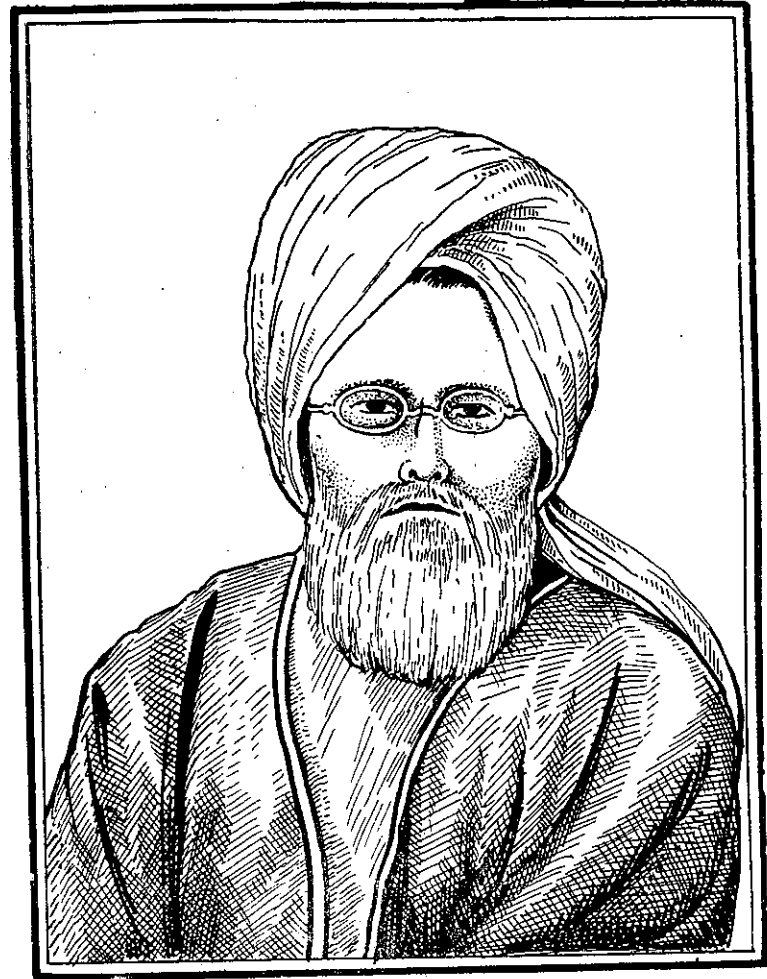


stop any of his style but he was quite progressive in his ideas. His desire for learning was so intense that he was eager to learn from every possible source and he was not at all afraid to ask questions. He had a wide knowledge of the history and literature of the East and West.

Maulana Shibli Nuamani

In a literature more advanced than Urdu, it is doubtful if the works of Maulana Shibli would have come in for a very prominent mention in taking stock of its purely literary productions, though they might have ranked high in the biographical and historical section of that literature. As Urdu is still in the process of growth, the efforts of those who have contributed to the building up of the edifice of its literature, must be judged by a standard different to that applicable to the literatures of some older and richer languages, and from this point of view, Shibli must take his place among the foremost masters of Urdu literature. He belonged to Azamgarh, and, by birth and domicile, was not connected with either of the two great centres of Urdu, namely Delhi or Lucknow. Nor can it be said, strictly speaking, that he belonged to any of the two great schools of Urdu writing associated with Delhi and Lucknow. At different periods of his life he came in touch with both the schools and probably imbibed what was good in each. As a student he profited by the able guidance of Maulvi Fazul Hasan, one of the most famous and successful teachers of his day, who could count a large number of distinguished men among his pupils. Maulvi Fazul Hasan belonged to



