



MUSLIM EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN NINETEENTH  
CENTURY INDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF SHIBLI  
NU'MANI'S THOUGHT & PRACTICE

BY

NUSBA PARVEEN

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ISTAC  
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY  
MALAYSIA

MARCH 2005

## Abstract

The nineteenth century witnessed many efforts by Muslim philosophers and scholars to redefine and readjust to the growing challenges of Western civilization. Education was viewed as the key area of reform in this process. Traditionally, Muslims had derived their inspiration from the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah – acquiring knowledge was viewed not only as an act of worship, but also a means of understanding God's creation and God Himself. However, European material progress and the need for Muslims to catch up with the times led some Muslim scholars and community leaders to adopt European methodology. But this would not be possible without developing a clear relationship with traditional Muslim education. It is in this context that Shibli Nu'mani (1857-1914) becomes so important in modern Islamic thought. Shibli was a philosopher, historian, theologian, poet and an educationist. He was the main person behind the foundation of Nadwatul 'Ulamā' Lucknow, through a new curriculum to develop a working relationship between Islamic and Western civilization. In a way his was an effort of Islamization of knowledge in the context of nineteenth century India but it has not yet been studied systematically. This dissertation explains this context and examines his effort.

This thesis begins with Shibli's life and writings and a background of Muslims in the Indian sub-continent with special reference to their educational condition. It studies in detail the British educational policies and their impact on Muslims. This resulted in the efforts of founding traditional Muslim *madāris* as well as the institutions of modern learning. Then in the third, fourth and fifth chapters it studies the philosophy, contents and method of education as Shibli viewed them. The sixth chapter assesses the contributions of Shibli in educational field with reference to Nadwatul 'Ulamā'. Finally, we examine Shibli's achievements and the causes of his failures.

What makes Shibli an important scholar of the nineteenth century is the fact that he propagated a theory different from his contemporaries to improve the education of Muslims. In contrast, most of his contemporaries attempted to teach traditional education to make Muslims retain their religious identity in the changed political situation. Others stressed the teaching of modern science and learning to equip Muslims to face the challenges of modernity. Shibli was the only person who knew the benefits and weaknesses of both systems of education and wanted Muslims to learn the best of both and attempted to bridge the gap between the two. Shibli knew that traditional Islamic education aimed at the attainment of virtues in an individual while pursuing knowledge as an obligatory commandment from God. It was, therefore, hoped that this education would produced scientists and philosophers who were well versed in the Qur'an and *hadith*. But in his time the promoters of traditional education were ignorant of the demands of the times whereas the modernist group believed that the traditional education was unnecessary. Shibli, therefore, applied a unique method as he used history and *kalām* to teach Muslims the characteristics of Islamic education. This was the main reason for Muslim stagnation. Shibli believed, because each group was against the other, and it was badly affecting the progress of Muslims. Shibli stressed that both groups need to make the Qur'an their main guide and must give due importance to each subject, while stressing a bigger role of the '*ulamā*' than they had.

## ملخص البحث

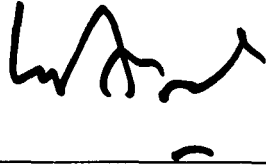
شهد القرن التاسع عشر جهوداً متعددة لفلاسفة وعلماء المسلمين من أجل إعادة تشخيص تحديات الحضارة الغربية الصاعدة وتكييفها. وفي هذا الإطار كان يُنظر للتعليم كمجال مهم للإصلاح. وقد كان المسلمون تقليدياً يستشعرون وحي إلهامهم من تعاليم القرآن والسنة التي لم ينظروا إليها كفعل للعبادة فحسب، بل وسيلة لإدراك الخلق الإلهي والإله نفسه. ولكن التقدم المادي الأوروبي وحاجة المسلمين لمواكبة العصر دفعنا بعض علماء المسلمين وقادة المجتمع لتبني النهج الأوروبي. بيد أن هذا لا يمكن أن يتحقق دون تطوير علاقة واضحة مع التعليم الإسلامي التقليدي. وفي هذا المضمار قد أضحى شبلي نعماني (١٨٥٧-١٩١٤) علماً مهماً في الفكر الإسلامي الحديث. وقد كان شبلي فيلسوفاً ومؤرخاً، وقيهاً، وشاعراً، ومعلماً. وكان الشخص الرئيس وراء تأسيس ندوة العلماء بلكهنو، وقد استطاع من خلال منهج تعليمي جديد أن يؤسس لعلاقة عملية بين الحضارتين الإسلامية والغربية. وقد كان هذا الجهد يصب في إطار إسلامية المعرفة في هند القرن التاسع عشر، لكنه جهد لم يدرس دراسة منتظمة. وتبين هذه الأطروحة هذا الواقع وتناقش محاولة شبلي نعماني.

تبدأ هذه الرسالة ب حياة شبلي، ومؤلفاته، وخلفية المسلمين في شبه القارة الهندية وذلك بنظرة خاصة لواقع التعليم هناك. وتتطرق تفصيلاً إلى السياسات التعليمية البريطانية، وتأثيرها على المسلمين. وقد تبلور حصيلة ذلك في الجهود التي أدت إلى تأسيس المدارس الإسلامية التقليدية والمعاهد الحديثة. وتناقش في الفصل الثالث والرابع والخامس فلسفة التعليم ومضمونها ومنهجها حسب ما يراها شبلي. ويقوم الفصل السادس بإسهامات شبلي في مجال التعليم وذلك بنظرة خاصة لندوة العلماء. وأخيراً تناقش إنجازات شبلي وأسباب إخفاقه.

