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Research Article

A Critical Analysis of Maulana Shibli Nomani's Educational Thoughts

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Abstract. Maulana Shibli Nomani (1857-1914) was a distinguished Islamic scholar, historian, philosopher and reformer in British India. A key figure in the Aligarh and Nadwa movements, he played a pivotal role in advancing Muslim education and intellectual renewal. Shibli emphasized blending traditional Islamic learning with modern education, advocating for the study of modern sciences, humanities, and the English language. Shibli aimed to bridge the gap between traditional scholars and modern thinkers within Muslim society. At Nadwat al-Ulama, he reformed the curriculum to include English, Hindi, and Sanskrit alongside Islamic studies, fostering a holistic approach to learning. He also established the Dar al-Musannefin in Azamgarh to promote Urdu scholarship and make classical texts accessible to wider audiences. Although he faced criticism from both conservative and liberal groups, Shibli's writings, such as *Maqalat-e-Shibli*, celebrated the intellectual achievements of early Muslim scholars and highlighted the need for a balanced education. He supported female education, though his views were tempered by the social norms of his time. Shibli's legacy lies in his vision for gradual yet transformative educational reform. His efforts continue to inspire intellectual growth and social cohesion among Indian Muslims during a period of profound change.

Keywords: Education, Muslim, Nadwatul ulama, educational institutions, modern education

INTRODUCTION

Shibli Nomani was a prominent Islamic scholar, poet, philosopher, historian, educational thinker, author, orator, reformer, and critic of orientalist during British Rule. He was also proficient in Arabic and Persian languages. Shibli was associated with two influential movements in the region, the Aligarh movement and the Nadwa movement. Allamah Shibli Nomani dedicated his life to the reconstruction and rejuvenation of Muslim society. He paid great attention to the educational needs of the Muslims of India. According to Gorekar, Shibli occupies an elevated position in the Muslim educational system, akin to Sir Syed.¹ Gorekar further states, "The credit of introducing educational and social reforms among the Indian Muslims goes to Shibli."² His service with regard to educational reforms and allied practical activities was praised on the one hand, and on the other, they were criticized.

Background

The 19th century was a period of significant challenges and transition for the educational condition of Indian Muslims. Both internal factors within the community and external changes brought about by colonial rule contributed to this.

The decline of the Mughal Empire marked the end of Muslim patronage of education. This led to a decline in the quality and reach of traditional education. Maktabas and madrasas, the centers of traditional education, primarily focused on religious studies and traditional sciences. Modern subjects like natural sciences, technology, and Western political thought were neglected. A section of the Muslim community feared that exposure to these modern subjects would lead to a loss of cultural and religious identity.

The Aligarh Movement, which began during this period, led to the establishment of the Aligarh Muslim University. This marked the beginning of a transformative period for Muslim education in India. The seeds of reform sown in the early 19th century would later transform the Muslim educational landscape in the second half of the century.

Life sketch of Maulana Shibli

Maulana Shibli Nomani was born on June 3, 1857, in Bindwal, a village located in the Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh, India. His family had a rich history, with one of his ancestors, Sheoraj Singh, embracing Islam approximately four centuries prior. Upon conversion, Sheoraj Singh received the Islamic name Sirajuddin. Shibli Nomani's father was Sheikh Habibullah, and his mother was Begum Hamidah. He had three brothers and one sister.

Nomani's childhood was spent in a tranquil and pleasant environment. This idyllic setting likely fostered his intellectual curiosity and love of learning.

¹Professor N.S. Gorekar, Allamah Shibli Nomani aur unke Ta'limi Atkār-o- A'māl, *Nawa-e-Adab*, Bombay: vol. 42, No.2, October 1992, p. 61.

² *Ibid*, p. 63.

Shibli Nomani received his education through traditional methods from local teachers, focusing on the study of the Holy Quran, Hadith, and Fiqh. He furthered his studies at the renowned Farangi Mahal in Lucknow and Darul Uloom in Ghazipur. However, he lacked proficiency in the English language and other modern disciplines.

