
English Translations of the Holy Quran in the Sub-Continent

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ABSTRACT Islam being the religion of approximately one-fifth of mankind, the message of the Holy Quran assumes universal importance. Given the vast diversity of social and cultural outlook among the followers of Islam, English translations and commentaries of the Holy Quran play a fundamental role in decoding the Qur'ānic message to the non-Arab reader.

Arabic, the language of the Holy Quran, known as one of the most eloquent languages, has a singular advantage over other languages in explaining the spirit of the Holy Qur'ān. That is why the early years of Muslim history do not show any translation of the Holy Qur'ān.

However, when the Muslims power declined, and most of the Muslim world, came under colonial rule the imperialists sought to perpetuate their supremacy by depriving the Muslims of their legacy. This led to English translations of the Holy Qur'ān sponsored by the colonial powers. In an attempt to thwart these conspiracies and to convey the true message of Islam to the English speaking people, the Muslim scholars of the time came up with their own English translations of the Holy Qur'ān. Since then a large number of English translations and commentaries of the Holy Qur'ān have appeared in print. The Scholars in the Sub-continent like Daryabadi, Yusuf Ali, and Muhammad Asad etc. played a key role in translating the meaning of the Holy Qur'ān. A Survey of these scholarly works pointing out the maltranslation of Qadianies is here.

Key words: Quran ,Translation, sub-Continent

Islam being the religion of approximately one-fifth of mankind, the message of the Holy Quran assumes universal importance. Given the vast diversity of social and cultural outlook among the followers of Islam, English translations and commentaries of the Holy Quran play a fundamental role in decoding the Qur'ānic message to the non-Arab reader.

when the Muslims faced a decline, and there was colonial rule over most of the Muslim world, the enemies stepped forward to gain an upper hand and to deprive the Muslims of their legacy. So English translations of The Holy Qur'ān were started by them. To confront those and to convey the

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true spirit of the Holy Qur'ān, the Muslim scholars of that era decided to translate the Holy Qur'ān so that all the conspiracies of the enemies may Become ineffective. Following were the main causes behind this move:

- The abolition of the Islamic Caliphate.
- The rise of Qadiyanis, who were active in translating the Holy Qur'ān into European languages to proclaim their ideological uniqueness.
- The appearance of translations made by non-Muslims, whether missionaries or Orientalists, and danger felt by Muslims as a result of the usually erroneous and confounding nature of these translations.¹

We can honestly say that there must be a reason of preaching Islam in the later translations. Since then there are a plenty of English translations of the Holy Qur'ān. Scholars of the Sub-continent also rose to the occasion and contributes in this regard. We shall view some of them in the coming pages.

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The History of the translation of the Holy Qur'ān is very old. A prevailing notion is: "The first translation of any part of the Qur'ān occurred during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). The Muslims in Abyssinia, under the leadership of J'afar ibn AbiTalib, recited the first few verses of Surah Maryam to the Negus, which were translated to him. This incident occurred before the migration (*Hijrah*) of the Prophet (ﷺ) to Madīna and is probably the first recorded instance of any translation of the Qur'an.² Another incident was of Abū Sufyān translating to the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius (610 – 641 AD), the Prophet's letter containing the Qur'anic verse 3:64. And yet another reference is of Salmān al-Fārsi translating *Surah al-Fātihah* for some Iranian converts to Islam.³

However, the first English translation of the Holy Qur'ān was inspired by the French translation of Du Ryer (1647).⁴ In the following pages a survey of English translations of the Holy Qur'ān in the Sub Continent is being given. We can divide these works into two major catagories; Muslim and Qadiyani.

QADIYANI TRANSLATIONS

- 1. The Holy Qur'ān translated with short notes 'based on the Holy Qur'ān or authentic traditions of the Prophet, or New Testament or scientific facts' by Mohammad Abdul Hakim Khan Patiala, 1905.**

This called the first English Translation of the Holy Qur'ān by a Muslim.⁵ However, according to Kidwa'i this is the first Qadiyani translation. This was a simple and straight translation however, was badly stained by literalism. It did not include Arabic text. This contains Rejection of miracles, Jinn and physical, material bounties of Paradise. Kidwa'i criticizes, "It is indeed inexplicable how for more than a century MAHK's work, abounding in Qadyani contents and other serious blemishes, escaped critical scrutiny. It, nonetheless, deserves the unenviable distinction of being the first Qadyani English translation of the Qur'ān, as to the place of the first Muslim English translation."⁶

