyoto University still lacked the material on Islamic studies and history and culture of the South Asian Muslims. There were no sufficient books on Pakistan, Pakistan Movement and the religious and national movements of South Asian Muslims. I realized that the high ups of the University understood the importance of Pakistan in Islamic World and they wanted to begin the teaching in Pakistan studies but not merely as a taught course but rather research on a higher level. Research for PhD has already begun and one or two students have completed their theses at the level of PhD related to the subjects of South Asian Muslims.

A large portion of my library has the books about the Muslims of South Asia that include books on Language and Literature, history and politics, educational and religious movements and biographies of the personalities who were associated with these movements. The high ups of the Kyoto University knew about my library through the researchers and teachers who came to Karachi to use my collection for their research. These high ups had the desire to acquire some collection like other Japanese universities to allow their students and teachers conduct their research in their own university in Japan.

Most of my writings are based on studies on South Asian Muslims' academic and cultural contributions and for that purpose I have acquired most the reference and relevant research material including catalogues of manuscripts and bibliographies of books on oriental studies from all over the world. These materials provide the information about the presence on any book, manuscript, their authors, compilers in the libraries around the world.

A large number of books on South Asia and on its academic and historical subjects published in various countries of the world in Urdu, English, Arabic and Persian language have also accumulated in my collection. It is the same with the books on biographical references, encyclopedias, handbooks on Islam and dictionaries for Urdu, Arabic and Persian and other languages, and a variety of South Asian gazetteers too. Some of them are in sets of huge volumes. I am confident that this type of collection on South Asian Muslims and their contributions is hardly available even in the major libraries of my country. Without exaggeration or being victim of self-praise, I am sure that no library, public or private, could be compared with my collection in this context. I also acquired catalogues on the oriental studies, sometimes original, sometimes photocopies from the important and renowned Indian, European and American libraries. In addition to all these this collection has some rare manuscripts, microfilms, too.

As mentioned earlier most of the books in this collection are on literature and South Asian history but other topics such as Islam and other religions and sects; annotation, exegesis, and various school of thoughts; Sufism, philosophy, education, linguistics, journalism, feminism, fine arts, calligraphy, architecture, culture and civilization and some other academic topics. The books that are invaluable or not available in other libraries are a

prominent part of this collection. The histories of literatures, biographies, autobiographies, literary criticism, travelogues, and research methodology are also available in this collection. Books on different periods of South Asian history, historiography, and regional histories especially centres of civilizations such as Delhi, Awadh, Deccan, Punjab, Bengal, etc. are available as prominent sections of the collection. These books, besides in Urdu are also in English and Persian languages.

I have arranged the books according to the subjects, and for my ease and convenience. It differs from the scientific systems of arrangements used in present day libraries. This arrangement was retained when the “*Aqeel Collection*” was shifted to Kyoto and the books were arranged accordingly as listed in its shelf list. Every subject has a specific corner in this arrangement such as History and Historiography have special niche in my heart and that is the reason I have quite a collection of books and photocopies of the theses. These books cover the beginning of the Muslim rule to the British period. The historical books on Muslim rule have been arranged on different periods such as advent of Muslims, Delhi Sultanate, Mughal Period and then Colonial Period. Most of these books are in Persian language but a number of them are translated and available in Urdu and English languages. Many books in this section deals with research studies and based on masterpieces of historical works. It also contains books on Indian and Hindu-Muslim history of civilization and culture. British colonial officers posted in India have also penned some books and their observations on the Indian politics, culture and society and these are available in this section. Travel accounts of British officers and foreign travelers during the Mughal Period are included in original English or in their translations.

Books written on colonial and post-colonial periods have a separate section. These books detail the arrival of the foreigners and their struggle to occupy the vast tracts of this region. The battles fought against the British colonialists in Bengal and Mysore, especially the brave fight by Tipu Sultan to save the country and the war of independence in 1857 is the bulk of these books.

Political documents and collection of letters are also quite important. These letters were written by the politicians, writers, *Ulama* and intellectuals’ in their individual as well as collective entities. Saiyyad Ahmad Khan and his Aligarh Movement gave impetus to the independence and Pakistan Movement and large number of books is included in this corner. Books and political documents on Indian National Congress, Muslim league and other political and religious parties’, and their activities are here too.

History section cradles travelogues of the Indians who visited various countries wrote about them and the travel accounts of the foreigners who wrote about India and its observations. A few of them are rare and not easily available these days. Some travelogues are by the Indians who wrote while travelling in different parts of India for their academic

and cultural purpose. Among them the travelogues written in 18th and 19th centuries are invaluable and are available.

Biographies are part of history and make the majority of the books available here. These consist of the biographies of the Muslim rulers and are arranged according to their periods. These have a large number of books so they are placed in separate corners. These books also have the biographies of those who took part in independence and Pakistan Movements. These include the biographies of the common people and elites of the time. Some personalities like Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar and several other leaders have been allotted separate corners owing to their importance.

History section has a large number of books on regional histories too. It has a lot of books on important regions of South Asia that were very active historically, politically, culturally and in educational fields like UP, Punjab, Haiderabad (Deccan), Bihar, Bengal, Sindh and North West areas of India. Books about the centres of Muslim cultures such as Delhi, Awadh and Haiderabad are quite rich. Besides history, these consist of biographies of prominent personalities of these areas. Books on educational and cultural subjects are abound in the collection including books on prominent educational, cultural, religious institutions, *Madarsas*, *Dar ul uloom*, prominent colleges and universities of different regions of South Asia and other countries of Muslim world. There are sufficient number of books on Delhi College, Aligarh Muslim University, Usmania University, Government College Lahore, University of the Punjab and its affiliated institutions like Islamia College Lahore and their contributions in relevant fields.

