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First Urdu Newspaper in Germany for WWI Muslim Prisoners of War

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Abstract

During World War First (WWI), new avenues in social sciences were discovered. Germans treated all the prisoners of war according to their religion, language and culture. Hindostan, a camp newspaper which is the first Urdu newspaper from Germany started for Indian Muslim prisoners in 1915 and continued till 1918. During these four years 84 issues of this newspaper were published and distributed among the Muslim prisoners of wars in Wunsdorf and Zossen camps in Germany to propagate the idea of jihad. This article attempts to know the motivation and objectives of Germans behind this newspaper. Themes of this newspaper will also be analyzed and categorized.

Key Words: Urdu Newspaper, Hindostan, WWI, Indian Muslims, prisoners of war.

Under DAAD (Germany) program titled Research Stays for University Academics and Scientists 2019, I stayed at the Institute of Asian and African Studies Central-Asian Seminar of the Humboldt University Berlin during June-August 2019 and collected materials analyzed in this article in the Berlin State Library. I am thankful to the kind support and cooperation of all the relevant staff of the Berlin State Library.

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Millions of combatants took part in World War First (WWI). Among these combatants 1.4 million were South Asians combatants. Ninety thousand of these South Asians fought on the Western Front in Belgium and France. From French and British colonies some 600000 soldiers were deployed in Europe. A variety of encounters occurred between colonial and European troops in Europe.¹ South Asians combatant and non-combatants were captivated and made prisoners of war during the World War First. They were caught in Belgium, France, East Africa and Mesopotamia and other areas of war.²

New avenues were explored in social sciences during WWI. Texts, audio recordings and other data received from the prisoners of WWI are being used for Social, religious and ethnic structures, cultural and literary studies. It is also used to conceptualize studies in micro history. Academician played an important role in the research in Halfmoon Camp. They used textual material to understand global conflict. One may know about new insights regarding WWI through analysis of various historical sources. Analysis and study of materials related to WWI reflect conditions of captivity and war as well as other problems of racism and colonial past. The camps of the prisoners of war were like museums of different peoples of the world.³ Among these text, audio and other materials, one important thing is the *Hindostan*, the first Urdu newspaper published from Germany.

German Information Centre for the East, NfO (Nachrichtenstelle fur den Orient) was a special propaganda bureau located in the German Foreign office in Berlin. It was founded in autumn 1914. Archaeologist and Orientalist, Max Freiherr von Oppenheim (1860-1946) was the person who submitted a proposal for NfO. This proposal titled Denksschrift betreffend die Revolutionierung der islamischen Gebiete unserer Feinde (Memorandum with Regard to Revolutionizing the Islamic Realism of our Enemies). The Camp Newspaper was also mentioned in the proposal.⁴ Nfo was a propaganda institution and its aspirations to foment anti colonial strife among the prisoners. ⁵There were other parallel newspapers titled *El Dschihad* or *Kaukasien*, for propaganda in the camps of Zossen and Wunsdorf. ⁶ Hindostan was produced outside the camp without the participation of the prisoners. ⁷ The camp newspaper Hindostan is a unique historical source which was reflecting direct reaction to British propaganda as well as propaganda among the prisoners of war.⁸ NfO decided to conduct a survey of the camps to know the number of speakers and feasibility of production of a newspaper.

Regarding the language question the NfO took into account the ethnic, religious and language composition of the of the prisoners in the camps. They came to know about a diversity of languages and started recordings of these languages. A total of 2672 audio recording were made. There are almost 300 recordings of the languages of South Asia. These languages of South Asia including Gurung, Nepali, Garhwali, Bengali, Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Baluchi, Pashto and many others.⁹

After the survey and recording in the two propaganda camps situated in Berlin they decided, according to the structure of language, that newspapers will be issued in six languages e.g. Arabic, Russian, Georgian, Turko-Tatarian, Hindi and Urdu. Besides number of prisoners, they also considered available language capacities within and around the NfO.¹⁰ Initially, like other newspapers, the name Al-Jihad was also suggested for this newspaper. Indian Independence Committee Berlin rejected the name of the newspaper as Al-Jihad and proposed for the name Hindostan for Hindi and Urdu version of the camp newspaper. The reason that the name Al-Jihad was not accepted because many members of IIC were not Muslims but they were using aliases like Hassan Ali Khan (Kersasp), Syed Khadar Ali (Kedar Nath), Abdul Aziz (Basanth Singh), and Jan Muhammad (Chat Singh).¹¹ Members of the Berlin IIC¹² such as, Har Dayal (1884-1957), Muhammad Barkatullah (1854-1927) had reservations in such type of propaganda due to eventual persecution by the British Government.¹³

