A Critical Study of ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī’s Translation and Commentary of the Holy Qur’ān in the Light of First Three Editions

Dr. Hafiz Khurshid Ahmad Qadri

Assistant Professor, Department of Arabic & Islamic Studies, GC University Lahore

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Sultan Shah

Dean, Faculty of Languages, Islamic & Oriental Learning, GC University Lahore

Abstract

‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī has been a noteworthy translator and commentator of the Holy Qur’ān. His endeavor has survived the test of time with more than 200 editions. The first edition did not come as a whole but in piecemeal fashion in thirty episodes. The very first edition had some problems with transliteration, names and number of verses of some Surahs. There are some un-resorted claims in the preface too. His educational background and personal literary taste let his effort lag behind the notch he set for himself. The authors will try to highlight all the above-mentioned aspects of his rendition. Though it has refined over the course of time due to the efforts of many researchers but the authors here intend to record some of the original facts related to the earlier editions. This establishes the viability of the topic for he is the most published translator till date. Methodical style of investigation is opted, coupled with a bit of analysis and comparison aiming a compact, far-reaching and all-encompassing article on his rendition. The question which drives this study is whether ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali’s translation and commentary in vogue is same as it was in the first three editions. We expect it to be a very useful and comprehensive input in the academic circles. Some salient features of A. Yūsuf ‘Alī’s Translation of the Holy Qur’ān, to support the argument, will also be discussed in this research paper. It is recommended that the art of transliteration is to be taught in all the research institutions of social sciences.

Keywords: Translation, peculiarity, transliteration, symbolism, allegory, mystic approach, surah, paraphrase.

Introduction

‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī (1872-1953), the eminent translator of the Holy Qur’ān in English was born on 4th April 1872 in a textile town of Gujrāt. It was a part of Bombay presidency during the British rule.[1]

1 M A Sherif, Searching for Solace: A biography of Abdullah Yusuf Ali Interpreter of the Qur’ān (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2000), 4

His father Khān Bahādur Yūsuf ‘Alī Allah Bakhsh (d.1891) served in Sūrat Police Office. Though belonging to the Bohra community ‘Abdullah’s family neither had any connection with Dā’ūdī[1] subsect nor with Sulaimānī[2] but Sunnī Bohras.[3]

Typical of that era, his early education was based on recitation, learning and understanding of the Holy Qur’ān.[4]Formal education started from the Anjuman-i-Islam School in Bombay (now Mumbai).[5] He did his matriculation from Wilson School in 1887.[6] He got his B.A. degree from Bombay University in 1891. In June 1895, he received his degree in Law from the University of Cambridge.[7] Then there was no looking back and he joined Indian Civil Service on 23rd January, 1896 as Assistant Magistrate and Collector in Saharanpur in U.P. Life went on smoothly till 1914 when he resigned from ICS due to personal reasons.[8] After serving in Hyderabad Deccan’s administration for a short time he joined Islamia College Lahore as Principal in 1925.[9] He joined the same college as a principal for the second term

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[1]The Dā’ūdī Bohras are a religious denomination within the Ismā'īlī branch of Shi‘a Islam. The word Bohra comes from the Gujarati word vohrvu or vyavahar, meaning “to trade,” in reference to one of their traditional occupations which continues to this day. Dā’ūdī Bohras are a subset of Islam. They are traced

as: Dā’ūdī, Taiyebi, Musta'li, Isma'ili, Shia, Muslims. The Dā’ūdī Bohra Muslims trace their heritage to the Fatimid Caliphate.

[2] The Sulaimānī branch of Tayyibi Isma'ilism is an Islamic community, of which around 70 thousand members reside in Yemen, while a few thousands of Sulaimānī Bohras can be found in India. The Sulaimānīs are headed by a *da'i al-mutlaq* from the Makrami family.

3 K.K. Azīz A Biography of Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī, A Life Forlorn, (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2010), 2

Sunni Bohras are one of the communities from the state of Gujarat in India. In the 15th century, there was schism in Bohra community of Patan, Gujarat as many converted from Sh‘ia Isma‘ili Mustaa‘li fiqh to Sunni Hanafi fiqh. The leader of this conversion movement to Sunni was Syed Jafar Ahmad Shirazi Patani, himself a Bohra convert to Sunni Islam. This new group was known as Jafari Bohras and Patani Bohras. In 1538, Syed Jafar Ahmad Shirazi, a missionary from Patan, convinced Patani Bohras to cease social relations with Ismaili Bohras. This resulted in a large conversion, almost 80%, from Shia Ismaili Fiqh to Sunni Hanafi Fiqh.

4 Ibid, 2

5 Ibid, 3

6 M A Sherif, Searching for Solace, 5

7 Ibid, 10

8 Ibid, 19-32

9 K.K. Azīz, A Biography of Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī, A Life Forlorn, 24,30-31

of same length in 1935[1] and resigned from the post in 1937. During second tenure he published his Magnum Opus ‘The Holy Qur’ān, Text, Translation and Commentary’ in part wise fashion.[2] ‘Abdullah kicked the bucket in 1953 in London.[3]

Peculiarity of ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī

There are many aspects which highlight the peculiarity of ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī as a translator of the Holy Qur’ān:

1. He was the first translator of the Holy Qur’ān who was proficient in all the major eastern (Arabic, Persian, Urdu) and western languages (French, Latin and English).[4]
2. He opted Arabic as an optional subject in ICS examination and came top of the list, performing particularly well in languages and gaining out of 400, 385 in Urdu and 340 in Arabic.[5] ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī obtained 40 marks more in the Urdu and Arabic papers than his nearest rival.[6]
3. ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī was also a genuine research worker and worked hard on many educational projects with Punjab university successfully.
4. No translator of the Qur’ān was prolific writer as ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī had been.

