

**International Islamic University
Faculty of Islamic Studies (Usuluddin)
Department of Tafseer & Qur'anic Sciences**



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DEDICATIONS

~TO MY PARENTS:

My Respected Father, ABDUL AZIZ HANIF,
who cherished in me, the love of Al- Qur'an,

My Loveliest Mother, SAKINA RAHMAN, Who is
my first Qur'an teacher

رَبِّ اَرْحَمُهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيْتَنِي صَغِيرًا

"My Lord! Bestow on both of them, Your Mercy, as they
cherished me in my childhood."

&

~TO ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

Who loved to be called, a servant of Al-Qur'an

I dedicate this work...

Table of contents

Dedications	II
Preface	6-10
Introduction	11
☞ Is Qur'an translatable?	16
☞ Limitations of translation	21
☞ A brief sketch of Qur'anic translations and commentaries in English .	
▪ <i>Work of Non Muslims</i>	23
1. Orientalists	23
2. Qadiyanis.....	27
▪ <i>The Qur'anic translations and commentaries by The Muslims.</i>	32
Chapter: 1	
Part 1: Abdullah Yusuf Ali! A life sketch	43
Part 2: Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Writings	51
Part 3: The Holy Qur'an, Text, Translation & Commentary	53
Part 4: General Methodology	62

Chapter: 2

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Methodology	68
Regarding <i>Tafsir Bil Ma'thur</i> (Tradition- Based Tafsir)	
☞ Tafsir of Qur'an by Qur'an	81
☞ Tafsir of Qur'an by Prophetic traditions	88
☞ Tafsir of Qur'an by the statements of companions (RA)	94
☞ Tafsir of Qur'an by the statements of Successors	100
☞ On causes of revelation	104
☞ On <i>Al-Israeliyat</i>	109

Chapter: 3

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Methodology	
Regarding <i>Tafsir bil-ra'y/ bi'l- dira'yah</i> (Opinion Based Tafsir)	
☞ On linguistics of Qur'an.....	121

☞ On Issues of *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence) 127

☞ On mystical interpretation of Qur'an 132

Chapter: 4

A critical evaluation 139

Conclusion 145- 148

Bibliography: 149-159

Preface

In the Name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Repeatedly Merciful.

All praise and thanks are due to Allah (SWT), and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger, Muhammad (SAW)!

The Glorious Qur'an is the Book of Allah (SWT), Who has promised to safeguard its purity from any violation. It is incumbent on each and every person who seeks the dignity of this world and the bliss of the Hereafter, to regulate his life according to it. We must implement its commandments and pay homage to the magnificence of the One Who revealed it. This is an easy task for those favored with guidance from Allah, especially those blessed by having an understanding of Arabic, the language of divine revelation. But for those not acquainted with Arabic, their ignorance is a barrier between them and the source of guidance and illumination. For this reason, translating the message of Allah is not a task to be taken lightly or done superficially.

The far most aim of the Holy Qur'an is the guidance of human being, and when, one is not well versed in Arabic to grasp this guidance, a translation is the only possible alternative. One thing to note is that the translation of the meaning of the Qur'an, not the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an is in its original, pristine Arabic as it was revealed from Allah (SWT). Someone new to its verses may not fully understand the verses and may take them out of context. One must look into all the verses in relation to each other and the *Sunnah and Hadith* (The Prophetic traditions), the context of revelation, *Tafsir* (commentaries), the original lexical Arabic and scholarly understanding to fully interpret the Qur'an's meaning.

However, it is highly encouraged for every Muslim to read the Qur'an. As Abdullah Yusuf Ali says, "It is the duty of every Muslim - man, woman, or child - to read the Qur'an and understand it according to his own capacity." ¹

Qur'an translations can be said to be extremely important yet gravely serious. Their crucial importance stems from the fact that they represent the primary source of information for those who do not know Arabic – Muslims and non-Muslims – and who want to fathom the depths of Islam through reading its much revealed word. They are the major recourse of the former who, due to the language barrier, are deprived of approaching their revealed Book in Arabic, and those of the latter who are curious to pursue familiarity with Islam through first-hand knowledge instead of simply "imbibing received opinions and attitudes without individual thought and reflection. Their seriousness lies in the great role they play in formulating the recipients' opinion about Islam. About the benefit of reading the Qur'an by non-Muslims, Thomas Cleary² states:

"For non-Muslims, one special advantage in reading the Qur'an is that it provides an authentic point of reference from which to examine the biased stereotypes of Islam to which Westerners are habitually exposed. Primary information is essential to distinguish between opinion and fact in a reasonable manner. This exercise may also enable the thinking individual to understand the inherently defective nature of prejudice itself."³

However, it must be realized that, translations should be accurate and objective. This has not always been the case. Translating the meanings of the Qur'an offered an opportunity

¹ The Holy Qur'an, text, translation and commentary, Preface II

² (Born: 1949) in United States, Cleary is a prolific author and translator of Islamic and Buddhist religious literature, and of the Chinese Art of War tradition of strategy and statecraft. He received a PhD in East Asian Languages and Civilizations from Harvard University, but has had minimal involvement with the academic world. Cleary's recent translation of the Qur'an has been praised by Muslims who know English and Arabic. Another outstanding translation from the Muslim wisdom tradition is *Living and Dying with Grace*

³ http://www.quran.org.uk/ieb_quran_intro.htm

to distort and misinterpret its meanings or to divert Muslim minorities living under non-Muslim rule away from the Qur'anic text and to reconcile them to distorted translations. The fact that the defamation of Islam has been on the rise in recent years can be endorsed by many. In general Western media has been propagating the alleged claim that Islam is a religion that cultivates violence and promotes terrorism. However, some may not be conscious that the commencement of this movement is deeply rooted in the past. Perhaps one of the most important factors that spread a lot of misconceptions about Muslims religion goes back to the early renderings of the meanings of the holy Qur'an into western languages. The foregoing discussion highlighted the fact that the vicious outlook and negative image of Islam and Muslims with which westerners are currently overwhelmed can be traced back to the effects of the early renditions of the meanings of the holy Qur'an into foreign languages by missionaries' centuries ago. However, this is not to deny that some sectarian translations by Muslims contributed to spreading some misconceptions about Islam as well. Despite this gloomy situation, a glimpse of hope can still be aspired for on account of the amelioration in some of the translations that emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century and the turn of the new millennium. It can be argued that the translations surveyed in this paper are to a satisfactory extent free from both the calumnious attacks and sectarian deviant biases encountered in earlier translations by non-Muslims and Muslims respectively. One even longs that the fascination with the Qur'an and the favorable attitude towards Islam, could find its way to western media as a response to the libels launched against Islam.

Now, let us try to attempt an answer for the question, about what constitutes a satisfactory translation? The first prerequisite is impartiality. Presenting an entirely objective translation seems hardly possible; however, some criteria should be set for translators to constrain subjectivity from creeping in, in future translations. Second, in an era where growing hostility against Islam reached an unprecedented level, a satisfactory translation is one that makes it possible for the "other" to grasp the true spirit and instructions of Islam, on the one hand, and not to demote the beauty and meaning potential of the Qur'an through dispensing with the text complexities and ambiguities for readers' convenience on the other. How this can be realized, however, merits another complete study.

Topic of Study:

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation and Commentary notes are unanimously popular in both Muslim and non Muslims groups of people who are interested in Qur'anic studies. Mainly there are two different opinions, one gets to know about him quite frequently. The first one is very common, not just between the folks but also among scholars that Yusuf Ali was a staunch British lover, and the deep rooted love of Royal crown reflects in his writings. Others suppose that he was the only mean, who introduced Islam in the west in this modern era. Having being lived with his work for a reasonable period of time, I could not consider any of these statements fully correct, neither could I denounce them. While going through this study, InshaAllah a reader would sense it as well.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's work had been chosen for this research. Besides being the world's most popular and wide spread translation and commentary notes of Holy Qur'an, it remains a gloomy fact that so far no academic scholarship has been put forward, focusing this renowned work.

