Trends in Information Management (TRIM)
ISSN: 0973-4163
11(1), pp. 81-93

# Antiquity into Digital: A case study of Urdu literary magazine 'Nuqoosh' Research Center (NRC) and Digitization Project

**Saima Qutab**
**Farasat Shafi Ullah**
**Faiza Saqib**

**Abstract**

***Purpose:*** *The study reports the development of Urdu literary magazine "Nuqoosh" based on a unique collection of Urdu literary letters and original literary scripts submitted to editors of 'Nuqoosh'. It also brings into light the initiative for collecting the intellectual memory of literary works, its management and technical handling.*

***Design/methodology/approach****: The study employs qualitative research method involving document review, interviews, and personal observation of the Government College University (GCU), Lahore library and "Nuqoosh" the Urdu literary magazine's digitization project.*

***Findings****: The "Nuqoosh Research Center" (NRC) and museum collection is a unique experience for Urdu researchers across the globe to support evidence-based research opportunities. "Nuqoosh", a literary magazine and the digitization project set an example for the alike language experts, to respond the need of preserving and disseminating the original documents for the collective memory of the world.*

***Research Implications/Value****: The study throws light on the journey of literary magazine "Nuqoosh", which represents a valuable era of the modern Urdu.*

***Keywords****: Nuqoosh Research Center (NRC); Literary letters; Literary works; Manuscripts; Museum; Digitization*

***Paper type****: Case study*

## History of 'Urdu'

The Urdu and Hindi language belongs to the Indo-Iranian and Indo-Aryan branches of the Indo-European family of languages, commonly known as the Hindustani dialect **(BBC, 2007; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016)**. Urdu is a Turkish word which means *'an army, a market or a camp'*. Urdu in its less formalized register is referred to as a Rekhta, meaning 'rough mixture'. The language evolved through a commingling of local dialects Sanskrit, Hindko, Pashto, Pali, Prakrit etc. into the Arabic, Persian, and Turkish during the Mughal period of Indian history **(BBC, 2007; Kachru, 2008; Masica, 1993)**. Its ability to absorb words from other languages also reflects its meaning as 'an army'. However, there seems to be many different opinions about the exact origin of the Urdu language and cannot be ascertained when the Muslims of this region especially its elite started speaking Urdu, or rather its

predecessor which is often called *Handi, Handavi/Handui, Zaban-e-Hind, Zaban-e-Delhi, Rekhta, Gujari, Dakkhani, Zaban-e-Urdu-e-Mualla, Zaban-e-Urdu,* or just *Urdu* **(Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009; Rahman, 2002)**. Some trace back its invention to the arrival of Muslims in the 8th century in Sindh, while others consider its roots in the 14th century with the arrival of Mahmood Ghaznavi **(Matthews, Shackle & Husain, 1985)**. Urdu started to flourish in its true sense during the Mughal period in Delhi and Agra durbars by the Indian scholars using Persian and Persian scholars using Hindi in their communication and literary expressions. Eventually, it became the intellectual identity, medium of education, literary, and political expression of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent.

Urdu marks an abundance of literature and expression produced as original, translated and adaptations in many dailies, magazines, and publications in the 19th and 20th century. Later, the language also become one of the founding reasons for the 'two nation theory' causing the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 **(Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016; Rahman, 2002)**, and Pakistani leaders emphasized Urdu's centrality to the nation and in 1948 it was declared as the official language of Pakistan parallel with English to index Muslim identity (**Ayres, 2009; Kachru, 2008)**. **Rahman (2002)** states that although Urdu is Pakistan's 'official' language, it has also been perceived as an imported language that is or was native to only a few people in the region before independence from Britain in 1947, and, in fact, most people claim Urdu as a native language in India 'where its developing roots lie'. Urdu is one of the official languages of the six states of Northern India and iswell spoken and understood in other countries i.e. Nepal, Bangladesh, and the Middle East **(Ethnologue: Languages of the World, 2017; Fatihi, 2003; Matthews, Shackle & Husain, 1985)**. It's prominence as a language of administration, judiciary, business, formal literacy, media communication, religious sermons and more particularly as a language of intellectual activity, establishes it as a representative of religious, cultural and social heritage of the country **(Ayres, 2009; Zia, 1999)**. Urdu is spoken by nearly hundred million people around the world **(BBC, 2007; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009, 2016)** and is written from right-to-left in Nasta'līq script, derived from the Persian Arabic script **(Kachru, 2008)**.