Literature Review

‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī’s life, works and particularly his translation and commentary of the Qur’ān are the topics in vogue for more than four scores. His articles and speeches were published in the reputed journals and papers of England and the Subcontinent. His first

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1 The Crescent, Magazine of the Islamia College, Lahore, Summer Number Editorial Notes (Lahore: May-June, 1935) 1

2 A. Yūsuf ‘Alī, The Holy Qur’ān, English Translation and Commentary (with ‘Arabic Text), Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf (Lahore: Kashmīrī Bazar, 1934), Title Page

3 M A Sherif, Searching for Solace, 139

4 M A Sherif, Searching for Solace, 16

5 Ibid, 11

6 Ibid, 16

publication came to the surface in 1900.[1] As far the writing about Islam is concerned it was appeared in 1917[2]but a writing purely about the sublime book was the first part or installment of translation and commentary of the Holy Qur'ān which was published in June 1934.[3] Khurshid Kamal 'Azīz(1927-2009) popularly named as K.K. 'Azīz has published five volumes of 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī's writings. One of them is, 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī's Notes on the Qur'ān[4]. It is a collection of introductions and prefaces of different editions of 'Alī's translation and commentary of the Qur'ān and fourteen appendices. There is not any analysis or criticism in this compilation.

Muhammad Haneef Shahid compiled "Writings of 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī". In this compendium there are two critical articles: "Yūsuf 'Alī's Translation of the Qur'ān"[5] by Arthur Jefferey (1892-1959) and "Mr. Yūsuf 'Alī's Translation of the Qur'ān"[6] by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall. Present authors have consulted both the reviews but no reviewer pondered over the discrepancies like problems with transliteration, number of verses in a particular Surah, names of Surahs, mentioned in 'Alī's version and exact dates of publication of thirty installments. "Searching for Solace, a biography of 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, Interpreter of the Qur'ān" is a great work but it does not have any analysis or criticism about the translation or commentary of the Holy Qur'ān by 'Ali. The files of "The Muslim World Book Review"[7] are swarmed with the analysis, comments and criticism on 'Abdullah

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1 Ibid, 213

2 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, Muhammad-A towering personality (Woking: Islamic Review, Vol. 5, Nos. 2-3, February, 1917), 60-61.

3 A. Yusuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, (Lahore: Kashmīrī Bazar, 1934), Title Page

4 K.K. Aziz(ed.), Notes on the Qur'ān (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2009), 263

5 Muhammad Haneef Shahid, Writings of Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Aibak Road, 2000), 75-88.

6 Ibid. 88-90.

7 A. R. Kidwai, Translating the Untranslatable: A survey of English Translations of the Qur'ān, The Muslim World Book Review, (London: The Islamic Foundation, 223 London Road, Leicester, LE2 1ZE, U.K. Vol.7, No. 4, Summer 1987), 66- 71

Yūsuf ‘Alī’s translation and commentary of the Qur’ān but aspects which the present researchers have highlighted never been discussed even in this esteemed journal too.

The Background of ‘Alī’s Translation

‘Alī had started his translation in 1928. By then, the 56 years old scholar had already gone through such tragedies – dishonesty of his first wife and disobeying attitude of children[1] – and “the bitter anguish of a personal sorrow” nearly unseated his reason and “made life seem meaningless”. Then he sought refuge in the Qur’ān and his long-cherished project provided him a new hope.[2] The personal circumstances and deep scars which afflicted his life and the anguish of an emotionally distraught man seeking solace are apparent in his approach to the Qur’ān. However there had been some other indirect influences of the social and political climate of the time also.

Faults in the piece-meal publication of his Translation and Commentary

A rendering of the Holy Qur’ān by the pen of a born Muslim, polyglot speaker and writer was awaited in the first half of 1930s. ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī felt the need of this holy work and started to publish the results of the project in 1934. Following is the scheme of his work:

1. The translation of the whole Holy Qur’ān did not appear at once but it made its appearance in part wise fashion. The part “I” containing the first *sīpāra* or thirtieth part of the Qur’ān الٓمٓ *Alif Lām Mīm* came to the scene in August 1934.[3] Part “I” consisted of verses 1-7 of very first *Sūra Fatihah [Sūrah al-Fatihah]* and verses 1-141 of *Sūra* II *Baqara [Sūrah al-Baqarah]*. Being an orthodox Muslim, he never considered Basmala (Tasmiah) as the first verse of every surah of the Holy Qur’ān except in surah al-Fātiḥah.

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33 M A Sherif, Searching for Solace, 28, 29, 47

2 Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī, The Holy Qur’ān, 1938, vi

3 A. Yusuf ‘Alī, The Holy Qur’ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), 1934, Title Page

2. Part "II" سَيَقُولُ(*Sayaqūl)* consisted of verses 142-252 of second *Sūrah* of the sublime book, got printed on 1st September 1934.[1]

3. Part "III" containing the third *Sīpāra* تِلكَ الرُّسُلُ(*Tilk-ar-Rusul)* which consisted of verses 253-285 (according to the title page) of the second *Sūrah* (The Heifer) and verses 1-91 of third *Sūrah* آل عمران (The Family of *'Imran*).It is a well-known fact that second *Sūrah* of the Qur'ān (*al-Baqarah* or the Heifer) consists of 286 verses. The same is mentioned in the beginning of this *Sūrah* and the last verse is numbered as 286. But the title page showed the last verse of second *Sūrah* as 285 rather than 286.Appendix I: "on the Abbreviated Letters" is also a part of the binding. This *Sīpāra* was published on 1st December 1934.[2]

4. Part "IV" containing the fourth *Sīpāra* لَن تَنَالُوا(*Lan Tanālū*) consisted of verses 92-200 of 3rd *Sūrah* and verses 1-23 of 4th *Sūrah* (*Nisāa*, or the Women). It appeared on 1st March, 1935.[3] *Sūrah* al-Nisā (wrongly transliterated as *Sūra* Nisāa) by two aspects.

