

# Munshi Mahbub Alam and His Activities Related to the Turks

## Münşi Mahbub Alem ve Türklerle İlgili Faaliyetleri

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the activities of Munshi Mahbub Alam, a prominent intellectual figure of the 19th-century Indian subcontinent, in relation to the Ottoman Sultanate and the Turkish people. Mahbub Alam was not only a journalist and publisher but also an educator, translator, and traveller, making him one of the most versatile intellectuals of his time. Through his Lahore-based newspaper *Paisa Akhbar*, he conveyed political and social developments within Ottoman lands to Muslims in the subcontinent, thus contributing to the construction of a positive public perception of the Ottomans and the Turkish nation. Within the framework of the Ottoman Caliphate's central position in the eyes of Indian Muslims, his publishing efforts supported the growth of Pan-Islamist thought and functioned as an intellectual bridge between Turks and Indian Muslims. His journals, educational initiatives offered noteworthy observations on Turkish society. In this work, he dedicated considerable space to Istanbul, providing detailed descriptions of the moral, cultural, and intellectual dimensions of Ottoman society. This article assesses his interest in the Ottomans, his portrayals of the Turks, his contributions to education and publishing, and his broader intellectual legacy. His commitment to the Ottoman Sultanate was not merely an expression of cultural admiration but also a reflection of the aspiration to establish unity within the Islamic world. In this regard, Mahbub Alam acted with Pan-Islamic sentiments and ideals, supporting the Ottomans in its political struggle against Western powers.

**Keywords:** Munshi Mahbub Alam, Ottoman Sultanate, Turks, Indian Subcontinent, Islamic Civilization, Modernization, Intellectual Activities

### Öz

19. yüzyılda Hint Alt Kıtası'nda faaliyet göstermiş önemli bir entelektüel şahsiyet olan Münşi Mahbub Alem'in Osmanlı Devleti ve Türklerle ilgili faaliyetleri bu makalede ele alınmıştır. Mahbub Alem, yalnızca bir gazeteci ve yayıncı değil, aynı zamanda eğitimci, mütercim ve seyyah kimliğiyle de döneminin çok yönlü aydınlarından biri olarak dikkat çekmektedir. Özellikle Lahor merkezli olarak yayımladığı *Paysa Ahbar* gazetesi vasıtasıyla Osmanlı topraklarında yaşanan siyasi ve toplumsal gelişmeleri alt kıta Müslümanlarına aktarmış, bu yolla Osmanlı Devleti'ne ve Türk milletine dair olumlu bir kamuoyu algısının inşasına katkı sağlamıştır. Osmanlı hilafetinin Hint Müslümanları nazarındaki

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merkezi rolü bağlamında Mahbub Alem'in yayıncılık faaliyetleri, Pan-İslamist düşüncenin güçlenmesine hizmet etmiş; aynı zamanda Türkler ile Hintli Müslümanlar arasında entelektüel bir köprü işlevi görmüştür. Bu süreçte yayımladığı dergiler, eğitim alanındaki girişimleri ve özellikle 1908 tarihli *Sefername-i Europe-u-Bilâd-i Şam-u-Mısır* adlı seyahatnamesi, Türk toplumuna dair gözlemleriyle dikkat çekmiştir. Seyahatnamesinde İstanbul'a geniş yer ayırarak Osmanlı toplumunun ahlaki, kültürel ve ilmi yönlerini tafsilatlı biçimde tasvir etmiştir. Bu makalede onun Osmanlı Devleti'ne olan ilgisi, Türk milleti hakkındaki tasvirleri, eğitim ve yayıncılık alanındaki katkıları ile entelektüel mirası değerlendirilmiştir. Osmanlı Devleti'ne olan bağlılık ve ilgisi sadece kültürel bir hayranlıktan ibaret olmakla kalmayarak İslam dünyasında güç birliği kurma arzusunun da bir tezahürü olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Mahbub Alem, Osmanlı Devleti'nin Batı'ya karşı verdiği siyasi mücadelede "Pan-İslamist" duygular ve ideallerle hareket etmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Munşi Mahbub Alem, Osmanlı Devleti, Türkler, Hint Alt Kıtası, İslam Medeniyeti, Modernleşme, Entelektüel Faaliyetler