**Government College University (GCU), Lahore**

Government College (GC), established in 1864, is one of the oldest educational institutions in Pakistan and was granted a university status in 2002. In its history of about 150 years, the institution takes pride in producing many great poets, writers, philosophers, actors, musicians, journalists, sportspeople, judiciary & civil servants, politicians, nuclear

scientists, doctors, engineers, and many other prominent figures in and outside Pakistan.

**The GCU Libraries**

There are several state-of-the-art libraries in GCU: Fazal-i-Hussain Library (central library), Postgraduate library, life sciences library and other seven departmental libraries. All libraries contribute to establish the support for the bright students and alumni of the GCU. The libraries provide conventional and advanced services to users e.g. circulation, reference services, multimedia facilities, library orientation programs, inter-library loan programs, newspaper indexes, OPAC, HEC digital library access, GCU virtual library and the library society. GCU libraries house approximately 300 thousand books, thousands of serial publications, manuscripts, and archival collections. The GCU virtual library is a project of digitizing thesis, The Ravi (university magazine), Nuqoosh literary letters and manuscripts held at the GCU library.

**'Nuqoosh' the Magazine**

*'*Nuqoosh' is a prominent magazine of Urdu literature devoted to the progress of language and its literary aspects in Pakistan and to the residents and immigrants from various cultural and lingual backgrounds. The first issue of the magazine appeared under the editorship of two eminent Urdu writers: Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi and Khadija Mastoor in March 1948, just a few months after the independence of Pakistan. It successfully establishes the foundations of modern Urdu prose and poetry as well as Urdu literary journalism **(Rahman, 1983)**. During, April 1951, Muhammad Taufil joined as the editor and gave an exciting spin to the Urdu literary magazine publication style by adding qualitative research, historical investigations, evidence and documentary research, interviews etc. Considering Taufil's successful efforts, he is affectionately known as *'Muhammad Nuqoosh'* by contemporary Urdu literary personalities **(Anjum, 1989; Rahman, 1983)**. Since beginning, the magazine maintained the state of bestseller and a high-brow among highly literate Urdu readers. The special issues for 'Nuqoosh' established as authentic and primary sources of information on various literary figures, literary elements, religious, cultural, and social events.

The collection of NRC is significant as it throws light on the writing style of many Urdu writers and depicts the literary, political, social, and cultural inclination and influences of more than a century **(Ruaf, 2007)**. It consist original letters of authors submitting their works, criticism and debates on literary aspects. These letters not only provide information about the author's style of writing and conversation, but also witness the development of the Urdu language and script. The collection

development of the 'Nuqoosh' has been appreciated by the Urdu critics and literary circles **("Urdu literature centre", 2012; Warrich, 2007)**.

**'Nuqoosh' Research Center (NRC) and Museum**

The historical record of handwritten scripts of famous writers and correspondence with editors on Urdu literary aspects was donated to GCU by Javaid Tufail son of Muhammad Tufail, the then editor of Nuqoosh, Dr. Waheed Qureshi and Basir Mojed in 2006. Although many renowned institutions around the world including French museum were willing to acquire these collection of letters and pay a hefty sum, but GCU was preferred due to its legacy and affiliates **(Rauf, 2007)**. Nuqoosh museum was set up at the GCU postgraduate library considering the importance of the collection and its' future usage.

