

Pashto Adabi Tolana: History and Contributions

Ayaz Ahmad ¹, Asghar Khan ²

This paper overviews the history and contributions of Pashto Adabi Tolana in Afghanistan. Archival sources and publications by the Tolana are studied qualitatively for tracing this history and contributions. Pashto Adabi Tolana emerged after the official merger of various informal societies that promoted Pashto language and literature. The Tolana was assigned a significant role in the reconstitution of Afghan national identity. This new identity was guided by Pashtoon nationalist sentiments in Afghanistan. The Tolana contributed to this national aspiration as it financed, supervised and published a number of research studies, manuscripts, magazines and translations from and into Pashto language. It also contributed to the development of Pashto language curricula by engaging in corpus planning, acquisition planning and standardization of Pashto language in Afghanistan. The early ambition soon waned, but the academy survived and expanded its cope to natural sciences. The article establishes that Tolana played a significant role in reshaping the identity of modern Afghanistan.

Key Words: Pashto, Pukhto, Pashto Adabi Tolana, Pashto Academy, language policy and planning, Afghanistan.

Introduction

In twentieth century Afghanistan underwent a transformation as it aspired to become a modern state with its own indigenous identity. The existing predominance of Persian culture and language in Kabul was considered unwanted. The new approach to identity favored Pashtoon nationalism and promotion of Pashto language was considered as reliable means to this end. Various informal societies for the promotion of Pashto languages and literature emerged in Afghanistan at the beginning of twentieth century. The Pashtoon elite in Kabul helped their merger and thus Pashto Adabi Tolana (Pashto Academy) was formed. One historical clue was the French Academy, which might have inspired King Amanullah Khan to pin his hope of national unification on an academy intended to promote a national culture and language. The paper explores the history and contributions of this academy in Afghanistan. First it overview the genesis and evolutions of Pashto Academy in Afghanistan and then overviews its services and publications.

Research Questions and Method

This is essentially an exploratory study of the history and contributions of a national language academy. Qualitative nature of the study is therefore obvious. Primary sources of this study include the publications of the Pashto Adabi Tolana. The study aimed to trace the history and therein highlight significant contributions of the Tolana. It was guided by the following research questions.

1. How Pashto Adabi Tolana developed under the pressure of history in Afghanistan?

¹ Department of English, AWKUM, Mardan

² Department of Regional Studies, University of Peshawar

2. What are the significant contributions of Pashto Adabi Tolana in the development of nationalism in Afghanistan?

History

Pashto Tolana was founded in 1937. In the beginning, it was formed with intention to oversee the research promotion at national level related to arts, languages, history, culture, sociology and archaeology. Before its formation, there were two precursor organisations that were busy in conducting research on the languages and literature of Afghanistan. One was called Anjoman-i Adabi of Kabul, a gathering for the promotion of literature established in 1930, and the other was Anjoman-i Pashtu, a gathering of literary people in Kandahar began in 1931. The Pashto Tolana was formed by the merger of these two societies.[1] The other popular name in the Western literature for this society was The Literary Society.[2] The initial aim of promotion of research in the social sciences and humanities aided to it the aim of establishing cultural and scientific relations with foreign countries.[3]

In 1932 it began publishing the Kabul Yearbook, this monumental work contained overview of the progress made in Afghanistan and its publication continued till the end of twentieth century.[4] It was generally believed that The Pashtu Society was established to standardize Pashtu as a language of official use in the leading domains of power such as offices, judiciary and learning. Such strategy was intended to remove Dari that was already ascendant in the said domains.[5] The plan for bringing this vital shift in the narrative of national identity from the historical domination of Persian language and culture to the new one that had local roots in the ascendant Pashto language became a reality with the royal declaration that made Pashto the official language of Afghanistan. With this announcement Pashto was to be used as the only language in official correspondence and archiving. While giving an interview to the Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society in 1937 the Afghan prime minister stated, "from next year it [Pashtu] is to become the language of our officials, doing away with Persian. Our legends and our poems will then be understood by everyone. We shall draw from them a pride in our culture of the past which will unite us".[6] This official backing made Pashto the only official language of Afghanistan, summing up the nationalist ideology of the Afghan King Amanullah Khan that were initiated in 1920s. Thereby the process of giving official recognition to the essentially Pashtun based redefinition of Afghan identity was undertaken by Pashtu Tulana (Pashtu Academy). Corpus planning, status planning and cultivation of Pashto language became foundation of this renewal of national identity. Education remained focus of such activities, followed by coinage of terminologies for official use.[7]