Moulana Shibli Nuamani

Saharanpur and was connected for a considerable period with the Punjab University. So far as Urdu is concerned, Maulvi Faizul Hasan may be regarded as one connected with the Delhi School. Shibli's earliest literary associations may therefore be taken to be with Delhi. Another and a more direct contact with the Delhi School began when Shibli attracted the notice of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and was appointed a Professor in the M. A. O. College at Aligarh. This brought him under the charm of the strong personality of the old Syed and gave him numerous opportunities of a close touch with the great writers of Delhi. I think it is mainly due to these associations that one finds more of the Delhi style in his writings than that of Lucknow. Towards the end of his career he got into intimate touch with Lucknow and this added some of the elegance and polish of Lucknow to his style. Maulvi Shibli had a varied career, the details of which, though very interesting, will be out of place in a sketch dealing mainly with his literary activity. He was a man of great ability and perseverance and his work was many-sided. He was chiefly known as a great teacher, who could inspire his pupils with great ideas and ideals and who has actually made some of the leading men of the present generation of educated Moslems what they are. He was at first a prominent helper and supporter of the educational movement of Sir Syed and contributed substantially to the success of the Educational Conference founded by the latter. After serving the Aligarh College for many years, he began to

feel that in educating Moslems greater emphasis on a knowledge of Arabic was needed to make them conversant with their religion. He became interested, therefore, in the *Nadwat-ul-Ulema* movement, and soon rose to be one of its leaders. This movement aimed at the advancement of Moslems through their education on the Oriental side being directed to the teaching of religion and by teaching them English as a secondary language. He also spent many years at Hyderabad, Daccan, in the educational and literary departments of the Nizam's dominions, and did very useful work there. He returned from Hyderabad to Lucknow with a pension from the Nizam's Government to continue his favourite literary pursuits. During the last year of his life he developed an interest in politics and wrote many political poems. He was also engaged at this time on his *Magnum Opus*, the *Sirati-Nabi* or the Life of the Prophet, the writing of which he had long contemplated, but which he was eventually enabled to undertake on account of the munificent pecuniary help given by the late Begum of Bhopal.

Shibli started life at a time when Persian scholarship counted far much more among Moslems than a knowledge of Urdu. Having a natural bent for poetry, he began to write Persian poems and continued doing so all his life. His Persian poems deserve to be classed among the best productions of Indian writers of Persian and are possessed of great beauty. Four collections of them have been printed and are known as *Diwan-i-Shibli*, *Dasta-i-Gul*, *Bue Gul* and

Bargi-Gul. If Shibli's attention had been directed to Urdu from the very outset and if he had written Urdu verse instead of Persian from his youth onwards, he would have probably achieved remarkable success in Urdu poetry, but barring a few Urdu poems like the *Masnavi Subh-i-Umed* he did not discover till late in life that he could do well in Urdu verses. His work as a writer of Urdu, therefore, began with prose. He wrote the biographies of many heroes of Islam. As a scholar he was fond of research and his reading of Islamic History was very wide. With his knowledge of Arabic and Persian he had an easy access to original sources of history. His contact with a European scholar like Professor T. W. Arnold, (afterwards Sir Thomas Arnold), added to his own fondness for historical research. The two great scholars, as colleagues on the staff of the Aligarh College, became fast friends and each influenced the other to a remarkable degree. Mr. Arnold started studying Arabic, Persian and Urdu, while Maulvi Shibli began to learn French and acquired a fair knowledge of it. Though he could not talk French, yet he could read books in that language and began to devour the works of French scholars on Oriental subjects. He also travelled abroad and visited Egypt and Turkey, thus broadening his outlook. He gave the impressions of his travels in a book called the *Safar Nama-i-Rum*, which is very interesting and is one of the best books of travels written in Urdu. Having felt that well-written books on the lives of the heroes of Islam were very much needed and that there was immense scope for research in this