## Introduction

Munshi Mahbub Alam (1862–1933) was an intellectual figure who lived on the British-ruled Indian subcontinent from the second half of the nineteenth century into the first quarter of the twentieth century. What makes him significant for the Turkish sphere is his close interest in the Ottoman Sultanate and the Turkish people, as well as his Pan-Islamist ideological orientation. Although he was one of the subcontinent's leading journalists, he also held the concession for *Paisa Akhbar*, one of the period's most respected publications. During his travels, he first published his impressions and observations in his newspaper and subsequently compiled them into a travelogue. This process helped to foster a positive perception of the Ottoman Sultanate and the Turks among public opinion in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>1</sup> In addition, other Indian Muslim newspapers -most notably Hakeem Muhammad Khan's *Akmal'ul-Akhbar* published in Delhi and Shaykh Ghulam Muhammad's *Wakeel* based in Amritsar- alongside the Lahore-printed *Paisa Akhbar*, closely tracked developments in the Ottoman Sultanate. The political and military pressures to which the Turks were subjected by European powers received extensive coverage in the Indian press. By translating articles from Ottoman and Arab newspapers, many Indian journals, led by *Paisa Akhbar*, sought to reinforce solidarity among Muslims and strengthen the caliphal authority of the Ottoman Sultan. Mahbub Alam's *Paisa Akhbar* thus functioned to cultivate a positive perception of the Ottoman state among Indian Muslims and opened the way for unity and resistance against the British colonial administration's divisive and repressive policies.<sup>2</sup> The articles published in his newspaper, by conveying in detail the developments taking place within the borders of the Ottoman Sultanate, argued that Indian Muslims should stand alongside the Turks. For the British, who held political dominance over the subcontinent, had caused the people to be crushed under heavy taxes.<sup>3</sup> Mahbub Alam and other leading Indian Muslim intellectuals strove to unite their diverse ethnic identities under a single umbrella in opposition to the British. They advocated for an Islamic identity and for solidarity under Islam. Indeed, they achieved considerable success in this endeavor. In this context, Mahbub Alam emerges as a personality firmly committed to the idea of Islamic unity.

Some Ottoman newspapers published in Istanbul in Turkish and Urdu, such as *Paik-e Islam*, also fulfilled the role of supplying the Urdu press and were effective in fostering relations with the Muslims of the subcontinent. The reports carried by the *Paik-e Islam* newspaper were not well received by the British, making it the first paper published within the borders of the Ottoman Sultanate to draw their objection.<sup>4</sup> The British administration also began publishing

1 Arzu Çiftsüren, "Urdu Dili Ile Yazılan Türkiye Seyahatnameleri Bibliyografyası," *Sosyal Bilimler Araştırmaları Dergisi* 15, no. 2 (2020): 562.

2 Mehmet Kemal Çakmakçı, "Minnettar Gözler" İle 'Peşaver Ekspresi' Adlı Öykülerde Hindistan'ın Bölünmesi Sırasında Yaşanan Katliamlar," *Göç ve İskan Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2, no. 2 (2024): 94.

3 Nuriye Bilik and Mehmet Kemal Çakmakçı, "1947 Hindistan-Pakistan Ayrılığında Kadınların Yaşadığı Sorunların Urdu Hikâyesine Yansımaları," *Doğu Dilleri Dergisi* 10, no. 1 (2025): 3.

4 Azmi Özcan, "1880'de İstanbul'da Çıkarılan Bir Gazete ve İngiltere'nin Kopardığı Fırtına: Peyk-i İslâm," *Tarih ve Toplum*, no. 99 (1992): 45.

the London-based *El-Khilafa* newspaper in order to weaken the influence of the Ottoman Sultanate and the power of the caliphate. However, the Indian Muslim press, more effectively than the British anti-caliphate publications, demonstrated a successful stance in the political and intellectual struggle of the period.

