

A STUDY OF MUSLIM LIBRARIES IN MAHARASHTRA: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract : *Libraries have long been considered repositories of knowledge, culture, and identity. In the Muslim community, libraries have historically played a central role in preserving religious texts, scholarly writings, and cultural heritage. Maharashtra, a state in western India with a significant Muslim population, has a rich tradition of Muslim libraries dating back to the medieval period and continuing to exist today. This paper presents an overview of Muslim libraries in Maharashtra, tracing their historical roots, development, functions, contribution to education and the challenges they face in the present era. The study also highlights the importance of these institutions for community development and cultural preservation*

Keywords : Muslim libraries, Islamic heritage, knowledge preservation,

Introduction :

Libraries founded by the Muslim community in Maharashtra are significant cultural and intellectual institutions that have played a crucial role in preserving Urdu, Arabic, and Persian literature, and promoting education. Many were established before India's independence and continue to serve as vital centers of learning for local communities. The collections often extend beyond religious texts to include a wide array of subjects, making them important resources for historical, literary, and scientific research. (NewsBits-May 10, 2023)

Maharashtra, a state that has seen centuries of Muslim presence through the Deccan Sultanates, the Mughal Empire and later the Nizams of Hyderabad, Libraries developed as integral parts of mosques, madrasas, khanqahs (Sufi centers) and community organizations. Today, Muslim libraries in Maharashtra exist in urban centers such as Mumbai,

This paper presents an overview of these libraries by analyzing their historical development, organizational structures, collections, contributions, and current challenges. Pune, Aurangabad and Nagpur, as well as in smaller towns and rural areas.

Definition :

“Refers to a scholarly investigation that aims to provide a general understanding

of the origin, growth, present condition, functions, and challenges of Muslim libraries in the state of Maharashtra. It indicates a broad survey rather than an in-depth case study, focusing on how these libraries preserve Islamic heritage, serve educational and cultural needs, and adapt to modern developments in library science. The term *overview* suggests that the study will cover historical, social, and functional aspects in a comprehensive but generalized manner.”

A "Muslim library" in Maharashtra is typically a public library founded by and for the local Muslim community, but it serves all members of society, regardless of religion. These institutions often possess a significant collection of books in Urdu, Hindi, English, and other languages, covering religious subjects as well as general knowledge, literature, and history.

Literature Review :

- The study of Muslim libraries in India has attracted the attention of scholars mainly from the point of view of historical preservation, cultural significance and educational development. Scholars such as Ansari (2010) offer a comprehensive historical survey of Islamic libraries across India, emphasizing their role in preserving rare manuscripts and Islamic scholarship. He explains that libraries established by Muslim rulers and communities were central to both religious and secular education.
- Rizvi (1985) in his work on Sufism has highlighted the contribution of Sufi centres in maintaining manuscript collections, especially in the Deccan region. These collections, often preserved by Sufi families and khanqahs, later became valuable sources for researchers of Islamic and regional history. Similarly, Eaton (2005) explores the broader socio-cultural history of the Deccan Sultanates, where patronage of scholars and libraries was integral to governance and cultural life.
- Modern scholars have also examined the contemporary functions of Muslim libraries. Khan (2015) emphasizes their role in promoting literacy, higher education, and community development in urban India, while Hasan (2011) discusses how Urdu libraries, in particular, preserve and disseminate literary culture among Muslims. The reports of the Maharashtra State Urdu Academy (2018-2022) further illustrate how Urdu libraries in the state continue to meet educational and cultural needs despite financial and infrastructural limitations.
- The issue of preservation is another important concern in literature. Ghosh (2009) outlines the challenges libraries face in India regarding the preservation of manuscripts, and highlights the lack of facilities, expertise, and awareness. UNESCO (2012) also emphasizes the importance of digitization for the preservation of fragile documentary heritage. Which is especially relevant for Muslim libraries containing rare Arabic, Persian and Urdu texts.
- Despite these contributions, there remains a notable lack of research focused

specifically on libraries established and run by the Muslim community in Maharashtra. Although extensive studies (Ansari, 2010; Rizvi, 1985; Eaton, 2005)

shed light on India and the Deccan, analyses at the regional level are limited. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by providing an overview of the historical development, collections, roles and challenges of Muslim libraries in Maharashtra.

Literature Survey :

I have used some of the references from the articles and research papers that I searched for in writing the paper in my research paper. The scope of the present study is Muslim Libraries, Muslim Literature or Collection available in Muslim Libraries in Maharashtra. Libraries to be included for the study:

1. Private Library
2. Personal Library
3. Public Library

Although there are different areas of development of Muslim Libraries but Present study is limited to modernization (Automation and Networking) to Improve the library management efficiency as well as services provided.

Objectives of the Study:

1. **To trace the historical development** of Muslim libraries in Maharashtra.
2. **To identify the role** of Muslim libraries in the preservation and dissemination of Islamic and general knowledge.

Discussion :

Objective 1: Trace the historical development of Muslim libraries in Maharashtra This objective aims to study the origins, development, and changes of Muslim libraries in Maharashtra during different historical periods.