وقد ظل شبلي عالماً مهماً في القرن التاسع عشر نتيجة لترويجه لنظرية مازته عن معاصريه فيما يخص تحسين تعليم المسلمين. ونجد في المقابل أن معظم معاصريه قد استمروا في تدريس التعليم التقليدي ليمكنوا المسلمين من الحفاظ على هويتهم في واقع سياسي متغير. وقد عوّل آخرون على تدريس العلوم الحديثة ليمكنوا المسلمين من مواجهة تحديات الحداثة. وقد كان شبلي الشخص الوحيد الذي عرف محاسن ومساوئ النظامين التعليميين، وطلب من المسلمين أن يدرسوا محاسنهما، ويحاولوا عبور الحاجز الفاصل بينهما. وكان شبلي يدرك أن التعليم الإسلامي التقليدي يهدف إلى ترسيخ الفضائل في الشخص خلال فترة تلقيه العلم باعتباره فريضة من الله. ومن ثم فقد كان يعوّل على أن هذا التعليم سيتيح لعلماء وفلاسفة متمكنين في القرآن والسنة. إلا إن مروجي التعليم التقليدي في هذا الزمن الحاضر جاهلون بمتطلبات العصر، بينما المجموعة التحديثية تعتقد أن التعليم التقليدي ليس ضرورياً. لذا فإن شبلي قد طبق طريقة فريدة، لأنه استخدم التاريخ والكلام ليعرف المسلمين بخصائص التعليم الإسلامي. وقد كان شبلي يعتقد أن ذلك هو السبب الرئيس في ركود المسلمين، لأن أية مجموعة كانت ضد الأخرى، وكان أثر ذلك سالباً على تقدم المسلمين. وقد أوضح شبلي أن المجموعتين تحتجان أن يكون القرآن مرشدهما الرئيس، ويجب أن يعطيا نوعاً من الاهتمام لكلا الأمرين، بينما حث على دور أكبر للعلماء من دورهم الذي كان قائماً آنذاك.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis of Nusba Parveen has been examined and is approved by the following:



---

WAN MOHD NOR WAN DAUD  
Supervisor



---

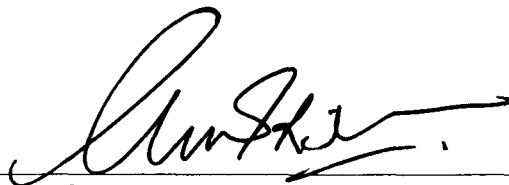
SSEMKAMANYA SIRAJE ABDALLA  
Internal Examiner

---

GHULAM NABI SAQEB  
Internal Examiner

---

ANIS AHMAD  
External Examiner



---

MOHAMED RIDZA WAHIDDIN  
Chairman

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

NUSBA PARVEEN

Signature: Nusba Parveen

Date: 13/3/2005

**DECLARATION OF COPYRIGHT AND AFFIRMATION OF FAIR  
USE OF UNPUBLISHED RESEARCH**

Copyright © 2004 by NUSBA PARVEEN. All rights reserved.

**MUSLIM EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY INDIA:  
AN ANALYSIS OF SHIBLI NU'MANI'S THOUGHT AND PRACTICE**

No part of this unpublished research may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior written permission of the copyright holder except as provided below.

1. Any material contained in or derived from this unpublished research may only be used by others in their writing with due acknowledgement.
2. IIUM or its library will have the rights to make and transmit copies (print or electronic) for institutional and academic purposes.
3. The IIUM library will have the right to make, store in a retrieval system and supply copies of this unpublished research if requested by other universities and research libraries.

Affirmed by NUSBA PARVEEN

Nusba Parveen  
Signature

13/3/2005  
Date

## Acknowledgement

The idea of writing about a scholar from the sub-continent who has not been duly exposed came from our respected Professor, Prof. Malik Badri, while I was searching for a suitable topic. He suggested that I should do the research on a personality whose writings have not been studied yet. I liked the idea and began my research on Shibli Nu'mani who was little known outside the sub-continent except in Iran and Egypt for his Persian and Arabic writings. I am thankful to the Professor for this.

My understanding of the need to appreciate and learn from the classical Muslim scholars developed after I met the learned Professor and Founder-Director of ISTAC, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, whose lectures were an eye opener for me. It is through him that I came to know the true meaning of knowledge in Islam and the underlying factors of western civilization. His deep insight into Islamic education and philosophy 'to put things in their right perspective and giving due acknowledgement to deserving scholars' had perhaps motivated me to write on Shibli Nu'mani to adopt new strategies for future education. What has helped me penetrate deep into Shibli's main thesis was the background in which I grew up – the insistence of my father, Irfan Ahmad Khan on the hermeneutical study of the Qur'an. He believes that the main problem of Muslims is their ignorance of their text Book (the Qur'an) which is supposed to be their main guide in every field of education. Shibli was one scholar of modern times who insisted on making the Qur'an the guide for both modern and religious education as in early Islamic history.

