

## EXPLORING THE PAST: A CASE STUDY OF FATAWAS (RELIGIOUS DECREES) REGARDING TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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### **Abstract:**

The present study discussed the attitude of Muslim religious scholars in sub-continent when it was under the influence of British rulers. It explored the causes of the indifference of religious scholars and their hostile attitude towards English language in sub-continent in pre-partition era. The researcher collected the data from different fatawa books written by Muslim religious scholars in the pre-partition era. Fifteen fatwas were collected from the different scholars' books. The researcher analyzed the fatawas (religious decrees) under the paradigm of Islam and English language and attitudes of religious scholars in pre-partition era. The fatawas were analyzed by the content analysis of the text. The results shown by the analysis indicated that Muslim religious scholars were not in the favor of English language learning and teaching at an extreme level even they delivered a Fatawas against the English language that learning and English is illicit (Najaiz) because they were of the view that Christian missionaries were against the Muslims and Islam. The results of the study suggested that in the future planning of the curriculum of the English language they must be mindful about the cultural needs as well as religious needs of the society so that every group of the society could learn English according to their needs. The study also highlighted the issue of cultural harmony in perspective of English language learning.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, Fatwas, English Language Learning, Religious Scholars, Muslims, Islam

### **Background and Literature Review:**

It was the age of renaissance when Europe and other western nations were awakening from their long slumber of ignorance. Navigators were discovering new routes and parts of the world. Scientists were exploring new facts and old beliefs were dying out.

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New branches of knowledge were getting birth. Commerce and trade were at its apex. Traders were voyaging all over the world with greater prospects. Apart from trade, hegemonic designs were also lying behind these voyages. Different trading companies, under the umbrella of their backing governments, were strengthening their powers in other countries.

East India Company, with the support of the British Government, first time came to India in 1600. Its arrival also proved the advent of English Language into India, though it was not taught to the natives for the next two hundred years, because the British could not get unchallenged power till September 1803, when General Lord Lake entered into Delhi in a victorious manner. British rule had already been established in Poona, a central city, to Calcutta, a coastal city. This exotic rule stamped its effect on all the fields of collective life of the sub-continent. Its effect was very much evident especially in legal, educational and philosophical spheres of native life.

Undoubtedly, the British were representative of a certain culture and of the prevalence their culture and language were inevitable with the strengthening of their rule in the sub-continent.

Christian missionaries played a significant role regarding the prevalence of English language in the subcontinent. They considered it a useful tool to preach Christianity. In East India company rule, Charles Grant (1746 – 1823) was a very important figure who was persistent to civilize the Indians through English language and literature. He wanted to enforce British laws, to declare English as the official language and the language of education at schools and colleges. He was of the view that there should be no governmental support for the non-Christian religious education in Sanskrit or other languages. He had a strong belief that all the social, moral evils and wide- scale illiteracy and ignorance could be removed only through the prevalence and publication of modern English language education<sup>[1]</sup>. Therefore, religious scholars considered English as a tool of westernization. According to them, modern education was against their belief, culture, society, and traditions<sup>[2]</sup>. That was the reason of opposition from the Muslim religious community. It was believed by the Indians, especially by the Muslims that students would become anti-religious and embrace

Christianity after getting the education of English language and literature. That was the reason that the Muslims did not like to study or learn English language but they, strongly, opposed mission schools and the learning of English language [2]. Altaf Hussain Hali in 1835 writes when the Muslims in Calcutta heard that government of India wanted to promote English education, they prepared a request (signed by 8000 peers and scholars) with summary that the unusual concentration of the British government on the education of English language declares that the government want to Christianize the Indians [2].