Firstly, the name of the *Sūrah* is a proper noun with *Alif Lām (al)* in the beginning but A. Yūsuf 'Alī mentioned it without article *Alif-Lām*.

Secondly long vowels of Arabic are symbolized by the sign "ā", and it is also highlighted in the transliteration table given by 'Alī. An English letter cannot be used in a consecutive manner while transliterating any foreign word into English unless it is a double stressed letter i.e., *Mushaddad*. Here *Sūrah's* name "*Nisāa*" is written with two consecutive "a". first for long vowel "ā" and second for consonantal sound. Actually only "ā" for long vowel was enough. For the consonantal sound an apostrophe can be used like *al-Nisā*'.

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1 Ibid.

2 A. Yusuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, (Lahore: Kashmīrī Bazar, 1935), Title Page

3 A. Yusuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), 1935, Title Page

5. Part "V" وَّالْمُحْصَنٰتُ *(Wal-Muḥṣanāt)* consisted of verses 24-147 of the fourth *Sūra Nisāa* [*Sūrah al-Nisā'*]. It was issued on 1st July 1935.[1]

6. Part "VI" لَا يُحِبُّ اللّٰهُ *(La Yuḥibb-ullāh)* consisted of verses 148-175 of 4th *Sūrah* and verses 1-85 of 5th *Sūra Māida*. Its publication date is 1st September 1935.[2] The ending letter of 5th *Sūrah's* name is "*Hā*" which should be transliterated with the English letter "h" but here it is transliterated with short vowel "a". The article *Alif Lām* is also ignored. Actually, the name is "*Sūrah al-Māidah*".

A. Yūsuf 'Alī showed some difference of opinion in the total number of surah al-Maidah's verses. Normally the fifth sūrah's verses are considered as 120 but 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī's version showed the number as 123.[3] He divided the first, 15th and 23rd verses of sūrah al-Maidah into two.[4] Hence the total verses of sūrah al-Maidah became 123. It may not be assumed as printing mistake because in the title of the sūrah, above number is mentioned.

7. Part "VII", وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا *(Wa iẓā Sami'ū)* consisted of verses 86-123 of 5th *Sūrah Māida* [*al-Māidah*] and verses 1-110 of 6th *Sūrah* (*An'ām*).

In the words *Sami'ū* and *An'ām*, letter *'ain* is wrongly transliterated with an apostrophe instead of an inverted apostrophe. *Sūrah's* name "*al-An'ām*" is wrongly mentioned without article *Alif Lām*.

Part VII was printed on 1st October, 1935.[5] Appendix II, "On the *Taurāt*" and Appendix III, "On the *Injīl"* are also included in the part VII.

Taurāt and *Injil* are *Arbaic* pronunciation of the Books of Prophet Moses and Prophet Jesus (peace be upon them). These books are always mentioned in the

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, 1938, 238

4 Ibid, 246

5 A. Yusuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text),1935, Title Page

Qur'ān with preceding *Alif-Lām* i.e., "*al-Taurāt*" "*al-Injīl*" but 'Alī mentioned the names of the books without Article *Alif-Lām*.

8. Part "VIII", وَلَو اَنَّنَا(*Wa lau annanā)* consisted of verses 111-165 of 6th *Sūra An'ām* [*Sūrah al-An'ām*] and verses 1-87 of 7th *Sūra A'rāf*. Part VIII appeared on 1st November, 1935.[1]

The name of 7th *Sūrah al-A'raf* was written there without preceding *Alif-Lām* and inverted apostrophe.

9. Part "IX" قَالَ المَلَاُ(*Qāl-al-mala-u)* comprised of verses 88-206 of 7th *Sūra A'raf* [*Sūrah al-A'rāf*] and verses 1-40 of 8th *Sūrah Anfāl*.

The name of 8th *Sūrah* is "*al-Anfāl*" but it is mentioned without article *Alif Lām*. The actual name of ninth part is *Qal-al-mala-'u,* with second last letter as an apostrophe but it is without this sign.

Appendices IV and V, "Egyptian Chronology and Israel" and "Egyptian Religion and its steps towards Islam" are also included in this part.

It was published on 1st December, 1935.[2]

10. Part "X", وَاعلَمُوا(*Wa'lamū* [*Wa'lamū*]) contained verses 41-75 of 8th *Sūrah, Tauba*. This part appeared on 4th January, 1936.[3]

The name of 9th *Sūrah* "*al-Taubah*" is mentioned without preceding *Alif-Lām* and affixing "h" both in *Sūrah and al- Taubah.*

11. Part "XI" يَعتَذِرُونَ(*Ya'taẓirnūa)* of the Holy Qur'ān comprised two incomplete and one complete *Sūrah*. Verses 94-129 of 9th *Sūra Tauba* [*Sūrah al-Taubah*], verses 1-

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[1] Ibid.

[2] A. Yusuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), 1935, Title Page

[3] A. Yusuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, (Lahore: Kashmīrī Bazar, 1936), Title Page

109 of 10th *Sūra [Sūrah] Yūnus* and verses 1-5 of 11th *Sūra, [Sūrah] Hūd* are included in this part. It was published on 1st February, 1936[1].

The opening word of 11th part يَعتَذِرُونَ *(Ya'taẓirūna)* is mis-transliterated as "*Ya'taẓirnūa*" which should be "*Ya'taẓirūna*"

The letter [ع] *'aīn* is wrongly symbolized with apostrophe rather than an inverted apostrophe.