I am very grateful to my Supervisor, Prof. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud for being so helpful to me throughout my thesis, not only as my Supervisor but also as the Student Advisor at ISTAC. His lectures on education and Islamization have been very helpful to me for shaping my ideas on education. He has given me tremendous help in my writing, by meticulously providing valuable suggestions, encouragement and comments to give it this shape. He has also assisted me with patience and wisdom in the technical details and went painstakingly through the several times. I am very much indebted to him for everything. I must also express my special gratitude to Associate Professor Dr. Ssekamanya Siraje Abdallaah, my second Supervisor for going through my dissertation several times. I will always be grateful to him for that and for providing valuable suggestions in improving this thesis.

Perhaps all of the ISTAC professors were helpful to me (and many other students too, like the members of a family) in developing my understanding of both East and West and were always extending their assistance to me. Some of them from whom I benefited most are Prof. Mehdi Mohaghegh, Prof. Ahmad Kazemi Mousavi and Prof. Alparsalan Achigenc. Prof. Hasan al-Najjar deserves my special thanks for teaching me that knowledge of Arabic for which I will be always grateful to him. Also, Associate Prof. Dr. Kamar Oniah binte Kamaruzzaman deserves my special thanks both as a student of ISTAC and then as a Professor for providing her valuable comments and suggestions from time to time.

I must also express my gratitude for those scholars from Pakistan and India who have provided me with the books of Shibli Nu'mani here in Kuala Lumpur which it would not have been possible for me to get even if I had gone there myself. The names of Prof. Suheyl 'Umar, Director of Iqbal Academy Lahore; Prof Anis Ahmad of the International Islamic University Islamabad; Prof. Jamil Farooqi and Prof. Arshad Islam at the IIUM are worthy of mention.

Last but not the least, I am very thankful to my husband, Abdullah Ahsan for not only helping me borrow the books from the IIUM library but also for sometimes reading the manuscript and making valuable suggestions. I am also grateful to him and my children Hafsa, Saeb and Arqam for co-operating with me and helping with my household chores. All praises and gratitude be to Allah for providing me this opportunity and making me fulfill this responsibility for His cause. May Allah accept this humble attempt in His cause and help it contribute for the welfare of not only Muslims but all human beings and also reward those who have assisted me in this cause.

# MUSLIM EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY: AN ANALYSIS OF SHIBLI NU‘MANI’S THOUGHT & PRACTICE

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgement .....	vii
<b>CHAPTER I.....</b>	<b>1</b>
(1) Objective of this Thesis .....	1
(2) Shibli’s Background .....	2
(3) Shibli’s Writings .....	15
(3.1) His Writings on Education .....	24
(4) Sources of Shibli’s Thought .....	28
(5) Shibli’s Contemporaries.....	37
(6) Review of the Literature about Shibli.....	46
<b>CHAPTER II: PRE-NINETEENTH CENTURY EDUCATIONAL SITUATION IN INDIA .....</b>	<b>52</b>
(1) A Brief Survey of Education in Pre- Colonial India.....	53
(1.1) Curriculum during the Mughal Era .....	65
(1.2) Curriculum recommended by Shah Wali Allah.....	66
(1.3) Curriculum according to Mullah Nizami .....	67
(2) British Educational Reforms .....	71
(2.1) Establishment of Calcutta <i>Madrasah</i> .....	72
(2.2) Curriculum of Calcutta <i>Madrasah</i> .....	74
(3) Foundation of Dārul ‘Ulūm Deoband .....	87
(3.1) Curriculum of Deoband <i>Madrasah</i> .....	92
(4) Aligarh Muslim University: Beginning of Modernism.....	99
<b>CHAPTER III: SHIBLI’S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION .....</b>	<b>107</b>
(1) Shibli’s Concept of Education .....	109
(2) The Aim of Education .....	122
(3) Objectives in Education According to Shibli .....	134
(4) Shibli’s Theory of Education .....	137
(5) Key Terms used by Shibli .....	141
(5.1) <i>Ta’lim</i> and <i>Tarbiyah</i> .....	141
(6) Prophet as a Model Educator.....	146
(7) Shibli’s Opinion on other Approaches to Education .....	153
(7.1) Al-Ghazālī .....	154
(7.2) Dars-i Nizamiyyah .....	158

(7.3)The Most Crucial Level Education.....	163
CHAPTER IV CONTENTS OF EDUCATION ACCORDING TO SHIBLI.....	168
(1) <i>Farḍu Kifāyah</i> and <i>Farḍu ‘Ain</i> .....	169
(2) The Qur’an as <i>Farḍu ‘Ain</i> .....	174
(3) Shibli’s Position on Modern Sciences .....	179
(4) Position of Philosophy According to Shibli .....	187
(5) Significance of <i>Kalām</i> to Shibli .....	202
(6) Shibli’s Attitude towards Şufism .....	212
(7) Role of Languages: English, Arabic, Urdu .....	216
(8) Shibli’s Concept of History .....	223
CHAPTER V SHIBLI’S METHODOLOGY IN EDUCATION.....	234
(1) Shibli’s Approach as an Educationist.....	234
(2) Shibli on Teaching and Instruction .....	241
(2.1) Shibli’s Concept of “ <i>İslamizing</i> ” or Making the Modern Sciences “Muslim”.....	250
(3) Shibli’s Style in Writing.....	258
CHAPTER V SHIBLI’S CONTRIBUTION .....	277
(1) Dārul ‘Ulūm Nadwatul ‘Ulamā’, Lucknow .....	299
(1.1) Curriculum at Nadwah.....	306
(2) Dār al-Muşannifin .....	313
CONCLUSION .....	320
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	334