The Muslims were already suffering from the great economic crisis because of least opportunities of employment at public offices but after 1835, when English was declared as the language at court and public offices, the majority of the Persian-literate Muslims were deprived of their jobs. The Muslims, being illiterate to the English language, were declared ineligible for all governmental jobs except peon or water-sprinkler. It also worsened their economic condition. In these conditions, it became inevitable for the Muslims to get modern education and the knowledge of English language if they wanted to get government jobs. In that situation, the scholars who came forward to face the Christian missionaries, they felt the requirement and importance of learning the English language. Maulana Rehmat-Ullah Keranvi got the help of Doctor Muhammad Wazir Khan to learn English language<sup>3</sup>. Dr. Wazir Khan had studied a lot about Christianity and Judaism from English, Latin and Hebrew books during his stay in England. He had also brought a great store of Latin-Greek, Hebrew and English books about Christianity and Judaism with him during his stay and employment at Agra. He came forward to face the Christian missionaries. Both the scholars contested the Christian Bishop Carl Gottlieb Pounder and defeated him [4]. Another reason of ulama's indifference towards teaching and learning of English language was also the religious and educational interpretation of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan who struggled to improve the condition of the Muslims, found the reality that it was not possible to improve the economic and political condition without acquiring modern education and English language [5]. Therefore he enthusiastically presented English literature and modern education to the Muslims. He kept on

insisting the people about the significance of English education through his Journal “Tahzeeb-e-Ikhlaq” [6]. In short Sir Syed advocated the idea of acquiring modern education and English language in a very strong way. He established ‘Madrissa-tul-Aloom in 1857 and MuhammadanAnglo Oriental College 1878 at Aligarh. He not only favored the acquiring of English language but also English manners and habits [7]. Therefore religious scholars considered English as a tool of westernization. There were some certain instances of the hatred of Muslim religious scholars towards English language and modern education. Renowned Muslim scholar Abdul-RazzaqFrangiMehli did not like to see the British Chief Commissioner Oadh requested to meet him but he refused. He even boycotted the use of British products and never travelled on train [7]. Another religious scholar Hafiz Muhammad Ismaeel did not see the face of any British. He did not use even a single word of English in whole of his life. He called ‘Tomatar’ which was Urdu translation of ‘Tomato’ as ‘Lalbangan’[8]. However, there are some certain individual examples of acquiring English Language. A Muslim religious scholar Muhammad JafarThanesari while his imprisonment learnt English language from a Hindu, Ram Saroop. He got good excellence in that language with the knowledge of English language. He helped many of the Muslims saving them from capital punishment [9]. Syed Nazir Hussain Dehlvi, the eldest Ahl-e-Hadith scholar, was one of the early scholars who issued a ‘Fatwa’ on favor of learning English language for the sake of employment [10].Dar-ul-AloomDeoband was established in 1866. English language and modern education were not included in its course. Its founders neither favoured nor supported English education. They showed indifference towards it. Its founder MolviQasimNanotiv was aware of the significance of English language but he wanted to put his attention only on the Islamic knowledge. He thought that English language was already taught at government schools and colleges and there was no need to promote it further. Once he directed the students to get modern education from the government institutes after the completion of their Islamic education [11]. In the sub-continent, for the first time English language was included in the syllabus of Madrissas by Molvi Syed Nazir Hussain Dehlvi, who established institute with the name Madrissa-e-Ahmadia at Shahabad

in Behar Province in 1890. Dar-ul-AloomNidwa-tul-Ulma was established by Molvi Muhammad Ali Mongeri in 1898 in Lakhnu. English language was also included in its syllabus in 1902 a class was arranged for English as the second language. A teacher was also appointed for the purpose<sup>[13]</sup>. ShibliNaumani was a renowned scholar at Nidwa, wanted to include English language and modern education so that students could contest Christian missionaries. He wanted Muslim religious scholars to study English language in order to guide the educated people, to reply the Christian preachers and to correct their wrong concepts. Some Ulama did not agree with shibli even Maulana Habib Sharwani, a very renowned, moderate religious scholar, did not support Shibli due to the sensitivity of issue<sup>[12]</sup>. At last in 1903, English was included as a compulsory subject into the syllabus of Madrissah and Shibli's effort did not go waste. Dar-ul-uloom produced a few students who provided great services in education and religion after getting English language. Mulana Hakeem Syed Abdul Ala got admission at a missionary school in lakhnu and passed his matriculation in 1915. He passed his B.sc. in English literature and Botany with distinction in 1919. Further he passed his MBBS from King George Medical College in 1925 <sup>[13]</sup>. Another religious scholar Molvi Abdul Bari who duly founded Madrisah-e-Nazamia at FarangiMahal, was one of the prominent Ulamas who favored the teaching English language at Islamic institution <sup>[14]</sup>. However, the ulama at FarangiMahal could not get great success in this regard. Though much effort was made, yet the students did not take interest. These efforts could not get fruit to the required level, though students got a little know how about English.