Munshi Mahbub Alam, through the *Paisa Akhbar* newspaper, demonstrated a keen interest in the political and social developments of the Ottoman Sultanate and aimed to convey the wars waged by the Turks to readers in the Indian subcontinent. As an important figure in the press world, he published low-cost newspapers to reach broad audiences and strengthened the intellectual exchange between the Turks and the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, he emerges as a pioneering intellectual who supported the independence movement against the British, fought against the censorship attempt of the Vernacular Press Act introduced by the British Indian administration in 1878 to suppress publications in local languages, and sharply criticized the British colonial administration.<sup>5</sup> Thus, his publications and struggles provided an important source on the socio-political developments of the period.

## 1. Life and Intellectual Identity

Munshi Mahbub Alam, one of the pioneering figures of the nineteenth-century Indian subcontinent, was born on 21 February 1862 in the village of Bharo, in the city of Gujranwala, Punjab province of British India. After completing his primary education in the district of Sheikhupura, he undertook his secondary studies in the city of Qasur.<sup>6</sup> In 1880, he enrolled in the Lahore Medical College but, upon his father's death, left the institution that same year, turning to literature and embarking on a career in publishing.<sup>7</sup> He was bestowed the title "Editor of Editors" in recognition of having trained a great number of journalists. Indeed, the majority of those educated under his tutelage went on to publish their own newspapers in subsequent years.<sup>8</sup> In addition to earning his livelihood through literary and publishing activities, he also assumed a pioneering role in this field.

Munshi Mahbub Alam played an active role in The All India Muslim Educational Conference (AIMEC), founded by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in 1886. In 1904, together with the Indian scholar and women's rights advocate Moulvi Sayyid Mumtaz Ali (1860–1935), founder of the journal *Tehzib-un-Niswan*<sup>9</sup>, he spearheaded the decision to establish a school for girls in Aligarh.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, at the 1905 meeting of the conference, he insisted that a portion of

5 Asghar Ali Engineer, *They Too Fought for India's Freedom: The Role of Minorities* (Delhi: Hope India Publications, 2006), 141.

6 Munshi Mahboob Alam, *Islami Encyclopedia: Har Qism ki Islami o Deeni Maalumaat ka Makhzan* (New Delhi: Etihad Publishing House, 2004), 3.

7 Arzu Çiftsüren, "Münşi Mahbub Alem ve 'Kavâid-i Türkî,'" ed. Onur Kılıçer and Turgay Gökgöz (II. Uluslararası Avrasya Çalışmaları, "Avrupa'da Türkiyat ve Şarkiyat Çalışmaları," İstanbul: Demavend Yayınları, 2018), 30.

8 Munşi Mahbûb Alem, *Urdu Sahafet Ki Eyk Nadir Tarih* (Lahor: Magribi Pakistan Urdu Akademi, 1992), 149.

9 Rauf Parekh, "Literary Notes: Moulvi Syed Mumtaz Ali and Other Feminist Moulvis," *Dawn E-Paper*, June 13, 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1694576>.

10 Abdul Rashid Khan, *The All India Muslim Educational Conference: Its Contribution to the Cultural Development*

the endowment's revenues be allocated to education, and his request was approved.<sup>11</sup> This effort by Munshi Mahbub Alam constituted a significant step toward elevating the educational standards of Muslims on the subcontinent. It is evident that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Moulvi Sayyid Mumtaz Ali exerted a formative influence on the development and shaping of his intellectual world.

Munshi Mahbub Alam, who died on 27 May 1933 in the city of Lahore, left behind numerous periodicals and newspapers as well as various literary works. His grave is located in the Miani Sahib Cemetery in Lahore.