Most quotations of the Qur'an translation are taken from Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Quran* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980). Only in rare cases the translation is taken from Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* ( Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1989) or is author's own.

The translation for the Urdu text used in this dissertation is the author's own unless otherwise specified.

The method adopted for Urdu transliteration is the same as standard Arabic transliteration and for many Urdu words, Urdu pronunciation has been kept.

## CHAPTER I

### (1) Objective of this Thesis

This work is an attempt to study the educational reforms in nineteenth century India with special reference to Shibli Nu'mani. It examines Shibli's ideas on education and their impact on modern Muslim education. Nineteenth century was the period when Muslims throughout the world were at their lowest in pursuit of knowledge and were getting weaker both morally and politically. To address this problem many Muslim intellectuals stood and tried to equip the Ummah with proper education. Shibli propagated a theory of education different from his contemporaries but his contributions have not been highlighted properly, particularly outside Urdu audience they are known very little. This thesis is therefore an attempt to bring Shibli's ideas on a wider level.

Shibli stressed on a more active role of '*ulamā'* (religious scholars) to bring a reform in Muslim education. He believed that '*ulamā'* in his time might be experts in their field but were ignorant of the contemporary issues, which was against their religious duty. He therefore aimed at transforming the curriculum of religious institutions, which was not producing creative and dynamic thinkers like the early Islamic history. He believed that the role of religious scholars was very significant in transforming the minds of common Muslims. However, these scholars were not effective anymore and created a big gap while dealing with educated Muslims. Therefore, they needed to be

equipped with modern science and education. He was convinced that if these scholars revive their true Islamic spirit rooted in search of knowledge they would be able to instill quest for knowledge in every Muslim which will subsequently change their conditions.

The thesis will start with a background of Shibli in 19<sup>th</sup> century India in the first chapter. In the second chapter, educational conditions of Indian Muslims before 19<sup>th</sup> century and the effects of British colonialism over the education of Muslims in 19<sup>th</sup> century would be studied. In the third chapter Shibli's philosophy of education including his objective and the theory of education would be discussed. The fourth chapter is focused on what were the essential contents in education to Shibli. The fifth chapter is on Method adopted by Shibli in implementing his ideas in education which includes his writing style and method of teaching. And the final, sixth chapter 'Shibli's Contribution' is meant to study his efforts and their impact on the education of Muslims and would highlight his efforts in the establishment of Nadwatul 'Ulamā'. In the conclusion we will analyze the overall impact of Shibli on Indian Muslim society and the causes for not achieving his goal in his lifetime.

## (2) Shibli's Background

Muhammad Shibli, popularly known as Shibli Nu'mani was born in the famous year of struggle for independence in India, on May 8, 1857,<sup>1</sup> in the district of Azamgarh (in

---

<sup>1</sup> This was the historical day when uprising started in Shibli's native district of Azamgarh, United Provinces now Uttar Pradesh.

eastern Awadh) in a Rajput family.<sup>2</sup> He was the first child of Sheikh Habibullah<sup>3</sup> and the selection of name (on famous şufi Shibli) perhaps indicates his inclination towards şufism. Shibli's parents devoted him for the acquisition of religious knowledge and provided for him the best religious education available at that time. Shibli was a smart child with a sharp memory and his first teacher *ustāz* Hakim Abdullah (d.1890) used to say that 'the signs of perfection and love for literature were found in him from the beginning.'<sup>4</sup> Then he went to Moulvi Faizullah and learned from him some Arabic books.<sup>5</sup>

But Shibli's formal education began when he joined the *mudarris* Muhammad Fārūq Chiryākoti (d. 1909), a famous scholar of his time. Shibli studied all the books of *ma'qūlāt* from him and was always obliged to him for that, and for developing his interest in Persian.<sup>6</sup> Both teacher and pupil worked very hard on learning of

---

<sup>2</sup> His ancestors are reported to have embraced Islam in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>3</sup> Shibli's mother was from an Ansari family and was a very pious and devoted lady. Shibli said that she was very punctual in her night (*tahajjud*) prayers and he adopted this from her training. Shibli had three brothers and one sister, his brothers' names were Mehdi Hasan, Muhammad Ishaq and Junaid and they all studied law.