Head of the NfO Max Freiherr von Oppenheim for the first time put forward this concept on 9th January 1915 to start a camp newspaper for propaganda which will be distributed in Wunsdorf *Halbmondlager* (Halfmoonor Crescent Moon camp)¹⁴ and Zossen camp. Within the Halfmoon Camp, a Special Indian Camp (Inderlager) was created. ¹⁵These were two special camps for propaganda among Muslim prisoners of War. ¹⁶ Eleven more special camps for Muslim POWs were scattered in Germany.¹⁷ On 26th January 1915, he approached the press headquarter in Berlin for approval. ¹⁸ Other parallel newspapers like *El-Dschihad* in Arabic, Turco-Tatarian and Russian languages, *Kaukasien* in Georgian language appeared on 5th March 1915. Hindostan started at the beginning of April¹⁹ 1915. ²⁰ Persian Newspaper *Kavesh* was also printed during the first world war from Berlin by Persian intellectuals. ²¹ Deciding script for Urdu and Hindi newspapers was also an issue. Regarding the Gurmukhi script, Ferdinand Graetsch, after his visits to the camps advised that it is not necessary. Only two Sikhs knew Gurmukhi. Some Sikhs avoided it being a holy status of the script. ²²

The main purpose of this newspaper was the propogation of the idea of Jihad in Hindostani Muslims against British India. They thought that these people will rise against their colonial overlords.²³ Although Germans, tried their best but this propaganda was not successful. One of the researches conducted on Prisoners of war, by Heike Liebau, shows that 1000 prisoners from Vineyard Camp and 800 prisoners of Crescent Moon Camp expressed their willingness to proceed to Turkey by September 1915. There were 49 Indian Muslims prisoners of war among all these prisoners of war who agreed to go to Turkey.²⁴ At that time many Pathan soldiers deserted British army. Main reason of the desertion of Pathan soldiers was their pro-Turkish feelings.²⁵ Newspapers published from Afghanistan like Siraj-ul-Akhbar and Hamdard put in the minds of Muslims about Turkish invincibility.²⁶

Urdu newspaper Hindostan was written by hand and then replicated by a photomechanical method. Sometimes printed numbers also appear. On 27th April 1915 first attempt was made to print the title page of Urdu newspaper but this practice did

not continue.²⁷ In October 1915, number of Urdu newspaper was reduced to 700. Out of the total number, 200 copies were sent to Halfmoon Camp in Wunsdorf.²⁸

In the newspaper authors and translators' names have not been given but in the archive and other record a few names are mentioned. Urdu speakers for newspaper were judged to be more open to a pan Islamist propaganda not least the preservation of the Turkish Khilafat. ²⁹Glasenapp, being a member of the NfO, was publishing materials in the NfO organ responsible for propaganda. He is among the important and leading figures who were working for the production of Hindostan, the camp newspaper.³⁰

German as well Indian persons were writing and translating articles for this newspaper. From German side members of NfO like Indologist Helmuth von Glasenapp (1891-1963) Ferdinand Graetsch and Konsul Neuenhofer were involved in the newspaper to choose and write text and control text and translation done by the Indian translators and writers. The following Indian writers were involved from Indian side in the production of this newspaper. Ahmad Mansur,³¹ Taraknath Das, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, Chempakaraman Pillai, Bhupendranath Datta, Shivdev Singh Ahluwalia, M. Prabhakar, Hardayal, Abdul jabbar Khiri, Abdul Sattar Khiri, Abdul hafiz, Acharya, Varma, Mitha Singh, Reinhard Kaundinya, Rishikesh Latta, Tarachand Roy. ³² As compared to other propaganda literature and newspapers Hindostan was comparatively small in number because it was exclusively for the Prisoners of War in the *Inderlager* (Indian Camp). ³³

Based on the contents articles published in Urdu newspaper are grouped in the following categories:

1. About Germany

There are articles related to Germany as an Islam-friendly country. Articles regarding Kaiser's sympathies for Muslims are also available. Articles related to Cultural and economic prosperity of Germany have also been included. There are contents that show Germans as a strong nation and Germany with rich resources and machines for warfare . These propagandas reached to India and soldiers started desertion.