After the inception of Pashtu Society, its head office was moved to Kabul in 1935. In 1937 the precursor societies of the Tolana were abolished as Pashto Tolana (Pashtu Society) supposedly functioned their roles. [8] When it was founded, Ustod Salahudin Saljuki became its first chairman. Sardar Muhammad Naim functioned as the symbolic president (he was one of the three cousins who dominated in the major part of the reign of King Zahir Shah and was minister of education then). With the new mandate, Pashto Tolana remained part the powerful Afghan state's press department.[9] Immediately after establishment, it flourished well as new bureaus for translation and research in history, anthropology, sociology, political science, economics, physics, chemistry, biology, manufacturing, languages and literature (especially the international centre for Pashtu studies) were established and the projects of developing dictionaries and encyclopaedias were undertaken.[10] In 1940, it was made part of the Education Ministry. Distinguished Afghan scholars were honoured to supervise its activities. Abdel Rehman Pəzhwak, (1941-5), Abdūl Raḥf Benāwa (1946-51), Sidiqullah Rishteen (1951-56), Gūl Pacha Ulfat (1956-77) and Seddiq Roohi (1973-79). Following Saur Revolution this academy was revamped and rebadged as the Afghan Academy of Sciences and Sulaiman Lāyeq was made its head in 1980. Once again the socialist regime reorganized it in 1986 by adding 3 vice-presidents, 8 academic scholars, 32 supporting academic scholars and other twenty two members to perform the Herculean task of reshuffling Afghan identity and based it on socialist ideology.[11] When the socialist era weakened in the last days of president Najibullah, the activities of this academy become fewer and far between.

Promotion of collective national training for culture and civilization were the goals set for its formation. National folk literature that was the enshrined in the customs and traditions was collected in order to understand the development of language and literature in Afghanistan, and to establish relation in the same field with other countries for the benefit of national culture through accommodating wealth of knowledge from all sources. To achieve this aim, a monthly publication 'Kabul' was started in the year 1311 H or 1933. The annual news of the politics and institutions were published as Year Book (Sal Nameh).[12]

As already stated the Qandahar Literary Society started a year after the Pashto society. Their aim was also to promote the literary gatherings and to expand national research through studies on Pashto language. In 1314 H or 1933 this academy was transferred to the Capital. As the purpose of the founding societies were represented in this academy, they were merged into it, and it was named at that time Pukhto Tolana. In 1318 H or 1940, when permanent department of State Publication was established at that the department was conducting research on Pashto language and was arranging for publication in it. In 1333 H (1955) in the published principles that contained 56 articles was forwarded to His Highness with the recommendation of the Council of Ministers, and it became the guiding principles of its scope and administration, which gave it freedom of enterprise and capacity to perform a role in the national affairs. In the mentioned principles its administrative structure was as follows: Director, Assistant Director, Secretary, General Editor for lexicography, General Editor for literature and General Editor for translation. Editor of the Kabul Magazine headed the Review Committee. Under these principles this academy had 22 distinguished individuals working in it. It had academic relation with all literary and academic societies. In 1335 H (1957) it was restructured and attached to the ministry of Information and Ministry of Learning (education). In 1336 H. (1958) with an official notification from the office of His Highness with due approval of the Council of Ministers Pukhto Tolana became Afghanistan Academy.[13] Like a university, six disciplines or departments were established in it, which run as under:

1. Serhanwunki
2. Serhanyar
3. Serhanmal
4. Serhanwal
5. Serhandwoi
6. Serhanpal [14]

Under the proposed scheme it had 11 members and 12 employees. After becoming Afghanistan Academy of Sciences, the work previously initiated continued.