## 2. Publishing Endeavors and His Special Interest in the Turks

In the early nineteenth century, the Urdu press (newspapers and journals) on the Indian subcontinent—then in its infancy—laid its initial foundations with publications such as the *Sada Sukh Lal Jam-e Jihannuma* newspaper and the *Delhi Urdu Akhbar* under the editorship of Moulvi Muhammad Baqir (1780-1857). The successors to these pioneering figures rendered considerable service to both the Urdu press and the Urdu language. Among the distinguished names of the period were Munshi Naval Kishore, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Abdul Halim Sharar, Tajvar Najeebabadi, Munshi Sajjad Husain, Mawlana Zafar Ali Khan, Mawlana Hasrat Mohani, Rashidul Khairi, Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, Mawli Abdur Razzaq Malihabadi, Mawlana Muhammad Ali Jauhar, Niaz Fatehpuri, Abdul Majeed Daryabadi, Ijaz Ahmed Siddiqui, Shahid Ahmed Dehlvi, Muhammad Tufail, Hayatullah Ansari, and Munshi Mahbub Alam.<sup>12</sup> These figures played a significant role in the formation of public opinion and the realization of social transformation on the Indian subcontinent, paving the way toward independence and freedom.

Munshi Mahbub Alam began his publishing career with the *Kilid* journal, under the editorship of his uncle. Subsequently, he launched numerous newspapers and periodicals:

- *Khadim 'ut-Talim*: Originally the *Kilid* journal, which over time evolved into a newspaper.
- *Himmat*: A newspaper launched in 1887 featuring social and cultural content; shortly thereafter its name was changed to *Paisha Akhbar*.<sup>13</sup>
- *Zamindar-e Bagban*: In this newspaper—dedicated to agriculture, the economy, and the hardships faced by the peasantry—he served as editor.
- *Paisha Akhbar*: Founded in 1887 in the Fairuzwala district of Gujranwala and later relocated to Lahore, this low-priced newspaper reached wide audiences across the subcontinent. Unlike its contemporaries, it chose to address society's problems rather than

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of *Indian Muslims 1886-1947* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 145.

11 Ibid., 213.

12 Mushtaq Ahmed Wani, "Cammu-u-Kashmir mein Urdu Sahafat ka Asri Manzarnama," *Rekhta*, April 12, 2025, <https://www.rekhta.org/articles/jammu-and-kashmir-mein-urdu-sahafat-ka-asri-manzar-nama-mushtaq-ahmed-wani-articles?lang=ur>.

13 Alem, *Urdu Sahafet Ki Eyk Nadir Tarih*, 147.

recount the beauties of winter and summer.<sup>14</sup> Moral, political, social, and artistic topics were addressed.<sup>15</sup> *Paisa Akhbar*, as the first Urdu newspaper to achieve commercial success, was printed in dimensions of 18 × 12/2 format that subsequently became the standard for other newspapers.<sup>16</sup> It made significant contributions to the intellectual and literary world of its time by pioneering in the field of journalism. Unlike other contemporary newspapers on the subcontinent, it was characterized by a focus on articles defending the nation's interests rather than on literary writings. With its news-oriented journalistic approach, the newspaper cultivated a habit of news reading among its readers.<sup>17</sup> Sold at the modest price of two rupees, the newspaper's initial print run of approximately one hundred copies had risen to 10,000 by the early 1900s. Munshi Mahbub Alam also published accounts of his travels through Europe and Islamic lands in *Paisa Akhbar*. In 1908, he combined these newspaper articles with his personal notes and issued them as the travelogue *Safarnama-e Europe u Bilad-e Sham u Misr*.<sup>18</sup> The *Karhana-e Paisa Akhbar* press in Lahore, where *Paisa Akhbar* was printed, also published the works of the period's leading literary figures. Among these was Muhammad Iqbal's 216-page treatise *Ilm 'ul-Iqtisad*, published in 1904.<sup>19</sup>

- *Sharif Bibiyan*: This monthly journal, aimed at contributing to the social and cultural development of Muslim women in the subcontinent, continued its publication from 1893 until 1949.<sup>20</sup> The founding editor was Munshi Mahbub Alam, and from 1909 onward the second editor was his daughter, Fatima Begum. Recognized as the first periodical published for women on the subcontinent<sup>21</sup>, *Sharif Bibiyan* had a brief run but nonetheless served as a model for numerous subsequent women's magazines.<sup>22</sup> He played a role in bringing the *Tahzib 'un-Niswan* magazine—founded in 1898 by Mumtaz Ali and his wife, Muhammadi Begum—into publication.<sup>23</sup> The support of the women rulers of Bhopal in the establishment and development of periodicals and newspapers aimed at women is undeniable. Educated Indian women of varying political and social perspectives followed the example set by these female sovereigns, striving to advance women's education and to address the challenges

