

Sindhi Translations and Commentaries of the Qur'ān In the 19th and 20th Centuries

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Abstract

The Qur'ān, the holy book of about 1 billion Muslims around the world emphasized, at many places, on the understanding of its eternal and sublime message to reflect it in the society. To understand its message and to convey it to the whole of humanity, Muslim scholars of different ethnicities in different parts of the world started working on the translations and commentaries of the Qur'ān from very beginning. This emphasis led many scholars to the field of translation and commentary. As a result, the Qur'ān was translated partly into more than a hundred languages of the world and completely more than fifty. By looking into the history of the field of translation and commentary of the Qur'ān, it appears that the Sindh (second largest province of Pakistan in terms of population) is one of those areas of the world in which the Qur'ān was first translated in general and in Sub-continent in particular. Some scholars and researchers -- as has been discussed in the paper -- hold the view that the Qur'ān was first translated in Sindhi language, though it is not available at present.

After Arabic and Urdū languages, Sindhi is the first and linguistically rich language in which many more translations and commentaries are produced than other languages of the world and which is still continuing. According to the *Dāirah e Mārif e Islāmiyyah* (Islamic Encyclopaedia in Urdū language) the number of these translations and commentaries is more than 67. And, of course, this information is recorded some forty years ago, after which, many other similar works are produced by Sindhi scholars up to date. More of these works have been done in the 19th and 20th century. One of the distinguishing and interesting things is that some translations of the Qur'ān were produced in the form of poetry which, of course, is quite difficult task as compared to prose though it is, theologically, also difficult to translate the word of God in a perfect manner.

The paper tends to highlight the important features of these works that were produced in this fertile area of the world and particularly in Sindhi language in the period of 19th and 20th centuries.

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Sindh – one of the ancient civilizations in the world and currently second biggest province of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan- is known in the history of Islam as ‘the gate way of Islam’ to the South Asia region and Sindhi language is known as a member of Indo-European languages which is spoken by about 250 million inhabitants of Pakistan and India.¹ Although Muslims stepped in this region just after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allāh’s peace and blessings upon him) and to some other historical sources, contacts of Sindhi people with the Arabs are also traced out in the life of the Prophet himself, yet this region administratively and politically came into the fold of Islam in Umayyad Dynasty in the year 93 AH/711 CE and remained under Muslim rule about two centuries. It is firmly believed that native people- who are called Sindhis due to the attribution to this region- must have felt the need of understanding of the newly revealed book i.e. the Qur’ān, as is mentioned by the famous Muslim historian and traveller Buzrug bin Shahryār. According to his statement, in the year 270 AH, the Hindū ruler of Alor wrote to Muslim ruler of Maṣūrah Sindh Abdullah ibn ‘Umar al Habāri, expressing his need for the book on Islamic beliefs and teachings to be written by well-versed Muslim scholar. Abdullah handed over this responsibility to one of the Irāqī scholars -unfortunately his name is not recorded in history- who spent well enough time in Sind, and possessed good command on Sindhi language. It is really interesting to know that this Irāqī scholar has produced a translation of the meaning of the Qur’ān in Sindhi verse which is, of course, quite difficult task to undertake as some scholars mentioned². The Hindū ruler impressed by his work to the extent that he requested al-Habāri to let him stay with him for couple of years.³ Unfortunately, this earlier translation of the Qur’ān is lost due to unrest and continuous foreign invasions on this region and presumably nowhere found at present.

The long stay of Arabs in Sindh and earlier contacts between Sindhis and Arabs - as have been stated above - have influenced Sindhi grammar and language to a noticeable extent (this could be a topic of separate paper to be produced). This influence could be observed in the book of ‘Muqaddimah al-Ṣalāh’ by Makhdūm Abu ‘Al-Hasan Thatvi, which is also known as ‘the Sindhi of Abu ‘Al-Ḥasan Thatvi’. This form of Sindhi is called in Sindhi literature as ‘*Kabt*’.

