

## The Significance Of Scientific Society Translations In The Proliferation Of Modern Sciences

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### Abstract

*Molvi Abdul Haq's quote, 'Our words are just words, but Sir Syed takes action,' perfectly captures the essence of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's multifaceted personality. During the colonial era, Sir Syed's efforts to empower a subjugated and downtrodden nation through politics, education, and other fields are a testament to his vision and leadership. However, his emphasis on translating Western and modern sciences, arts, and literature to modernize the nation and bring it up to date with global advancements shows his farsightedness and wisdom. The establishment of the Scientific Society, which translated numerous books on history, politics, agriculture, mathematics, and geography, highlights the importance of Sir Syed's mission to educate and enlighten the nation. These translations not only illuminated the path for future progress but also provided a roadmap for modernization. This article will highlight the significance of the Scientific Society's translations in promoting modern sciences and knowledge.*

**Keywords:** *Essence, multifaceted, empower, subjugated, downtrodden, testament, farsightedness, enlighten, illuminated, modernization, significance,*

### Introduction

When a nation begins its journey towards advancements in fields of knowledge and technology, it initially enhances its language by adopting terms from more developed languages. An individual can readily comprehend and communicate in his native language, but achieving the same fluency in another language is challenging. The progress and development of under developing nations hinge on the sciences and arts, and translation serves as the most effective conduit for fostering this connection. According to Goethe: “ Translation stands as one of the most vital and esteemed endeavors across all domains of human affairs.” (1)

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Translation is a hallmark of cultured and progressive nations. It not only fosters awareness of the theories, thoughts, and emotions of other cultures and civilizations but also promotes our own cultural expression and enriches our language's vocabulary.

"Eversince man started to speak; he has an urge to translate --- to translate himself and others." (2)

Just as the creation and continuity of creative literature are crucial in any language's literary tradition, translations of masterpieces from other languages also hold significant importance. Without translations, familiarity with global scientific and literary activities at the international level would not be possible. The development and continuity of creative literature within any language is immensely important, just as the translations of masterpieces from other languages also hold significant importance. Without translations, familiarity with global scientific and literary terms at the international level would not be attainable.

"The art of translation, let me put it as clearly as I can, it is not based on mechanical law of coagation but on the law of personal sympathy, it is a human transaction." (3)

### **Role of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in Scientific Society**

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's comprehensive and influential personality has left deep impacts on various aspects of life, such as education, literature, ethics, religion, and politics. His practical efforts in fields like politics, social issues and education during the most challenging times of colonial rule and decline were evidence of his dedication to unite and uplift the disillusioned nation. Sir Syed's foremost objective was to rouse the nation in accordance with the principles of modern thought and the demands of the contemporary era. In this context, recognizing the significance of translation in the endeavour to firmly establish the nation on modern principles by leveraging Western and modern sciences, arts, and literature, reflects Sir Syed's erudition and deep insight. Regarding this matter, Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali says:

"The widespread dissemination of modern sciences in the country cannot be possible until or unless scientific books are translated into the local language. He considered this task even more essential and significant than the propogation of English education." (4)



The building of scientific Society (1864)

Since the populace of India in general and the Muslims in particular, lacked proficiency in the English language, they were unable to access Western modern sciences adequately. Therefore for them, it was necessary either to learn English or to have various scientific and artistic books translated from English into Urdu. For the former purpose, Madrasat-ul-

Uloom was established in Aligarh. Additionally, Varna Kevlar University was planned to teach Western studies in Urdu language, but due to the insufficient support from British authorities, the project had to be abandoned. Despite not seeing the completion of this project, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan understood the significance and necessity of this movement. This was his unwavering faith and sincerity that kept him dedicated to continue his efforts, regardless of opposition.

The foundation of Scientific Society is a significant endorsement of Sir Syed's sophisticated theoretical and futuristic insight. He was aware that Western literature and sciences were acquiring global significance; if the people did not adopt these disciplines then they would fall behind and be doomed to anachronism. Sir Syed expounded on the significance of forming a society in article under title "Iltmas Bakhidmat Sakinan-e-Hind Dar Bab-e-Taraqi-e-Ahl-e-Hind" (5) on the education of Indians in 1863. He emphasized the need for a council to be set up that would translate and disseminate the greatest works written in both Eastern and Western languages. Sir Syed's article paved the way for the establishment of the Scientific Society. Consequently, on January 9th, 1864, Sir Syed and his English friend Lieutenant Colonel Gerorge Farquhar Irving Graham made the announcement of the society's establishment after a highly convincing session in Ghazipur. (6)



This was the first society of its kind in subcontinent which dedicated to the dissemination of scientific and English knowledge. Its sole purpose was to promote intellectual enlightenment and cultural advancement. Molana Hali says:

“By translating English literary and scientific books into Urdu, the local population will take interest for Western literature and sciences. Lectures on scientific subjects should be held within society. The government's policies and ideas of governance should be presented to the people via a newspaper published in both Urdu and English. Members from English, Hindu, and Muslim communities should be included in this society that would progressively lessen national biases, religious prejudices as well as the misgivings Indians have about the British.” (7)

### **Objectives of Scientific Society**

Molvi Abdul Haq elucidates the objectives of the Society in the following manner:

- I. To translate books on sciences and arts, which, due to being written in English or other European languages, are inaccessible to Indians, into languages that are commonly used by Indians.