12. Part "XII", وَمَا مِن دَآبَّةٍ (*Wa ma min dābbatin)* had verses 6-123 of 11th *Sūrah* (*Hūd*) and verses 1-52 of 12th *Sūra [Sūrah] Yūsuf*. This part appeared in May, 1936[2].

13. Part "XIII", وَمَا أُبَرِّئُ (*Wa mā Ubarri-u)*, had four *Sūrahs* verses 53-111 of 12th *Sūrah* (*Yūsuf*) verses 1-43 of 13th *Sūrah* (*Ra'd*), verses 1-52 of 14th *Sūrah* (*Ibrāhīm*) and verse 1 of 15th *Sūrah* (*Hijr*). This part was published in June 1936[3].

In the name of 13th *Sūra [Sūrah*] (*Ra'd*) and 15th *Sūra [Sūrah]* (*Hijr*) preceding *Alif-Lām* was ignored; (*Sūrah al-Ra'd*) (*Sūrah al-Ḥijr*) and letter (ع) *'ain* is characterized with an apostrophe (Ra'd) which is infact an inverted apostrophe, as (al-Ra'd). On title page the name of 15th *Sūrah* is *Hijr* but it is the only *Sūrah* in 'Alī's version-in the text- which is named correctly with preceding *Alif- Lām i-e al- Ḥijr* .It should be noted that the correct spelling are in the text, the title page persist with the same mistake.

Appendix VI, "Allegorical Interpretation of the story of Joseph" is also included as an appendix.

14. Part "XIV" رُبَمَا(*Rubamā)* comprised two *Sūrahs* verses 2-99 of 15th *Sūra Hijr* [*Sūrah al-Hijr]* and verses 1-128 of 16th *Sūra Naḥl* [*Sūrah al-Naḥl*]. This part got printed in July, 1936[1].

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] A. Yusuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text),1936, Title Page

15. Part "XV", سُبۡحٰنَ الَّذِیۡ *Subḥān-al-laẕī)* contains verses of two *Sūrahs*. Verses 1-111 of *Sūrah* 17th (*Banī Isrā-īl*) and verses 1-74 of 18th *Sūrah* (*Kahf*). It was published in August, 1936[2].

There is a problem in the transliteration of the word اسرائیل *Isrā'īl* but it is *Isrā-īl* which is slightly different than that of the correct one, without apostrophe after fourth letter ā. The name of 18th *Sūrah* transliterated without article *Alif-Lām and last 'h' of Sūrah.* "*Sūra Kahf*" should be *Sūrah al-Kahf*.

16. Part "XVI", قَالَ اَلَمۡ(*Qāla-Alam),* consisted of verses 75-110 of 18th *Sūra Kahf* [*Sūrah al-Kahf*], verses 1-98 of 19th *Sūra* [*Sūrah]Maryam* and verses 1-135 of 20th *Sūrah* (*Ṭā-Hā*). It appeared in September, 1936[3]. Appendix VII, "Who was *Ẕul-qarnain*?" was included in Part "XVI".

17. Part "XVII", اِقۡتَرَبَ(*Iqtarab),* comprised verses 1-112 of *Sūrah* 21 (*Anbiyāa*) and verses 1-78 of *Sūrah* 22 (*Ḥajj*).

The Names of both the *Sūrahs* were without article *Alif-Lām*, *Sūra Anbiyāa* and *Sūra Ḥajj*. The correct version is *Sūrah al-Anbiyā'* and *Sūrah al-Ḥajj*. There are two "āa" in the name of *Sūrah* 21. One "ā" for the long vowel was enough and for the consonantal sound an apostrophe might be used. It was issued in October, 1936[4].

18. Part XVIII, قَدۡ اَفۡلَحَ (*Qad aflaḥa),* had verses 1-118 of *Sūrah* 23 (*Mū-minūn*), verses 1-64 of 24th *Sūrah* (*Nūr*) and verses 1-20 of 25th *Sūrah* (*Furqān*). It appeared in October, 1936[5].

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[1] A. Yusuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text),1936, Title Page

[2] Ibid.

[3] A. Yusuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), 1936, Title Page

[4] A. Yusuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), 1936, Title Page

[5] Ibid.

The names of above three *Sūrahs* were transliterated without article *Alif-Lām*. Viz, *Sūra Mū-minūn* [*Sūrah al-Mu’minūn*], *Sūra Nūr* [*Sūrah al-Nūr*], *Sūra Furqān* [*Sūrah al-Furqān*]. In the name of 23rd surah there must be apostrophe before the second “m” of the word. Appendix VIII: “Mystical Interpretation of the verse of Light”, is also appended in this part.

19. Part “XIX”, وَ قَالَ الَّذِينَ (*Wa qālallaẓīna*) comprised of verses 21-77 of 25th *Sūra Furqān* [*Sūrah al-Furqān*], verses 1-227 of 26th *Sūra* (*Shu’arāa*) and verses 1-59 of 27th *Sūra* (*Naml*). It was printed in November, 1936[1].

Sūra Shu’arāa [*Sūrah al-Shu‘arā’*], *Sūra Naml* [*Sūrah al-Naml*].

One long vowel ā was enough in al-Shu‘arā and there must be inverted apostrophe in the middle. Appendix IX, “*Thamūd* Inscriptions at *al-Ḥijr*” is included in this part. *Al-Ḥijr* is the only *Sūrah* which is spelt correctly not only here but in the text as well.