In this earlier form of Sindhi language, many Sindhi scholars produced remarkable religious literature such as Makhdūm Diyā al Din Thatvi and Abu ‘Al Hasan Thatvi.

This work of translation of the meanings of the Qur’ān begun in Sindh since very early days of Muslim rule and of course continues up to date. This is why some scholars, such as Sayyid Sulaymān Nadvi, Allāma Ghulam Mustafā Qāsmi, Sayyid Abu Zafar Nadvi, Muhammad Ishaq Bhatti, hold view that the meanings of the Qur’ān were first translated in the world in Sindhi,⁴ particularly in Sub-continent

it was Sindh where the meanings of the Qur'an was first ever translated though not in Sindhi rather in Persian which was done by great Sindhi scholar and mystic Makhdum Nūh Hālāi.⁵ It is also worth-mentioning here that in Sindhi language the number of translations and commentaries of the Qur'an are greater than any other language of this region. According to the Dā'irah-e- Ma'ārif-e- Islāmiyyah (Encyclopaedia of Islam in Urdu) the number of these translations & commentaries exceeds 67 and this was recorded about 45 years ago, after which many other similar works are produced up to date.⁶

It seems important to note here that the issue of the exact translation of the meaning of the Qur'an is also hotly debated among Muslim theologians and research scholars.⁷ This issue has been very severe in Sub-continent as may be seen in the case of Shah Wali Allāh al Dihlawi when he first translated the meanings of the Qur'an in Persian in 1762 CE; he faced fatwa's of 'kufr' from the Ulema of that time. However, it is almost agreed that the exact translation of the word of God is not possible in any human language. Above all, there is difference of opinions among the scholars as to how the sensitive - and at the same time the most important work as the understanding of it is believed to be religious obligation- work of translation could be undertaken. These discussions continued until the assembly of the Grand Ulamā of al-Azhar issued a Fatwā in 1355/1936,⁸ explaining the possibility of translating the meaning of the Qur'an in interpretive translation and in the impossibility of transferring its meaning along with the characteristics of Arabic composition to other languages. As a matter of fact, this difference of opinion ultimately resulted in the work of translation, hence variety of translations were produced aiming at drawing closer to the meanings of the word of God. In addition, this difference and variety of work could also be observed in the translations of the meanings of the Qur'an in Sindhi language.

Sindhi Translations and Commentaries in the 19th Century

This period comprises two eras: first, the era of local rulers who are called Talpurs. Second, the era of foreign rulers i.e. the British Rule. The era of Talpurs came to end when Britain defeated the Talpurs in the war of Miyani in 1843 CE. Although in the era of Talpurs the official language was Persian in Sindh, yet they were ardent to Sindhi language and were famous for patronizing Ulama and scholars. Richard Burton noticed in his book that in the era of Talpurs the children were used to be sent to Madāris at the age of four, where they learn the Qur'an from Molvi or Ākhund (teacher).⁹

We discuss below the features of some important Sindhi translations and commentaries of this era and try to highlight the contribution of Sindhi scholars in this field.

1. The Commentary of Ākhund ʿAzīzullāh Matyārvi (1746-1856 CE)

Ākhund ʿAzīzullāh ibn Muhammad Zākir Matyārvi was a great scholar of Sindh in this era. He was born in the city of Matyāri (previously the district of Hyderabad, now a separate district) in 1746 CE. His elders were originally from Thatta - once it was a great centre of education and literacy in Sindh - and were affiliated with teaching and thus were called in Sind 'Ākhund'. He learnt reading the Qur'ān at his home and completed his religious education from Molānā Muhammad ʿUthmān Matyārvi. After graduating in religious education, he started teaching at the madrasa of his spiritual master of Luwāri.

Little before Ākhund ʿAzīzullāh, another versatile scholar of Sindh Makhdūm Muhammad Hashim Thatvi (d. 1750 CE/1164 AH) wrote a commentary of just last Juz' of the Qur'ān in the form of 'kabt'.