Apart from this, there were other couples of reasons and motivation for initiating a project like this. The most obvious was my very own inclination and affiliation with Yusuf Ali's work. It always remained a first hand source of guidance, enlightenment and satisfaction to me. Though, there remained times, when I got confused about certain of Yusuf Ali's philosophies, interpretations and theories, but still it would be very honest to say that whenever I searched for true *solace*, Yusuf Ali always responded in positive Alhamdulillah.

As the topic depicts, the study mainly deals with methodological aspect. The traditional style of methodological study has been carried out, but there was a lot of room for alteration. Where classical Arabic style was not applicable or suitable, English manuals have been used. Apart from Qur'anic verses, Arabic text has not been used, but where it was indispensable to quote, it has been written in Roman script.

Apart from introduction the study is divided into four main chapters. Introduction mainly deals with the meaning and authority of translation followed by a brief note of Qur'anic scholarship in English language. The chapter 1 deals with Yusuf Ali's introduction, educational and family back ground, writings and motivations. Chapter 2 describes the traditional trends of Tafsir writing and Yusuf Ali's contribution in it. Chapter 3 explains his trends in opinion based Tafsir writing and lastly chapter 4 concludes the debate, highlighting Yusuf Ali's work in an over view.

Word of Thanks:

There is a tradition that every researcher mentions the problems he or she under goes while doing the research and writing it down. In my case, the biggest one was not only the lack but at times an obvious absence of source books and materials, not only about the topic but also about the methodology. The only available work was in Arabic, so I translated the texts and then used them. In this way, sometimes it took me more then estimated time.

At the end, I would like to extend the words of gratitude and thanks to all those who helped me out to come up with this work in every way.

To the University – my Alma Mater- , The Faculty of Usuluddin in general and my own department (Tafsir & Qur'anic Studies) in particular, All my teachers who gave me valuable inspirations throughout my studies. My very true expression of thanks address my supervisor Dr. Tahir Mahmood, who was my guide throughout the journey – in all ups and downs, he remained an unshaken help. Also a great help has been rendered to my by my very respected teacher Dr. Fadhl Elahi, who not only encouraged my to initiate this project but also played a vital role to make my earnest wish - writing down the thesis in English, for he very first time in department- , come true. May Allah (SWT) bless him with best of rewards.

My very special words of thanks to Dr. Muhammad Abdul Haleem (Director, Islamic Center, School of African and Oriental studies, University of London), who not only revised my thesis out line and provided me with valuable recommendations, but also send me the required materials from his prestigious institute.

I am also in debt to express my heartiest gratitude to my teachers Dr. Muhammad Qaseem Mansur, who was assigned as my initial supervisor and who help me out to proceed with my work at times where I was headed by blocking confusions., & to Dr. Fadhil Hadi Wazeen , who always remained a very encouraging teacher. Being himself a great lover of Qur'anic research, he engraves the same passion in his students. Not only that but, also he provided me with valuable sources and instructions whenever I was in need.

I am very thankful to all library authorities of my university, and the libraries I consulted in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) and Erfurt (East Germany).

Besides my parents, I am very much grateful to my siblings especially my brother Hafiz Aziz ur Rehman & my sister Dr. Fozia Aziz who always remained my constant source of back up and encouragement. Whenever I was in need of an energetic boost, they always responded in positive. I also owe words of thanks to my extended family, friends and everyone else who helped me out in all possible ways throughout my research..

May Allah (SWT) accept this effort and bless Abdullah Yusuf Ali with eternal peace and make this contribution an increase in his *Hasanaat*. Aameen

Introduction

The Qur'an is inimitable in its style and diction. As the final discourse between Allah (SWT) and man, it was revealed in the language of the final Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the language of the people among whom he was raised and by whom the last message was destined to be carried to the end of the world. Allah (SWT) created man in a variety of colors and taught him diverse languages. Allah (SWT), Most Wise, sent each of His messengers speaking the language of his people in order to facilitate the transmission of the divine message. This was clearly stated in the verse:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانٍ قَوْمِهِمْ

"I never sent a messenger with other than his people's language".⁴

The very language, in which the Holy Qur'an is written (Arabic), is a kind of miracle, being an astonishing exception to the historical rule that a language cannot survive in the same form for more than 500 years⁵.

⁴ Ibrahim: 4

⁵ Versteegh, C.H.M, *Arabic Grammar and Qur'anic exegesis in early Islam*, (Leiden: 1993), V.

⁶ (1343-1400) was an English author, poet, philosopher, bureaucrat, courtier and diplomat. Although he wrote many works, he is best remembered for his unfinished frame narrative *The Canterbury Tales*. Sometimes called the father of English literature, Chaucer is credited by some scholars as being the first author to demonstrate the artistic legitimacy of the vernacular English language, rather than French or Latin.

In the course of five centuries, a language changes so radically that the coming generations find it increasingly difficult to understand the works of their distant predecessors. For instance, the works of Geoffrey Chaucer⁶, the father of English poetry, and the plays and poetry of William Shakespeare⁷, one of the greatest writers of the English language, have become almost unintelligible to twentieth century readers, and are now read almost exclusively as part of college curricula with the help of glossaries, dictionaries and 'translations.'⁸

But the history of the Arabic language is strikingly different, having withstood the test of time for no less than 1442 years. Wording and style have, of course, undergone some development, but not to such an extent that words should lose their original meaning. Supposing someone belonging to the Qur'anic times of ancient Arabia could be reborn today, the form of language in which he would express himself would be as understandable to modern Arabs as it was to his own contemporaries.⁹

It is as if the Qur'an had placed a divine imprint upon Arabic, arresting it in its course so that it should remain understandable right up to the last day. This being so, the Qur'an is never just going to collect dust on some obscure 'Classical Literature' shelf, but will be read by, and give inspiration to people for all time to come.

In the field of science, despite the great and rapid advances in knowledge in recent years, we come back to what was asserted in the Qur'an, so many centuries ago, as having arrived at the quintessence of the matter. Just as the Arabic language seems to have been crystallized at a particular point in time in fact, at the moment of divine revelation, so also does science seem to have been arrested in its course, the Qur'an having the final say

⁷(1564 –1616) was an English poet and playwright, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist.

⁹ Baljon, J.M.S, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation (1880-1960)*, (Netherlands: E.J.Brill, 1961), 89.

on matters which for centuries lay beyond man's knowledge and which still, in many important cases, elude man's intellectual grasp. The most significant of these is the origin of the universe.

The study and knowledge of the Qur'an is essential not only for Scholars and Philosophers, but for everyone: an ordinary person, a student, a worker, a trader, a learned person as well as for all faithful believers. It is essential for every committed Muslim, since it is the main source and foundation of the religious thought and faith. Whatsoever gives meaning, essence and sanctity to his existence lies in the Holy Qur'an.

Importance of Translations and their Benefits

The translations of the meanings of the Qur'an are of great importance for two reasons:

- 1- To present the message of Islam to non-Muslims and invite them to ponder over the Qur'an.
- 2- To point out to Muslims the revealed guidance and will of Allah to be observed by them.

Without translations of the Qur'an today there is no way of effective *da'wah* either to non-Muslims or to Muslims themselves since those familiar with the language of the Qur'an are few in number, and the vast majority of people have no opportunity to become acquainted with the meaning of the Qur'an unless it be rendered into their own tongue.