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- 14 Khuram Shahzad, "The Evolution of Muslim Press in Punjab (From the Early Beginning to the 1947)," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 56, no. 2 (2019): 44.
  - 15 Alem, *Urdu Sahafet Ki Eyk Nadir Tarih*, 147.
  - 16 Shahzad, "The Evolution of Muslim Press in Punjab (From the Early Beginning to the 1947)," 44.
  - 17 Alem, *Urdu Sahafet Ki Eyk Nadir Tarih*, 148.
  - 18 Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, eds., *Oceanic Islam: Muslim Universalism and European Imperialism* (New Delhi: Bloomsbury Academic India, 2020), 26.
  - 19 Celal Soydan, *İkbal'e Dair* (Ankara: Hece Yayınları, 2016), 290.
  - 20 Dushka Saiyid, *Muslim Women of the British Punjab: From Seclusion to Politics* (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1998), 53.
  - 21 Sabiha Naheed, "Vucud-e Zen se he Urdu Sahafet me Rang," *Rekhta*, accessed April 12, 2025, <https://www.rekhta.org/articles/wajood-e-zan-se-hai-urdu-sahafat-men-rang-dr-sabiha-naheed-articles?lang=ur>.
  - 22 In the Indian subcontinent, numerous magazines for women continued to be published in different cities. In this context; Khatoon-e Delhi (Aligarh), Ismat (Karachi), Akhlaq-e Niswan (Bhopal), Rahbar (Gaya), Khatoon-e Mashriq (Meerut), Hareem (Lucknow), Khatoon-e Mashriq (Delhi), al-Hasanat, Batul and Hijab (Rampur), Banu (Delhi), and Shama (Delhi) were published as magazines addressing only women. See. Ibid.
  - 23 C. M. Naim, "A Treasure Trove," *Dawn*, June 26, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1267187/a-treasure-trove>.

they faced.<sup>24</sup> Educated Indian women began to take an active role in the press, which they believed to be one of the most pivotal factors in bringing these efforts to fruition.

- *Bachun ka Akhbar*: Munshi Mahbub Alam, in addition to the *Sharif Bibiyan* magazine addressing neglected women in his society, founded in 1902 *Bachun ka Akhbar*, the subcontinent's first periodical for children. This magazine continued its publication for approximately ten years, featuring fairy tales, riddles, moral teachings, and poems aimed at young readers.<sup>25</sup> Through this magazine, Munshi Mahbub Alam sought to instill a reading habit in children.

- *Akhbar-u-Nasim 'us-Saba*: The Arabic-language monthly journal, which he also assumed ownership of, commenced publication on 15 January 1893 in Lahore under the editorship of Qadi Zafaruddin Ahmad and was printed at the Hadim'ut-Talim press. Featuring scholarly articles in diverse fields such as science, literature, and religion, this periodical made a significant contribution to the dissemination of the Arabic language in the north-western Indian subcontinent and to the advancement of the region's intellectual life.<sup>26</sup>

He became a prominent figure in Lahore's publishing world by the late nineteenth century. As one of the subcontinent's foremost journalists, Munshi Mahbub Alam embarked in the early twentieth century on a journey that encompassed France, England, and other European nations, as well as Islamic cities such as Istanbul, Damascus, and Cairo. As noted above, he first published his observations and impressions in his own newspaper, *Paisa Akhbar*, and subsequently compiled them into the travelogue *Safarnama-e Europe u Bilad-e Sham u Mişr*.<sup>27</sup> Thus, alongside his journalistic endeavors, he compiled his observations from his travels through Ottoman lands and Europe in his work titled *Safarnama-e Europe u Bilad-e Sham u Mişr*.<sup>28</sup> In 1900, Mahbub Alam, while returning to his country India from the Paris World's Fair, undertook a two-month journey encompassing Istanbul, Damascus, and Egypt. Although he was impressed by the European capitals on his outbound and return trips to Paris, he set Istanbul as the focal point of his travelogue, devoting nearly one third of it to describing the city. Upon arriving in Istanbul after his days in Europe, he reported that he no longer felt like a stranger there. While, from the train window, he observed that the lifestyle in some Turkish villages remained Eastern, he also noted the differences that distinguished Istanbul from India: dressing like Europeans, sitting on chairs and eating with knife and fork, the presence of written menus in restaurants, and the services offered in barber shops were among the main distinctions that caught his attention. In conveying his observations of Turkish society