Ākhund ʿAzīzullāh was first Sindhi scholar who wrote the translation and footnotes 'Hāshiyah' on the Qur'ān in the form of prose other than the poetry namely 'Kabṭ'. From the technical point of view, this translation is first complete prose translation that we have today in hand.¹⁰ According to Sindhi scholars this translation is one of the best of its kind due to the style of Ākhund which was followed by his successors such as Molānā Muhammad Ṣiddīque Norangpoto (d.1901CE) and Qādī Faṭḥ Muhammad Nizāmāni (d.1911 CE). Allāma Qāsmi states that 'this translation was widely spread in Sindh that it was available almost in every mosque of Sindh'.¹¹ The note found on the last page of this translation reveals that it is an interpretive translation which is very close to the meanings of the Qur'ān and is not a literal translation.

One of the interesting things is that Ākhund gave Persian translation of Shah Wali Allāh al-Dihlavi underneath his Sindhi translation which is most probably due to an attempt of making it easy to understand, as Persian was very wide spread and commonly understood language in that time.

In addition, Ākhund has also precisely given in footnotes the causes of revelation (*asbāb al nuzūl*) by Sheikh Saʿdī Shirāzi in Persian language which makes it far more useful for understanding the Qur'ān. The author seems to be much more influenced by Arabic grammar and language in his style of writing of Sindhi as he has used *Arabs* in his Sindhi script. This translation was first published in 1870.¹²

2. The Commentary of Muhammad Faḍl

And Muhammad Fāḍil Shah (1836-1900 CE)

It is really regrettable to know that very little about the life and work of Molānā Muhammad Faḍl is recorded in the history. What we know about him is that he was born in Hyderabad Sindh and was a great religious scholar and expert

in Arabic language. He could write the commentary on the Qur'an from sūrah al-Fatiḥa to sūrah Yūsuf and did not complete it due to his death. After his death his student Muhammad Fāḍil Shah completed unfinished work of his teacher like the precedent of Jalālayn which is a very famous commentary on the Qur'an in the Muslim world. Muhammad Fāḍil Shāh was also born in Hyderabad Sind in 1252 AH/1836 CE. He got his early religious education from Molānā Abdullah Walhāri and graduated by Molānā Muḥammad Ḥasan. His uncle Muḥammad Yūsuf Shah was qādi (Judge in Shari'ah law) of Hyderabad during British rule. This commentary was first brought to notice by Muhammad Ṣiddique Musāfir who called it 'Tafsir Fāḍiliyyah' which seems to us to be incorrect,¹³ the correct name of the commentary is 'Tafsir Fāḍilayn'. This complete commentary is in three big volumes containing 1277 pages.¹⁴

It also appears that its style is much more influenced by the famous commentary of Jalālayn and was named by the later author in the same way. However, it has been attempted by the authors to adopt some new style within it. The author first gave literal (word for word) translation of the text and then gave the commentary of almost every verse in footnotes. The author has also given the causes of the revelation of different verses citing references from various classical commentaries on the Qur'an. It seems important to mention here that one can hardly find any difference between the portions of two different authors which is clear evidence of the skills and expertise of the later author. This commentary is easy to understand for its simple language used in it.

This commentary was written just after the new Sindhi script was introduced by the then British Commissioner of Sind Sir Bartle Freer in 1853 CE, when Sindhi scholars endeavoured to produce Sindhi literature in general and religious literature in particular in new Sindhi script. It is supposed that the authors of this commentary might have benefited from their predecessor i.e. Ākhund Ṣāzizullah's translation.¹⁵