Translations of the meanings of the Qur'an therefore are not only permissible but a duty and obligation upon Muslims, and the practical basis for the extension of the Islamic *da'wah* to other peoples all over the world.

The Qur'an is not just like other religious books which are content to discuss the problems of existence of Allah (SWT) and creation in cryptic tones, or like those which merely convey a series of simple moral advice and counsels, so that those who believe in

them are hopelessly left to search for guidance in other sources¹⁰.

It is a book where all essential ingredients of life can be found. Unlike other books, the Qur'an discusses and formulates all the ideas and views that are essential for a man's life, besides communicating the tenets of faith. Since the Qur'an is book of life, it also lays down all the principles of life including that of moral and ethical values for the purpose of individual, social and familial existence. Unfortunately, the study of Qur'an has been left for Scholars and learned people only

All the Prophets sent by Allah (SAW) were raised up from among their own people, even though they all carried the same basic message. Thus, in spite of final message's universality, echoes in the verse;

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“And We have not send you, but as the one who gives glad tidings and as a Warner towards the entire mankind”¹¹

The Islamic state arose in the Arabian Peninsula, engulfed it and quickly spread to the neighboring lands of Africa, Asia Minor, India and Asia. Arabic soon became not only the language of the final revelation of Islam, but also the official language of a vast Islamic empire encompassing diverse cultures and languages. Some of the people already spoke Arabic, while most did not. However, within a very short period, Islam and Arabic

¹⁰ Ansari, Muhammad, Fazl-ur-Rahman, *The Qur'anic Foundation and the structure of Muslim Society*, (Karachi: The world Federation of Islamic missions, 1973), 2/34.

¹¹ *Saba*: 28

spread rapidly among the people. “Some foreign languages absorbed Arabic-Islamic terms and who spoke them began to write them in the Arabic script”.¹²

The famous hadith of the Prophet (SAW),

“Whosoever reads a letter from Allah’s book earns a blessing”¹³,

took a new meaning. This statement was made to Arabic – speaking Muslims to encourage them to read as much of Qur’an as possible. The goal behind this encouragement was increased exposure to Allah’s message, and it was never intended to be the mere parroting of the vehicle in which it was brought. However, with the rise of Turkish cultural nationalism,¹⁴ there arose the concept of reading the letters and words of the Qur’an simply for the blessing.

The translation of the Qur’an from Arabic to other languages is accepted by Muslims as merely an aid to understand the Qur’an and not a substitute for the text. This distinction is quite clear in the minds of Muslims, and therefore, efforts have been made in all ages to teach Muslims the Qur’an in the original Arabic right from the early childhood. Any translation of the Qur’an is a human effort and will constitute a form of *tafsir*, since it purports to explain the Arabic words into the language of translation.¹⁵

¹² Philips, Abu Ameenah Bilal, *The methodology of Qur’anic explanation* (UAE: Dar Al Fatah, 1997), 75 & Ayoub, Muhammad, *The Qur’an and its interpreters*, (Albany: State university of New York Press, 1984), 24.

¹³ Collected by *at-Tirmithi* and authenticated by *al-Albani in Saeeh Sunan At-Tirmithi* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1st edition, 1998), vol.3, p.9, no. 2327.

¹⁴ Martin, Richard, C, ed., *Approaches to Qur’an in Religions Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford publications, 1985), 142.

¹⁵ Doi, Abd al-Rahman I, *Introduction to the Qur’an* (Lagos: Islamic publications Bureau, 1977), 176.

Is Qur'an Translatable?

The translation of the Qur'an is a controversial issue which always raises such pressing and recurring questions as: Is the Qur'an translatable? Is it translatable in whole or in part? Is the translation a substitute for the original Arabic or a mere approximation and an attempt to translate the untranslatable? After their first appearance when a large number of non-Arabic speaking people had embraced Islam, these questions became again prominent when the issue of the translation of the Qur'an was raised in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁶

As Muslims we believe that the Qur'an is the absolute Word of Allah revealed in Arabic to His Prophet Muhammad (SAW) by the archangel Gabriel as a boon and mercy to all mankind. It represents Allah's guidance, which should be followed to enlighten the lives of humans, to find happiness and to lead a good life. The Qur'an moulds our thought and elevates our spirituality.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, "translation" means :

*"Expressing the sense of a word, sentence, or book in another language."*¹⁷

To be realistic one should never expect any translation to convey in full the idea expressed in the original Language. The word for translation in Arabic is "*tarjamah*",

¹⁶ Philips, Abu Ameenah, Bilal, *Usool at-Tafseer, The Methodology of Qur'anic explanation*, (UAE: Dar Al Fatah, 1997), 22.

¹⁷ *Oxford comprehensive English dictionary*, (London: Charles letters & Co, 1988, Oxford University press), 783.

which is also used for “*explanation*”, that is why Abdullah ibn “Abbas”¹⁸ (RA) is called *Tarjuman al-Qur’an* (The interpreter and the Commentator of the Qur’an), But the world as used by Jurists (*Fuqa’ha*) applies to both explanation and literal translation. In both case it is very important to know that each language has its own distinctive structure, grammatical features and vocabulary nuances. What appears in a translation is the translator’s understanding of the original text.¹⁹

This fact can be well understood in Ahmad Von Denfers’²⁰ words,
“The translation of the Qur’an from Arabic into English or any other language certainly does help to bridge the gap between the two languages and bring the message to the non-Arabic reader, but it can never do so completely. Although this fact must not put off the enthusiasm of a translator or the dissemination of the translated message, it is still true to say that the original beauty of the divine words, their spirit, their *Ie’jaz* (miraculous construction of the message) cannot be captured in the translation, however accurate it might be.”²¹

Those who have tried to translate the Qur’an from its Arabic original have found it impossible to express the same wealth of ideas with a limited number of words in the new

¹⁸ (618-687), was a cousin of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Frequently known as “Ibn Abbas”, Truly the master mind and the father of Quranic Exegesis, called *al-Hibr or al-Bahr* because of his doctrines. Prophet (SAW) made dua for him for the true knowledge of interpretation. He is revered by Muslims for his knowledge. He was an expert in its exegesis, as well as an authority on the Sunnah, due to his zeal in acquiring new knowledge.

¹⁹ Jullandari, Rashid Ahmad, “Qur’anic exegesis and classical tafsir”, *The Islamic Quarterly*, vol: 12, No. ½ (Fall 1967), 79-80

²⁰ A well-known German Muslims scholar who wrote the very first Book of Ulum al-Qur’an in German language and later of translated it into English by the title “Sciences of the Qur’an”. The author has also translated the Qur’an in German.

²¹ Denfer. Ahmad Von, *Sciences of the Qur’an* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1984), 134.

language. Arabic, when expertly used, is a remarkably terse, rich and forceful language, and the Arabic of the Qur'an is by turns striking, soaring, vivid, terrible, tender and breathtaking. In Professor Gibb's words, "No man has ever played on that deep-toned instrument with such power, such boldness and such range of emotional effects".²²

Pickthall²³ writes in foreword of his translation;

"... The Qur'an cannot be translated. ...The book is here rendered almost literally and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the Glorious Qur'an, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy. It is only an attempt to present the meaning of the Qur'an and peradventure something of the charm in English. It can never take the place of the Qur'an in Arabic, nor is it meant to do so".²⁴

Indeed, some writers, recognizing this extreme difficulty, have refrained from calling their works "translation" Pickthall for instance, called his rendering "The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an," while Arberry entitled his, work or effort "The Qur'an Interpreted." Both have made their translation directly from the Arabic. Needless to say, in the case of into English, the result is bound to be still further away from the original. Despite the evident inaccuracy of the word, "translation" remains the most convenient one.