Chief Commissioner wrote to the Viceroy.

At the time when these desertions began the bazaars were full of blood curdling stories of the Germans, of whom the people have never heard before and who seemed to their rumour fed imaginations to be a race of *Ginnis* sprung into existence in a single night, fully armed with superhuman and unheard means of warfare, with power of sailing in the air and dropping tons of explosives on any spot.³⁴

2. War and Political Situation in the World

> Second category contains articles related to the war and overall political situation in the world. Successful fighting of the Germans and situation at different war fields have been written in detail reports particularly in 1915 and 1916. After the October Revolution in Russia a shift in contents can be observed. One of the article related to Russia published in No. 70 (28th January 1918) titled as "naya ghadar Rus mi" [the new revolution in Russial.

3. Political and Economic Development in South Asia

This part was to address the patriotic feelings of prisoners. There were articles to rose nationalist sentiments and developing an image of Britain as colonial power exploiting her colonies. It also includes articles related to economic and political development of South Asia. British tax system and economic policy in India has been criticized in some of the articles. Although definite evidences are not found but some poems with patriotic themes, seem to be written by prisoners, are also found in the newspaper.

On the top of the title page of this newspaper Iqbal couplet was published.

ساری جہان سے اچھاہندوستان ہمارا ہم بلبلیں ہیں اسکی دہ گلستان ہمارا

This verse of Iqbal was also written on the Hindi version of this newspaper along with "Bande mataram" on the left side. But the Hindostan (Urdu version) did not have the central 'bande mataram'.

Diversity in style is also observed for presenting different contents. Military language has been used in writing reports related to war but text related to pan-islamic contents had a religious empathy.

A few random topics among the topics discussed in this newspaper are given below in Urdu language.

جہاد، جرمنی کی نئی فتح، مصر میں انگریزوں کی خوفناک حکومت، انگریزی ظلم کے خلاف ہند وستان میں بغادت، سنگاپور میں ہندوستانیوں نے جرمنوں کو بحاما، جرمنی کے دوبڑے فتوحات، انگریز مسلمانوں کے مسجدوں اور دیگر مبر ک مقامات کو غارت کر رہے ہیں، پیٹر زبر گ میں قحط کا خطرہ، ہندوستان میں بے چینی، روس کے بر خلاف کوہ قاف میں تر کوں کی فتح، تر کوں کی نئی عظیم الشان فتح د شمنان اسلام کے بر خلاف انگریزوں کوشکست فاش نہر سویز اور شہر بصر ہ پر ، مصر کی ازادی جمال پاشا کی تقریر ، جرمنی کا انگلستان پر ہوائی حملہ انگریزوں میں خوف، ایر ان میں اواز، ہندوستان میں بغاوت، ہندوستان اور حب الوطنی، انگریزوں کا ظلم 1857 میں، جرمن کی تازہ فتح، ہندوستان سے خبر، مشرق اور مغرب میں جرمنی کی فتوحات، جرمن اور اسٹر پا کی فتح، افریقہ اور ایشامیں جہاد، انگریزوں کی نفرت اسلام ہے، ترکی فوج کی شاندار ہتھیار بندی، ہندوستان میں ہل چل، جرمنی کاعر وج، انگریزی افواج میں افسر وں کا جانی نقصان، درہ دانیال پر تر کوں کی تازہ فتخ، ہندوستانی سیاہیوں سے خطاب، نیافتوہ شریف، مختصر جنگی خبر س، ہندوستان میں بے چینی، جنگ اطالیہ، انگریزی جالبازی مانی پر، ہندوستانی حب الوطنی، ہندوستان میں فوجوں کی بغادت، لڑائی کی تازہ خبریں، آم کی فصل، دغاباز انگستان، یولیس اور ڈاکخانہ، انگریزی عذاب، مسجد کی بنیاد، جرمنی میں ایک حامع مسجد کاا ختیام، جرمنی میں بہقام ونز ڈورپ مسجد کا اختیام، ازادی کی ضرورت، جنگی خبریں، ہندوستان میں بے چینی، مولو ی حسن فنہی کا وعظ، اٹلی تر کوں ے بر خلاف جنگ کا اعلان دیت ہے، مٹی کے برتن، مشرق میں فتح کا جلوس، ہانگ کا نگ میں جہاز کا سخت