The collection of NRC and museum started gradually with the first installment of 4000 letters by 386 famous Urdu authors during 1948 to 1985. In later installments, GCU received another 10,000 letters and scripts. Currently, 'Naqoosh' museum has more than 14,000 letters of 1933 literary figures of Urdu language and literature, a collection of 400 original scripts and positives of articles published in the magazine; a collection of thousands of books used by the editors for the magazines' special issues; copies of all the Naqoosh issues from 1948-2005 and some personal belongings of Urdu writers e.g. famous typewriter of Saadat Hasssan Manto etc. **(GCU, 2017; Qutab, Bhatti & Ullah, 2014;Rauf, 2007; "Urdu literature centre", 2012;Warrich, 2007).** In May 2012, the Nuqoosh museum was extended as NRC to facilitate and promote the interest of students and researchers in Urdu literature. The research center is equipped with an Urdu library, a state-of-the-art reading room, computer center and the Nuqoosh museum.

Some of the letter's positives, original letters and literary work scripts preserved in the collection are more than a century old. There are about 350 letter's positives including 122 of Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan (dated 1856-96); original literary scripts of 300 authors and correspondences by about 1100 authors from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Some of the noteworthy letter collections **(see images 1 - 6)** are of Intizar Hussain (8), Balwant Singh (30), Jagan Nath Azad (64), Josh Malihabadi (26), Jeelani Bano (72), Ismat Chughtai (22), Krishan Chander (80), Shahid Ahmad Dehlvi (98), Daagh Dehlvi (68 including Ghazals), Jagan Nath Azad (64), Qurratulain Hyder (82), Mumtaz Mufti (62), Mahendranath Gupta (74), Naseeruddin Hashmi (68), Niaz Fatehpuri (80), Hajra Masroor (48), Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi (100) and many more **(GCU, 2017).**