To illustrate this point let us have an example of the attributes of Allah (SWT);

²² The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol: 1, *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge university Press, 1983) 137-138.

²³ Muhammad Markaduke Williams, A convert British Muslim and renowned translator of The Holy Qur'an Under the title "*The glorious Qur'an*" in 1930.

²⁴ Pckthall, Muhammad Marmaduke Williams, *The Glorious Qur'an* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), XI.

He is *Al-Khaliq* (One Who creates everything).

Al-Fatir (The original Creator of things – without a previous example to imitate),.

Al-Bari (Who creates and perfects things without previous example), *Al-Bari* (who creates and gives substance).

All these names are translated interchangeably as the “Creator,” the “*Malek* is “king,” (or again) the “Maker and Owner” and *Maalik* is the “supreme sovereign.”

Again, the word *Al-Qadir* means “The highly capable”. *Al-qadir* and *Al-moqtadir* are two different superlative forms with the same root. *Al-Moqtadir* was constructed by some as “Most potent” and by others as “Almighty.” The closest rendering could be “The most capable of great things.” Ali rendered the word as “The powerful” while he rendered *Al-qadir* as “The possessor of power.” The latter word was interpreted by many as “Almighty and by some as “The able;” whereas the closest expression would be “The infinitely capable.”²⁵

By translation of the Qur'an is meant the expression of the meaning of its text in a language different from the language of the Qur'an, in order that those not familiar with it may know about it and understand Allah's guidance and will.

There is agreement among Muslim scholars that it is impossible to transfer the original Qur'an word by word in an identical fashion into another language. This is due to several reasons:

- 1- Words of different languages do not express all the shades of meanings of their counterparts, though they may express specific concepts.
- 2- The narrowing down of the meaning of the Qur'an to specific concepts in a foreign language would mean missing out other important dimensions.

²⁵ For more examples see, Ayoub, Muhammad “Translating the Meaning of the Qur'an: Traditional Opinions and Modern Debates”, *Afkar*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (Ramadan 1406/May 1986), 349.

3 - The presentation of the Qur'an in a different language would therefore result in confusion and misguidance.

However, there is no doubt that translations of the meanings of the Qur'an had already been made at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as a solution for those who did not understand the language of the Qur'an:

When *Heraclius*, the Byzantine emperor received the message Prophet Muhammad (SAW) had sent to him through his messenger, the verses of the Qur'an therein, together with the message, had to be translated, and the report by *Abu Sufyan* on this matter, states that translators were called for the conversation between the emperor and *Abu Sufyan* and that the message from the Prophet included a passage from the Qur'an.²⁶

Similarly, translation from a passage from *Surah Maryam* which was recited by the Muslims in front of the Negus of Abyssinia must have occurred. It might even be taken as indicating that the Muslims carried with them written extracts from the Qur'an in case the Negus questioned them, before one of them recited from the Qur'an: do you have something with you from what he brought from Allah?

A word-by-word translation of the Qur'an into another language would not be adequate. Therefore good translators have always aimed at first determining the meaning of a passage and then rendering it into the other language. Hence translations of the Qur'an are actually expressions of meanings of the Qur'an in other languages.

²⁶ Tibwi, Abdal al-Latif, "Is the Qur'an translatable? Early Muslim Opinion". In *Arabic & Islamic Themes*, (London: Luzac Inc.1974), 48.

Limitations of Translation

The Qur'an is an eternal word of Allah (SWT). Since the Qur'an has been revealed in the Arabic language any translation of it would not be the word of Allah. Furthermore, the concept of the uniqueness and inimitability of the Qur'an (*i'jazal-qur'an*) is, closely linked to its expression in the Arabic language. This would become immaterial in translation. Lastly, because of the different meanings that words carry in different languages, the translation would never adequately express all the meanings of the Qur'an carried by the original text.

.So! It can be concluded here that the translation of the Qur'an from Arabic to Other languages is accepted as merely an aid to understand the Qur'an and not a substitute for the original text. This distinction is quite clear in the minds of Muslims, and therefore, efforts have been made in all ages to teach Muslims the Qur'an in its original Arabic right from the early childhood. Any translation of the Qur'an is a human effort and will constitute a form of *tafsir* (Explanation or commentary), since its purpose is to explain the divine words. This is indeed a very difficult task as Abdullah Yusuf Ali has said in the preface of his translation.

“It was in fact the double task of understanding the original, and producing its nobility, its beauty, its poetry, its grandeur, and its sweet practical and reasonable application to everyday experience”.²⁷

²⁷ Ali, Abdullah Yusuf, *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and commentary* (Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1983), xii.

A brief sketch of Qur'anic translations & commentaries in English Language

Almost all languages spoken by Muslims have translations of the Qur'an in them but before the publication of the massive World bibliography of the Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur'an²⁸, it was hard to even track down the material on the translation of the Holy Qur'an in various languages. Nonetheless, since the Bibliography is not annotated, the reader gets no idea about the translator's details, his dogmatic presuppositions and his approach to the Qur'an, as well as the quality of the translation.

Here, it has been tried to sketch out a fairly detailed list of complete Qur'anic translations and commentaries present in English language in an annotated order. Least familiar and partial efforts are not included. Each work contains a brief description. In preparing this list, apart from other sources, every possible help has been taken from the respected Dr. A.R. Kidwai's articles.

The first translation of the Qur'an into a Western language was made into Latin. It was carried out by *Robertus Rottenness and Hermannus Dalmata* in 1143, but was not published until 1543²⁹. In 1647 *Andre du Ryer*, French Consul in Egypt, translated it into French.³⁰ Many later English translations were based on a Latin version Father *Ludovic Maracci* carried out in 1698. Maracci was the confessor of Pope Innocent XI and was taught Arabic by a Turk.³¹

²⁸ *World Bibliography of the Translations of the Meaning of Holy Qur'an* (Istanbul: OIC Research Center, 1986) provides a comprehensive data about the translation of The Holy Qur'an in various languages.

²⁹ Pearson, J.D., "Translation of the Qur'an", in *The Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1995), 429.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 430.

³¹ Oughali, AkmaluDinn Ehsaan, *World Bibliography of the Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur'an: Printed Translations: 1515-1980* (Istanbul: OIC Research Center, 1986), 54-56.

Out of the 18 complete translations of the Holy Qur'an, 7 are by Englishmen, 10 by Muslim Indians and 1 by an Iraqi Arab, of Jewish descent.³²

The Qur'anic translations & commentaries by non-Muslims

Non-Muslims have shown a remarkable interest in Qur'anic translations and commentaries, here it has been tried to high light the important works of two non-Muslim groups specifically, who have shown a great interest in this regard. The Qadiyanis and the Orientalists. It is to be noted here that, only complete works of Qadiyanis and Orientalists have being included, with a level best neutral and non-bias approach.

1. THE WORK OF QADIYANIS::

The Qadiyanis³³, though abandoned Islam, have been actively engaged in translating the Qur'an. Their considerable translational activities are motivated by the urge to proclaim their ideological uniqueness. The most popular and wide spread Qadiyani translations and commentaries of The Holy Qur'an can be listed as follows.

1. **Ali, Muhammad, Lahori, *The Holy Qur'an: English translation (Lahore 1917)***. 12 editions. The translation supplemented by exhaustive notes betrays the translator's Qadiyani beliefs. Grossly twists and

³² *Encyclopedia of the Holy Qur'an*, First edn. (New Delhi: Global vision Publishers, 2000), Vol. 4:1156.