During the second and third decades of twentieth century, a great change took place regarding the religious education among Ulama-FarangiMahal. The new generation began to get English language and modern education. One of the important aspects of this change was that the decision was taken by the elders themselves <sup>[14]</sup>.

Most of members of the young generation of the family even girls had turned to acquire English language and modern education till 1950. However it was dare step to set an example of acquiring English language at religious institution. Now trend towards English teaching and learning is changing because learning of English

language is so easy now a day. Quality teachers and material of English language learning is also available everywhere. Peoples of Pakistan have also realized the importance of English language politically, socially and in educational institutes, even at those places that were totally against the English language, as a Madrassah teacher from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa views through English we can communicate Islam to others, we can learn about Judaism and Christianity, we can achieve harmony, we can learn.

#### **Significance of Study:**

During the conduction of research on English language in social and educational context it was compulsory to know the attitude of Muslim religious scholars because they are active part of our society and education system. The findings of this study will prove helpful in developing the thought of society towards the English language learning and teaching. It is also helpful in exploring the historical roots of attitudes of religious scholars. It may prove helpful for the policy makers to design the different syllabuses for the Madrassah students according to their needs.

#### **Objective of study:**

1. To know about the attitudes of religious scholars towards English language learning and teaching in the past
2. To know about the positive and negative attitude of religious scholars towards English language
3. To know about the reasons behind their attitudes towards English language

#### **Methodology:**

The present study is quantitative in nature, researcher gone through different fatawas books to collect the data. Fifteen fatwas were randomly collected from different books written by well-known religious scholars of their time. After collecting the data, fatawas were analyzed through content analysis.

**Analysis:**

The fifteen Fatwa's used in the current study given by well-known religious scholars were analyzed in different dimensions:

1. The religious scholars allows English language learning and teaching but with certain reservations. In this dimension, they are of the view that there is no harm in learning and teaching English language if it does not affects Islamic values and identity of teachers and students. For example in fatwa No 2 given by Shah Abdul Aziz Muhadis Dehlvi, "it is permitted if a person learns English so that he will be able to understand books and hidden meanings of words".

As in fatwa No. 6 given by Maulana Rashid Ahmed Gangohi, "it is right to learn English until that nobody is culpable of calamity as well as it will be harmful for Islam".

And in fatwa No 11 given by Maulana Abdul Hai, "learning of language whether the language of non-Muslims is not prohibited in Islam, this is in fact to acquire English language education is not prohibited according to sharia".

2. Moreover, they allow English language learning and teaching when it is only beneficial for Muslim and Islam. They think that it must be used to oppose the prejudice against Muslims and Islam and modern philosophy.

As it is clear in fatwa No. 7 given by Maulana Muhammad Ali Mongari, "it is compulsory to learn English to oppose modern philosophy because this philosophy is in English language and has been translated; todisprove this philosophy, it is not sufficient as was treated with Greek philosophy as treated in early Islam".

In fatwa No. 9 given by Maulana Shibli Nomani, "religious education needs as well English languge because without awareness of modern education, how can we contend modern philosophy? How can we preach Islam in Europe without heightened awareness of English language? How can we understand the knowledge of Aryan's and Christian's religious literature without the awareness of English?"