24 Azra Asghar Ali and Shahnaz Tariq, "Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz and the Socio-Cultural Uplift of Muslim Women in British India," *Journal of Research Society of Pakistan* 45, no. 2 (2008): 119.

25 Naim, "A Treasure Trove."

26 Hafizur Rahman, "Growth and Development of Arabic Journalism in India: A Critical Study," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research* 9, no. 11(2) (2020): 57.

27 Arzu Çiftsüren, "Urdu Dili İle Yazılmış Türkiye Seyahatnamelerine Genel Bir Bakış ve Türklerle İlgili Yazılmış İlk Seyahatname: Aine-i Freng," *Şarkiyat Mecmuası*, no. 43 (2023): 59–60.

28 Mehmet Kemal Çakmakçı, "Paisa Ahbâr Gazetesi Işığında Balkan Savaşları," in *Türkiye'de Pakistan Çalışmaları I*, ed. A. Merthan Dündar and Davut Şahbaz (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Asya-Pasifik Çalışmaları Uygulama ve Araştırma Merkezi (APAM), 2023), 94.

in his travelogue, he drew attention to their prominent moral values—sincerity, humility, and hospitality—stating that these qualities held an important place in the fabric of Turkish society:

*Every foreigner who visits Constantinople and returns carries with them the thought that the Turks are of good character; humble, sincere, and hospitable. Even upon meeting with people of the upper classes, the same impression arises. Undoubtedly, the Turks hold a distinctive position in the world by virtue of their fine morals.*<sup>29</sup>

Mahbub Alam describes the Turks in his travelogue as a people endowed with compassion, generosity, and trust in divine providence. He emphasizes that they show kindness not only to humans but even to animals, and he regards the multitude of charitable endowments (vakıfs) in Ottoman society as evidence of this compassion and generosity. He notes that, because the Turks truly believe that God is the giver of sustenance, they are a society that loves to share with those in need; when they sit at their tables, they invite those around them, demonstrating the importance they place on a culture of sharing. The author also underscores that, unlike Europeans, the Turks do not discriminate by skin color and hold no sense of superiority over Black or dark-skinned people.<sup>30</sup> In his travelogue, Munshi Mahbub Alam devoted extensive attention to the education system of the Ottoman Sultanate. He noted that the process of modernization began under Sultan Mahmud II and continued under Sultan Abdulmecid and Sultan Abdulhamid II. Examining the madrasas and mektebs, he reported that religious sciences were taught in the madrasas, while mektebs offered instruction in mathematics and the natural sciences, and—excluding non-Muslim students—also in Islamic sciences. He explained that madrasa graduates could serve as qadis, imams, and muftis, whereas mekteb graduates could pursue careers as state officials or in the military. He further observed that mosque curricula included courses in tafsir, hadith, and fiqh. Referring to elite institutions such as the Mekteb-e Mulkiye-e Shahane and the Mekteb-e Harbiyye-e Shahane, he noted that their alumni occupied high-ranking positions within state bodies, and he provided detailed information on the curricula of Ottoman educational establishments. He emphasized that the educational reforms implemented during Sultan Abdulhamid II's reign were more comprehensive than any seen in earlier eras.<sup>31</sup>

Mahbub Alam acquired the bulk of his knowledge about Istanbul and the Ottoman Sultanate from English-language sources. While critically engaging with these sources, he endeavored to convey his own objective observations. He argued that Ottoman society was hospitable, courteous, and bound by moral values, and, contrary to the claims of European writers, that corruption was not widespread within the Ottoman bureaucracy. He expressed admiration for Istanbul's historical and architectural splendours and drew attention to the modernisation of Ottoman educational and cultural life. However, he also voiced concern over the insufficiency

29 Zeynep Altınköprü, "II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Urdu Dili ile Yazılan Seyahatnamelerde Türkiye ve Türkler" (Yüksek Lisans, İstanbul Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2024), 36.