Upgrading the Afghanistan Academy to Afghanistan Academy of Sciences was informed by the then Afghan government to consolidate research centres in Afghanistan under one umbrella to promote efficiency in research.[15] When the Academy of Sciences was formed in 1360 H.S (December 1981) it became the acme research centre of Afghanistan. Under the new official mandate the following sub-centres were established:

- 1- Centre of Natural Sciences.
- 2- Centre of Social Sciences.
- 3- Centre of Language and Literature.
- 4- International Centre of Pashto studies.[16]

Pashto Tolana in its early days functioned as the most powerful official body for corpus planning, standardization and acquisition planning in Afghanistan through research on topics related to language and literature, publications and grants for manuscript writings (mainly for Pashto language). Later, branches for research on Dari language, history and archaeology were also included. When research and promotion of

natural sciences was entrusted to the academy, the change of title from Pashto Tolana to Academy of Sciences became necessary. Despite the notoriety of Taliban regime for the suppression of education and knowledge, the allowed the Academy continue its work after adding the branch for studying Islam.

After the end of Taliban regime, Academy of Sciences was restored as part of reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. President Hamid Karzai was deeply interested in the restoration of this academy. Therefore, it became one of the few institution to become functional in 2001. He kept the academy directly accountable to his office. This ensured fast recovery and efficiency in its. The importance of this academy was acknowledged in the post-Taliban government by giving the president of academy a status equal to a minister and making president of Afghanistan, the appointing authority.

Presently the Academy has been divided into three branches:

1. Department of Humanities and Social Science. It includes research and promotion of scholarship in Afghan history, geography, sociology, politics, archaeology, political sciences, economy, languages and Literature. It also works on development of the Ariana Encyclopaedia and supports international promotion of Pashtu Language.
2. Department of Natural Sciences. This branch supports research in all branches of natural sciences such as biotechnology, physics, chemical engineering etc.
3. Department of Islamic Studies. It includes Qur'anic Studies, Hadith, the Fiqah, Sufism and Beliefs.

'Strategy of Academy of Sciences of Afghanistan', is a part of Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) for 2008-13. It ascribes the following goals to the Academy in the new setup.

1. Coordination of scientific research in Afghanistan
2. Keeping liaison with education and higher-education ministries for the reforms and formation of curricula and addressing issues related to academic research.
3. Cooperation with other government ministries and independent agencies for analysing needs and help in solving problems Afghan state and society.
4. Maintenance of relation and cooperation with international and national academies (foreign) to keep Afghan researchers up to date.

The important project currently under completion in the Academy is the creation of the Ariana Encyclopaedia of Afghanistan. It is most ambitious project to make the first bilingual national encyclopaedia in Dari and Pashtu. This is intended to build on the incomplete project of Daira-tul-Maarif of Afghanistan Academy (Pashto Tolana). There are 300 members of the Academy.

Depending on budget the Academy publishes the research studies of its members. In 2010 Professor Rashed, the President of the Academy, won the Economic Cooperation Organisation's (ECO) Award in recognition of outstanding contributions in the field of education. The academy supports publication of a number of Currently the Academy publishes a wide range of magazines, mainly in Pashtu and Dari. These include:

- Tibion (Study of Islam)
- Tabiyat (study of physics, chemistry and biology etc)
- Khurasan, Pashtu, Kabul, Zeray (promotion of Afghan literature)
- Ariana, Afghanistan, Kushani (promotions of Afghan fine arts) [17]
- Tafakker promotes applied sciences and use of technology in Afghanistan.

The frequency of these magazines and periodicals range from biannual to quarterly, however one of its publication "Zeray" is fortnightly.

This academy maintains strong links with partner institutions in Iran, Russia, Pakistan, India, Italy, Turkey, Tajikistan and France. It is a member of IAP (Interacademy Partnership, Italy), a global network of the world's science academies, and TWAS (Italy), the academy of sciences for the developing world. It is very keen to develop reciprocal links with academies and research institutions in further countries.