20. Part “XX”, اَمَّن خَلَقَ (*Amman Khalaq*) contained verses 60-93 of 27th *Sūrah Naml* [*al-Naml*] verses 1-88 of 28th *Sūrah* (*Qaṣaṣ*) and verses 1-44 of 29th *Sūrah* (*’Ankabūt*). It was published in January 1937[2].

The names of both above *Sūrahs* were transliterated without article *Alif-Lām*. *Sūra Qaṣaṣ* [*Sūrah al- Qaṣaṣ*], *Sūra ’Ankabūt* [*Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt*]. The letter *‘ain* is mis-transliterated with an apostrophe rather than an inverted apostrophe.

21. Part “XXI”, اُتلُ مَا اُوحِيَ (*Utlu mā Ūhiya*) [’Utlumā ’ *Ū*ḥiya] consisted of verses 45-69 of *Sūrah* 29, *’Ankabūt* [*Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt*], verses 1-60 of 30th *Sūrah*, *Rūm*, verses 1-

[1] Ibid.

[2] A. Yusuf ‘Alī, The Holy Qur’ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, (Lahore: Kashmīrī Bazar, 1937), Title Page

34 of *Sūrah* 31 (*Luqmān*), verses 1-30 of *Sūrah* 32 (*Sajda*), and verses 1-30 of *Sūrah* 33 (*Aḥzāb*). It was issued in February, 1937[1].

The names of *Sūrah* number 30, 32, 33 were transliterated without article *Alif-Lām*. *Rūm* [*al-Rūm*], *Sajda* [*al-Sajdah*], *Aḥzāb* [*al-Aḥzāb*]. There should be two apostrophes in the name of 21st part as: ’Utlumā ’*Ū*ḥiya. In the name of *Sūrah* 32, the last “h” was not mentioned in *Sajda* [*Al-Sajdah*]. Appendix X, “First Contact of Islam with World Movements” and Appendix “XI” “Comparative Chronology of the Early Years of Islam” are also included in this part.

22. Part XXII, وَمَن يَّقنُتْ (*Wa man yaqnut*) consisted of verses 31-73 of *Sūrah* 33 *Aḥzab* [*al-Aḥzāb*], verses 1-54 of *Sūrah Saba* the 34th, verses 1-45 of 35th *Sūrah, Fāṭir* and verses 1-21 of 36th *Sūrah*, *Yā-Sīn*. It was published in March, 1937[2].

23. Part XXIII وَ مَا لِيَ(*Wa ma liya*) consisted of verses 22-83 of 36th *Sūrah* (*Yā-Sīn*), verses 1-182 of 37th Sūrah (*Ṣāffāt*), verses 1-188 of 38th *Sūrah* (*Ṣād*), verses 1-31 of *Sūrah* 39th (*Zumar*). It was printed in April, 1937[3].

The names of *Sūrahs* 37 and 39 were transliterated without articles *Alif-Lām. Sūrah* 37 *Ṣāffāt* is *al-Ṣāffāt* and *Sūrah* 39 *Zumar is al-Zumar*.

24. Part XXIV, فَمَن اَظلَمُ(*Fa man aẓlam*) consisted of verses 32-75 of *Sūrah* 39th (*Zumar*) [*al-Zumar*], verses 1-85 (*Mū-min*), verses 1-46 (*Hā-Mīm*). It was printed in May, 1937[4].

The name of 40th *Sūrah* was transliterated with long vowel *Mū-min* but it should be *al-Mu’min* with preceding *Alif Lām* and an apostrophe after the second letter

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[1] A. Yusuf ‘Alī, The Holy Qur’ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), 1937, Title Page

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] A. Yusuf ‘Alī, The Holy Qur’ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), 1937, Title Page

"u". At the title page of 24th part of the Holy Qur'ān *Sūrah* 41 was mentioned as *Hā-Mīm* but actually it is "*Hā-Mīm al-Sajdah*" which was ironically mentioned inside but without article *Alif-Lām* and "h" at the last as: "*Hā-Mīm Sajda*" which is an incomplete transliteration.

25. Part XXV, إِلَيهِ يُرَدُّ (*Ilaihi Yuraddu*), consisted of verses 47-54 of *Sūrah* 41st [*Hā-Mīm al-Sajdah*], verses 1-53 of *Sūrah* 42nd (*Shūrā*), verses 1-89 of *Sūrah* 43rd (*Zukhruf*) [*al- Zukhruf*], verses 1-59 of 44th surah *Dukhān* [*al- Dukhān*], verses 1-37 of 45th surah *Jāthiya* [*al-Jāthiyah*].

In the transliteration of 43rd, 44th and 45th sūrah's names, the preceding *Alif Lām* is missing and in 45th *Sūrah's* name the last "h" was also ignored by the translator 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī. It was printed in June, 1937[1]

26. Part "XXVI", حٰمٓ (*Hā-Mīm*) included verses 1-35 of *Sūrah* 46th (*Aḥqāf*), verses 1-38 of *Sūrah* 47th (*Muḥammad*), verses 1-29 of *Sūrah* 48th (*Fat-ḥ*), verses 1-18 of *Sūrah* 49th (*Hujurāt*), verses 1-45 of *Sūrah* 50th (*Qāf*) verses 1-30 of *Sūrah* 51st (*Zariyāt*). It was issued in July, 1937[2].

The names of *Sūrah* number 46, 48, 49 & 51 were transliterated without preceding *Alif-Lām*. *Aḥqāf* [*al-Aḥqāf*], *Fat-ḥ* [*al-Fat-ḥ*], *Ḥujurāt* [*al-Ḥujurāt*], *Zāriyāt* [*al-Zāriyāt*].