حاد نه، برلن میں مسلمان قیدی، ہندوستان کی خبریں، حب الوطنی کی ایک نظم، ہندوستان میں ریلوں کی خرابی،زمانه جنگ میں جرمنی کی تد نی حالت،ٹری یولی کی ازادی، بلگر پاکا جنگ میں داخلہ، وعظ بموقعہ بقر عيد، جرمني كي موجوده تهدني حالت، افغانستان ميں حرفت كي ترتي، جرمني كي تهدني حالت، جنگ مالكن، انگریزوں کی بے رحمی، ایران میں روسیوں کی قصابانہ حرکات بمعہ تصاویر، انگریز ہندوستانی سیاہیوں سے کیسے سلوک کر تاہے ، مشرقی افریقہ میں جرمن اور مسلمان دوست ، سر دیا کا عنقریب خاتمہ اور استنبول کاراستہ صاف، ہند وستان میں چیز وں کی قیمت اور جنگ، بمبئ میں بے چینی، تر کی جنگی جہاز، جرمنی کاجنگی قرضه، ہندوستان میں جنگلی جانوروں اور سانپوں سے اموات، عراق میں انگریزوں کا ظلم، جنگی ہوائی جہاز، جرمنی کاوزیر اعظم اورامن کا مدعا، دبلی میں پولیس افسر کا قتل، جنگ کی قیمت، قومی قانون کے برخلاف انگریزوں کا نیاجرم، ہندوستان میں ٹیکس کا ظلم، درہ دانیال کی فتح، تر کی کے جانشین کی وفات اور تخت سے دست بر داری، انگلستان اور سر دیا، 1915 میں ہندوستان کی مالی حالت، انگریز ہندوستان پر کس طرح حکومت کرتے ہیں، ہندوستان میں ایک نیا قانون جس کو جی چاہے گر فتار کرلو، نہر سویز پر ہندوستانی سیاہیوں میں قومی جوش، پنجاب میں بے چینی، انگریز ہندوستانی سیاہیوں کے کیا قدر کرتے ہیں، انگریزی عدالتوں میں کوئی انصاف نہیں، روس کا کاغذی روبیہ ، ہندوستان کو انگریز لوٹ رہے ہیں، ہندوستان میں غارت گری، ہندوستان کو انگریز نشہ پلا رہے ہیں، جرمنی کی وزیراعظم کی تقریر، جرمنی میں زخمیوں کی خدمت، جایان کیاسبق سیکھا تاہے ، ہندوستانی سیابی کی عزت، کو تل مارہ کې فتح، بثالي سوڈان ميں جہاد استنول ميں معتبر خبر ، ہندوستان ميں امن ميں خلل، ہندوستاني فوجوں ميں ا قومی حرکت،

Total of 84 issues published. Last issue in Urdu as well as in hindi was published on 21st August 1915. Time span between two numbers is from a few days up to a few weeks.

A year-wise list of available and missing copies of this newspaper in the Berlin State Library is given below.

1915

Issue	Date	Issue	Date
No.		No.	
1	Missing	13	17 th August 1915
2	9th April 1915	14	20 th August 1915
3	30 th April 1915	15	7 th September 1915
4	23 rd April 1915	16	22 nd September 1915
5	27th April 1915	17	11 th October 1915
6	5 th May 1915	18	21 st October 1915
7	20 th May 1915	19	2 nd November 1915
8	25 th June 1915	20	6 th November 1915
9	14 th July 1915	21	7 th December 1915
10	27 th July 1915	22	20 th December 1915
11	4 th August 1915	23	23 rd December 1915
12	10 th August 1915		

1916

Issue	Date	Issue	Date
No.		No.	
24	4th January 1916	36	14 th July 1916
25	18th January 1916	37	17 th July 1916
26	28th January 1916	38	5 th August 1916
27	7 th February 1916	39	22 nd August 1916
28	28 th February 1916	40	Missing
29	7 th March 1916	41	Missing
30	28 th March 1916	42	7 th October 1916
31	1 st April 1916	43	20 th October 1916
32	26 th April 1916	44	2 nd November 1916
33	14 th May 1916	45	15 th November 1916
34	31 st May 1916	46	20 th November 1916
35	30 th June 1916	47/48	28 th December 1916