Shibli had a deep understanding of Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and Islamic history. He combined traditional Islamic scholarship with modern methodologies. He was a renowned scholar and wrote several books on different topics like history, literature, philosophy, etc.

He served as a faculty member at M.A.O. College and worked at Sar Rishta Uloom-o-Funun as well as Nadwatul Ulama.

Shibli Nomani passed away on November 18, 1914, in Azamgarh.

Association with Educational Institutions

Shibli Nomani was associated with various educational institutions and contributed significantly to their development and the promotion of education.

Association with the Aligarh movement

In 1883 A.D., he was appointed as a professor of Eastern languages (Arabic and Persian) at the M.A.O. College in Aligarh. At that time, this college was the sole center for modern education for Muslims. During his 16-year stay at Aligarh College, he was able to get acquainted with the modern education and the activities of the modern educationalists. At Aligarh, Shibli became an advocate of Sir Syed's idea of blending Islamic teachings with modern Western education. He helped modernize the curriculum by incorporating subjects like history, science, and philosophy alongside traditional Islamic studies.

He established the National School at Azamgarh in 1883 A.D., where English was the medium of instruction. Shibli Nomani was the driving force behind the establishment of the institution in 1913. His goal was to provide a quality education that combined modern sciences and traditional Islamic teachings.

The school embodied his vision for a balanced curriculum that integrated secular and religious studies, catering to the educational needs of Muslims in the region. He believed in the importance of modern education for the upliftment of the Muslim community. The school was designed to offer a progressive educational framework that aligned with global advancement.

Shibli introduced a curriculum that emphasized:

Religious education: Teaching Arabic, Persian, and Islamic studies. Modern subjects: Including English, mathematics, and science

In 1894 A.D., Nomani joined the Nadwah movement initiated by Muslim Ulama and remained closely associated with it for the establishment of a Madrasah, later known as Nadwat al-Ulama. He served as its secretary from 1903 to 1912 A.D. Shibli Nomani was instrumental in shaping the intellectual and educational vision of Nadwa. He sought to modernize Islamic education by blending traditional Islamic studies with contemporary subjects, emphasizing the need for reform in the madrasa system.

Madrasatul Islah (Madrasatul Sarai), located in Sarai Mir, Azamgarh, is a significant aspect of his educational reforms. Madrasatul Islah, which means the

"School of Reform," was established to create a balance between traditional Islamic education and the demands of modernity. Although Maulana Shibli Nomani was not the founder of Madrasatul Islah (it was formally established in 1908), he played a key role as a guiding force and advisor.

His vision was instrumental in shaping the madrasa's philosophy, emphasizing the need for reform in Islamic education by combining religious knowledge with modern intellectual approaches. Maulana Shibli Nomani's contributions to Madrasatul Islah were rooted in his commitment to reforming Islamic education. By advising and shaping the institution's philosophy, he ensured that it became a beacon of balanced and progressive Islamic learning. His influence on Madrasatul Islah remains a testament to his vision of harmonizing tradition with modernity.

In 1912 A.D., Nomani founded the Dar al-Musannefin Institute at Azamgarh. Shibli Nomani's association with Darul Musannefin Shibli Academy (House of Writers) was one of his most enduring contributions to Islamic scholarship and intellectual thought in the Indian subcontinent.

Shibli Nomani envisioned Darul Musannefin as a center for producing scholarly works on Islamic history, literature, theology, and culture. He aimed to provide a platform for Muslim scholars to engage in research and writing, ensuring the preservation and development of Islamic knowledge.

Though Shibli laid the conceptual foundation for the institution, it was formally established after his death in 1914 by his students and associates, notably Sulaiman Nadvi, in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh. It was named Darul Musannefin Shibli Academy in his honor. This institution rendered valuable service to both the nation and the community by translating oriental books into Urdu language.