27. Part "XXVII", قَالَ فَمَا خَطْبُكُم (*Qāla fa mā Khaṭbukum)* consisted of verses 31-60 of *Sūrah* 51 (*Ẓāriyāt*) [*al-Ẓāriyāt*], verses 1-49 of *Sūrah* 52nd (*Ṭūr*), verses 1-62 of *Sūrah* 53 (*Najm*), verses 1-55 of *Sūrah* 54th (*Qamar*) verses 1-78 of *Sūrah* 55th (*Raḥmān*), verses 1-96 of *Sūrah* 56th (*Wāqi'a*), verses 1-29 of *Sūrah* 57 (*Ḥadīd*). This part was printed in August, 1937[3].

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[1] A. Yusuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), 1937, Title Page

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

Appendix XII: "The Muslim Heaven" was also included in part 27 of Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī's translation and commentary of the Holy Qur'ān.

The names of *Sūrah* numbers 52, 53, 54, 55, 56 & 57 were transliterated without preceded *Alif-Lām. Ṭūr (al-Ṭūr), Najm [al-Najm], Qamar [al-Qamar], Raḥmān [al-Raḥmān], Wāqi'a [al-Wāqi'ah], Hadīd [al-Hadīd]*

In the name of *Sūrah* 56, الواقعة (*al-Waqi'ah)* the Arabic letter "ع" *'aīn* was not symbolized with an inverted Apostrophe and the "h" for the last "ة"was also missed.

28. Part "XXVIII", قَدْ سَمِعَ (*Qad Sami'(a)-Allāhu)* consisted of verses 1-22 of *Sūrah* 58th (*Mujādila*), verses 1-24 of *Sūrah* 59th (*Hashr*), verses 1-13 of *Sūrah* 60th (*Mumtaḥana*), verses 1-14 of *Sūrah* 61st (*Ṣaff*), verses 1-11 of *Sūrah* 62nd (*Jumu'a*) verses 1-11 of *Sūrah* 63rd (*Munāfiqūn*), verses 1-18 of *Sūrah* 64th (*Tagābun*), verses 1-12 of *Sūrah* 65th (*Ṭalāq*), verses 1-12 of *Sūrah* 66th (*Taḥrīm*). Part 28 was issued in September, 1937[1].

The first three words of part 28 of the Holy Qur'ān were not transliterated properly, the proper version may be as follows:

"*Qad Sami'Allahu*" an inverted apostrophe for the letter "ع" *'aīn* could not be mentioned and a bracketed "(a)" before "*Allah*" is useless. According to the transliteration table mentioned by 'Alī himself a bracketed "(a)" is not the symbol of any Arabic letter.

The names of *Sūrah* numbers 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65 & 66 were transliterated without preceding *Alif-Lām*. The name of *Sūrah* number 58 is اَلْمُجَادَلَةِ (*al-Mujādalah)* but it was transliterated as "*Mujādila*" which is different from the original.

[1] A. Yusuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), 1937, Title Page

Mujādila [al-Mujādalah], Ḥashr [al-Ḥashr], Mumtaḥana [al-Mumtaḥinah], Ṣaff [al-Ṣaff], Jumu’a [al-Jumu‘ah], Munāfiqūn [al-Munāfiqūn], Tagābun [al-Tagābun], Ṭalāq [al-Ṭalāq], Taḥrīm [al-Taḥrīm]

29. Part “XXIX”, تَبٰرَكَ الَّذِى (*Tabārak-allaẓī*) comprised verses 1-30 of *Sūrah* 67th (*Mulk*), verses 1-52 of *Sūrah* 68th (*Qalam*), verses 1-52 of *Sūrah* 69th (*Hāqqa*), verses 1-44 of *Sūrah* 70 (*Ma’ārij*), verses 1-28 of *Sūrah* 71st (*Nūḥ*), verses 1-28 of *Sūrah* 72nd (*Jinn*) verses 1-20 of *Sūrah* 73rd (*Muzzamil*) verses 1-56 of *Sūrah* 74th (*Muddaththir*) verses 1-40 of *Sūrah* 75th (*Qiyāmat*) verses 1-31 of *Sūrah* 76th (*Dahr*) verses 1-50 of *Sūrah* 77th (*Mursalāt*). The second last part of ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī’s translation got printed in October, 1937[1].

Appendix XIII: “Ancient Forms of Pagan Worship” was associated with part 29.

The names of *Sūrah* numbers 67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76 & 77 were transliterated without preceding *Alif-Lām*.

Mulk [al-Mulk], Qalam [al-Qalam], Ḥāqqa [al-Ḥāqqah], Ma’ārij [al-Ma‘ārij] Jinn [al-Jinn], Muzzammil [al-Muzzammil], Muddaththir [al-Muddaththir] Qiyāmat [al-Qiyāmah], Dahr [al-Dahr] Mursalāt [al-Mursalāt]. The last “h” in surah al-Hāqqah and an inverted apostrophe in al-Ma‘ārij are also missing.

30. Part “XXX”, عَمَّ(‘*Amma)* consisted of 37 last *Sūrahs* of the Qur’ān i.e., from 78 to 114. In all these the names of *Sūrahs* were transliterated without preceding *Alif-Lām*. This last part was published in December, 1937.[2]

Appendix XIV, “Oaths and Adjurations” was attached in the last part of the Qur’ān. There was a monogram in the middle of all the title pages. In the monogram ذٰلِكَ الكِتٰبُ لَا رَيبَ فِيه(*ẕālikal kitābu Lāraiba fīhi)* was written in a fine artistic way.