The umbrella organisation of Afghanistan Academy of Science into which the erstwhile Pashto Tolana assimilated in 1981 still work closely with other organisations of similar objectives inside Afghanistan. One of these is the ANJOMAN-I ADABI (LITERARY SOCIETY). A literary circle founded by Muhammad Nadir Shah in 1930. Early members included Qari Abdullah the poet laureate, Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghobar, Muhammad Sarwar Joya, Muhammad Karim Nazihi, Sarwar Goya Etemadi, and others. They edited and published the periodical Kabul and from 1932 the Salnamah, Kabul Annual. The Literary Society and the Historical Society later became part of the Afghan Academy.[18]

Afghanistan academy was fortunate to be served by the leading scholars of Afghanistan. GUL PACHA Ulfat was one of them. He remained president of the Pashtu Academy in 1957. He was a popular Pashtu poet. In 1936 he became editor of the daily newspaper Anis and subsequently served as director of Ziray (1938), Himanat (1940), Kabul Magazine (1942), and Ittihad-i Mashriqi (1947) [19]. Abdul Rauf Benawa published the newspaper Tulu-i Afghan (Afghan Sunrise), and wrote a book Pashtana Likwal. He became president of the Pashtu Academy.[20] Sulaiman Layeq is a poet and writer in Pashtu and Dari who was a founding member of the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), member of the Politburo, the party secretariat, and president of the Afghan Academy of Sciences. [21] Abdul Rahman Pazhwak was a poet, scholar, and writer in Pashtu and Dari. He presented Afghanistan in the United Nations in 1966, and in Bonn (Germany as ambassador in 1972). His outstanding contribution was to serve as Director General of Pashto Tolana in 1941. [22]

Contributions

Afghanistan Yearbooks were the greatest contribution of the Pashto Tolana as it kept the publication regularly appearing throughout the functional life of Tolana and its morphs such Academy of Sciences. If take the Yearbook of 1975 as standard we find education was one of the targeted area of the government of Afghanistan in the year under review. Policy of the new government of Afghanistan focused, according to this report, on need based teaching, importance of practical work, promotion of technical skills, provision of supplementary teaching materials to schools, teacher training in effective teaching methods, and the need of research for the improvement of teaching. Fellowships for the teachers were announced to let teachers go to Japan, India, Germany, Australia, and Philippines for learning of advanced skills in technical and basic sciences. Educational broadcasts were initiated in that year. [23]

In addition to the general overview of the educational, scientific and research activities the report for 1975 also gave a detailed discussion of the achievement and progress of Afghanistan Academy or the Pashto Tolana. Responsible for the development of Pashto language in the country, The Pashto Academy had published produced following academic works in 1975.

1. Dictionaries (from and to) English, Russian-Pashto, Pashto.
2. Bibliographic compilation of Pashto manuscripts and publications
3. Publications of works and biographies of illustrious poets of Pashto.
4. Translation of important works in Pashto into other languages. Similarly translation of key works in foreign languages to Pashto.
5. Revision, correction and printing of Pashto books.
6. Development of books for 1665 courses in Pashto language

Through the support of this academy many books became part of the collection of this academy through original publications, translations and revision of older publication.[24] In this connection the services of Afghan Encyclopedia Society (Ariyana Dayeratul Maref) is praiseworthy. This society was established under the umbrella of Pashto Tolana to undertake the project of publishing a bilingual encyclopaedia in Dari and Pashto of all aspects of Afghanistan history, archaeology, society, politics, government, science and technology etc. As the European states had been engaged in such activity to preserve their history and culture, therefore, the same ambition guided the inauguration of this project. This project, after starting in 1941 by Sardar Muhammad Naeem (the education minister) under the lead of Mian Hussain Mujadidi. The scope of ambition was not properly assessed in the beginning, therefore, the enthusiasm and funding for the project deflated soon. However, the Persian edition succeeded in reaching the size of six volumes. While the first volume in Persian came out in 1948 it took 22 years for the sixth to get published in 1970. [25] Due to lack of funding this project was abandoned when the glossary of encyclopaedia reached alphabet "F". The volumes that covered alphabets A to E had one thousand pages each while the last one covering F had only 371 pages [26]. The project recalls to mind "Encyclopaedia Britannica" and "Encyclopaedia Americana" in formatting. This project engaged a large number of Afghan experts who contributed to finalizing various entries in the six volumes.