³³ Qadiyanis, A deviant sect rooted originally in *Qadiyan* (A town in Gurdaspur District, Eastern Punjab, India). The founder of this sect is *Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiyani*, who claimed to be the *Mahdi*, then the Promised *Maseeh* and finally declared his prophet hood. The community is mainly divided into two major sub-sects (Ahmadies & Lahories). Qadiyanis have been officially announced as a non-Mulsim minority by the Government of Pakistan in 1974. Although this group deny the authority of Muhammad (saw) as the final messenger of Allah(swt), but their interest in Qur'anic studies is quite obvious, and this is merely to hold a name of Islam. Most of their works are based upon anti-Muslim elements with a sheer distortion of facts. Nevertheless their hostile minds have done the worst possible work to black-list the religion of Islam, through the harsh, purposeful, and subtle mis-interpretations, mis-translations, mis-representations of the Sacred text.

misinterprets the Qur'anic verses related to the Promised Messiah and the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as the seal of prophet hood. Swayed by pseudo rationalism, Muhammad Ali denies the occurrence of some miracles such as the gushing forth of twelve springs as a result of the Prophet Moses' striking his staff, angelhood of *Harut and Marut*, Jinns listening to the Qur'an, and the stoning of *Abraha's* army to death by the birds. The language used in his translation is not also up to the mark.³⁴

2. **Sarwar, Ghulam, *Translations of the Holy Qur'an* (Singapore, 1920).** 8 editions. The introduction constitutes a brilliant critique of the English translations of the Qur'an by Sale, Rodwell, Palmer and Muhammad Ali. Devoid of the Text and notes. The only defect Sarwar discovers in Muhammad Ali's translation is the very poor construction of a great many passages in the body of the translation hence his new translation.³⁵
3. **Kamaluddin and Nazir Ahmad, *A running Commentary of the Holy Qur'an* (London, 1948).** 4 editions. Includes a lot of mistakes in linguistics and style. The thoughts are often confusing and contradictory. While trying to emphasize on the Running commentary the translators ignored the essence of divine words quite often.³⁶
4. **Ali, Sher, *The Holy Qur'an* (Lahore, 1995).** 13 editions. The official Qadiyani translation of the Qur'an. Apart from retaining the unpardonable faults of misinterpretation and mistranslation found in Muhammad Ali's translation, Sher Ali interpolated more blatantly the Qadiyani doctrines into his translation.³⁷

³⁴ An-Nadavi, Abdullah Abbas, *Tarjamt ma'ani Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem*: A brief hand-out published under the series of monthly publications (Makkah: OIC Research centre, 1994), 83.

³⁵ Kidwai, A.R, "Translating the underslatable: A survey of English Translations of the Qur'an" *The Muslim World Book Review*, Vo.7, No. 4 (Summer 1987), 231.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 232.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 232.

5. **Peer, Salahuddin, *The Wonder Koran (Amainbad, 1960)***. 2 editions. Another Qadiyani translation of the Qur'an shows the intelligent mental make-up of the translator while twisting the words and phrases without keeping in mind the Pre and Post Qur'anic text.³⁸
6. **Nuri, Khadim Rahman, *The Running Commentary of the Holy Qur'an with under-bracket comments (Shilling 1964)*** 3 editions. Sufistic leanings of the translator characterize this Qadiyani translation of the Qur'an.³⁹
7. **Firozuddin Ruhi, *The Qur'an (Karachi, 1965)***. Written in a quite modern style with more rational approach. This translation has been criticized from various Qadiyani groups.⁴⁰
8. **Farid, Malik Gulam (ed.), *The Holy Qur'an: English Translation and Commentary (Rabwah, 1969)***. 2 editions. The commentary is based on Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad's Urdu Translation of the Qur'an. Published under the auspices of Hadrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad, Third Successor of the Promised Messiah and Head of the Ahmadiyyah Movement.⁴¹
9. **Khan, Zafrullah, Sir: *The Qur'an: Arabic Text and English Translation (London, 1970)***. 4 editions. A notable Qadiyani translation. It begins with a typical introduction of some length. The English text has a literacy style common to so many translations which simultaneously lose much of the character of the original. Only Arberry has succeeded in combining both. Zafrullah Khan's work is, on the whole, a very free interpretation of the text and suffers from a sectarian bias. Marred by

³⁸ Ibid., 235.

³⁹ Ibid., 236.

⁴⁰ Translated from, An-Nadavi, Abdullah Abbas, *Tarjamat ma'ani Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem*: A brief hand-out published under the series of monthly publications (Makkah: OIC Research centre, 1994), 85.

⁴¹ Ibid., 87

unaccountable liberties in that Zafrullah Khan, following the footsteps of other Qadiyanis does not recognize the Prophet Muhammad (saw) as the last Prophet.⁴²

2. THE WORK OF ORIENTALISTS:

The Orientalism⁴³ has always shown a particular interest in Qur'anic studies. Many Orientalist scholars have made their efforts of translating the Qur'an in various western languages particularly in English. Some of these Western translations of the Holy Qur'an (not all, of course), tried intentionally to represent a distorted picture of Islam to western common folk. The very important point to be noted here is that the interest of missionaries in translating the Qur'an was not confined to translating into European languages; they were even involved in translating the Qur'an into the native languages of some Islamic peoples and tribes.⁴⁴ The misinterpretations made by these Orientalists are so strongly plastered with such attractive colors of their linguistic excellence and delusive logic that people, who are hardly or even totally unaware of the actual Qur'anic factors of faith, get caught in the falsehood tempered with the eloquence.⁴⁵

Thus, studies, focusing on those aspects of each translation of the Qur'an, are urgently needed lest Western scholars misguide the unsuspecting non-Arabic speaking readers of

⁴² Ibid., 96.

⁴³ Derived from the word "Orient" which means "Areas located in the East of Mediterranean Sea". *Orientalism* is a specific discipline of study which deals mainly in Oriental (Eastern) studies. It covers Eastern languages, culture, civilization and religions. *Orientalists* are those expertises who stand up for this scholarship. It has been observed since long that Arabic and Islamic Studies have always been discipline in which Orientalist scholars have shown a remarkably great enthusiasm.

⁴⁴ Ameli, Abbas Sadr, Sayyid, *An enlightening commentary into the Light of The Holy Qur'an Part 1*, (Isfahan: Imam Ali Public Library's series, 1992), 21

⁴⁵ For more details see, Husain, Asaf, Ali, *Orientalism: Islam and Islamists* (London: Book Marks Co.,m 1989), 73 & Ahsan, M.M., "The Qur'an and the Orientalists: A note on the authenticity of the so-called satanic verses", *The Islamic Quarterly* 24 (1980).121-33.

TH S 2 43

the Qur'an. An effort has been made in the following discussion to bring out the hallmarks and shortcomings of the major complete translations of the Qur'an.

1. **Ross, Alexander, *The Alcoran of Mahomet translated out of Arabique into French, by the Sieur Du Ryer... And newly Englished, for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish vanities (London, 1649)***. 8 editions. The latest edition came out in 1856. A very crude specimen of the Orientalist-missionary approach to the Qur'an. In his 'Introductory Note Ross (a chaplain of King Charles I), specifies his purpose: "I thought good to bring it to their colors, that so viewing thine enemies in their full body thou must the better prepare to encounter...his Alcoran'. In the same rabidly anti-Islamic vein is the Appendix to the work entitled as "A needful caveat or Admonition, for them who desire to know what use may be made of or if there is danger in reading the al-Coran'.⁴⁶ As to the quality of the translation itself, Zwemer's⁴⁷ remark is quite illuminating: "He (Ross) was utterly unacquainted with Arabic, and not a thorough French scholar; therefore his translation is faulty in the extreme'.⁴⁸
2. **Sale, George, *The Koran: Commonly called the Alkoran of Mohammad (London, 1734)***. At least 123 editions. The latest edition appeared in 1975. Contains an exhaustive Preliminary discourse on *Seerah* and the Qur'an. In translating the Qur'an Sale's missionary intent is quite marked. For in the note to the reader he suggests the rules to be observed for 'the conversion of Mohammedans; evaluates the Prophet thus: "For how criminal sever Mohammad may have been in imposing a fake religion on mankind, the praises due to his real virtues ought not to be denied him' (p.