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[1] A. Yusuf ‘Alī, The Holy Qur’ān, English Translation and Commentary (with Arabic Text), 1937, Title Page

2 Ibid.

Publication in Three and Two Volumes

In the four years' time (1934-1937) the translation and commentary of the Holy Qur'ān was published in thirty episodes. In the early months of 1938 the consolidation of the 30 episodes into three volumes, with the original installment covers (so with the short-comings mentioned above) retained within the body of each volume was printed. In the second quarter of 1938 Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf published the third edition in the form of "The Holy Qur'ān – text, translation and commentary". It was a two-volume edition, leather cover with gold embossed lettering.[1]

Principles which were not followed by A. Yūsuf 'Alī

As an interpreter of the Holy Qur'ān, he devised some principles for himself to follow. These guidelines are remarkable, as far as conventional approach is concerned.

1. He stressed that the opinions of early commentators should be followed as far as meanings of Arabic words are concerned. He was of the view: the older the better.[2]

On the other hand, he himself came up with hyperbolic meanings of different words of the Holy Qur'ān. Yūsuf 'Alī's approach leads him to a kind of exaggeration. He constantly makes additions for which there is nothing corresponding in the text, but which elevate the conception given in the Qur'ānic text. Arthur Jeffery[3] (1892-1959) quoted some examples:

> "*al-Ḥai al-Qayyum* is translated "the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Eternal", where "Eternal" is an addition not contained in nor justified by the text."[4]

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1 M A Sherif, Searching for Solace, 224-225

2 Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, 1938, xi

3 Arthur Jeffery (1892-1959) was a protestant Australian Professor of Semitic languages from 1921 at the School of Oriental Studies in Cairo and from 1938 until his death in New York. Materials from the history of the text of the Qur'ān. The Old codices and the Foreign vocabulary of the Qur'ān which traces the origins of 318 foreign (non-Arabic) words found in the Qur'ān, are his major works.

4 Arthur Jeffery, Yūsuf 'Alī's Translation of the The Qur'ān, The Moslem World, vol.30, No.1, (New York: Columbia University, 1940), 54-66

Jeffery opined that this exaggerated attitude towards the translation of the Qur’ān is not beneficial for the art of translation but mere homiletics.

2. The second principle, when it comes to preference, it should be given to the orthodox commentators. However, ‘Alī did left room for the later scholars on the condition that they come up with a justified opinion of their own.

On the contrary, he described the story of Yūsuf (A.S) as ‘Allegorical Interpretation of the Story of Joseph’ with reference to Jami (1414-1492)[1] in the Appendix VI.[2] He was primarily a poet, a mystic and was certainly not a scholar of Qur’anic sciences.

3. ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī laid emphasis on the use of contemporary and reader-friendly language[3] while actually he was ardently inspired by the Romantic classics of English Literature.

Commenting on Yūsuf ‘Alī’s diction Arthur Jeffery (1892-1959) pointed towards the fact that the Qur’ānic Arabic is in a rugged, broken style which is infact the Prophetic style, but ‘Alī unable to follow that, ends up with a fitful diction. The Qur’ānic verses are smooth, well-knit and with flowery sentences but Yūsuf ‘Alī translated them into broken lines of erratic prose-cum-poetry which is also accumulated with unnecessary capitalization of words. Why did the translator adopt this anomalous form of presentation? Jeffery gives the reason:

“His giving it a form that looks like verse form, is to suggest the rhythmical character of the original text.”[4]

‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī chose a vocabulary which was close to his poetic ideals. His choice of words goes hand in hand with the overall style of his work as well as his own temperament. He uses “thee’s” “thy’s” “hast’s” “thine’s” “ye’s” and “Thou’s” abundantly[5]

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1 'Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmī was a Persian poet who is known for his achievements as a prolific scholar and writer of mystical Sufi literature.

2 Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī, The Holy Qur’ān, 1938, 594-600

3 Ibid, xii

4 Ibid, 56

5 Ibid, 14,15,17,1560

which for-sure adds solemnity to the work but narrows the number of readerships. Consider the following three verses of *Sūrah al-Fātihah*:

إِيَّاكَ نَعبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَستَعِينُ (الفاتحه ١: ٤)

"Thee do we worship and Thine aid we seek." (*al-Fātiḥah* 1:4)

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ اَنعَمتَ عَلَيهِم غَيرِ المَغضُوبِ عَلَيهِم وَلَا الضَّآلِّينَ (الفاتحه ١: ٦-٧)

"The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, not of those whose portion is wrath nor of those who stray." (*al-Fātiḥah* 1*:* 6-7)

Another significant aspect of the vocabulary in 'Alī's work is the way he made use of the superlatives. He translates verse 64:17 as:

إِن تُقرِضُوا اللهَ قَرضًا حَسَنًا يُّضٰعِفهُ لَكُم وَ يَغفِر لَكُم وَ اللهُ شَكُورٌ حَلِيمٌ (التغابن ١٧: ٦٤)

"If ye loan to God a beautiful loan, He will double it to your (credit), and He will grant you Forgiveness: for God is most Ready to appreciate (service), Most Forbearing."[1]

The frequent use of superlatives and capital letters by Yūsuf 'Alī, in combination with his preference for archaic words, produces a text which is removed from common usage, elevated, poetic, distinct for its rhythmic qualities and it constantly reminds the reader that the text being read belongs to another category.

Pre-requisites of a Translator of the Qur'ān

For a form of knowledge so deep in content and elevated in position as Qur'ān is, a criterion is required for its translator to meet. The clauses of model devised by A. Yūsuf 'Alī for a translator of the Holy Qur'ān are:

1. In order to become one, a wide range of knowledge and reading on almost every conceivable subject is required.

1 Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, 1938, 1560

2. The most varied experience in life was yet another pre-requisite, according to him, for an interpreter of the Qur’ān.
3. A translator of the sublime book should have an acquaintance with previous translations, dictionaries and general works of reference.[1]

All the above-mentioned points, however, are self-centered and are devised to make himself an epitome of the field. Being proficient in Arabic in general is one thing and being a scholar of Qur’ānic Arabic is another. He truly was a remarkable historian, a law-expert, linguist and a good scholar of Bible but duly not well-versed in Qur’ānic sciences, Fiqh and Hadith compilations. Jeffery has highlighted in this way:

> “The translator has drawn largely on what he has learned of western culture. Shakespeare and the English poets, modern writers and articles in the Encyclopedia Britannica, tags of Latin and quotations from the historians, are all used.”[2]

Characteristics of Translation and Commentary of A. Yūsuf ‘Alī

There are some features which distinguish ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī from the rest of his field.