Sindhi Translations and Commentaries in the 20th Century

1. The Translation of Molānā Tāj Mahmūd Amroti (d.1929)

Molānā Tāj Mahmūd Amroti was great spiritual and religious scholar and has been very famous in the history of Indo-Pak for mainly two reasons. Firstly, the role that he played in the Khilāfat Movement during 1919 CE before partition of Sub-continent. Secondly, for the translation of the meanings of the Qur'an. His translation was first published in three volumes from Al-Haq Press Sukkur Sindh in 1916 CE.¹⁶ Molānā Amroti, at first, published this translation excluding original Arabic text of the Qur'an, which was at that time quite a new and different way of translation, upon which some religious scholars of Sindh raised questions and harshly criticized and issued a fatwā of 'kufr' (disbelief) against him like Molānā Qamar al Din Indhar of Pano Ṣāqil Sindh.¹⁷ After that Molānā Amroti was

convinced by the opinion and declared that he will not publish it again without original Arabic text.

This work is not literal translation rather it is the interpretive translation of the meaning of the Qur'ān and it is up to the standards of modern Sindhi prose which could easily be understood by aboriginal people of this region. This is why it is widely spread and read in the province of Sindh that no other translation has been so popular. He has also used explanatory words in the brackets at certain places to make readers easily understand the meanings of the Qur'ān.

2. The translation and Commentary of

Molānā Muhammad Madani (1897- 1978 CE)

Molānā Muhammad was born in Bhanbhro, the small village of Hālā in 1897 C.E. He embraced Islam through his school teacher. Molānā got his religious education from renowned religious scholars of India of that time like Molānā Hussain Ahmad Madani, Molānā Khalil Ahmad Sahāranpuri, Molānā Anwar Shah Kashmiri and Molānā Ubaydullah Sindhi. After the completion of his education he started his career as a teacher of Arabic at famous educational institute Sindh Madrasat al Islam Karachi, during which he accomplished the translation of the meanings of the Qur'ān. After retiring from Arabic teaching at Sindh Madrasah, he started teaching again at Madrasah Mazhar al Uloom of Khaddah in Karachi. In addition to this translation, Molānā did write a commentary on the last four Ajsa' of the Qur'ān.

It appears from his translation and commentary that he followed the way of his predecessors in the translation and commentary of the Qur'ān like Molana Amroti. He has not given forward at the beginning of the translation and commentary. Furthermore, he gave causes of the revelation and summary of every sūra in the beginning of each sūra. He seems to be much more influenced by the philosophy of Shah Wali Allāh which could be evident throughout his commentary. This was first published in Karachi in 1953.¹⁸

Overview of some other translations and commentaries

In the last, it seems useful to give very brief list of other translations and commentaries to have some idea of this work done in Sindhi language during the 19th and 20th centuries.

1. The translation and commentary of Makhdūm Muhammad Shafī Siddiqui (d. 1898 CE)
2. The commentary of Sūra Yāsīn and al Rahmān by Molānā Tāj Mahmūd Amroti, published at Mahmūd al Matābī Amrot.¹⁹

3. The commentary of Juz' 'Alamma by Molānā Ahmad Norangpoto, published in 1901.²⁰
4. The translation and commentary of Qādhi Sharaf al Din Sewhāni, the unpublished copy of it is preserved at the institute of Sindhology Jamshoro.
5. The Commentary of Molānā Muhammad Uthman Norangzada (d. 1918 CE), published at Molvi Muhammad Azīm Kutbkhāna Shikarpur.
6. The commentary of Qadhi Fath Muhammad Nizāmāni (d. 1911 CE).
7. The commentary of Makhdūm Allāh Bukhsh Khuhravi (d. 1916 CE).
8. The translation and commentary of Molānā Muhammad Khan Laghari (d. 1943 CE)
9. The commentary of one fourth part of last Juz' of the Qur'an by Molānā Abd al Rahim Maqsi (d.1943), published.²¹
10. The translation of Molānā Nūr Muhammad 'Ādilpuri (d. 1944 CE).
11. The commentary of Molānā 'Abd al Khāliq Kandyārvi (d. 1947 CE), published at Waqf and Masjid Society, Hyderabad 1944.²²
12. The commentary of sūra al Furqān by Faqir Hidāyat Ali Najfi (d. 1939 CE).
13. The commentary of Molānā Ali Muhammad Mahayri (d. 1947 CE).
14. The translation of Qādi 'Abd al-Razzāq

This translation was classical Sindhi language which is now rewritten in cotemporary style by the author of this paper and published by Da'wah Academy IIUI, Karachi 2006.