**Image 1: Letter of Daagh Dehlvi**

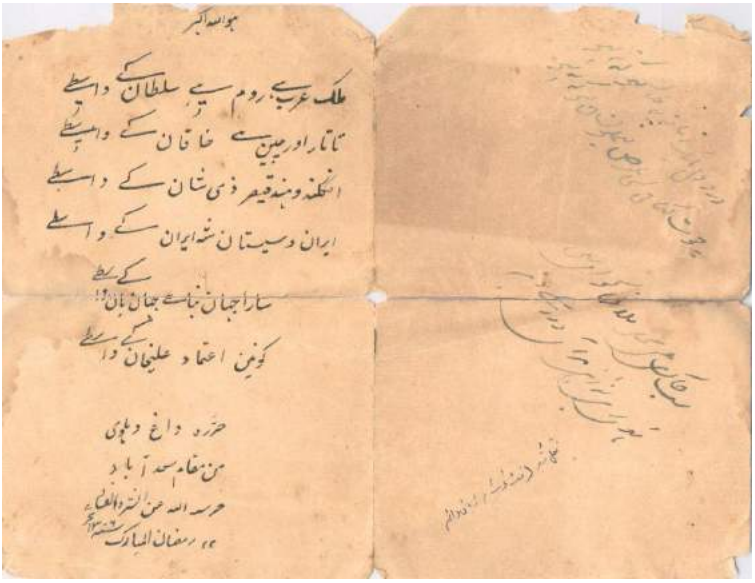


**Image 2: Letter of Khadija Mastoor (dated 1946)**

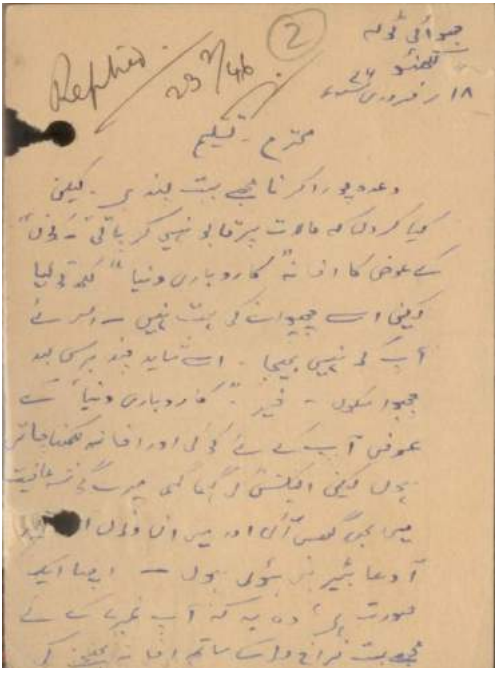


**Image 3: Letter of Khadija Mastoor (dated 1959)**

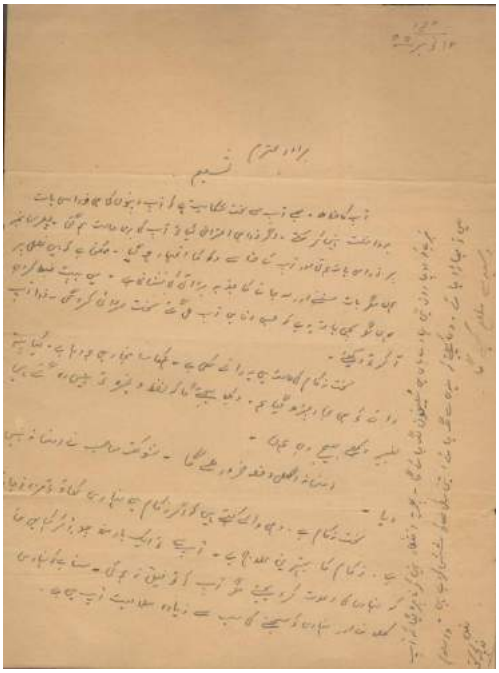


**Image 4: Letter of Shibli Numani**

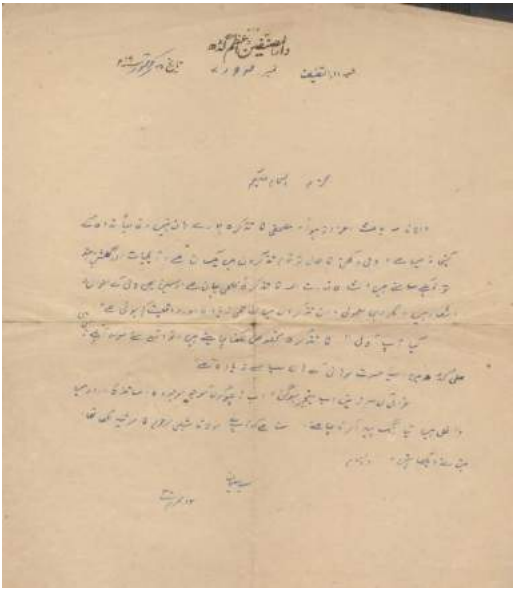


**Image 5: Letter of Shibli Numani (dated 1919)**

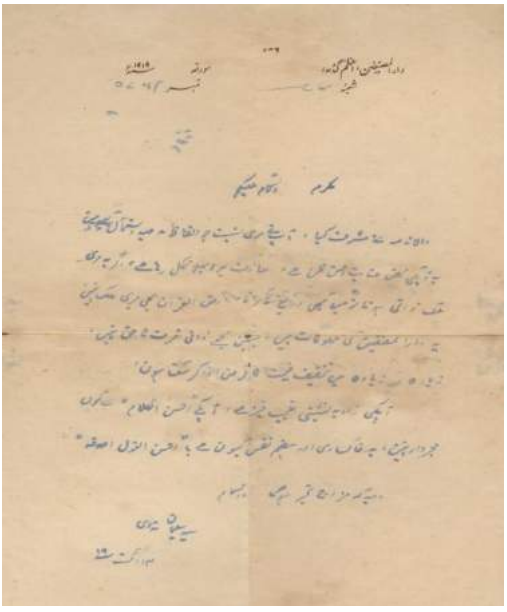
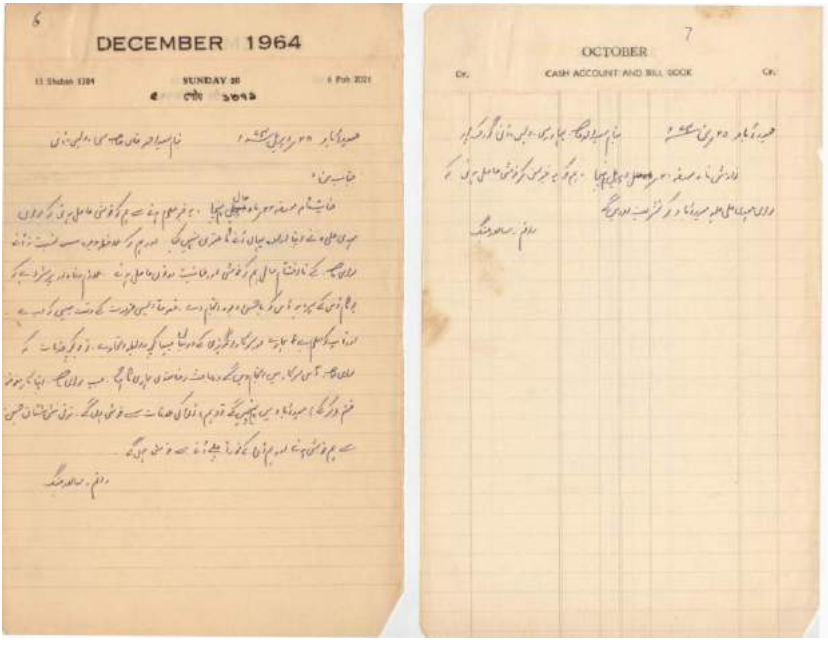


**Image 6: letter of Salar Jang (dated 1964)**



**Technical processing**

The collection's managerial and technical handling was planned by the then chief librarian, Abdul Waheed. It includes classification and arrangement; conservation and digitalization; access and marketing.

**1) Classification and arrangement**: Nuqoosh letters are classified according to authors and further assigned with codes and date of writing. Accordingly, separate file folders are prepared for the letters and these folders are arranged according to their codes. Self-devised classification and arrangement is:

Letter classification = Author > File > Number >LtrQty (letter quantities)
Folders arrangement = Author Alphabetical > File > Number >LtrQty

**2) Conservation**: There are four major factors of the deterioration of any artifact i.e. environmental, biological, human, and natural factors **(Prytherch, 2005)**. The library received thecollection over half century-year-old boxes. The collection is well-kept by the magazine editors and mostly documents are in good condition. To extend their physical life, the library ensures conservation and a proper environment. All letters are carefully fumigated before any sort of physical handling in the museum. The process reduces the chances of deterioration by insects and worms as well as prevents other threats to the paper **(Qutab, Bhatti & Ullah, 2014)**. Also, each letter is placed in plastic cover and into a folder to prevent direct human touch yet ensuring the readability.

**3) Digitization:** Physical conservation of original artifacts is undoubtedly valuable to preserve the intellectual content and artistic formats **(Li & Niu, 2010)**. Facsimiles, microfilming and now digitization is in practice for the content preservation. The advanced and emerging technologies have made the preservation of contents possible even with less financial and human resources. Digitization provides safety to the original documents and swift access to content around the world.

**Digitization project:** A digitalization project was initiated in 2009, to provide researchers easy access, while preserving the original documents. Currently, more than 4700 digitized letters are available through LAN andCD/DVD, while scanning of remaining letters is in the process.

- ***Equipment:*** The GCU Library received a grant from Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan to set a digitization lab to digitize the GCU thesis repository and the 'Ravi' library (University's official magazine).
- ***Human Resource:*** The human resource working on the digitization project consists of an IT professional, an assistant librarian and two computer operators.
- ***Imaging:*** The library uses a Kodak scanner i1320 with a speed of scanning 60 pages per minute. Digital cameras are also used for the delicate letters and materials following imaging standards as

recommended by the World Digital Library (WDL). Scanning of images is done at 300 dpi and files are saved in TIFF format at 8-bit greyscale for black and white and 24-bit for pages with color images. The images are stored in the original size as a master copy and later converted to PDF files.