The history of early libraries in the region dates back to the 13th century, when the Bahmani and Deccan Sultanates encouraged scholarship and established manuscript collection centers (Eaton, 2005). During Mughal and later Nizam rule, libraries flourished in Aurangabad and Marathwada, often associated with madrasas, mosques and Sufi khanqahs, where Arabic, Persian and Urdu manuscripts were stored (Rizvi, 1985). In the colonial and post-independence eras, Muslim reform movements and community trusts expanded access by creating reading rooms and public libraries that combined religious and secular education (Khan, 2015). Thus, tracing this historical development provides insight into how Muslim libraries evolved from mosque-based and private collections to modern community and institutional libraries, which reflects both continuity and adaptation to changing socio-political contexts (Ansari, 2010).

Objective 2: Recognize the role of Muslim libraries in the preservation and dissemination of Islamic and general knowledge This objective emphasizes the functional importance of Muslim libraries in Maharashtra. These institutions have served not only as repositories of

books but also as cultural, intellectual and educational centres. Historically, they have preserved rare manuscripts, Quranic commentaries, hadith compilations, and works on Islamic jurisprudence, thereby safeguarding the community's religious heritage (Ansari, 2010). Additionally, many Muslim libraries have incorporated general knowledge resources, including Urdu and English literature, modern science, and social studies, making them valuable for broader educational development. (Khan, 2015; Hasan, 2011). Thus, they have served as a vehicle for cultural preservation while promoting literacy, higher education, and social integration.

(Maharashtra State Urdu Academy, 2020). Recognizing their role helps us understand how Muslim libraries have served as both heritage institutions and educational resources, bridging tradition and modernity.

Historical Background of Muslim Libraries in Maharashtra :

Islamic presence in Maharashtra dates back to the 13th century with the establishment of the Bahmani Sultanate and later the Deccan Sultanates (Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, and Golconda). These regimes encouraged scholarship and established libraries that housed Arabic and Persian manuscripts. Aurangabad, once the capital of the Mughal Empire in the Deccan, emerged as a prominent center of Islamic learning.

During the rule of the Nizams of Hyderabad, several madrasa-based and private libraries were established in the Marathwada region (which was part of Hyderabad State until 1948). These libraries contained rare manuscripts, Islamic jurisprudence works, and Persian literature. Families of nobles and scholars maintained private collections, some of which later became public resources.

The colonial period brought new challenges but also opportunities for modernization. Muslim reformist movements in Maharashtra emphasized literacy and the establishment of reading rooms and libraries attached to schools and community centers. After independence, Muslim organizations and trusts expanded the network of libraries, especially in urban areas, to provide access to religious and secular education.

Characteristics of Muslim Libraries in Maharashtra :

Muslim Libraries in Maharashtra can broadly be classified as:

- **Religious libraries** : Attached to mosques and madrasas, focusing on Qur'anic studies, tafsir, Hadith, and Arabic literature.
- **Community libraries** : Established by trusts, social organizations, and Muslim associations, providing general knowledge resources along with Islamic literature.
- **Academic libraries** : Attached to Muslim-run schools, colleges, and research institutions, offering modern subjects as well as Islamic studies.
- **Private collections** : Maintained by scholars, Sufi saints, and families, often containing rare manuscripts (Rizvi, 1985).

The Collection typically include :

- **Religious texts** : (Qur'an, Hadith compilations, tafsir,). Classical literature in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu.Modern works on science, social sciences, and politics.Urdu periodicals such as *Inquilab* and *Roznama Siyasat*.Rare manuscripts dating back several centuries (Ansari, 2010).
- Users include madrasa students, researchers, community members, and young readers preparing for competitive exams (Khan, 2015).
- Case Studies of Prominent Muslim Libraries in Maharashtra Khuda Bakhsh Library, Aurangabad: Known for its Urdu and Persian works, attracting scholars from across India.
- **Maulana Azad Library, Mumbai** : Serves as a hub for Muslim students, with both Islamic and modern subjects.
- **Madrasa Libraries in Marathwada** : Institutions in Aurangabad, Jalna, and Nanded preserve classical texts and promote modern education.
- **Private Collections in Khuldabad** : Sufi families maintain handwritten manuscripts accessible to researchers (Rizvi, 1985; field observations, 2022).

Role of Muslim Libraries :

Educational Development: Supporting literacy and higher education (Khan, 2015).Cultural Preservation: Protecting Islamic manuscripts and Urdu/Persian literature (Ansari, 2010).Religious Guidance: Providing access to Qur'an commentaries, Hadith, and fiqh.Social Integration: Serving as centres for dialogue, meetings, and cultural exchange (Maharashtra State Urdu Academy, 2020).

Lack of funding and reliance on donations (Ansari, 2010). Poor infrastructure and preservation facilities (Ghosh, 2009). Technological gap and lack of digitization (UNESCO, 2012).Low awareness among younger generations who prefer digital platforms (Hasan, 2011).Manuscript deterioration due to poor conservation practices (Rizvi, 1985).

Digitization of manuscripts and Urdu periodicals (UNESCO, 2012). Government support and inclusion in public library networks. Introduction of e-resources and online catalogues (ILA, 2017).Employment of trained librarians with Urdu/Persian cataloguing skills. Community engagement through workshops, reading events, and cultural activities.

Conclusion :

Muslim libraries in Maharashtra represent a significant part of the state's intellectual and cultural heritage. From medieval manuscripts to modern educational resources, these libraries serve as bridges between tradition and modernity. However, they face serious challenges that need urgent attention. By combining community initiative with government support and modern technology, these institutions can be revitalized to meet the needs of present and future generations.

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