A huge collection of books is on religion including large number of books on Islam, consisting of basic faith, Qur'anic translations, prominent exegesis, introduction and histories of the exegesis, their writers, and their contribution to Islam. *Hadith*, the traditions of Prophet Muhammad, Islamic Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), biographies and contributions of renowned and distinguished Indian canonists (*Faqeeh*), Islamic ideologies, Islamic philosophy, and statesmen, reformers, their movements, in Mughal period, *Jihad* and *Jihadi* movements during British rule, and prominence and struggle of the *Mujahidin*. The collection also has books on the prominent *Ulama* of their time such as Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi (Mujaddid Alf Saani) and Shah Waliullah and their academic and religious contribution, and services of their family and disciples for the Islamic cause. The books are also available on the life and works of individual *Ulama* and their school of thoughts including *Darul Uloom*, *Deoband*, *Nadwat ul Ulema*, *Farangi Mahal*, and *Khairabad*. A lot of books are on the history of these schools, their background, activities and contributions.

Many books on the religious institutions and parties like *Anjuman Hidayat-ul Islam*, *Jama'at-e Islami*, *Jamiat ul Ulama-e Hind* and *Jamiat ul Ulama-e Islam* and on the *Ulama*

associated with them, their disciples and their services in the rejuvenation of Islam are arranged in this collection. The books on the prominent *Ulama* and revivalists like Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi, Shah Waliullah and his Family, Saiyyad Ahmad Khan, Ashraf Ali Thanvi, Abul Kalam Azad and Maulana Abul Aala Maududi have a separate corner. The same corner has books on different religions such as Hinduism and Sikhism and Islamic sects that include *Shiites*, *Wahabis*, *Ahl-e Hadith*, *Deobandi*, *Barelvi*, *Khairabadi*, *Qadiani*, etc. The corner has books on the *Ulama* and prominent personalities of Hinduism and Sikhism. There are books on the Christian missionary activities and reaction of the Indians against them, their movements against Christianity, and debates and controversies among the Christian preachers and Muslim *Ulama*. The same corner boasts the books on *Sufis* and their life and contributions and their *silsilas*.

Languages corner has books on linguistics containing evolution of Urdu language, its history, theories that discusses how, when and where the language began its journey. The corner also has the books that compasses information on the compilation of grammar, history of the lexicography, its evolution, important dictionaries, prominent lexicographers, tradition of Persian lexicography in India, problems of the language during the British rule, British 'Divide and Rule' policy through the languages, birth of Hindi during the British rule, controversies between Urdu and Hindi, evolution of political, national differences and nationalism among Hindus and Muslims on the basis of language, and the condition of official implementation of Hindi and Urdu in India and Pakistan, etc.

This section also includes evolution of the regional languages of South Asia, especially Punjabi, Sindhi, Baluchi, Pashtu, Saraiki and languages of Northern areas. History of Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, and Hindi languages are also part of this corner. In the literature section I have arranged these books in different categories such as *Ghazal*, Panegyric (Ode), *Masnavi* (An epic or romantic poem), *Na'at* (poem in praise and love of the Prophet) evolution of fiction, important poets and writers and their masterpieces and their biographies or studies appeared on their work are arranged in the same section. Separate corners have been arranged for the masters of South Asian and Persian literature such as Ameer Khusrao, Mir Taqi Mir, Ghalib, Saiyyad Ahmed Khan, Iqbal, etc. Section especially on Iqbal is quite extensive and important because it has a number of rare and valuable books and journals specific for studies on life and works of Iqbal and his position as an extraordinary Muslim thinker, poet and politician of his time in South Asia.

Books on criticism and research studies have been kept in the literature section and allotted a separate corner. It contains a large number of books that are theoretical debates on criticism and the critics. Since I have special inclination for research, this section is quite extensive with books on research methodology, its tradition and its prominent research scholars and their works. Another section beside the preceding sections contains books on

critical articles, research theses, and works in recognition of stalwarts of literature written inside and outside the country including India, Europe and America, in different languages especially Urdu and English.

Books on miscellaneous topics such as feminism or women emancipation is also there. These books highlight the emancipation movements of Indian, especially Muslim women during colonial rule and the efforts that were appeared during these movements. These efforts included journalistic, educational and social activities. These books also mention the achievements of women during this period. Travelogues, mostly between South Asia and the West, autobiographies of the people of different categories, and collection of letters of prominent peoples and scholars are also have their sections in this *Collection*.

The total number of books in this collection was around 35,000 including Urdu and English newspapers, magazines and research journals of national and international universities. Among them, about 27,000 books and magazines were relocated to Kyoto University. Remaining books are still at my residence in Karachi and are increasing in numbers and subjects. These books are essential for my continuing studies and research. These books mostly belong to South Asian history and culture of the Muslims and their contributions in academic and literary fields that cover my present research interests. Most of them are histories, historical studies on Muslims of South Asia, reference books, catalogues of printed books and manuscripts preserved in different libraries, biographical dictionaries of *Ulama*, politicians, poet and writers and on the history of language and literature. I wish these books will also find a place in *Aqeel Collection* at Kyoto University one day.