- II. Whenever the Society deems it appropriate, it shall publish a newspaper, gazette, newsletter, magazine or other similar periodical, with the aim of promoting the intellectual and cultural advancement of Indians, and disseminating knowledge and information that shall foster their mental and spiritual growth.
- III. Identify and search for rare and exquisite books by ancient Asian authors, which have been lost or forgotten over time, and making them accessible to all. (8)



The Scientific Society removed the ignorance, darkness, and alienation of Indians by translating Western sciences and ideas and created an atmosphere where every Indian could understand and eager to learn science and other disciplines. On 6th June, 1864, Raja Jay Krishan Das delivered a speech in which he claimed that this society had far-reaching consequences.

"It might be said that until now, no easy method for the dissemination of European sciences and arts was understood, but now the establishment of the Scientific Society by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan with his utmost courage for the betterment of his compatriots is a remarkably ingenious initiative. Even a small investment in this endeavor could yield significant benefits for you, your children, and all your compatriots." (9)

The primary goals of the Scientific Society included promoting knowledge and literature, as well as translating various scientific and artistic works to refine literary tastes. In this context, Sir Syed and Colonel J.W. Hamilton advised to translate foreign language books, including Political Economy, Natural Philosophy, Meteorology, etc., into Urdu. Approximately forty books on history and various sciences and arts were translated into Urdu by the Scientific Society. Details of some of these books are listed below.

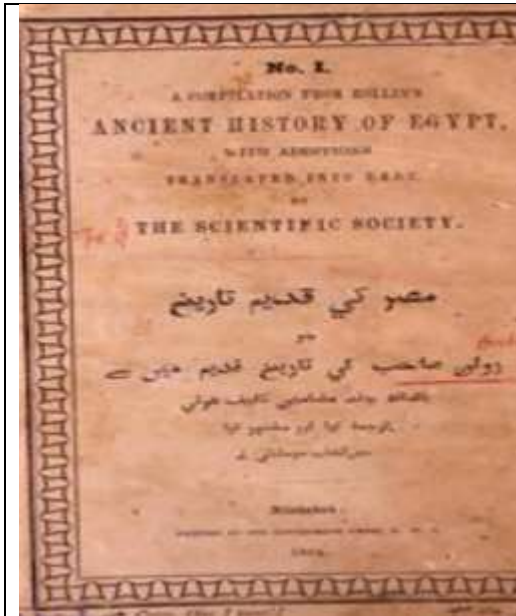
- ◆ Rollin's Ancient History of Egypt
  - ◆ Rollin's Ancient History of Greece
- ◆ History of India by Mountstuart Elphinstone
  - ◆ The History of Persia by John Malcolm (Four Volumes)
- ◆ Tareekh-e-Ferooz Shahi by Zia Ud Din Berni
  - ◆ Toozuk-I Jehangeeree
- ◆ Political Economy By Nassave William Senior
  - ◆ Outlines of Modern Farming by Robert Scott Burn
- ◆ Tomlinson's Treatise on Natural Philosophy
  - ◆ Tomlinson's Treatise on Pneumatics



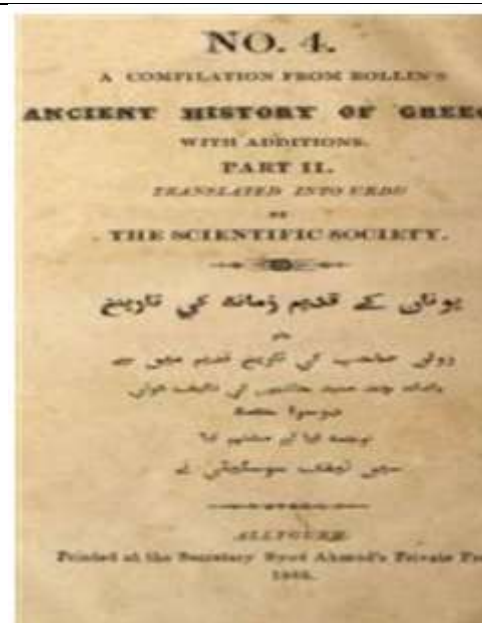
- ◆ Tomlinson's Treatise on Mechanics
  - ◆ Harri's Treatise on Electricity
- ◆ Theory of Equations by Isaac Todhunter
  - ◆ Mechanics for Beginners by Isaac Todhunter
- ◆ Examples of Analytical Geometry of Three Dimensions by Isaac Todhunter
- ◆ A Treatise on Plan Co-ordinate Geometry by Isaac Todhunter
  - ◆ Treatise on the integral calculus by Isaac Todhunter
  - ◆ Treatise on differential Calculus by Isaac Todhunter