<sup>4</sup> His teachers were Muhammad Yusuf of Farangi Mahal and Nazir Hussain of the Delhi tradition of Shah Wali Allah. Hakim Abdullah relates this story that once while Shibli was still a child and living with the teacher, at night teacher was sleeping and when the teacher woke up in the middle of the night he found young Shibli sitting in a corner and writing a piece of history. This means that from his childhood Shibli was inclined towards history and it developed and got polished after his arrival to Aligarh and seeing Sayyid Ahmad's library. Sayyid Suleyman Nadvi, *Hayāt-i Shibli*, 1<sup>st</sup> Pub., 1943, Dār al-Mu'annifin Shibli Academy, Azamgarh, 1993, p.71. Hereafter cited as *Hayāt-i Shibli*. Suleyman Nadvi also says here that in his childhood Shibli used to spend his free time at the book stores.

<sup>5</sup> Shibli also studied from Moulvi Ali Abbas and Mawlana Hidāyatullah Khan for some time.

<sup>6</sup> Shibli refers to *Mir Zāhid, Mullah Jalāl ma' Mir Zāhid, Hamidullah, Sharḥ Muṭāla'ah, Şadra, Shams Bāzighah*, which he studied with him. Writing about the greatness of the teacher Shibli says that he was a very good scholar, who had deep knowledge of the subjects and taught sincerely, but he was

philosophy.<sup>7</sup> Shibli wrote later in a letter “I learned philosophy with great effort and diligence, and was involved in it for long time.”<sup>8</sup> The teacher not only gave him the theoretical understanding of logic but generally had all his pupils practice and exercise *naṣab-i arba‘ah*, *qaḍāyā* and *ashkāl* regularly.<sup>9</sup> Although he had finished his required education, his quest for more knowledge prompted him to travel to ‘Farangi Maḥal’ in Lucknow.<sup>10</sup> But he could not stay there because of too much emphasis on logic and grammar, and went to Rampur to join Mawlana Irshad Hussain, an expert in fiqh. After completing his education in fiqh and its principles, he left for Deoband and spent some time reading about *farā’id* informally. He then traveled to Lahore to learn from the famous scholar of *adab*, Mawlana Faizul Hasan Saharanpuri (d. 1887), professor at Oriental College, Lahore.<sup>11</sup> It was Faizul Hasan who inculcated an interest in the Arabic poetry of *Jāhiliyyah* (pre-Islamic) in Shibli. The simplicity and effectiveness of this literature left an everlasting impact on Shibli. He also learned *faṣāḥah* and *balāghah* of the Qur’an from him, which became very important for Shibli, such that

---

careless and very unceremonious type, therefore he could not stay in one place and even finish any of his writings.

<sup>7</sup> *Hayāt-i Shibli*, p.76.

<sup>8</sup> Shibli Nu‘mani, Letter to Habibur Rahman Sherwani, no. 13, *Makātīb-i Shibli*, Dār al-Musannifin Shibli Academy, Azamgarh, 1966, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. vol. 1, p.117.

<sup>9</sup> Suleyman Nadvi writes that it was because of this practice that Shibli always used logic in speech and writing. He refers to Mawlana Fārūq who used to say “*anā asadun wa anta Shibli*” (I am the lion and you are [its] cub) *Hayāt-i Shibli*, pp.75-76.

<sup>10</sup> Farangi Mahal is a famous seminary of traditional education founded in Lucknow in 1694, during the reign of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. It was founded by the Mullah Nizamuddin Sihāli, the founder of Dars-i Nizāmiyyah, in a house granted by Emperor.

<sup>11</sup> It is related that Shibli’s father did not want him to travel that far and wanted him to prepare for the law exam, but Shibli insisted and with very little money in hand embarked to learn more. Faizul Hasan was a very busy professor but he could not say no to Shibli, seeing his interest and intelligence, so he found the time on the way to and from college. These lessons, and then Shibli’s journey with the

he gave them a central place in his life. It was customary at that time to acquire the *‘ilm of ḥadīth* after the completion of other sciences, so Shibli went to the best teacher of *ḥadīth*, Mawlana Ahmad Ali Muḥaddith Saharanpuri (d. 1894 A.D.), as he had earlier gone to the best teachers in other fields. While Shibli was studying *ḥadīth* under him, his father and other family members decided to go for hajj (1876), and on the recommendation of his teacher Shibli also joined the family.<sup>12</sup> He also used this journey in the quest for knowledge and visited all the libraries of Medina about which he used to say that ‘the treasure of *funūn* ḥadīth he saw there, was not seen any where else.’<sup>13</sup> Shibli also read one *Mathnawi* at the grave of the prophet and had lifelong memories of the generosity of Arabs and the feelings of the pilgrims.

After returning from hajj, Shibli’s life took a new turn. His father wanted Shibli to study law and be a professional following the family tradition. Shibli sat for an entrance exam to please his father and failed, but amazingly his brother Mahdi who had just learned a few lessons from Shibli had passed. This was more painful to Shibli than failing the exam itself. Then he took it as a challenge and sat for the exam again and passed next year in 1880. At the insistence of his father he began practicing in 1881, in his hometown Azamgarh but faced many problems due to his sincerity and honesty. Seeing that, his father found another job for him as a copywriter in the court. It was not worthy of his scholarship yet he was relieved to have avoided practicing

---

teacher to his hometown, became so fruitful that Suleyman Nadvi says it brought his interest in literature to perfection in the field. *Ibid.* pp.81-83.