30 Ibid., 36.

31 Ibid., 64–66.

of industrial development in the Ottoman State and the economically weakened condition of its Muslim population.<sup>32</sup> With the observations concerning Istanbul and the Ottoman Sultanate in his travelogue, Ottoman society is presented both as part of the East and as influenced by Europe. Travelogues, alongside newspapers and journals, played a significant role not only in reinforcing political, social, and literary interactions but also in the development of Urdu.<sup>33</sup> To date, travel writers from the Indian subcontinent have composed numerous travelogues on the Ottoman realm and Türkiye. Travelogues centered on the Turks occupy a significant position, as they reflect the political and cultural dynamics of their era.

The fundamental motivations behind journeys from South Asia to Ottoman territories were religious, political, and cultural. Chief among these were the visitation of Istanbul as a natural stop on the Hajj pilgrimage; the heightened interest in Ottoman lands under Sultan Abdulhamid II's policy of Islamic unity; the inclusion of Ottoman provinces by travelers touring Europe in their travelogues; and the general attraction of the Ottoman domain to explorers. Throughout history, Istanbul has served as an important center for both Muslims and non-Muslims, acquiring spiritual significance for Muslims due to the conquest hadith attributed to the Prophet. This interest led to an increase in travelogues on the Ottoman lands and fostered a substantial body of Urdu literature concerning those territories. Today, there are over one hundred Urdu travelogues written about Türkiye.<sup>34</sup> Munshi Mahbub Alam, in the preface of the aforementioned travelogue, examined events concerning the Ottoman Turks in detail and provided information on their daily lifestyle, moral values, scholarly status, and customs and traditions with a level of detail rarely matched by other travelogues. Of the work's total 900 pages, approximately 250 are devoted to the Ottoman Sultanate and the Turks.<sup>35</sup>

Munshi Mahbub Alam prepared a work entitled *Qawaid-e Turki* with the aim of teaching Ottoman Turkish to speakers of Urdu. Published in Lahore in 1902, this volume was the first to teach Turkish through the medium of Urdu. In addition to his special interest in the Turks and their language, Alam produced numerous scholarly studies in linguistics: his *Mahbub 'ul-Emsal*, also published in Lahore in 1902, offers a comparative analysis of cognate idioms in Urdu, Punjabi, Persian, Arabic, and English. He further issued in 1903 two practical guides in Lahore: *Angrizi Bol Chal*, an English conversation manual, and *Zaruri Angrizi Alfaz*, a concise dictionary providing Urdu equivalents for essential English vocabulary.<sup>36</sup>

32 Adeeb Khalid and Elisabeth Özdalga, "Pan-Islamism in Practice: The Rhetoric of Muslim Unity and Its Uses," in *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 211.

33 Hatice Görgün, "Pakistan ve Türkiye İlişkilerinin Gelişiminde Hindistan Hilafet Hareketinin Etkileri," *Doğu Araştırmaları* 2022, no. 26 (2022): 69.

34 Arzu Çiftsüren, "Urdu Zeban Mein Turki Ke Sefernamun Ka Eyk Umumi Caizah Our Turkiye Ke So Safarnamun Ka İşariya," *Bazyaf*, no. 44 (2024): 61–62.

35 Altınköprü, "II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Urdu Dili ile Yazılan Seyahatnamelerde Türkiye ve Türkler," 28.

36 Çiftsüren, "Münşi Mahbub Alem ve 'Kavâid-i Türkî,'" 31.