Maqalat-e-Shibli

Additionally, Shibli Nomani wrote numerous articles on various aspects of education. Following are these articles which are in the third volume of *Maqalat-e-Shibli*:

1. Musalmanon ki Guzashtah Ta'lim
2. Madarse aur Dar al-Ulum
3. Qadim Ta'lim
4. Mulla Nizamuddin Bāni-e-dars-e-Nizamīyah
5. Dars-e Nizamīyah
6. Nadwah aur Nişāb-e- Ta'lim
7. Fan-e-Nahw ki Murawwajah Kitābein
8. Ta'lim Qadimo - Jadid
9. Mashriqi Conference
10. Riyasat Hyderabad ki Mashriqi University
11. Ahya e Ulūm aur ek Radical

Through these articles, Shibli Nomani wanted to make reforms in the Muslim society. In these articles he addressed the Muslim community that the Muslims of earlier generations have accomplished great success and glory and that the glory they were witnessing in the field of education (of the modern period) should not be considered something new or novel. To prove his statement, he presented the

glorious achievements of the Muslims of earlier periods in the field of education and learning.

Shibli Nomani's Educational Thoughts

Shibli was a thinker of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; therefore, his educational ideas were influenced by the social and political conditions of Muslims during that era.

Unfortunately, circumstances prevented Nomani from fully implementing his educational views, which he deemed crucial for Muslim education, including female education. His writings reveal a strong advocacy for English language education and the study of other subjects.

Shibli Nomani says,

"There is no denying the fact that the root of progress lies in education. However, the real issue is that modern education is devoid of religious principles, and worldly education does not contribute to advancement. In modern education, religious influence has been reduced to a negligible level. The combination of education and religion addresses fundamental issues of humanity."³

Shibli Nomani observed that Indian Muslims were struggling to survive. He noted that their neighbours (other religious communities) were progressing due to their acquisition of modern education. Nomani warned that if Muslims remained backward in this field, their national and communal life would suffer, and they would become the ultimate losers.⁴

In another article, Nomani identified two distinct groups within Muslim society. One group consisted of religious scholars holding traditional views, while the other represented the modern educated and liberal segment. He recognized the existence and importance of both these groups, stating, "Both these groups are essential parts of the Muslim community and therefore they must work unitedly."⁵ However, he also sought certain reforms for both groups.

Nomani ardently desired that Muslim religious scholars acquaint themselves with modern education and liberal views by reading English and other sciences. This, he believed, would enable them to effectively counter the attacks of European writers on Islam and Muslims. Similarly, he wanted the modern liberal group to pursue religious studies alongside modern education and develop a deeper understanding of Islam. Shibli Nomani recognized the importance of modern education alongside traditional Islamic studies. He believed that Muslims could not progress until they mastered both.⁶ Nomani remained associated with Nadwat al-Ulama, a traditional Islamic seminary, where he endeavored to introduce changes in the curriculum and teaching methods. He faced strong opposition in his pursuit of reforms but eventually succeeded in introducing the English language. He also made arrangements for

³ Shibli Nomani, *Khutbat e Shibli*, ed by Molvi Masud Ali Nadwi, Ma'arif press, Azamgarh, 1941, p.58.

⁴ Shibli Nomani, *Hawa Ka Rukh Düsri Taraf: Mashriqi Conference, Maqalat-e-Shibli*, vol. III, ed.by Syed Sulaiman Nadwi, Ma'arif press, Azamgarh, 1988 p.146.

⁵ Shibli Nomani, *Ta'alim Qadim-o-Jadid, Maqalat-e-Shibli*, vol. III, op.cit., p. 143

⁶ Shibli Nomani, *Khutbat e shibli*, op.cit., p.139-142

teaching Hindi and Sanskrit. Nomani's primary objective for Nadwat al-Ulama was to bring about a transformation in Muslim education and reform Muslim scholars.

Shibli Nomani faced criticism from both religious and liberal quarters. Some accused him of being against English education, a charge that is entirely baseless. He was a strong advocate for modern education as well as English language.