<sup>12</sup> Starting from 1863 it took Shibli 13 to 14 years in the acquisition of learning.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p.92.

law. He did these kinds of (odd) jobs while helping his father in his business for next two years.

Shibli's first contact with Aligarh occurred in 1881 when he came with his father to see his younger brother Mehdi, who was studying at Aligarh school. Shibli accompanied him to Aligarh and wrote an ode in the praise of Sayyid Ahmad's activities, which were becoming popular at that time. Sayyid Ahmad admired the ode so much that he published it in the *Aligarh Gazette* immediately. Later in 1883, there arose a need for a Persian professor in Aligarh and Shibli applied for it at the recommendation of his teacher Faizul Hasan. Shibli was (thus) hired to teach Arabic and Persian (to F. A. and B. A. students) as an assistant professor at a low salary. Even though unhappy with the salary, Shibli was satisfied with his job. Because of his performance, he was soon promoted to a full professorship with a higher salary.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> The story of Shibli's hiring by Sayyid Ahmad is an interesting one. When Shibli was called for the interview at Sayyid Ahmad's residence he arrived there at the appointed time. He was then asked to wait in the library to be seen shortly. While waiting there Shibli started looking at the books with amazement as he had not seen such books before. There were locks in the bookshelves and he could only see the books from outside. He was then told of some engagement and asked to come next day. When next day he came and was asked to wait, he found the locks of the shelves were open so he started turning and popping the books with astonishment. When he became tired of standing he just sat on the floor busy in reading. Again he was told of some excuse and was asked to come next day. This time when he came he found few chairs in the library and he made himself comfortable exploring new books. As the time passed by no one came to see him and he was told that he had been hired (or Sayyid Ahmad himself came). When he protested that he did not have the interview yet, he was told that this was the interview and Sayyid Ahmad was happy with his interest in books. This meeting became so strong that soon Sayyid Ahmad invited Shibli to stay with him in a small bungalow next to his own bungalow so they could see each other every day. Sayyid Ahmad used to ask for his help in any research or information he needed for his writings and Shibli would promptly provide him with that. This relationship became very intimate and both were more and more impressed by the other's understanding and performance. Sayyid Ahmad had a grand library and Shibli was amazed to see so many books there which were not available any other place. There was a good collection of European books, sometimes with translation, and also many classical Islamic sources. It is said that Shibli read all these books of Sayyid Ahmad's library in one year.

Shibli's personal interests were expressed in the form of poetry at this stage. At first it was only Persian but now he was beginning to write in Urdu as well. His poems became so popular in college that there was hardly any function which did not include his poetry. While he was enjoying the life at Aligarh, he was also becoming aware of the weaknesses of the modern education it was promoting. Slowly the nature of his poetry changed from innovative love stories to truly depressing conditions of his nation, of which *Mathnavi Subh-i 'Umīd* (The Dawn of Hope, published in 1885) is still very popular.

At Aligarh Shibli was exposed to books by European scholars on Islam and also some classical books by Muslim scholars published in Europe. Shibli was also lucky to have T. W. Arnold at Aligarh, a professor of philosophy in the College who introduced him to the modern world and principles of modern education. Shibli learned French from Arnold<sup>15</sup> through the study of *Tamaddun Islam* by Monsieur Sedillot. Arnold also learned Arabic from Shibli and discovered that 'there are still gems in the upholders of traditional education.'<sup>16</sup> This relationship was so strong that Shibli's journey to Egypt and Turkey was taken in part because of Arnold's company.<sup>17</sup> Shibli had been postponing this trip for some time.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> *Shibli Nu'mani, Safar Nāmah Rūm-o-Miṣr-o-Shām*, Matba' Tuhfa-i Jannat, Delhi, 1923, p.8. Hereafter cited as *Safar Nāmah*.

<sup>16</sup> Suleyman Nadvi says that it was through this friendship that they influenced each other and Arnold's *Preaching of Islam* is the result of this acquaintance. *Hayāt-i Shibli*, p.140.

<sup>17</sup> *Safar Nāmah*, p.8.

<sup>18</sup> Shibli relates one incident of the journey which shows Arnold's love for knowledge which had impressed the former. While on the ship one day, Shibli found out that the engine of the ship was

Shibli, who was a promoter of traditional education, had become a central figure in the life of this modern institution. It was a difficult job for anyone to introduce religious color to the lives of the English educated students but Shibli did it effectively. While at Aligarh, Shibli actively participated in extra-curricular activities such as laying down the foundation of a society to promote Arabic, arranging a regular study circle of the Qur'an and hadith after prayers, staging debates in Arabic and Urdu, and doing research on various subjects. Slowly however he developed differences with Sayyid Ahmad Khan on various issues. This gap between them widened when Shibli tried to expose the weaknesses of the writings to Sayyid Ahmad. At last Shibli went on a long leave after the death of Sayyid Ahmad in March 1898, and later sent his resignation.