⁴⁶ Oughali, AkmaluDinn Ehsaan, *World Bibliography of the Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur'an: Printed Translations: 1515-1980* (Istanbul: OIC Research Center, 1986), 73.

⁴⁷ A renowned Orientalist, Biography could not be found.

⁴⁸ Zwemer, S.M., *The Muslim World*, (Luck now: Alam Press, 1935), 252.

vii), talks of different editions of the Qur'an which, for him, vary in contents (p. 45), points out the borrowings in the Qur'an, (pp. 49 and 50) and refers to the piecemeal revelation of the Qur'an as a 'contrivance' (p.50). Full of instances of omission and mistranslation. For example, *Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem* is simply rendered as 'Most Merciful'. The recurrent Qur'anic address, "*ya aayuhan nas*" is translated as 'O people of Mecca'. Renders as 'Substitute' and as 'Secret History'. Parts of some verses have been altogether omitted, as for example, in *Aal -Imran* III: 98 are not translated.⁴⁹

3. **Rodwell, J.M., *The Koran (London, 1861)*.** 32 editions. Rodwell was the Rector of St. Ethelberga, London. He questions the authenticity of the traditional Surah order and invents a new so called chronological Surah order. In the Introduction he refers to the prophet as the crafty author of the Qur'an; indicates the Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian and other sources of the Qur'an; advises missionary activities how to carry out their work and hold the prophet a victim of self-deception, a cataleptic subject from his early youth...liable to morbid and fantastic hallucinations (p.14). Suffers from a number of mistakes of mistranslation and misinterpretation. For example, (*al-Mudathir: 39*) is translated as 'they of God's right hand', (*al-Kauthar: 2*) as 'Pray therefore to the Lord and slay the victims'. Explains the use of the word *abd* (*al-Alaq: 10*) in the Qur'an thus: 'Since it was the slaves who had embraced Islam, the Qur'an used this expression'.⁵⁰
4. **Palmer, E.H., *The Koran (London 1880)*.** 15 editions. A Cambridge scholar entrusted with the preparation of a new translation of the Qur'an for Max Muller "Sacred Books of the East Series". Nykl notes no less than 70 instances of omissions and mistranslation in his translation.⁵¹ Nykl, A.R.,

⁴⁹ An-Nadavi, Abdullah Abbas, *Tarjamt ma'ani Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem*: A brief hand-out published under the series of monthly publications (Makkah: OIC Research centre, 1994), 45.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁵¹ Kidwai, A.R., "Translating the untranslatable: A survey of English Translations of the Qur'an" *The Muslim World Book Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Summer 1987), 331.

'Notes on E.M. Palmer's the Qur'an in the Journal of the American Oriental Society 56 (1936), pp.77-84.

5. **Whery, Alfred, Father, *The Koran Translated (Cambridge 1894)***. Written by a priest of Canterbury, who claimed that he wrote a comprehensive book on Islam (Religion of Muhamat), while the real inside unveils the reality of this translation which is based upon Usual *ash-shi'a* (The principles of *Shi'a*, deviant sect). The translation is full of hostile attacks on The authenticity of Qur'an, Seerah of Prophet Muhammad (saw) etc.⁵²
6. **Bell Richard, *The Qur'an translated with a crucial rearrangement of Surahs (London 1937)***. 4 editions. His aim in translating the Qur'an is to 'understand the deliverances of Muhammad afresh' (p. v). Apart from describing the Prophet as the author of the Qur'an, Bell believes that the Qur'an in its written form was 'actually written by Muhammad himself'. Illustrates 'alteration, substitutions and derangements in the text'. For example, II: 209 is a later addition, 206-208 are unconnected scraps and 210 is the original continuation of the verse No. 205. On each page he indicates his peculiar arrangement of verses.⁵³
7. **Arberry, A.J., *The Koran Interpreted (London, 1955)***. 12 editions. A.J. Arberry, a renowned Orientalist and Professor of Arabic at the Universalties of London and Cambridge, has been, so far, the latest non-Muslim translator of the Qur'an. Contains no explanatory notes or background information about Surahs. Not altogether free from omissions and mistranslations. For example *Al-Anfal: 59* is rendered as: 'And thou are not supposed that they who disbelieve have outstripped me' whereas the correct translation would be: 'Let not those who disbelieve deem that they have escaped Me'. *An-nabi-ul Ummi* is mistranslated as 'the Prophet of the common folk'. Other instances of mistranslation are: *Aal-Imran: 43; Nisaa:*

⁵² Ibid., 332

⁵³ Ibid., 332

72, 147 and 157; Maida: 55, Aaraf: 157; al-Sajdah: 23; al-Anfal: 59 and Yunus: 88, etc.⁵⁴

8. **Dawood, N.J., *The Koran (London, 1956.)*** 11 editions. An Iraqi Jew. Speaks of the influence of Jewish and Christian teachings on the Prophet and condemning the traditional *Surah* order follows the chronological *Surah* order. Marred by serious mistakes of translation 'bani Adam' (al-Araf: 31) is rendered as children of Allah (correct translation is 'children of Adam'), in *Al-Baqarah*: 191 is mistranslated as 'idolatry is worse than carnage' (correct translation is 'oppression is worse than slaughter').⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Kidwai, A.R, "Translating the untranslatable: A survey of English Translations of the Qur'an" *The Muslim World Book Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Summer 1987), 332.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 334

The Qur'anic Scholarship of Muslims.

Obviously, Muslims could not allow the missionary effort – invariably confounding the authenticity of the text with a hostile commentary of its own – to go unopposed and unchecked. Hence, the Muslim decision to present a faithful translation of the Qur'anic text as well as an authentic summary of its teaching to the European world. Later, the Muslim translations were meant to serve even those Muslims whose only access to the Qur'anic revelation was through the medium of the European languages⁵⁶. Naturally, English was deemed the most important language for the Muslim purpose, not least because of the existence of the British Empire which after the Ottomans had the largest number of Muslim.

The early English translations of the Qur'an by Muslims stemmed mainly from the pious enthusiasm on their part to refute the allegations leveled by the Christian missionaries against Islam in general and the Qur'an in particular.

1. **Kahn, Mohamad Abul Hakim, *The Holy Qur'an, (Patial, 1905)*, 2 edns. Subtitle: 'With short notes based on the Holy Qur'an or the authentic traditions of the Prophet (SAW), or/and New Testaments or scientific truth. All fictitious romance, questionable history, and disputed theories have been carefully avoided'. A physician by profession, Abul Hakim Khan was not thoroughly versed in Islam. Initially he had Qadiyani leanings which he later recanted. His translation is more of a rejoinder to the anti-Islam missionary propaganda rife in the day than a piece of sound**

⁵⁶ For more details follow the link, Kidwai, A.R, "English translations of the Holy Qur'an: An annotated bibliography". <http://www.quranonline.org/articles/v.print/110.66p-73/2002> .

Qur'anic scholarship. Contains scant notes. His translation is badly marred by literalism.