3. In addition, the use of extreme words like language of non-Muslims, paganism, liberalism, disputing, profanity, harmful, illicit and language of destruction shows their indifference

towards the English language. Apparently they seem allowing English when we closely observe the use of these words, they are enforcing certain conditions through these words.

4. There are many examples in these fatwas where religious scholars have allowed the English language learning with the use of adversative conjunctions like: until, because, if, after, than, so, and, but etc. the use of these conjunctions is an evidence of religious scholars prejudice towards English language.
5. The religious scholars have conditionally allowed the learning and teaching of English language. As in fatwa No. 1 given by Maulana Muhammad Ashraf Ali Thanvi, “English is a licit language like all other languages. But three factors make it faulty. Under these factors: 1. English is licit, 2. English illicit, 3. English is also worship”. In fatwa No. 2 given by Shah Abdul Aziz Muhadis Dehelvi, “it is permitted if a person learns English so that he will be able to understand books, letters and hidden meanings of words”. In fatwa No. 5 given by Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi, “after completing the Islamic education, if students join government institutions to acquire modern education, it is very best for them to accomplish their perfection”. In fatwa No. 6 given by Maulana Rasheed Ahmed Gangohi, “it is right to learn English until that nobody is culpable of calamity as well as it would be harmful for Islam”. In fatwa No. 10, “given by Maulana Shibli Nomani, “If the theologians know English language, they would be able to convert over Islamic jurisprudence in case of presents (hadia)”. In fatwa No. 15 given by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, “now a day it is mostly seen that with the spread of English, it is causing the spread of evils as well, so it is better to be careful at some extent income is not dependent on this subject and there is no limit of greediness”.

#### **Discussion:**

In the past (pre-partition era) the Muslim religious scholars were against the learning and teaching of English language in the pre-partition era. Some of them were of the view that people who learn or teach English language are kafir (Non-believers). Religious



scholars never used a single English word in their life because they were against the learning and teaching of English language. They also delivered the Fatawas against the English language that learning English is illicit. The main reasons behind these attitudes were indifference of British of Government towards the Muslims. They forced Muslim students to study Christianity in their schools<sup>[14]</sup>. After the freedom war of 1857 the Muslim scholars were killed and sent to jail. Muslims were fired from their jobs and financially they were made very weak.

Some scholars were in the favor of English language learning and teaching because after sometimes they realized the Muslims cannot make progress in the modern world without learning English language. They favored teaching and learning of English language, motive behind this phenomenon was to get the knowledge of modern subjects and to compete the Christian and to stop propaganda against the Muslims and their religion<sup>[15]</sup>.

Muslim religious scholars gave the permission of learning English just only when it does not affect the religious and cultural identity of learners and he should not follow the teachings of any other religion except Islam.

### **Conclusion:**

The analysis of collected data was done on level of attitude of Muslim religious scholars towards the English language learning in Pakistan. In the past religious scholars were against the teaching and learning of English language but after some time when they realized that English language learning is compulsory for the Muslims to prevent their culture, religion and for making progress in the modern world, they allowed Muslim students to English and other modern subjects. In the present scenario English language has become one of the dominated languages of Pakistan and it is compulsory for the progress of Pakistan. Religious scholars are not only allowing English language learning, even they themselves are also learning English language. While concluding I must say religious scholars are in favor of teaching and learning of English language but this permission is conditional with the firmty of Islamic values and believes. On the other hand adversative conjunctions and

conditional sentences are evidence of prejudice of Muslim religious scholars towards the English language.

#### **Fatwa No. 1**

Maulana Muhammad Ashraf Ali Thanvi was a well-known member of Dar-ul-aloom Deobandshuraa (committee). He was one of the most respected religious scholars of Madrassah Deo-Band. He gave many fatwas in this regard that are present in his book “Amdad-ul-Fatawa”. This fatwa is taken from this book.

