

A GUIDE TO MANUSCRIPT RESEARCH AT MAULANA AZAD LIBRARY, ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY

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I traveled to Aligarh Muslim University on several occasions in 2009 and 2010 to study the collection of Urdu and Persian manuscripts at Maulana Azad Library. My research centered on the history of marsiyah (a genre of elegaic poetry) and its development in Urdu and Persian over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition to marsiyahs, I consulted manuscripts from a wide range of genres, including literature, history, and religious treatise, and gained facility working in the Manuscript Room. In this article, I will give an overview of the organization of the manuscript collection at AMU and offer practical suggestions for scholars planning a research visit to the library.

COLLECTIONS AND CATALOGS

There are three sources of information about AMU's manuscript holdings: published catalogs, unpublished handlists, and a card catalog. Most of AMU's manuscripts belong to one of twelve main collections, each named for its donor. These twelve collections are not integrated, which makes it difficult to locate copies of a given manuscript across collections. With the lack of an integrated master catalog, one must resort to an initial cross-reference search in the reading room's card catalog, and follow promising leads in catalogs and handlists.

An excellent introduction to AMU's published manuscript catalogs is Omar Khalidi's bibliographic survey of manuscript collections in India, which provides a list of catalogs and secondary materials ("A Guide to Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu Manuscript Libraries in India," *MELA Notes* 75-76, Fall 2002-Spring 2003, pp. 1-59). Many of the published catalogs for AMU listed in Khalidi's article are readily available in the U.S. through Interlibrary Loan. It is best to consult these catalogs before traveling to India, because locating them in India outside of AMU's library is a formidable task. Even AMU's collection is missing a few of the key catalogs, such as the sole published Urdu catalog, whose existence, curiously, was not known to the library staff (Khan 1995). Following this article, I have listed the published catalogs for AMU's collection, including five that are absent from Khalidi's survey.

Unfortunately, published catalogs cover only a part of AMU's manuscript collection. Items not included in published catalogs are found in the handlists available in the library's Manuscript Room. AMU's manuscript holdings comprise twelve named collections. Seven of these (the Abdul Haqq, Abdus Salam, Habibganj, Jawahar Museum, Subhan Allah, Sulaiman, and University collections) have their own corresponding handlists. The remaining five (the Aftab, Ahsan, Munir Alam, Qutbuddin, and Shefta collections) are listed together in a single register. The contents of the handlists are often sketchy, giving only the name and subject of a manuscript. Nonetheless, these handlists provide the most comprehensive overview of AMU's collection.

A third source of information about AMU's manuscript holdings is the card catalog located in the Manuscript Room. This card catalog cross-references manuscripts by title and author, and is useful for locating multiple copies of a manuscript in the named collections. The far-right portion of the card catalog has records for the published books belonging to the twelve named collections. These books are kept in the manuscript division, separate from AMU library's general collection. Many of these are quite rare, dating to the turn of the twentieth century. To my knowledge, these books are not listed in the library's main catalog, making this card catalog the sole record of these materials.

THE SYED MASUD HASAN RIZVI "ADIB" COLLECTION

AMU is home to an exceptional collection of manuscripts donated by Sayyid Masud Hasan Rizvi "Adib" (1893-1975), one of Urdu's most distinguished scholars and literary critics. Adib, who was a longtime professor of Persian at Lucknow University, published a range of influential works on the history of Urdu literature, but a recurring focus of his research was marsiyah, especially those composed by Mir Anis. Adib's works on marsiyah include *Ruh-e Anis*, *Aslaf-e Anis*, *Anisiyyat*, and *Naqd-e Anis*. An important legacy of Adib's research on Urdu marsiyah was his effort to gather manuscripts of marsiyahs from private collections in the early twentieth century. Adib's collection was donated to AMU in the mid-1970s and comprises some 125 bound volumes, each, in turn, containing dozens of marsiyahs from various copyists and collections. Manuscripts in the collection range in date from the mid-eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, and are invaluable not only for the study of marsiyah, but also for the development of Urdu language and literature in general. Adib's collection is cataloged as a subset of AMU's "University" collection, and its contents are available in Khan's published catalog of Urdu manuscripts (1995: 384-423).

THE MANUSCRIPT READING ROOM

I was granted permission by AMU's head librarian to access the Manuscript Room, on the basis of recommendations from my university and sponsoring institution. The manuscript

reading room has space for around eight scholars, but it was rare to find more than a few working there at any one time. The procedure for requesting manuscripts is quite straightforward, once one learns to navigate the collection's organization and catalog system. I found the staff in the reading room generous and professional. In general, the organization of the reading room and the care of manuscripts at Aligarh were outstanding.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Prior to 2008, AMU did not charge a fee for photographing manuscripts. On my early visits to the library, the fee for photography was ten rupees per folio. There is a copy stand in the manuscript reading room positioned near an outside window for optimal lighting. A copy stand is used to secure a camera parallel to the face of a manuscript page; this helps eliminate loss of image quality due to unsteady hands, a common problem when photographing in natural lighting. With a copy stand my modest digital camera produced high resolution photographs that could be enlarged many times over. At AMU, I preferred to photograph manuscripts myself, but the staff was well-equipped to photograph requested folios and deliver them on a CD, either in person or by post.

The staff had begun a project to digitize the library's entire collection, and had made impressive progress to that end. Unfortunately, prior to my last visit to AMU in 2010, the Vice-Chancellor had suspended all manuscript photography—even for the library staff—because another institution had been discovered selling digital copies of AMU's manuscripts. I was not able to determine whether the ban on manuscript photography is still in effect.

LOGISTICS

Most hotels in Aligarh suitable for a lengthy stay are located near the train station in the area called Centre Point. AMU runs guest houses on campus. Its rooms are reportedly cheaper, but less comfortable than some of the city's private hotels. I was told that the quality of the food served at the guest house is likewise inferior to restaurants in the Centre Point area.

One should take care in planning a visit to AMU to schedule around holidays and other closings. The manuscript reading room is open from 9:30 to 5 on most days, with an hour lunch break from 1:30-2:30. On Fridays, the reading room is only open from 8 to 12. The entire library is closed on Sundays and holidays.

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