- ***Digital Library:*** The PDF files of the letters are preserved in the greenstone software. This library is accessible for the users within GCU through the LAN network.
- ***Preservation & Distribution:*** The CD/DVD is available free of cost on request from the chief librarian.

**4) Access, services, and marketing**: The GCU library ensures easy access to resources for the researchers/scholars through many conventional and modern marketing techniques. Local and international students, researchers, alumni and writers regularly visit the library to benefit from the evidence-based research and reference. A complete list of authors, letters, scripts, positives, and books at the NRC is placed on the GCU website.

Library administration effectively uses print media and social networking tools to promote the collection. There are various guest articles, national newspaper editorials, letters to editors, magazine columns, library society reports, social media feeds, videos on YouTube, TV talk shows and radio programs conducted time to time to spread the information **(Hayat, 2011; Jaffery, 2011)**. The establishment of Nuqoosh museum, collaboration with the WDL, launch of NRC and many other events were covered in all popular national dailies and television channels to increase awareness among the public and researchers at the national and international level.

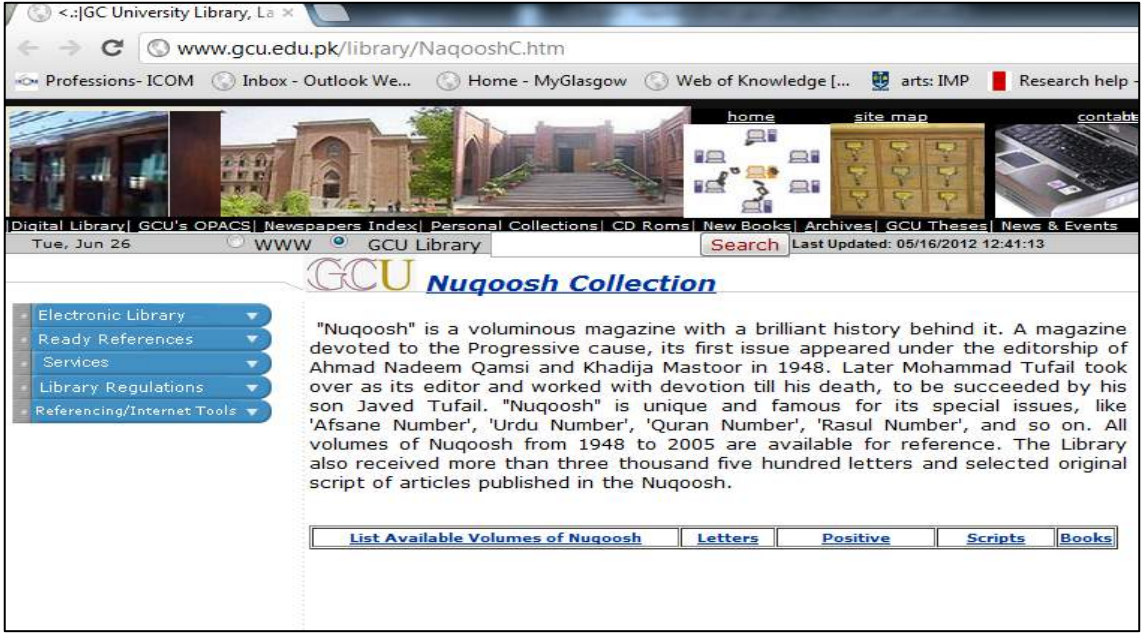
## Conclusion

The Nuqoosh magazine is considered a valuable era of the modern Urdu journey. The work published in the literary magazine are not only from the authors of Pakistan, but also from India, Bangladesh and worldwide. The Naqoosh museum and research center combines the literary legacy of more than a hundred million Urdu speaking people around the world. It is a unique capture of a literary magazine's journey over a half century for the people of literary taste in general and researchers in particular.

**Image 7: The Greenstone Digital Library of Naqoosh**



**Image 8: GCU Library Website, Nuqoosh Collection**



**References**

Anjum, N. (1989). *Ghalibiat: Collection in Nuqoosh magazine*. Lahore*:* Altaufil.