“English is a licit language like other all languages. But three factors make it faulty, first of all there are such subjects that are against the “Sharia” and people are unaware of sharia knowledge. Therefore, believes go against and some of believes are like profanity.

Secondly they should not adopt such subjects in which they have company of Non-Muslims, their liberal impact affects the personality, sometime in believes and sometime in action.

Third, if they don’t adopt their company nor it affects their personality, then at least they will have attention to make it source of income. Whether, the method of income is licit or illicit. Because of these factors it may reach to the limit of profanity, whether this evil is apparent or hidden. If somebody is far from these factors, means he does not lose his believes that is simple and authentic way. One who after getting religious education, has its firm belief, he is not bad in actions and has attention to get licit income. And then he follows the action, for such person English is right and licit. And more than it, if he has attention to use it for the service of people it is worship for him.

In nutshell sometimes English is illicit, sometime it is licit and sometime it is worship [16].

#### **4.2 Fatwa No. 2**

Shah Abdul Aziz MuhadisDehlvi was the first religious scholar and philosopher who gave fatwa about English language. When the interviewer asked that “English is licit or not”? Shah Abdul Aziz MuhadisDehlvi said: “It is permitted if a person learns English so that he will be able to understand books, letters and hidden meanings of words.

Zaid Bin Sabit (R.A) as followed the order of Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) he learnt the language of Jews and Christians (yahood-o-nasara) as well as learnt the rules of dictionary so that he would be able to reply those letters which (yahood-o-nasarah) sent to Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) but if a person learns English so that he gets luxurious enjoyment it is illicit [17].

### **Fatwa No. 3**

Maulana Muhammad Jaffer Thanseri has written about the importance of English language in his book “Twareekh-e-ajeeb” that, “English is a language of Art and Sciences, one who does not know about English definitely he is unaware about the knowledge of world and without learning English he will not be able to good in world affairs and partisan.

There is no other language except English in the world which has lot sources of income” [18].

### **Fatwa No. 4**

According to the autobiographer of Syed Nazir Hussain who was named as Maulana Fazal Hussain Behari “When English language was considered paganism so Mian Sahib considered it as illicit to acquire knowledge of sensuality and when it was prohibited to get Government job so Mian Sahib considered this kind of earning licit” [19].

### **4.5 Fatwa No. 5**

Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi who was the founder of Madrassah Dar-ul-aloom was well aware of need and importance of English language although his opinion about English was that, “After completing the Islamic education if students join Government institutions to acquire modern education it is best for them to accomplish their perfection” [20].

### **Fatwa No. 6**

Maulana Rasheed Ahmad Gangohi was follower of Maulana Muhammad Qasim and he said that it is licit to learn English language. While answering a question, “whether the teaching and learning of English is right or not”? In reply he said: “It is right to

learn English until that nobody is culpable of calamity as well as it would be harmful for Islam” [21].

#### **Fatwa No. 7**

According to Maulana Muhammad Ali Mungari “It is compulsory to learn English to oppose modern philosophy because this philosophy is in English language and has been translated, to disprove this philosophy it is not sufficient as was treated with the Greek philosophy in an early Islam” [22].

#### **Fatwa No. 8**

Maulana Muhammad Ali Mungari said that, “English is a language like Persian and Turkish languages, Persian and Turkish were the preliminary languages of non-followers there languages were published and introduced among Muslims when the speakers of their languages embarrassed Islam, thus if GOD blesses as it is always hoped and when English (people) will embarrass Islam, English language will be more or less same as with the Turkish and Persian languages. As we see the books in Persian and Turkish INSHALLAH we will see in English.

In the nutshell, by improving it we can get them into English and Arabic also, So that our coming generation can get benefit and can keep their minds and also can save their religion. There should be such colleges where English and Arabic are taught if a man sticks to English he may acquire necessary knowledge in Arabic then get it translated in English” [23].