- 2. The Holy Qur'ān, Arabic Text, Translation and Commentary, by Muhammad Ali Lahori, Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha't Islam, Lahore, 1917.**

This Qadiyani translation is supplemented by exhaustive notes and a lengthy introduction. According to Kidwai's review, "the translator grossly twists and misinterprets the Qur'ānic verses related to the Promised Messiah and the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) as the seal of Prophethood. Further, it denies the occurrence of some miracles mentioned in the Qur'ān."⁷

- 3. Translation of the Holy Qur'ān by GhulamSarwar, Singapore, 1920.**

Another translation by a Muslim Scholar of the Sub-continent does not include Arabic Text and any notes. Although he wrote a critique of early translators of the holy Qur'an (Sale, Rodwell and Palmer) yet he mostly approves the translation and approach of Muhammad Ali's translation.⁸ He himself wrote about his work, "I have attempted to be as clear as I can, and for this purpose I have divided my sentences into short phrases-- a translator should attempt to make his style clear and vigorous my endeavour [has been] to make my translation both simple and exact."⁹

- 4. The Holy Qur'ān by Sher Ali, Rabwah, Pakistan, 1955.**

This is the official Qadyani translation of the Qur'ān as Sher Ali was the main contributor to the official Qadyani English translation published in three volumes (1947-1963). Since 1955, however, a single volume edition crediting the translation to Sher Ali has been regularly issued by the official Qadyani missionary publishing house –Oriental and Religious Publishing Corporation, Rabwah, Pakistan. It has interpolated more blatantly the Qadyani doctrines. It retains the faults of

misinterpretation and mistranslation found in Muhammad Ali's translation.¹⁰ Now its revised edition is available.

5. The Holy Qur'ān: English Translation and Commentary by Malik GulamFarid, Rabwah, 1969.¹¹

As this is a Qadyani translation of the Qur'ān, its commentary is fully based on MirzaBashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad's Urdu Translation of the Qur'ān. the work is pitiable specimen of obnoxious Qadyanism that seeks to play havoc with the Qur'ān.¹²

6. The Qur'ān: Arabic Text and English Translation by Zafrullah Khan London, 1970.

This is a notable and one of the latest Qadyani translations. It does not have any separate explanatory notes, but combines his thoughts with the translated text. Zafrullah Khan followed the footsteps of other Qadyanis.¹³ He does not recognize the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) as the last Prophet. He was the foreign minister of Pakistan between 1947 and 1954.

7. The Wonderful Koran by Salahuddin Peer, Aminabad, 1971.¹⁴

Peer Salashuddin was a civil servant in Pakistan. According to Arfaque Malik, this is another Qadyani translation of the Qur'ān.¹⁵ while another scholar M. H. Khan does not place him in Qadiyani Translators instead he included him among Muslim Translators.¹⁶ According to Kidwa'i, "Salahuddin appears as a conscientious student of Qur'ān, gifted with deep and wide familiarity with tafsir corpus. He had, no doubt, an ardent desire to disseminate the message of the Qur'ān. It is an altogether different point, however, that he could not manage to deliver the same in a very presentable way."¹⁷

MUSLIM TRANSLATIONS

1. The Qur'ān: Arabic text and English translation, MirzaAbulFadl, Allahabad, India in 1911-1912.

These editions were without Arabic text and contained Sūrahs in chronological order. There were frequent references to the Bible pointing out the differences and criticizing the missionary views. A few explanatory notes were also included.¹⁸

2. The Qur'ān (Three Volumes) by MirzaHairatDehlwi, New Dehli, 1916.

This English translation neither had any commentary nor Arabic Text, while verse numbers were also confusing as they were with reference to each part not to the particular Sūrah. In fact this translation was made for 'alerting the Muslims of the Indo-Pak subcontinent to the Missionary/Orientalist onslaught against Islam and the Qur'ān'.¹⁹

3. Translation of the Holy Qur'ān from the original Arabic text by Hafiz GhulamSarwar, Woking, England, 1929-1930.

This had a detailed review of the previous translations and summary of

each Sūrah without any Arabic text. This translation could not get enough attention because soon after this were published the work of Pickthall and Abdullah Yusuf Ali.²⁰