Thus Shibli returned to his hometown in 1898 and worked on his *Al-Fārūq* and the National School he had founded in 1892. Shibli was invited by Arnold to attend the Oriental Conference in 1899 scheduled to be held in Italy but could not participate due to ill health. After staying one year in Azamgarh he moved to Hyderabad in 1901. He was offered a job in the religious ministry by the Chief Minister there but he rejected it and took the responsibility of an association founded to compose and translate Islamic books known as, "*Sir Rishta-i 'Ulūm wa Funūn*". His books *al-Ghazālī*, *ʿIlm al-Kalām*, *al-Kalām*, *Sawānih Mawlana Rūm* and *Mawāzana-i Anīs wa Dabīr* were published as part of this project. Beside this he also published *Nizām Akbari* and *History of Dakkin*

---

broken and the captain and the technicians were very worried trying to fix it. Scared of some mishap, Shibli did not know what to do and came to Arnold who was reading a book peacefully. Shibli asked him whether he knew what was going on. He replied, yes. Shibli said, "You have no fear? Is it the time to read the book?" Arnold replied, "If the ship is going to collapse then this little time left is more valuable and it would be irrational to waste it." Shibli says that this impressed him and he felt better seeing Arnold's courage and steadfastness (*istaqlāl*). *Safar Nāmāh*, pp.14-15.

(3<sup>rd</sup> vol.). Nawab Mohsinul Mulk, responsible for Aligarh College, tried to bring Shibli back in 1902 and clarified Shibli's position with the Lieutenant Governor but Shibli refused to go back.

Meanwhile Shibli was taking active part in the annual conferences of Nadwah from 1893 until 1898. He had given a new dimension to the Nadwah movement and proposed the establishment of a mother organization which was supported by other '*ulamā*'. Surprisingly, although Shibli was actively participating in the resolutions and amendments at Nadwah conferences, yet the organizers did not offer him any position or any role in any committee for curriculum, administration, or even in the magazine *an-Nadwah*, although he was the most appropriate person for it.<sup>19</sup> Shibli was very disappointed and sometimes used very strong words like 'hypocrite', etc., for these Muslims. However, at the request of a friend and director of Nadwah, Habibur Rahman Sherwani, Shibli attended the 1902 conference of Nadwah and impressed the audience of both modern and traditional education to support the cause of Nadwah, and the issue of *khatm-i Nubuwwah* (seal on Prophethood). This was to counter the claims of prophecy by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qādiyani, which was a popular issue of the time, and was well received. It was in the same meeting that he strongly suggested to bring a change in the curriculum of Nadwah to be followed by other institutions and

---

<sup>19</sup> Shibli expressed in his personal letters that when he left Aligarh for Nadwah, people there were not in favor of him. He said that if he had willed popularity then nothing was better than Aligarh but he wanted to serve Nadwah as a center for Islamic education. Letter to Habibur Rahman Sherwani, No. 40, 41 & 44, *Makātib-i Shibli*, vol.1, pp.142-145. Some people were against Shibli perhaps because of his job and affiliation with Aligarh and Sayyid Ahmad and they thought of him as an agent of Aligarh who wanted to make drastic changes in the curriculum.

began the movement for financial contributions for the building of Nadwah.<sup>20</sup> Also, he was able to convince other '*ulamā*' to bring changes in the Nizami curriculum, at the next conference of Nadwah (in 1903). However, his frustration at not implementing these resolutions is expressed in personal letters.<sup>21</sup> At the request of Habibur Rahman Sherwani, Shibli decided to leave his job (in Hyderabad) and stay presumably in Lucknow (on his own) to directly participate in the affairs of Nadwah.<sup>22</sup>

In 1903 Shibli was selected as the secretary of "*Anjuman-i Taraqqi-i Urdu*" in the Muslim Educational Conference with T. W. Arnold as its president, and he then devoted himself to the progress of Urdu. Many important works were translated and published under this organization. Shibli was so involved in it that he even did not want to be involved in the affairs of Nadwah anymore and tried to prepare a list of the books published in Urdu called "*Al-Fihrist*".

Finally, Shibli came to Nadwah towards the end of 1904 and besides looking into the curriculum of Nadwah, he intended to give lectures on different aspects of Islamic

---

<sup>20</sup> He urged his fellow '*ulamā*' to contribute generously for the building of Nadwah and show Muslims their love for knowledge. And this appeal brought fruitful results and '*ulamā*' donated generously and made commitments.

<sup>21</sup> Letters to Habibur Rahman Sherwani, No. 48, 50 & 52, *Makātib-i Shibli*, vol.1, pp.149-151.

<sup>22</sup> Shibli himself claimed in personal letters that he had good understanding of the curriculum and had also seen the curriculum in Turkey and Egypt, so that he was well aware of their benefits and defects. Shibli was the only Muslim of that time who was receiving books from the Arab world and could understand them. He wrote that he knew that he was the most eligible person for the responsibility of curriculum design and magazine publication, and he did not hesitate to admit that he considered it his religious duty to serve and educate Muslims. But he did not want to accept any major position and said that he could work as a vizier and not as the king and also thought that it was not wise for Nadwah also (because it might give rise to more opposition, because of personal enmity and misunderstandings about Shibli). *Ibid.* pp.143-151.