direction, Shibli started the compilation of a series of biographies of some of the greatest men of the Islamic world. His choice first fell on Hazrat Umar, the second Caliph of the Prophet of Arabia. Caliph Umar was a just and a powerful administrator, a great general and conqueror, and with all this an exceptionally unassuming and God-fearing man. Shibli gave an account of the life and work of the great Caliph in his well-known book *Al-Farooq*, which at once brought him into prominence, not only as a research scholar, but as a writer of good Urdu. This work was patronised by His Highness the late Mir Mahbub Ali Khan, father of His Exalted Highness the present Nizam of Hyderabad. The book was very much appreciated by the Urdu reading public and had a wide circulation. It was followed by several other biographical works, such as (1) *Al-Mamun*, (2) *Al-Ghazzali* and *Siratul Nuaman*. The first named book described the life of the famous Abbaside Caliph, Mamun, of Baghdad, who was a great patron of learning. The second book contained a history of the career of the great philosopher and theologian of Baghdad, known in Europe as Al-Gazelle. *Siratul Nuaman* was the biography of Imam Abu Hanifa, the renowned Muslim jurist and founder of the Hanafi sect of Sunni Moslems. The two latter works, dealing as they do with the lives of two men of learning, abound in Arabic quotations and are not written in the easy style of *Al-Farooq* and *Al-Mamun*.

Maulna Shibli has enriched the stock of Urdu literature by another readable biography, *Sawanih*

Maulana Rum, which describes the life of Maulana Jalalud Din Rumi, one of the great Sufis of Islam. Among smaller works of this type may be mentioned the *Bayan-i-Khisrau*, which gives a brief account of the life of Amir Khisrau of Delhi, whose poetry is so popular among the Sufis upto this day.

The books mentioned above are all valuable in their own way and would have sufficed to make Shibli memorable as a writer, but he aimed at something higher and more scholarly than these earlier publications. He conceived the idea of writing in Urdu a complete account of the life of the great founder of Islam. For this purpose he began an extensive study of this vast subject and engaged a considerable staff of young scholars to collect material for this huge work. He divided the work into four parts. He laid down the lines on which the research was to proceed, and appointed several scholars to do research work under his supervision. He also took notes of the main criticisms levelled at the Prophet by European critics and proceeded to reply to them or to explain the misunderstandings under which the critics had been labouring. He pointed out that the European critics depended on some books of doubtful authenticity instead of going to the most accredited and authentic sources of information and that they had thus taken an incorrect view on many matters. This work involved so much expense that Shibli found his own limited resources too inadequate for the completion of this task. His desire to serve the cause of learning and to enrich Urdu

literature, was so keen that he had always been spending all his earnings on his literary pursuits, purchasing rare books available in India, sending for books from Egypt or Persia and paying people to help him in his compilations. When he published his books he did not spare any expense in making them attractive and did not mind whether from a pecuniary point of view he lost or gained by his publications. Her Highness the Begum of Bhopal,¹ who is a great patron of learning, came to know of the intention of Maulvi Shibli to publish the *Sirat-i-Nabi* and undertook to provide the expense. With this royal help this work was taken up by Maulana Shibli in right earnest and it took several years. Shibli had just completed the writing of the first volume, consisting of an account of the Prophet's life and had approved of the other volumes compiled under his direction, when his career of immense usefulness was cut off and his earthly labours came to an end. The first volume of the *Sirat-i-Nabi* was, therefore, published after his death and one of his favourite pupils and collaborators in this compilation, Maulvi Syed Suleman Nadvi, saw it through the Press. This was followed by the volumes subsequently published. This work has met with a very favourable reception. It was not meant to be of a merely popular nature and therefore in some quarters its serious and scholarly tone was felt to be disappointing.

1. The late Begum of blessed memory was alive when this lecture was written. She is no longer with us, but her distinguished son, His Highness the ruler of Bhopal, is worthily keeping up the traditions of his mother.

while in other circles where seriousness was appreciated, the occurrence of passages of purely literary and artistic merit was not valued sufficiently, but the more reasonable critics are of the opinion that Maulana Shibli has placed the Urdu-knowing world under a deep debt of gratitude by this great work.