4. The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, London in 1930.

Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936), a British man of letters, who embraced Islam in 1914, was the son of Reverend Chas Pickthall, Rector of Chillesford, Suffolk, UK. The Nizam of Hyderabad offered him a job in the state education service and sponsored his venture of English translation of the Qur'ān. In consultation with al-Azhar Ulema, especially Mustafa al-Maraghi, Pickthall published his translation in 1930.²¹ This was the first translation of the Qur'ān by a Muslim whose first language was English. This faithfully represents the sense of the original. The use of the Biblical and Jacobean English tends to be a stumbling block for an average reader. This is one of the widely used English translations. Although one review identified 147 mistakes and another review identified 248²² mistakes in this translation, but few of those mistakes were considered substantial by Kidwai.²³ Pickthall was influenced by Mohammed Ali's translation and views. For example, he argues that Prophet Mohammed's(ﷺ) night journey to the heaven was only a vision.²⁴ It has too brief notes on the necessary background of some verses.

5. 'Abdullah Yusuf Ali's The Holy Qur'ān: Translation and Commentary, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf & Sons, Lahore, 1934.

This commentary was first published in Lahore in 1934, is widely known and popular. Its printing was subsidized by Saudi Government and was distributed all over the world free of cost till 2002. With some changes it has now being published by Amana Publications, USA. The translation is in blank verse. It is in biblical English. In fact he wanted to make English an Islamic language that's why he did this work. He himself knew that there is no possibility to substitute Arabic words so he tried to give fullest meaning of the Arabic text as he expressed in the First Edition. Before the verses of a one continuous subject or story he puts in a brief summary of the event and then goes forward translating it.

6. The Holy Qur'ān with English Translation and Commentary by Abdul Majid Daryabadi was published from Lahore in 1941.

This is a faithful translation, though largely unacknowledged. The translator was initially a journalist, but later became a great scholar of the Qur'ān. His translation includes extensive commentary and emphasizes on the accuracy over any literal embellishment.²⁵ Abdulmājid Daryābādī's commentary is remarkable for its traditional approach which confirms A.R. Kidwai's description as he wrote, "Abdulmājid Daryābādī's 'The

Holy Qur'ān: with English Translation and Commentary' is, however, fully cognate with the traditional Muslim viewpoint."²⁶

7. Translation of the Glorious Holy Qur'ān with Commentary by Ali Ahmad Khan Jullundri, Lahore, 1962.

It claims to be a True and Easy translation of the Glorious Holy Qur'ān. Appended to the translation is a lengthy appendix dealing with diverse topics. However, the appendix is in a bizarre way, and slights the role of Sunna. It has numerous mistakes in the translation and the text is difficult to read."²⁷

8. The Holy Qur'ān with English Translation and Commentary according to the version of the Holy Ahlul Bait by S.V. Mir Ahmad Ali, 1964.

This translation with commentary is from the Shia point of view. The work has become a standard Shia translation. It has a rich introduction about the Qur'ān, its English translations, and the Shia doctrines. It provides useful information about the Shia-Sunni differences. It strongly refutes the view that the Shias believe in the alteration (*Tahrīf*) of the Qur'ān. It claims the Qur'ānic authority for Shia sectarian doctrines. However, there is a new print of this translation with an introduction and editing done by Yasin al-Jibouri. It has removed the introduction and avoided any comments about Shia."²⁸

9. The Holy Qur'ān: Rendered into English by AbdurRahman and Gilani, Ziauddin Tariq, Lahore, 1966.

This is an explanatory translation supplemented by brief notes, without Arabic text. It is considered as a valid and useful translation. However, it suffers from the language and presentation weaknesses. Kidwa'i wrote, "This translation has gone almost completely unnoticed. Although it is pre-1980 publication, it does not find any mention in the otherwise definitive, World Bibliography of Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur'ān: Printed Translations 1515-1980 (Istanbul, Turkey, OIC Research Centre, 1986)."²⁹

10. Al-Qur'ān: Rendered into English, by Syed Abdul Latif, Hyderabad, 1969.

This is a translation by a professor of English language who initially, translated AbulKalam Azad's Urdu translation (*Tarjumānūl Qur'ān*) in English. His own translation was published later. Instead of translating the verses of the Qur'ān word by word and clause by clause, the translator aimed at conveying the unified idea meant by the entire sentence. According to Kidwai, this translation is a faithful effort with enthusiasm, but lacking any special features."³⁰