2. **Dehlawi Mirza Hairat (ed.), *The Koran: Prepared by Various Oriental earned Scholars and edited by Mirza Hairat (Delhi, 1912)***. 2 edns. Though intended as 'a complete and exhaustive reply to the manifold criticisms of the Koran by various Christian authors such as Drs. Sale, Rodwell, Palmer and Sir W. Muir', it contains little material to justify this claim. Verses numbered part0wise instead of Sura-wise. The language used in the translation is quite weak.⁵⁷
3. **Abu'l Fadl, Mirza, *The Qur'an translated into English from the Original Arabic (Allahabad, 1912)***. 3 edns. Dedicated to Sultan Jahan Begum, (Lady) ruler of Bhopal (India). References to the Bible with a view to bringing out the superiority of the Qur'an. Refutation of the missionary views in a casual manner. Includes few notes.⁵⁸
4. **Pickthall, Muhammad Marmaduke Williams, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an (London, 1930)***. At least 34 edns. An English man of letters, who embraced Islam, holds the distinction of brining out a first-rate rendering of the Qur'an in English. His work is one of the most widely used translations. Faithfully represents the sense of the original. His very frequent use of the Biblical English, however, tends to be a stumbling block for an average reader. Too brief notes on the circumstantial setting of the Surahs and the Qur'anic allusions hence not very helpful for uninitiated reader of the Qur'an.⁵⁹
5. **Ali, Abdullah Yusuf, *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary notes (Lahore, 1934-37)***. At least 39 edns. Another

⁵⁷ Ibid.,

⁵⁸ Kidwai, A.R, "Translating the untranslatable: A survey of English Translations of the Qur'an" *The Muslim World Book Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Summer 1987), 336.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 336.

extremely popular translation. An Indian civil servant by profession wrote his translation in style and couched in chaste English, it stands out above other translations as a highly readable rendering of the Qur'an into English. Copious notes are reflective of Yusuf Ali's vast learning. Nonetheless, some of his notes, particularly, on the Qur'anic eschatology and angelology smack of apologia and pseudo-rationalism. Sufistic bias is also quite marked in his notes.⁶⁰

6. **Jullundri, Ali Ahmad Khan, *Translation of the Glorious Holy Qur'an with Commentary (Lahore, 1962)***. 3 edns. The translator boastfully entitles his work as 'After few centuries a True and Easy translation of the Glorious Holy Qur'an. Marred by numerous mistakes of translation. Appended to the translation is a lengthy appendix dealing with diverse topics in a bizarre way, heaps abuses in the Saudi rulers and slights the role of Sunnah. A simply unreadable work.⁶¹
7. **Ali, S.V. Ahmad, *The Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary according to the version of the Holy Ahlul Bait. With special notes from Ayatullah Agha haji Mirza Mahdi Pooya Yazdi (Karachi, 1964)***. 3 edns. Vindicates on the authority of the Qur'an itself such sectrain doctrines of Shias as Imamah, Muta'a (temporary marriage), the nomination of Ali as the Prophet's successor, Taqqiyya (hiding the faith), Tabarra (cursing), and mourning in the month of Muharram. Invectives used against both the Umayyad and Abbasid rulers. Strongly refutes the view that the Shias believe in the alteration (Tahreef) of the Qur'an.⁶²

⁶⁰ For a detailed discussion on Yusuf Ali's unorthodox views, please see Kidwai, A.R., 'Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Views on the Qur'anic Eschatology', *Muslim World League Journal* 12 (5) February 1985, pp. 14-17.

⁶¹ Kidwai, A.R., "Translating the untranslatable: A survey of English Translations of the Qur'an" *The Muslim World Book Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Summer 1987), 336.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 337.

8. **Tariq, Abdur Rehman and Gilani, Ziauddin, *The Holy Qur'an: Rendered into English (Lahore, 1966)***. 1 edn. An explanatory translation supplemented by brief notes, without the Arabic text. Though this translation is in consonance with the orthodox Muslim viewpoint, its language and presentation leave a lot to be desired.⁶³
9. **Latif, Syed Abdul, *Al-Qur'an: rendered into English (Hyderabad, 1969)***. 1 edn. Apart from the translation of the Qur'an, Syed Abdul Latif also rendered Abdul Kalam Azad's incomplete Urdu tafsir *The Tarjuman al-Allah* into English. Devoid of notes and the text, this translation does not advance much one's understanding of the Qur'an. At best, it represents the author's pious enthusiasm to undertake a noble enterprise.⁶⁴
10. **Daryabadi, Abdul Majid, Maulana *The Holy Qur'an (Lahore, 1971)***. Published in two volumes. Maulana Daryabadi followed Muhammad Ali and Yusuf Ali in adding a substantial commentary to the interlinear English/Arabic text but his work is an interesting contribution in that it is chiefly comparative and quotes extensively from the Bible.. Whereas the former works were somewhat interpretive, Daryabadi is a strict translation of the Arabic original. A one – volume publication without his commentary has this note: This English Version is a Translation of the Arabic Text not its Paraphrase or Adaptation. This translation, however, suffers from serious English grammatical weaknesses. One can give the author a degree of the benefit of the doubt by presuming that in many cases a pleasing style has been sacrificed in the interests of an accurate rendering of the text, but it makes heavy reading for those whose home language is English. This work will remain in the shadows of Yusuf Ali's popular

⁶³ Ibid., 337.

⁶⁴ Kidwai, A.R., "Translating the untranslatable: A survey of English Translations of the Qur'an" *The Muslim World Book Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Summer 1987), 338.

version but the preference of some of the orthodox school for Daryabadi's edition gives it a place of importance in this field of study.⁶⁵

11. **Ali, Hashim Amir, *The Message of the Qur'an Presented in Perspective (Tokyo, 1974)***. 1 edn. In his zeal to bring out the thematic unity of the Qur'an, the translator has devised a new Sura order, rearranging the Suras under the five sections which he calls as the five 'books' of the Qur'an. Going a step further, he has made up 600 sections of the Text, in place of the standard 558 sections, for, what he calls, perspective purposes. In making a mess of the Sura and ruku order of the Qur'an, it does not occur to Hashim Amir Ali that the thematic unity of the Qur'an has been quite remarkably demonstrated by some exegetes without disturbing the traditional arrangements of the Qur'an. The level of translation is, however, fairly good.⁶⁶
12. **Al-Hilalai, Taquiuddin & Khan, Muhamamd Muhsin, *Explanatory English Translation of the Meaning of the Holy Qur'an (Chicago, 1977)***. 12 edns. This work is mostly commonly known as The Noble Qur'an. It is, in fact, a summarized English version of Ibn Kathir's exegesis, supplemented by al-Tabri's, with comments from Sahih al-Bukhari. Both the translators have been introduced as *Salafees* (traditional followers of the way of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) & rightly successors). The translation is intended to 'present the meanings of the Qur'an which the early Muslims had known.'⁶⁷
13. **Ahmad, Muhammad Mufassir, *The Koran: The First Tafsir in English (London, 1979)***. 1 edn. Explanatory notes have been

⁶⁵ An-Nadavi, Abdullah Abbas, *Tarjamat ma'ani Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem*: A brief hand-out published under the series of monthly publications (Makkah: OIC Research centre, 1994), 129.