Another epoch-making work of Maulana Shibli, which deserves special notice is the *Shiar-ul-Ajam*, which is a history of Persian literature in Urdu, in four volumes. The first volume of this book appeared in 1909 and was printed at the Faiz-i-Am Press, Aligarh. It dealt with Persian poets from Abbas Maruzi to Nizami and included an account of Firdausi, the famous author of the *Shahnama*. The remaining volumes were published in due course and received very appreciative reviews from the Press. The *Shiar-ul-Ajam* attracted the notice of the Punjab University and Maulana Shibli was awarded a sum of Rs. 1500/- by the University, as this work was considered to be the best book of the year in an Indian language. The valuable book of Professor Brown in English, on the history of Persian literature, had appeared before the book of Maulana Shibli. While appreciating the erudition and research of Professor Brown, Maulana Shibli differs from him in his estimate of some famous writers of Persian and adversely criticises parts of his book. Perhaps Shibli was a little too conscious of his own knowledge and information and was, therefore, more emphatic in expressing his differences with Professor Brown than he should have been. This was

taken exception to by a younger Indian scholar Professor Mahmud Khan Sherani¹ who championed the cause of Professor Brown, in a well-written article in the Quarterly Review, called *Urdu*. He adversely criticised the *Shiar-ul-Ajam* and tried to establish that Shibli's research was defective, particularly with regard to Firdausi, and that Professor Brown's conclusions rested on a sounder footing than those of Shibli. This is not the place to discuss the relative merits of the works of Professor Brown and Shibli, but what appeals to me in the *Shiar-ul-Ajam* is that an Indian scholar should produce in Urdu a critical work of this kind, which can hold its own in comparison with similar works of European scholars. I have it on good authority that an eminent European scholar, on seeing Shibli's book, observed that before he saw that book he could scarcely believe that any one, not having the advantages which the great centres of learning in Europe offer for research, could write such a book, sitting in India. It is precisely from this point of view that I regard the *Shiar-ul-Ajam* as a remarkable book in spite of any faults that Professor Sherani has found with it, as to the opinions embodied in it. I think it is a valuable addition to the stock of Urdu literature and has paved the way for other books of the same kind, especially for an up to date history of Urdu literature.

1. Alas Professor Sherani has now passed away. He was serving in the Islamia College, Lahore, when he wrote the article. He subsequently went to the Oriental College, Lahore, from where he retired some years ago. He belonged to Tonk State and died more than a year ago in his native home.

Among the lines of research taken up by Maulana Shibli was the tracing of the history of the development of what is known as *Ilm ul Kalam*, the object of which was to find rationalistic explanations of religion in order to satisfy sceptics and doubters within, and, hostile critics outside the pale of Islam. He has written a very instructive book in Urdu, under the above name, which was very much appreciated when it appeared and has been reprinted since. There is a collection of his shorter essays in Urdu, published as a *Rasail-i-Shibli*. Most of these short essays had been published separately from time to time, and have been collected subsequently. It is not necessary to mention all these essays, but two out of them deserve special notice. One was a pamphlet of some 76 pages on the old Library in Alexandria. Shibli tried to refute the theory that the old library was burnt by the Moslem conquerors of Egypt. He referred to English, French and German authorities in support of his contention and showed that a great misconception had prevailed on this subject. This pamphlet was published in 1902 at the Mufid-i-Am Press, Agra, and has since been reprinted several times. The other essay dealt with the period of the Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir and tried to show, by reference to historical works of recognised authority, that much of what was written against Aurangzeb, especially with regard to his attitude towards his Hindu subjects, was not correct.

Before concluding this brief notice of Shibli's prose works, I must mention his *Mawazina-i-Anis-*

o-Dabir. This book shows his great capacity as a literary critic. He understands all that criticism stands for in the literatures of the West, and sets about it in the spirit of a true scholar. In this book he has discussed the relative merits of the two great Lucknow writers of *marsia*. Those masters of Urdu verse devoted their lives to writing marsias. They were contemporaries and natural rivals in fame. They were both great masters of style and used to read their own compositions in public. Each one of them had his own set of admirers, and the spirit of partisanship among the admirers developed to such an extent that the differences between the two literary sects rose almost to the pitch of religious differences. Shibli has compared the two writers and recognises the position of both as eminent, but he does not conceal the fact that his own inclination is in favour of Anis. He has given arguments in support of his view, illustrating his arguments by extracts from the writings of the two poets. This book was published in 1907 (Mufid-i-Am Press, Agra) and aroused considerable opposition in many quarters.