11. The Message of the Qur'ān Presented in Perspective, Hashim Amir Ali, 1974.

It is a fairly good translation in terms of language. The aim of the

translator is reflected in the title of his translation as he has attempted to provide a high level and perspective view of the message of the Qur'ān. However, the main issue of this translation is its re-arrangement of the *Sūrah*s. The translator has devised a new *Sūrah* order, re-arranging the *Sūrah*s under five sections that he calls as the five 'books' of the Qur'ān. Going a step further, he has made up 600 sections (*Rukū*) of the Text, in place of the standard 558 sections, for, what he calls, perspective purposes. It has disturbed the traditional arrangement of the Qur'ān by making a mess of the *Sūrah* and *Rukū*' order.³¹

12. The Message of The Qur'ān, by Muhammad Asad, Gibraltar, 1980.

This is one of the widely used translations. It is very popular in the academic circles. It is translated in chaste and idiomatic English. The translator often refers to the *Tafsīr* of *Zamkhshari* and offers very logical and convincing explanations to some difficult verses. However, he uses this approach to rationalize even the miracles of Allah and appears to be reluctant to accept the literal meaning of some Qur'ānic verses. For example, he doubts the throwing of Prophet Ibrahim into fire, Jesus speaking in the cradle etc.³²

13. Al-Qur'ān: A Contemporary Translation by Ahmad Ali, Karachi, 1984.

The translator has background in teaching English and literature as well as in diplomacy. His translation has fluent idiomatic English. However, it suffers from a liberal approach and allegorical interpretations in dealing with certain miracles and commands of the Qur'ān. According to Kidwai's review, "It has several instances of mistranslation and it contains unorthodox, apologetic and pseudo-rationalistic views on hell, etc."³³

14. The Meaning of the Qur'ān by M.A.K. Pathan, 1993.

M.A.K. Pathan was a veterinary graduate who served in that capacity for 30 years in the Indian Army. M.A.K. Pathan's *The Meaning of the Qur'ān* is patently fallacious in both its conception and execution. Because of its outrageous attempt to present a garbled meaning and message of the Qur'ān and of all things Islamic, this work does more of a disservice to the cause of the Qur'ān.³⁴

15. The Qur'ān by Wahiduddin Khan, New Delhi, India, 2009.

The present work is English version of the author's earlier Urdu explanatory translation of the Holy Qur'ān, *Tadhkir al-Qur'ān* published in 1985. However this fact has not been mentioned. "The level of translation is fairly good. The translator has done a good job in articulating the meaning and message of the Holy Qur'ān in lucid,

easy to comprehend English. Remarkably it is faithful to both the Qur'ānic text and to Khan's Urdu rendering in *Tadhkir al-Qur'ān*. Appended to the work are a few explanatory notes.”³⁵

There are also some English translations from Urdu works of some reknown Scholars in the Sub-continent. These are:

- **Kanz ul Iman by Ahmad Raza Khan**
This is translated by Prof. Shah Faridulhaq and published by Dar ul 'Ulum Amjadia, Karachi, Pakistan, 1990
- **Tafheem al-Qura'n my Sayyid Moududi**
Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari translated this under the title, “Towards Understanding the Qura'n” published in 2006
- **Maariful Qura'n by Mufti Muhammad Shafi**
The translation was started by Prof. Muhammad Hasan Askari and completed by Prof. Muhammad Shamin. Mufti Taqi Usmany was the initiator.
- **Zia al-Qura'n by Peer Karam Shah Al Azhari**
The translation of this work under the title of JAMAL UL QURA'n by Prof. Anis Ahmad Sheikh has been published by Zia-ul-Qura'n Publications, Lahore, Pakistan.

This ever growing list of Translations and commentaries is latest till 2011 and based on the works of Ismat Benark, Mofakhir Hussain, Michel Sells and specially A.R. kidwai. The study shows that Muslim Scholars of the Sub-continent are not only aware of the need of hour but also trying to confront it practically.

This need is ever growing and Qura'nic message is being unfold continuously. The complete survey of the work done in this regard and specially with reference to Qura'nic studies on modern problems of this age is needed. There should be a comprehensive survey of the modern works regarding English Translations and Commentaries whether complete or incomplete, original or retranslations from the other languages. This would be a great help for the modern students who have been entangled with the Social or Scientific subjects and are groping for real knowledge about the Holy Qur'ān in the maze of English translations.

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