I. Interpretation of disjointed letters or *al-Muquaṭṭ‘āt*

‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī’s appendix-concerning *al-Muqaṭṭa‘āt*-is pre-empted by an apologetic note which tries to smooth some of the opinions about the abbreviated letters. He writes “Opinions are divided” about the exact meaning of each particular letter or combination of letters, but it is agreed that they have a mystic meaning… if we are asked to believe that certain initials have a meaning which will be understood in the fullness of time or

1 Ibid, xvi
2 Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī, The Holy Qur’ān, 1938, 62

spiritual development, we are asked to draw upon Faith, but we are not asked to do any violence to our reason.[1]

'Alī then dwells on various harmonic relationships which exist in the numbers of these letters and their appearance. He draws the conclusion that all the *Sūrahs* which start with *al-Muqatta'at* refer to the Qur'ān or the Book. He then explains that the exceptions to this characteristic feature, mentioned in *Itqān*, are not really exceptions because the three *Sūrahs* 29 *al- 'Ankabūt*, 30 *al-Rūm* and 68 *Nūn* taken as exception do refer to the Book.[2]

II. Mystic Approach of 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī

'Alī's mystic approach is more pronounced in his explanation of *al-Muqaṭṭa'at* and his appendix is strongly inclined towards a mystical understanding of the letter-symbolism. He explains every abbreviated letter at its first occurrence.

'Alī was more interested in the inner meaning of the Divine word. He saw the Qur'ān more as an ethical and moral code. He is an outstanding translator of the Qur'ān, both in scholarship as well as in spiritual insight, among all the English translators of the Qur'ān.

III. Symbolism and Allegory

Allegorical meanings in multiple verses of the Qur'ān have drawn the attention of many commentators. Every translator confronts the problem of translation and explanation of these verses. Yūsuf 'Alī describes in detail his understanding of such verses. He has included an appendix on the "Allegorical Interpretation of the Story of Joseph".[3] 'Alī stresses the fact

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1 Ibid, 118

2 Muzaffar Iqbal, Two Approaches to the English Translation of the Noble Qur'ān, A Comparative Study of the English Translation by 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī and Muhammad Asad, Journal of Qur'ānic Studies, 2000 cf. Muhammad Asad, Europe's Gift to Islam, M. Ikram Chaghatai (Lahore: Sange-e-Meel Publications,2000), 120

3 Muzaffar Iqbal, Two Approaches to the English Translation of the Noble Qur'ān, A Comparative Study of the English Translation by 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī and Muhammad Asad, Journal of Qur'ānic Studies, 2000 cf. Muhammad Asad, Europe's Gift to Islam, M. Ikram Chaghatai (Lahore: Sange-e-Meel Publications,2000) ,592-600

that things “beyond” the grasp of human intellect can only be understood by way of allegory and symbolism. He also mentions the fact that interpretation of the allegorical verses (*āyāt Mutashābihāt*) is susceptible to more than one interpretation. ‘Alī’s commentary on *Sūrah* Yūsuf is of particular interest. He points out symbolism, clash of good and evil and the progression from lower to higher classes in the narrative.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, it is concluded that ‘Alī produced an excellent translation of the Holy Qur’ān, with its own peculiarities. Yūsuf ‘Alī’s work has proven to be most popular rendering of the Qur’ān, perhaps due to its easy availability. Primarily ‘Abdullah’s translation of the Qur’ān had number of problems like, Apologetic tone, leaning towards modern sciences, language under the shadow of Romantics and diction impressed by the modernity. But due to his sheer sincerity many of the great publishers, organizations and even the Government of Sa‘udi ‘Arabia made it revised by the boards of scholars of great fame. They spent zillions on the project but could not come up with a flawless copy as the mistakes were recurrent in the entire edition. For instance, in the contents the name of *Sūrah āl-i-‘Imran*, *Sūrah al-An‘ām, Sūrah al-A‘rāf* and many others have been transliterated with apostrophe rather than an inverted apostrophe.[1] So, ‘Alī’s version can be acknowledged as a human exertion which may be erroneous and limited, is still a fine piece of translation of The Holy Qur’ān. He employs a number of techniques to make his translation accessible to a wide variety of readers. ‘Alī knows that, in the final analysis, his effort is but a human endeavor which can never reach perfection.

Recommendations

In the light of above discussion, it is obvious to recommend:

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[1] ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī, The Holy Qur’ān, English translation of the meanings and Commentary, The Presidency of Islamic Researches, Ifta, Call and Guidance (Al-Madina Al- Munawarah: King Fahad Holy Qur’ān Printing Complex, 1410 H.), 1673, 1772, 1744, 2017, b, e, Za, Zc, Zd

1. There should be a comprehensive and a unanimous scheme of transliteration in academic circles so that there may not be any difference of opinion in this regard.
2. It looks that there are some typographical or publishing problems, due to them some mistakes cannot be avoided. This problem can be solved by the involvement of authors and researchers in every step of publication.
3. The art or knowledge of transliteration should be taught in all the institutions of higher education, all over the world.
4. In academic and literary articles, written in English, transliteration of foreign words should be considered compulsory.