Endnotes:

¹ Ismet Binark and Halit Eren, *World Bibliography of Translations of The Meanings of The Qur'an: printed translations: 1515-1980*, Istanbul, 1986, p. 402

² Ghanghro Abd al Razzaq, *Qur'an Majid ja Sindhi Tarjuma ayn Tafsir*, Shikarpur: Mehran Academy, 1997, p. 22

³ Nadvi Sayyid Sulayman, *Arab o Hind kay Ta'lluqat*, Karachi: Karim Sons Publishers, 1976 , p. 342

⁴ Malkani Mangharam, *Sindhi Nasr ji Tarikh*, Hyderabad: Zeb Adabi Markaz, 1977, p.7; Nadvi, Sulayman, *Arab o Hind kay Ta'lluqat*, p.342; Nadvi Abu Zafar, *Tarikh-e-Sindh*, Azamgarh: Matba 'Ma'rif , 1947 p.357, Bhatti Muhammad Ishaq, *Barr e Saghir Pak o Hind men Ilm e Fiqh*, Idarah Thaqafat e Islamiyyah Lahore, 1973, p.27-28

⁵ It is important to note that there is wide spread misconception about it that it was Shah Wali Allah al Dihlawi who first ever translated the Qur'an in Persian which is of course after the availability of the translation of Makhdum Nuh Halai (1589 CE/ 998 A.H) is wrong, because Makhdum Nuh was predecessor of al Dihlawi. This translation is edited by Allama Ghulam Mustafa Qasimi and published by Sindhi

Adabi Board Hyderabad. See. Talpur Muhammad Juman, *Sindh Ja Islami Darsghah*, Hyderabad: Sindhi Sahat Ghar, 2007, p. 139

⁶ *Dairah e Ma'arif e Islamiyyah*, Lahore: University of the Punjab, 1978, Vol. 1/16, p. 615

⁷ Ibid, p. 541

⁸ Bahth fi Tarjamat al Qur'an al Karim wa Ahkamiha, *Majallat al Azhar*, VII,1 (Muharram 1355 A.H/1936 C.E), p. 77

⁹ Burton Richard, *Sindh and Races that inhabit in the valley of Indus*, (Sindhi translation), Hyderabad: Sindhi Adabi Board, 1971, p.125-126

¹⁰ Ismet Binark and Halit Eren, p. XXXII

¹¹ Qasmi Ghulam Mustafa, *Tafsir Hāshmi* (praface) Hyderabad: Sindhi Adabi Board, 1987, p. 12

¹² It was published by Qadi. M. Ibrahim at Muhammadi Printing Press Gujrat, see Ismet Binark, Halit Eren, p. XXXII

¹³ Musafir Muhammad Siddique, *Diwan Fadhil*, p. 58.

¹⁴ Ghanghro Abd al Razzaq, p. 111-116. This commentary is not yet published and is preserved in the personal collection of Mufti Abd al Rahman of Thatta.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 115

¹⁶ Ismet Binark and Halit Eren, p. 407

¹⁷ Bukhari Mahmud Shah, *Watan Ji Azadi Jo Imam*, Hyderabad: Shahbaz Publication, 1984, p. 49. This view was expressed the basis of *ijtihad* grounded in particular perspective which, in our view, in present times is no more valid.

¹⁸ Ismet Binark and Halit Eren, p. 405

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 414

²⁰ Ibid. p 409

²¹ Ibid. p.408

²² Ibid. p. 408