civilization on the “pattern of *qudamā*”.<sup>23</sup> In 1905 he was officially given the responsibility of *Mu'tamid* (Secretary) and was set to improve the curriculum and get the best teachers for specialized courses. While Shibli was actively involved at Nadwah he encountered a serious accident and his leg was amputated. He was passing a rifle full of bullets to someone and shot his foot. For some time he was disabled, yet he did not let it obstruct his activities. He took it lightly and even wrote poetry on it. The continuous efforts of Shibli at Nadwah were rewarded by successes and he soon became a prominent personality there. Other people at Nadwah could not tolerate this, particularly those who considered him an agent of Aligarh. This idea gave them strength and they tried to get support from other members who were already not in favor of his drastic changes. They thus tried to find little excuses to go against Shibli, but he remained confident and did not fear any one working for his cause sincerely.<sup>24</sup> But at the beginning of 1913, the opponents of Shibli got together and began a movement against him.<sup>25</sup> Frustrated and finding it difficult to work, Shibli left Nadwah and sent his resignation later in July 1913 from Bombay where he was working on the *Sīratun Nabī*. Students were shocked to hear about his resignation and wanted him to come back. Shibli tried to assure them that it was not possible for him to work and he

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. pp.142.

<sup>24</sup> Shibli's knowledge of law was very versatile at times and saved him from any accusation of sedition.

<sup>25</sup> A new editor of Nadwah was appointed after the resignation of Shibli from *an-Nadwah* whose name was Abdul Karīm. He wrote an article on *Jihād* and published it even before the official letter was given. This made Muslims very nervous as the situation was very tense and the British became suspicious of it. Shibli then suspended him for a while, after consultation with other members. These members later denied their consultation in the matter, and the opposition suspended him for six months with the consultation of the British and announced that Shibli had done this.

would still try to serve them, as the aim of his life was to serve Nadwah.<sup>26</sup> When Shibli came to visit Nadwah towards the end of the year, students were very excited and organized programs for him and regular study circles. The administration tried to stop every program, and frustrated at this, students declared a strike which became a big issue of the time. Shibli's efforts to bring any reconciliation failed and he urged his friends to end this problem for the sake of Allah<sup>27</sup> which was taken as further conspiracy against Shibli by his opponents. Now they went further and took *fatwā* from the 'ulamā' for the *takfir* of Shibli on the basis of his ideas in his *Ilm al-Kalām* and *Al-Kalām*. But it was over after one publisher named Abdus Salam asked him to write his opinion on whether he thought the universe is *qadīm* and the *nubuwwah* is acquired. The strike was stopped after Muhammad Ali, who was with Shibli, took the responsibility of controlling the students but the differences were not over until the death of Shibli. In the mean time Shibli's brother Ishaq died in August, 1914, and he had to go to Azamgarh heartbroken. Shibli was very shocked at his brother's death, yet he involved himself in the progress of the National School he had founded. He wanted to make it a High School with boarding rooms and planned a conference to attract Muslims.<sup>28</sup> Also he paid attention to Madrasatul Iṣlāh at Sarāi Mir (which was

---

<sup>26</sup> "Letter to the students of Dārul 'Ulūm", No. 22 and Letter to Abul Kamal Sayyid Abdul Hakīm Disnawi, No. 3, in *Makātib-i Shibli*, vol.1, p.328 and pp.306-307.

<sup>27</sup> Shibli wrote this in a letter to the administration which had called its members for the meeting, that it is Islamic to involve other people for reconciliation. However, they considered it part of his conspiracy against them and spread news accordingly. Quoted in *Hayāt-i Shibli*, p.667.

<sup>28</sup> In fact his brother Ishaq had taken responsibility to improve the situation of the school but when Shibli talked about the conference and the announcement for it, Ishaq showed some reservation. At this, Shibli wrote that 'pomp and show is not a good thing, but what to do, nothing is possible in the world without it. Look at the examples of prophets and reformers. Aligarh College was founded on this glamour and is still established on it.' Letter to Muhammad Ishaq, No. 25, *Makātib-i Shibli*, vol. 1, p.43.

started by some other people in his hometown), and Shibli had been given its responsibility in 1910. He tried to run it on the pattern of Gurukul and founded an association called *Ikhwān as-Ṣafā* to work on it. His aim with these institutions as well as *Dār al-Muṣannifin*<sup>29</sup> (where he planned to train Muslim writers) could not be attained in his life as he became very sick and passed away on Nov. 18, 1914. However, his students and friends tried to fulfill his dreams and all these institutions<sup>30</sup> are running successfully, much on the pattern he had designed.

Shibli himself did not participate in politics but he spoke about it in meetings and also wrote articles. Though his articles sometimes justified living under a non-Muslim government, Shibli was against pleasing the British Government and was critical of it without any hesitation whenever necessary. There were also times when he praised the government that it did not interfere in the religious affairs of Muslims and always responded if any thing was demanded from it. He also wrote the article “How can Muslims Live under the Subjugation of non-Muslim Rule” to explain that Muslims should obey their government as long as it gives them freedom to practice their religion, citing examples from Muslim history.<sup>31</sup> And the fact that he spoke against the Muslim League is surely an issue worthy of discussion. In reality, Shibli’s support for the Congress began because of its principles which were based upon the interests of Indian people as against the British interests. He was critical of the Muslim League

---

<sup>29</sup> These institutions will be discussed in detail later.

<sup>30</sup> They are discussed in the later chapters of this work.