Issue No.	Date	Issue	Date
		No.	
49	10 th January 1917	61	16 th September 1917
50	2 nd February 1917	62	26 th September 1917
51	13th February 1917	63	9 th October 1917
52	19 th March 1917	64	22 nd October 1917
53	31 st March 1917	65	19 th November 1917
54	20 th April 1917	66	3 rd December 1917
55	10 th May 1917	67	7 th December 1917
56	15 th May 1917	68	Missing
57	17 th June 1917		
58	30 th June 1917		
59	11 th July 1917		
60	11th August 1917		

Distribution of some camp newspapers were very restrictive. El Dschihad and Hindostan newspapers of the camp were not allowed outside of the two camps. In Spring 1917 South Asian prisoners of war were shifted from Wunsdorf to Rumania. Wunsdorf was declared a central camp for prisoners of war. At that time the strategy of propaganda also changed and the distribution of this camp newspaper became less restrictive.³⁵

1918

Issue No.	Date	No.	Date
69	24 th January 1918	78	6 th May 1918
70	28th January 1918	79	18 th May 1918
71	16th February 1918	80	5 th June 1918
72	28th February 1918	81	Missing
73	4 th March 1918	82	11 th July 1918
74	11 th March 1918	83	27 th July 1918
75	26 th March 1918	84	21 st August 1918
76	5 th April 1918		
77	17 th April 1918		

Conclusion

An Urdu camp newspaper, Hindostan, started in 1915 and continued till 1918. It is a unique historical source. It was distributed among the prisoners of war in two camps, namely Wunsdorf and Zossen camps situated in Berlin. Language and script of the newspaper was decided after a thorough research by the experts in these two camps. Main purpose of this newspaper was propagation of the idea of jihad among the Muslim prisoners of war. Authors and translators of the articles are not mentioned in the newspaper, however, archives show that they were Muslims, Hindus and Germans. Thematic analysis methodology was employed and found three dominant categories in the themes of the articles published in this newspaper. In the first category we found articles related to Germany and particularly its Islam-friendly aspects have been described. Articles related to richness in natural resources, economic and cultural prosperity of Germany are also found in this category. The second dominant theme in the newspaper is the information regarding political situation in the world. In the third category articles have been placed related jihad, religious sentiments and patriotic feelings of prisoners as well as articles related to nationalist sentiments. There are also contents to develop an image of Britain exploiting her colonies. Through this newspaper one can explore new avenues of WWI and other global conflicts.

Hindostan Urdu Newspaper, No. 2 (9th April 1915)



Hindostan (Urdu Newspaper) No. 12 (10th August 1915)



Lat issue of Hindostan (84, 21st August 1918)



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⁷ Ibid., p. 232

⁸ Ibid., p. 249

⁹ Liebau, Heike (2018). A voice recording, a portrait photo and three drawings: tracing the life of a colonial soldier, Working Papers No. 20, 2018, Berlin, ZMO (Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient), p.5.

¹⁰ Liebau, Heike (2011). Hindostan A Camp Newspaper for South Asian Prisoners of War One in Germany, In When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings, edited by Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau and Ravi Ahuja, New Delhi, Social Sciences Press, 2011, p. 240

¹¹ Ibid., p. 234

¹² The Berlin Indian Independence Committee. It was founded in September 1914 in Berlin. Intellectuals of different nationalities were involved in it. It was jointly working with NfO and German foreign office for propaganda among their fellow countrymen.

¹³ Liebau, Heike (2011). Hindostan A Camp Newspaper for South Asian Prisoners of War One in Germany, In When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings, edited by Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau and Ravi Ahuja, New Delhi, Social Sciences Press, 2011, p. 234

¹⁴ Halfmoon camp was one of the numerous special camps erected for specific groups of POWs or for a specific purpose.

¹⁵ Liebau, Heike (2018). A voice recording, a portrait photo and three drawings: tracing the life of a colonial soldier, Working Papers No. 20, 2018, Berlin, ZMO (Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient), p. 4.

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²² Liebau, Heike (2011). Hindostan A Camp Newspaper for South Asian Prisoners of War One in Germany, In When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings, edited by Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau and Ravi Ahuja, New Delhi, Social Sciences Press, 2011, p. 241

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³¹ He knew German, English and Urdu (p.239)

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