Although Shibli Nomani was associated with Nadwah, a traditional seat of Islamic learning, this does not mean he opposed English education. In fact, he was fully aware of the need and importance of the English language. To promote English education, he established a school at Azamgarh where English was the medium of instruction and made efforts to introduce English at Nadwah. In one of his articles, he stated:

"If any of the suggestions of oriental education would affect Western education, such suggestions should be openly discarded. Muslims are, these days, struggling for their existence and if they lag behind their countrymen in the field of education, their national and community life would be spoiled.

Based on this statement, no one can consider Shibli Nomani an opponent of the English language."⁷

According to Khurshid ul Islam, he only introduced Egyptian books written in Naskh script in place of the books written in Nasta'liq script at Nadwah and allowed the study of elementary English and he ignored the importance of mathematics, physics, chemistry, and other natural sciences. He did not recognize the material needs of Muslims and sought to address them through education.⁸ About the changes of Shibli Nomani, Khurshidul Islam thought it was only a change of script. Whenever Syed Muhammadul Husna believed that Maulana Shibli advocated for a complete overhaul of the old curriculum. But Maulana Muhammad Ali Mungeri (Maulana Muhammad Ali Mungeri was a renowned scholar and he was working at the post of Nazim at Nadwat al-'Ulama) considered such a drastic change neither feasible nor beneficial.⁹ Both accounts are somewhat exaggerated and inaccurate. Shibli Nomani was a proponent of gradual educational reforms, with a few exceptions that required immediate implementation.

Maulana Shibli Nomani's stance on the standard of English language taught at Dar al-Uloom was clear. He believed that his desire to propagate Islam could not be achieved through elementary English education. He advocated that members of the Muslim community should pursue English studies to the graduate level prior to undertaking the responsibilities of Islamic preaching and propagation.¹⁰

Khurshidul Islam's claim that Shibli Nomani neglected the education of mathematics, physics, chemistry, and other sciences is likely based on the fact that these subjects were not taught at Nadwah. However, it's crucial to consider the purpose of Nadwah's establishment. Nadwah aimed to produce scholars well-versed

⁷ Shibli Nomani, *Hawa Ka Rukh Düsri Taraf: Mashriqi Conference*, op.cit., p.146-147.

⁸ Khurshidul Islam, *Shibli Khuṭat kī Roshni mein*, *Shibli Naqqadon ki Nazar mein*, ed.by. Naz Siddiqui, Ilyas Traders, Hyderabad, 1976, p. 43

⁹ Syed Muhammadul Husna, *Sirat-e-Muhammad Ali Mangeri*, 1069A.H., Maktabah Dar al- Ulüm Nadwat al-Ulama', Lucknow, p. 207

¹⁰ Professor N.S. Gorekar, 'Allamah Shibli Nomani aur unke Ta'limi Afkär-o-Amal, op. cit., p. 64.

in English, Sanskrit, and Hindi to defend Islam and counter non-Muslim attacks. Therefore, studying natural and exact sciences was not considered necessary.

Some scholars support Shibli Nomani's ideas but not his approach. Surur Ahmad, supported by Ehrāz Ahmad Naqvi, contends that Shibli Nomani aimed to produce healthy, pious, and knowledgeable Muslims. Shibli Nomani envisioned a team of experienced Muslim scholars to lead the Muslim community intellectually. However, his dream remained unrealized and only existed on paper. The establishment of Nadwah as a reaction to the Aligarh movement was not a suitable step. Shibli sought to gain worldly advantages tactfully but lacked the necessary tact.¹¹ Both Aligarh and Nadwah continue to exist and demonstrate their success.