**Ancient sample of some books translated by scientific society**

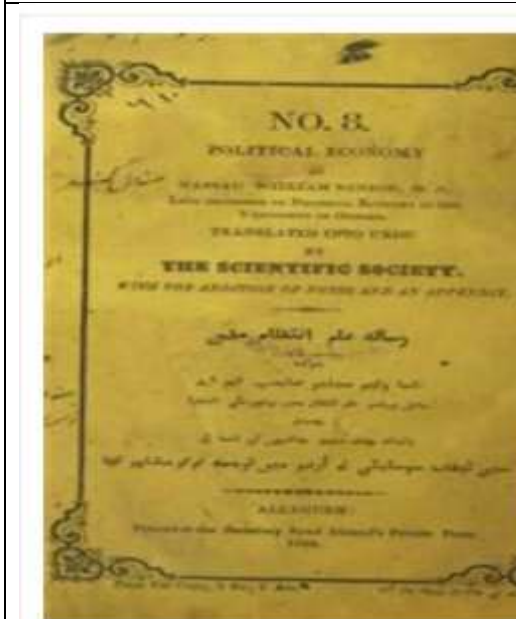
Here are some samples of books which were translated by Scientific Society:



Ancient history of Egypt



Ancient History of Greek



Political Economy



History Of India

A cursory review of the translations published by the Scientific Society makes it evident that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had a keen awareness of the practical utility of historical and scientific books in Urdu. The selection of books for translation was made with

consideration of contemporary demands. The Priority was given to those books that were immensely important and necessary for acquiring modern scientific knowledge at that time. Through these translations, Sir Syed's determination, strength of will and good intentions become apparent, showing that once he set his mind to it, he spared no effort in fulfilling the objectives of the Society.

The Scientific Society was not just an institution but rather a movement that played a significant role in the fields of history, science, mathematics, and economics, with far-reaching consequences. Under its influence, similar societies bearing the same name were established in various cities across India. The most notable of these is the Scientific Society of Muzaffarpur, Bihar, established on May 22, 1868. Here, books on politics, Astronomy, Geography, Physics, and architecture were published.

The Scientific Society's translations contributed significantly to the popularization of modern sciences such as astronomy, chemistry, geology, economics, and others. Notably, the translations of economic terms were done with great care and precision. As a result, most of these terms have been incorporated into Urdu economic literature, either in their original form or with some modifications, and have become an integral part of the subject. The translations produced by the Scientific Society had a profound impact on the writers of its era, prompting writers to integrate the information gleaned from these translations into their own writings, thus demonstrating a mental affinity of writers with modern sciences. Take, for instance, this passage from Mirza Hadi Ruswa's novel "Umrao Jaan Ada":

"They organized their farm (cultivation field) according to scientific principles. The farm included living quarters for women, adjacent to which was a small, concise space. This served as their laboratory (a place where scientific experiments were conducted). Inside, there were tools for blacksmithing and carpentry, chemistry equipment, natural specimens, and various samples of machineries. A separate area near the farm was allocated for collecting botanical specimens. Near this area was a summerhouse where a variety of rare trees, plants, and different types of fruit trees were cultivated. In this same summerhouse, there was an oval pool. In the middle of this pool and around the summerhouse, Miniature Mountains were constructed. Adjacent to the laboratory, an observatory was built, equipped with instruments for observing the weather, underneath which was a shelter for animals. Nearby, at some distance, there was a stable and cattle shed, and further away were accommodations for apprentices. Although the farm was not exclusively dedicated to agricultural experiments, those who were involved in farming should understand it as such." (10)

The purpose of citing the above quote by Mirza Hadi Ruswa is to demonstrate that, during that era, writers and intellectuals, both directly and indirectly, were not only aware of the importance and need for Sir Syed's Scientific Society's translations but also practically exemplified it, as evident in this quote where Mirza Ruswa's translation of English words into Urdu, undoubtedly, represents an effort to make the process of communication and understanding bilateral.

### **Conclusion**

It was definitely Sir Syed's vision that he tried to bring the nation out of the darkness of the past and make them aware of new ideas and contemporary needs. He made an effort to awaken and enlighten the nation according to the requirements of the present time. Although Sir Syed's goal was not directly related to promoting translations, it's possible that this idea was in his mind somewhere, as he was primarily a reformer and a compassionate leader. However, nature had chosen Sir Syed for remarkable services in other fields, and his indirect contribution to promoting translations became a catalyst for the dissemination of scientific and social sciences, as mentioned earlier. In that era, translation made it possible to transmit and understand scientific and social sciences. This laid the foundation for future institutions and individuals to follow the footsteps of Sir

Syed's vision, paving the way for new horizons in promoting translations and guiding future generations to explore new possibilities in this field.

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