Nasreddin Hodja's stories were translated from Turkish into Urdu and published in 1920 at the Hadimut-Talim press in Lahore under the title *Haje-e Nasreddin, yani Turkun ke Sheikh Chali ke Latifah* (*Nasreddin Hodja, that is, the Sheikh Chali of the Turks*:<sup>37</sup> *His Anecdotes*). In the book's preface, Nasreddin Hodja is characterized as a philosopher, poet, peasant, and traveler, and it is noted that his jests are so widespread throughout Turkish lands that it would be impossible for any individual to be unfamiliar with him and his anecdotes.<sup>38</sup> His work on Turkish texts demonstrates a robust command of the Turkish language. Through his translation entitled *Haje-e Nasreddin, yani Turkun ke Sheikh Chali ke Latifah*, Munshi Mahbub Alam introduced Turkish folk literature to the Indian subcontinent, playing a major role in its reception by local audiences. The translation of Nasreddin Hodja's anecdotes into Urdu was also crucial in embedding Turks' daily life and cultural values within the collective memory of Indian society.

Munshi Mahbub Alam published in 1921 from the Khadim'ut-Ta'lim Steam Press his work entitled *Assalatu Miraj'ul-Muminin*, meaning "Prayer is the Miraculous Ascension of the Believer." In this book, he emphasizes that prayer serves as a fundamental cornerstone for Muslims' spiritual elevation.

Munshi Mahbub Alam, bearing titles such as educator, publisher, and translator, demonstrates through both his translations from Turkish and the Arabic journal he published that he was a versatile intellectual.

## Conclusion

Munshi Mahbub Alam, in addition to being one of the pioneers of Urdu journalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the Indian subcontinent, reinforced Indo-Turkish friendship and solidarity through his close engagement with the Ottoman Sultanate and the Turkish people. His studies and publications concerning the Ottoman Sultanate and the Turks demonstrate the special significance he accorded to them. By reporting events from Ottoman lands in his newspaper *Paisa Akhbar*, he enabled the Muslims of the subcontinent to forge strong bonds with the Turks. His observations of Istanbul and Turkish society in his travelogue constitute a valuable document reflecting the cultural dimension of Indo-Ottoman relations. His journalistic and travelogue work, his grammatical treatise *Qava'id-e Turki*, and his folkloric

37 Sheikh Chali is a figure in the geography of the Indian subcontinent comparable to Nasreddin Hodja. He is known as an important Sufi scholar who lived in Thanesar, in the Haryana province of India. Believed to have been the spiritual advisor to the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh, Sheikh Chali is also noted for his madrasa education. His tomb is located at the highest point within the madrasa complex that bears his name. Inspired by Persian architecture, the madrasa comprises classrooms, residential quarters for students and teachers, a small mosque, and a bathhouse. Historically, the tomb was used by Sikhs as a gurdwara, during which its ornate marble was looted; it was later restored by the British and is today preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India. "Sheikh Chilli Tomb Complex, Thanesar," *Virtual Museum of Images and Sound, American Institute of Indian Studies*, February 11, 2025, [https://vmis.in/ArchiveCategories/collection\\_gallery\\_parent?id=1015&siteid=0&minrange=0&maxrange=0&count=24](https://vmis.in/ArchiveCategories/collection_gallery_parent?id=1015&siteid=0&minrange=0&maxrange=0&count=24).

38 Munshi Mahbub Alam, *Haje-e Nasreddin Yani Turkun Ke Seyh Çali Ke Latifah* (Lahor: Hadim'ut-Ta'lim Steam Press, 1920), 1–2.

translation Haje-e Nasreddin—a body of oral tradition transmitted across generations without prior written sources—further attest to his profound interest in Turkish language and culture. His leadership in educational initiatives, together with his sensitivity to the education of women and children, underscores the important role he played in social transformation. Alongside his newspapers, periodicals, translations, and travelogues, his contributions to the development of modern education opened new horizons in the cultural life of the subcontinent’s Muslim community. Taken as a whole, Munshi Mahbub Alam’s activities reveal his pivotal role in the advancement of the Urdu press, his leadership in strengthening Indo-Turkish relations, and his significant efforts to ensure the cultural representation of the Turks on the Indian.

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