Syed Sulaiman Nadwi suggested that Shibli Nomani should have considered the examples of the Prophet's companions, religious scholars, and Imams instead of Gurukuls and missionary schools. While Shibli Nomani did reference Gurukuls and missionary schools, his ultimate goal was to reform Muslim society.¹² Khurshidul Islam accuses Shibli Nomani of differentiating between the higher and lower strata of society. He claims that Shibli hesitated in admitting children from lower-caste families into educational institutions.¹³ This conclusion was likely drawn from a letter written by Shibli Nomani to a relative. In this letter, Shibli expressed his discomfort upon seeing a captain and a peon sitting together, indicating a perceived social hierarchy.

However, Shibli Nomani strongly refuted Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's apprehensions about lower-caste individuals occupying government positions if civil service examinations were held in India instead of England. This suggests that despite his own social biases, Shibli did not advocate for excluding lower-caste people from education. The aforementioned letter does not explicitly oppose the admission of lower-caste children into educational institutions.

Shibli Nomani's stance on female education was complex. While he never explicitly supported it, his letters and articles indicate a certain inclination towards it. However, scholars like Khurshidul Islam argue that Nomani was not in favour of women's education, citing a letter where he seemed to restrict it.¹⁴

Upon closer examination of these letters, it becomes clear that Shibli Nomani's primary concern was the segregation of genders, advocating for Purdah to maintain that separation. This suggests that he was not inherently opposed to female education itself.

Raj Bahadur Goar holds a different view, suggesting that Nomani favour Muslim women receiving modern education but was hesitant to publicly express this opinion due to potential backlash from religious scholars.¹⁵ Shibli Nomani's letters to

¹¹ Ehrāz Ahmad Naqvi, Shibli: Shakhshiyat aur Khuṭat, Adeeb, Aligarh: vol.V., No. 9 Shibli Number, September 1960, p. 263.

¹² Syed Sulaiman Nadwi, *Hayat-e-Shibli*, Darul Musannefin, Azamgarh p. 54.

¹³ Khurshidul Islam, Shibli Khuṭat kī Roshni mein, op.cit., p.54.

¹⁴ Shibli Nomani, *Makatib-e-Shibli*, vol. 1, ed. by Syed Sulaiman Nadwi, Ma'arif press, Azamgarh, 1966, p.21.

¹⁵ Dr. Raj Bahadur Goar, Nishatus-at-Thaniya aur Allamah Shibli, *Shibli ki Ilmi -o- Adbi Khidmat*, Khaleeq Anjum, Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu, Delhi. 1996, p. 18.

Atiyah Begum further support the idea that he held liberal views on female education.¹⁶

Shibli Nomani expressed his views on women's education and their participation in educational and social activities primarily in private letters rather than publicly. His attachment to Nadwah might have prevented him from publicly supporting this cause, as it could potentially impact the institution's reputation.

Despite these reservations, Shibli Nomani's educational views and contributions cannot be overlooked. He is considered an important thinker in the field of education, including women's education.

N.S. Gorekar argues that Shibli Nomani cannot be categorized with scholars and saints who were confined to monasteries and madrasas. He benefited from the company of both traditional Ulama and liberal intellectuals of his time. Therefore, his life and achievements differ from those of others, making him an embodiment of various branches of knowledge. Shibli was a great literary and academic personality, comparable to figures like Shah Waliullah, Mullah Mehmood, and Azad Bilgrami, possessing the virtues and qualities of an intellectual.¹⁷

Curriculum of Nadwah

Maulana Shibli realized that acquiring knowledge of the English language and Western sciences was essential for the cause of Islam. In 1902 A.D., at Amritsar, Shibli Nomani and two other committee members, Maulana Abdul Qayyum and Maulana Abdul Ha'i, prepared guiding principles for the curriculum of Nadwah. This curriculum broadly covered the following areas and fields:

- i. Rhetoric (fan-e-balāghat) and literature (Adab) along with Mukhtaṣar al-Ma'ānī, Dalā'il al-A'jāz of 'Abdul Qādir Jurjānī, A'jāz al-Qur'ān of Baqillānī, and Naqd al-Shi'r of Ibn Qudāmāh. In this, they emphasized more on rhetoric and literature.
- ii. Sīrat al-Mustaḳīm of Shāh Ismā'il Shāhīd and Shaikh 'Abdul Ḥa'ī Burhānwī and 15 paragraphs of Tafsīr-e-Baiḍāwī of Imām Baiḍāwī.
- iii. Mu'alim fī Uṣūl al-Dīn of Imām Rāzī in place of Ibn Rushd's Kashf al-Daulah and Imām Ghazālī's Al-Iqtīṣād for the teaching of 'Aqā'id.
- iv. The books Hidāyah Sa'īdiyah, Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-'Ain, and Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq of Suhrawardī. These books were prescribed.

for the study of philosophy. The philosophy of Ishraq was not included in the old curriculum of madrasa.

Hujjat al-Allah al-Balighah of Shah Waliullah. This book was included in the curriculum for the study of Asrar-e-Shariah.

Durus al-awliya . This book was prescribed for the study of falsafah-e-jadidah.

English language. The education of this language was made compulsory for every student of the institution.

The books which were prescribed for the different Darjah-e-Takmil were as under:

1. 'Ilm-e-Kalam:

¹⁶ Shibli Nomani, *Makātib-e-Shibli*, vol.1, op.cit., p. 19.

¹⁷ Professor, N.S. Gorekar, Allamah Shibli Nomani aur unke Ta'limi Afkar-o-Amal, op.cit., pp. 61-

Sharh Maqasid of 'Allamah Taftazani,
Kitab al-Sifat of Imam Baihaqi,
Tahafah al-Falasifah of Imam Ghazali and Tafkah al-Tahafah of ibn Rushd,
Rasa'il Arba'ah of Imam Ghazali,
Bahath 'Ismat-e-Anbiya' of 'Allamah ibn Hazm,
Talkhis al-Maqalah - o - Kashf al-'Adliyyah of Rahmat Allah al-Hindi,
Kitab al-Ruh of ibn Qayyim.

2. 'Ilm-e-Adab:

Diwan Imra al-Qais - o - Nabighah Dhubyani - o - 'Alqamah al-Fahl - o - 'Urwah
bin Wurd - o - Farazdaq,

Kitab al-Sana'tein of Abu Hilal 'Askari,
Asrar al-Balaghah of 'Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani.

Abi Tamam - o - Bakhtiri of al-'Amdi, 'Iqd al-Farid Abu 'Umar (RA) al Andulusi,
Mashq Nazm - o - Nathr.

'Ilm - e - Tafsir - Tafsir ibn Kathir, Baidawi Kashshaf, Kitab al-Nasikh wa'l-
Mansukh 'Ali Jaunpuri, Al Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an of Suyuti, A'ijaz al-Qur'an of
Baqillani, Tafsirat - e - Ahmadiyah of Mulli Jivan.

Fiqh and Ushul - e - Fiqh: Tahrir of ibn Hunain, Musallamus Thabat of Mulli
Muhib Allah, Ma'ani al-Athar of Tahawi, Bidayah al-Mujtahid of Qadi ibn Rushd.

CONCLUSION

Maulana Shibli Nomani was a farsighted scholar and reformer who played a crucial role in reshaping the educational and intellectual landscape for Indian Muslims during a period of cultural and political turmoil. His endeavors to integrate modern education with traditional Islamic teachings highlighted his dedication to bridging the gap between religious orthodoxy and modern liberalism. Through his involvement with institutions such as Aligarh, Nadwat al-Ulama, and the Dar al-Musannefin, Shibli aimed to equip Muslims with the necessary tools to confront the challenges of the modern world while safeguarding their religious and cultural identity.

Shibli's emphasis on English education, curriculum reforms, and advocacy for social and educational inclusion demonstrated his progressive outlook. Despite facing criticism from both traditionalists and modernists his writings and ideas continue to inspire educational thought, and his legacy underlines the significance of knowledge as a foundation for societal progress. Maulana Shibli Nomani remains a prominent figure in the history of Muslim education, leaving a profound impact on the intellectual and cultural awakening of his community.

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