#### **4.9 Fatwa No. 9**

According to Maulana Shibli Nomani “Religious education needs as well English language because without awareness of modern education, how can we contend modern philosophy? How we preach Islam in Europe without heightened awareness of English language? How can we understand the knowledge of Aryians and Christians’ religious literature without the awareness of English”?[23].

#### **4.10 Fatwa No. 10**

Maulana Shibli Nomani says about English language that, “If the “theologians” know English language, they would be able to convert over Islamic jurisprudence in case of presents (Hadya) etc. the erroneous translation been Non-Muslims would not be disputing in courts today” [24].

#### **4.11 Fatwa No. 11**

Maulana Abdul Hai was one of the supporters who were in the favour of Ali Garh College and he gave fatwa in the support. In his opinions “Learning of language whether the language of Non-Muslims is no prohibited from Islamic point of view, this is in fact to acquire English language education is not prohibited according to Sharia.

Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) himself ordered Zaid-bin-Sabit to learn the language of Jews as is written in “Jamia Termzi”, “to learn and read English is licit, until there is no harm to the religion and it is illicit to learn and read English and to learn its writing skills if it shows resemblance and affection with the English (people), there is no harm if we read these books and writings for the sake of information” [24].

#### **4.12 Fatwa No. 12**

In the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of Madrassah Nazamia Aalia Maulana Abdul Bari tells about the importance of English language that, “It is our great misfortune that Muslims are indulged in catastrophic disaster in case of Islamic education. There are two types of Muslims now a day, one group of those people who have got education from the old educational institutions; they people understand Islam on behalf of their old pattern and they are not able to aware urgency of modern era. Those who understand Islam without Islamic scholars but they understand Islam with the help of literary composition of European writers and sagacious, they do not get awareness of Islam from Muslim scholars but they get awareness from the Quranic translation of Spencer and George Sale. Historians have gone astray from the right way; it hurts me to see that modern educated people prefer study of Islam with the help of translation written by George Sale instead of knowing the Arabic language” [25].

#### **4.13 Fatwa No. 13**

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan announced in “Biang-e-dahl” that, “The English which GOD almighty has imposed on us without knowing that we can do nothing in this world, rather I would say we cannot even serve our religion, we often advice our nation that their goal should be to learn European knowledge and languages, we have got a right way to move that we should make high progress to learn European literature and science as for as possible” [26].

#### **4.14 Fatwa No. 14**

“English is under kind patronage of government of the day whereas the traditional knowledge of the Muslims is deprived by the official supervision. If they are not supported, the Muslims will not remain in touch with their past. The subjects under official supervision are being kept under government but subjects of Muslims are deprived or not under the official patronage. But when the Muslims are deprived from their knowledge they cannot remain Muslim and the new government has drew itself away from the patronage of subject. These subjects have reached the least level of their destruction under the circumstances created by the new government.

The existence and survival of these subjects may be making possible only through financial assistance of Muslim community” [27].

#### **4.15 Fatwa No: 15**

“English is a language like all other languages and English itself is not bad, it is one the blessing among all the blessings of Almighty ALLAH and Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) himself talked into Persian that was language of idol worshipers. But because of some factors it is big evil. If we don’t have those factors and purpose is only religious service like to deny Christianity and Jewish or for the sake of licit income, it is licit. Zaid Bin Sabit (R.A) was ordered by of Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) to learn the language of Jews and Christians (yahood-o-nasara), to reply those letters which (yahood-o-nasarah) sent to Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) (jamia Termzi). If we have those factors then it is compulsory to avoid from it.....and if a person is well aware of his religious believes, his attentions are good enough that he don’t follow the customs and believes of non-Muslims and don’t lose his faith, then it is licit to learn English or Hindi for the

sake of licit source of income. And people who don't have awareness of their religion, especially when it is very less and most probably such people have weak faith and are much allured towards non-Muslims, English is prohibited for such people..... but now a day it is mostly seen that with the spread of English is coming the cause of evils, so it is better to be careful and at some extent the income is not dependent on this subject and there is no limit of greediness" [28].

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