Ayres, A. (2009). *Speaking like a state: Language and nationalism in Pakistan*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

BBC. (2007). *A Guide to Urdu - 10 facts about the Urdu language*. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/other/urdu/guide/facts.shtml

Encyclopedia Britannica. (2009). *Urdu language*. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/topic/Urdu-language

Encyclopedia Britannica.(2016). *Hindustani language*. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hindustani-language

Ethnologue: Languages of the World (2017). *Urdu*. Retrieved from http://www.ethnologue.com/language/urd

Fatihi, A. R. (2003). *Language in India. 3*(2). Retrieved from http://www.languageinindia.com/feb2003/urduinbihar.html

GCU. (2017).*Nuqoosh Collection*. Retrieved from: http://library.gcu.edu.pk/NaqooshC.htm

Hayat. A. (2011, June 4).*GCU Nuqoosh Research Centre Inaugurate Pkg* [Video]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fWt_xsPj00

Jaffery, S. (2011). *GCU-Library*.[Video]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lPeEwk4QCO0

Kachru, Y. (2008).Hindi-Urdu-Hindustani. In B. B. Kachru, Y. Kachru, & S. N. Sridhar (Eds.), *Language in South Asia*(pp. 81–112).Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

Li, M., &Niu, J. (2010).A preservation framework for Chinese ancient books.*Journal of Documentation, 66*(2), 259-278.doi:10.1108/00220411011023652

Masica, C. P. (1993).*The Indo-Aryan languages*.Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Matthews, D. J., Shackle, C. &Husain, S. (1985). *Urdu Literature*.London: Urdu Markaz.

Prytherch, R. J. (2005). *Harrod's librarians' glossary and reference book: a directory of over 10,200 terms, organizations, projects and acronyms in the areas of information management, library science, publishing and archive management*. (10th Ed.). London: Ashgate Publishing.

Qutab, S., Bhatti, R., & Ullah, F. S. (2014). An investigation of conservation & preservation practices of intellectual heritage in Pakistan. In *IFLA-PAC Satellite meeting, Geneva, August 13-14,* 2014.

Rahman, M. M. U. (1983). *Muhammad Nuqoosh*. Lahore: Karwan-e-Adab

Rahman, T. (2002).*Language, ideology, and power: language-learning*

*among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India*.Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford university press.

Ruaf, Z. (2007). Precious letters of great literary persons. *Daily Jang.*

Urdu literature center inaugurated at GCU. (2012, May 26).*The Daily Nations*. Retrieved from http://nation.com.pk/lahore/26-May-2012/urdu-literature-centre-inaugurated-at-gcu

Warrich, A. A. K. (2007). Transfer of Muhammad Nuqoosh's literary heritage to GCU. *Daily Nawa-e-Waqat*.

Zia, K. (1999). *A Survey of Standardization in Urdu*.Retrieved from http://www.cicc.or.jp/english/hyoujyunka/mlit4/7-10Pakistan/Pakistan2.html

**Corresponding author**

**Saima Qutab** can be contacted at: saimaqutab83@gmail.com & squtab@uod.edu.sa

**Author biographies**

**Saima Qutab** is currently working as a Lecturer in Deanship of Library Affairs, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. Previously, she served on various professional and faculty positions in Pakistan. Her research interests are Intellectual Heritages, Digital Humanities, Library Website, Web 2.0, Women Empowerment, ICT, Information Literacy, Library Innovation and Human Cantered Libraries Services.

**Farasat Shafi Ullah** is Director of Central Libraries of Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. Previously, he worked as chief librarian in three major universities of Pakistan and taught to LIS undergraduate and graduate programs at Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan. He holds a master degree in LIS from University of West London, UK. He volunteers his library automation skills for the libraries across Pakistan. His research interests are Library Automation, ICT, Big Data, Open Source Software, KOHA, Information Literacy, Digital Humanities, Library Management, and Innovation.

**Faiza Saqib** is working as Senior Library Technician in Western Sydney University, Australia. She has a long experience of technical librarianship. Her research interests are library services through innovation.