Having dealt with the more important of the prose-works of Shibli, I come to his poems. They are not very many, but they have an interesting history and are very significant. Shibli had been so engrossed in his literary pursuits that he had hardly given any thought to politics. Moreover his association with Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who had tried to keep Moslems away from politics, may have had some thing to do with his own aloofness from political activities. His ideas on the subject,

however, changed after the death of Sir Syed and they underwent a further change, along with those of many other leaders of Moslem thought, in 1911, when it was announced that the partition of Bengal, which had repeatedly been declared to be a settled fact, was annulled. Shibli, like many others, began to believe in the efficacy of organised political agitation. The love of freedom was inborn in him and had been accentuated by his deep study of the literature of Arabia. It had been lying dormant in him for a considerable time. With the changed circumstances it kindled into a flame and he became one of the leaders of the liberal movement among the Moslems. He started writing short poems, relating to various incidents in the lives of the Prophet and his companions, with which his studies in Islamic history had rendered him familiar. He related in verse the well-known incident in the life of the Caliph Umar, when an Arab publicly challenged him for taking more than his individual share of cloth out of the booty taken in a campaign, and on being told that what seemed to be a larger share was the result of combining the share of Caliph Umar and his son, the Arab recognised that the Caliph was a just ruler and continued his allegiance to him. The object was to illustrate the absolute equality which prevailed among Moslems in the early days of Islam.

Another short poem which may be referred to in this connection is *Adl-i-Jahangiri*, in which Shibli describes how Jahangir, whose love for his queen, Nur Jahan, knew no bounds, once showed his great sense of justice and kingly duty in

ordering the execution of the sentence of death, which had been passed against Nur Jahan, by a Court, because a stranger had been killed by her by mistake. Jahangir did not cancel the order till the relatives of the deceased interceded on her behalf and accepted a large sum of money as a compensation, according to a doctrine of the Shariat (the law of Islam). These poems appeared at short intervals and were contributed to various newspapers and periodicals.

From these poems to others dealing with the political topics of the day was but a step and Shibli began to write about the National Congress and the Moslem League, and against political slavery. About this time there was trouble at Cawnpur in connection with a Mosque in which a number of Musulmans were killed as a result of firing by the police. This stirred the mind of Shibli and he wrote several poems, which were couched in strong words and were regarded by the authorities as objectionable and were suppressed by order. We are not concerned with the said order being justified or not, but I can say that as literature, pure and simple, apart from the views expressed in those poems, it is a pity that they were suppressed. As pieces of literature they deserved to live.

I may say a few words, before I finish, about his charming personality. He had a kind and affectionate heart and possessed an amiable and sweet nature. His pupils adored him and he loved them like his own sons and brothers. There was constant correspondence between him and them. He remained a student all his life and

most of his letters to his friends and pupils relate to literary matters. Syed Suleman Nadvi has collected a number of Shibli's letters and published them under the name of *Makatib-i-Shibli*. These are written in good Urdu and will repay perusal. They will also serve to throw light on some personal aspects of Shibli's life.

Shibli had taken great interest in the education and advancement of his younger brothers and, not having a son of his own, he devoted his love to them. The death of one of them, Maulvi Mohd. Ishaq, who was the ablest of them all, elicited from Shibli one of those spontaneous sobs in verse which by their pathos appeal to every heart and form the very essence of poetry. Similarly the lines, which he wrote about the accident which involved the amputation of one of his legs and made him lame for the remainder of his life, are very touching.

Shibli has left this world, but his works will long remain alive in the memory of his numerous admirers in India.