Overview of 23 Volumes of Kabul Yearbooks Published by Pashto Tolana

The Kabul Yearbooks or "Kabul Salnameh" are a great achievement of the The Afghanistan Academy or The Pashto Tolana. For this assignment I undertook to understand and comment on the essence of 23 volumes out of the available 44 volumes online on the Afghanistan Digital Library, besides description of the essential spirit and utility the wealth of information on ethnographic and historical dimensions of the structure, organization, policies and operations of the Afghan government, the thinking and orientation of the Afghan state elite and texts about Afghan culture, society and history could be describes as the recurrent themes in the volumes studies. In these volumes we find the emergence small but powerful new Afghan urban strata of professional technical and administrative intellectual elite as it developed alongside pristine monopoly capitalism in Afghanistan in the first third of the 20th century. The text is available both in Dari and Pashto. Under the auspices of Kabul government, most of the authors of these publications come from the pool of the government employed Afghan elite whose writings also appear in the annual and the monthly Kabul. The authors of yearbooks concentrated on information and ideas about Afghanistan in general, modernity, and the outside world, Europe in particular. The centre to periphery flow of thoughts are visible in the yearbooks produced by Pashto Tolana. The European modernization is viewed generally in the positive light as a commendable aim for the society in Afghanistan. The Kabul yearbooks contain a wealth of information about the structure and organization of the Afghan state apparatus. These mass produced texts are a rich source of ethnographic data about state-tribe relations, ethnic and linguistic contours of the operations of the government, modernization efforts in several areas including incipient industrialization, communication, public health, education. As a whole, these texts serve as a window on the culture, society, and politics of Afghanistan.

Despite their being a rich source of information they are generally ignored in research on Afghanistan, and no PhD or MPhil thesis has been undertaken on them according to my knowledge. The online availability of the original scan is a marvel of scientific technology that is working for the dissemination of information and scholarship.

Sources of Accessing the publications of Pashto Tolana

The library of Area Study Centre (Central Asia), University of Peshawar is a rich source of publication of the Pashto Tolana. It has extensive number of Kabul magazine, which after digital cataloguing could be searched through computers of the centre. Further, the presence of Dairatul Ma'arrif, Kabul yearbooks and other rare books such as Pashto-Dari Dictionaries, Pashto-English dictionaries and Pashto-Pashto

Dictionaries make Area Study Centre a leading resource of the publication of Pashto Adabi Tolana, which were collected laboriously over the years by its enterprising directors.

Online resources have recently added significantly to the resources on Afghanistan. US funded projects run by the New York University have made available the digital scans of the rarebooks on Afghanistan, such as the complete Siraj Al-Akbar and the text of similarly important rare historical documents on Afghanistan lying waste in the archives of the New York University. Presently full and free access is granted to about 500 books and works. Another project that is hosted by the Kabul University holds material of relatively newer times on Afghanistan is the Afghanistan Digital Library. It also offers a large number of digital documents, the present figure is about 3000 but it is to be increased to about 15000 documents on Afghanistan.

Conclusion

The paper overviewed the history and contribution of Pashto Adabi Tolana. The purpose of its foundation was nationalistic in essence. Afghan elite wanted to promote Afghan nationalism that is essentially Pashtoon in outlook. The project was ambitious and resources were limited, therefore, the grand funding and interest in its capacity soon waned. However, the initial enthusiasm and funding helped the Academy to support key projects that helped in the standardization of Pashto language

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