⁶⁶ Kidwai, A.R, "English translations of the Holy Qur'an: An annotated bibliography" <http://www.quranonline.org.com/articles/v.print/110.66p-73/2002>

⁶⁷ Khalifa, Muhammad, "Translation: Tried and Truth?", *The American journal of Islamic social sciences*, (Fall 1995), vol: 12, No. 2, 63.

interpolated into the translated text. It marks a serious deviation from the norms of the Qur'anic exegesis in that it would open the floodgate for presenting any material as the translation of the Text itself. Grossly misinterprets several Qur'anic terms. For example, al-Ghayb (the Unseen) is rendered as the 'consequence of one's action. The work has no notes but the author's interpretation is liberally written into the text itself which reads something like the Amplified Version of the Bible.⁶⁸

14. **Muhammad Asad, *The Message of The Qur'an (Gibraltar, 1980)***. 11 edn. Translated in chaste, idiomatic English by a Polish/Austrian convert from Judaism to Islam. However, it contains some serious departures from the orthodox viewpoint on a number of Qur'anic statements. The author is one of the modern school of Islamic scholars who rationalize much of the teaching of the Qur'an and endeavor to present its teaching in the spirit of 20th century modernism and skepticism about the actual physical reality of alleged supernatural events in history Asad appears to be reluctant to accept the literal meaning of some Qur'anic verses. For example, he doubts the throwing of Ibrahim into fire, Jesus speaking in the cradle; refers to Khidr and Dhulqarnain as mythical figures and expresses unconventional views on abrogation theory.⁶⁹
15. **Zayid, Mahmud Y. (checked and revised) in collaboration with a committee of Muslim scholar, *The Qur'an: An English translation of the Meaning of the Qur'an (Beirut, 1980)***. Based mainly on a Jew, N.J. Daud's English translation of the Qur'an hence repeats the mistakes of mistranslation that are present in Daud's translations.

⁶⁸ Kidwai, A.R, "Translating the untranslatable: A survey of English Translations of the Qur'an" *The Muslim World Book Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Summer 1987), 338.

⁶⁹ For details please see Arfaque Malik's review in the *Muslim World Book Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1890), pp. 5-7.

In the supplement on Muslim religious practices and law both the Sunni and Shi'a doctrines have been presented.⁷⁰

16. **Sarwar, Sheikh Muhammad, *The Holy Qur'an: Arabic Text and English translation (Elmhurst, 1981)***. 1 edn. Without any notes this explanatory translation paraphrases the contents of the Qur'an in a lucid style.⁷¹
17. **Shakir, M.M., *The Qur'an (New York 1982)***. An example of blatant plagiarism in that about 90% of this English translation has been verbatim copied from Muhammad Ali Lahori's English translation of the Qur'an. Though it does not contain any notes, the Shi'a doctrines have been indicated in the Subject index of the Qur'an with pointed reference to the Qur'anic verses in order to give the impression that such Shi'a doctrines as Imamha of Ali (RA) as the chosen one, martyrdom of Hussein (RA), khums, masoom (the infallible ones) and Vali occur in the Qur'an itself.⁷²
18. **Ali Ahmad, *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation (Karachi, 1984)***. 2 end. Evoid of explanatory notes or background information about Surahs, this translation rendered in fluent idiomatic English is vitiated by several instance of mistranslation. Contains unorthodox, apologetic and pseudo-rationalistic views on the hell, stoning of Abraha's army, the Tree, the Verses II: 73, 248 and 282, III: 49 and IV:01.⁷³

⁷⁰ Kidwai, A.R, "English translations of the Holy Qur'an: An annotated bibliography" <http://www.quranonline.org.com/articles/v.print/110.66p-73/2002>

⁷¹ Kidwai, A.R, "Translating the untranslatable: A survey of English Translations of the Qur'an" *The Muslim World Book Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Summer 1987), 341.

⁷² Kidwai, A.R, "Translating the untranslatable: A survey of English Translations of the Qur'an" *The Muslim World Book Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Summer 1987), 341.

⁷³ Ibid., 342-343.

19. **Irving, T.B., *The Qur'an: the First American Version (Vermont, 1985)***. 1 edn. Another native Muslim speaker of English Irving's work is indeed remarkable. Apart from the obnoxious title this translation is not altogether free from mistakes of translation and loose expressions, such as in al-Baqarah II: 37 and 157. Assigns theme(s) to each Qur'anic ruku (section). Contains neither the Text nor explanatory notes. Uses American English expressions and slang sometimes.⁷⁴
20. **Khatib, M.M., *The bounteous Koran: A Translation of Meaning and Commentary (London, 1986)***. 1 edn. An authentic and faithful translation of the Qur'an in readable, fluent English. Free from irksome use of archaic biblical English as in Pickthall, Yusuf Ali and Daryabadi. Contains a historically based 'Introduction' discussing Islam, the Qur'an and Seerah, and brief yet insightful notes on the circumstantial setting and the meaning of certain Qur'anic allusions and expressions. Suffers from a few inaccuracies in translation. For example al-Furqan : 16, 29, 46 and 62, al-Maidah: 67 and Maryam: 26 and 34, etc.⁷⁵
21. **Rashad Khalifa *The Qur'an: The Final Scripture (Authorized English Version) (Tucson, 1978)***. This translation is said to be contained a few blasphemous statements, (Though I never got a chance to go through it).⁷⁶
22. **Muhammad A. S Abdel Haleem , *The Qur'an (Oxford World Classics, Paper back, June 2005)*** Written in contemporary language that remains faithful to the meaning and spirit of the original, making the text crystal

⁷⁴ Kidwai, A.R, "English translations of the Holy Qur'an: An annotated bibliography" <http://www.quranonline.org/articles/v.print/110.66p-73/2002>

⁷⁵ For details see, Kidwai, A.R, "A brief review on Khatib's translation", *Muslim world book review*, (Spring 1988), Vol: 8, No. 3, 11-13

⁷⁶ Khalifa, Muhammad, "Translation: Tried and Truth?", *The American journal of Islamic social sciences*, (Fall 1995), vol: 12, No. 2, 63.

clear while retaining all of this great work's eloquence. The translation is accurate and completely free from the archaisms, incoherence, and alien structures that mar existing translations. Thus, for the first time, English-speaking readers will have a text of the Qur'an which is easy to use and comprehensible. Furthermore, Dr. Abdul Haleem includes notes that explain geographical, historical, and personal allusions as well as an index in which Qur'anic material is arranged into topics for easy reference. His introduction traces the history of the Qur'an, examines its structure and stylistic features, and considers issues related to militancy, intolerance, and the subjection of women. The translator has managed to transform the complex grammar and structure of the holy book into a form of modern English which reads easily and flows smoothly without taking liberties with the inviolable text.

23. **Dr. Zohurul Hoque, *Translation and Commentary on the Holy Qur'an*:** English translation with brief explanation of verses. The explanations are given in a unique way by Contains Arabic text, its placing them in parenthesis along with the actual translation. The flow of text between actual translation and the explanations gives a smooth textual flow. Outstanding feature of the translation is its loyalty to the actual Arabic – in terms of grammatical syntax and word usage. No Arabic word from the Qur'an was left untranslated and no new words were introduced inside the translation to elaborate a point, to justify a given opinion or for the sake of English writing.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ www.qurancommentary.com

Chapter: 1

Part 1: Abdullah Yusuf Ali! A life sketch

Part 2: Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Writings

**Part 3: The Holy Qur'an, Text, Translation & Commentary
: An Introduction**

Part 4: General Methodology

PART 1:

Abdullah Yusuf Ali: A Life Sketch

Sir Cam Johns⁷⁸, narrates;

“While many possess Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s English translation of the Holy Qur’an, A very few are aware of the scholar behind the mighty tome. There is much to be desired in the areas of biographical work and an appreciation of the man.

A short walk from St John’s College is a street where one of Cambridge University’s distinguished students used to live, one sees a plaque at 35 Thompson’s Lane commemorating the fact that Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the famous translator and commentator of the Qur’an, lived here. Abdullah Yusuf Ali has the distinction of being one of the earliest Muslims at Cambridge. He was a law student at St John’s College from 1891 to 1895.

My own search for Abdullah Yusuf Ali took me to Brook wood cemetery in Surrey. Brook wood is a few miles west of Woking, which is about an hours drive west of London. The Brook wood Memorial and War Graves site is a huge woodland area of some 15 acres with separate plots for different faiths. How do you find a particular grave in this maze?

I had taken with me a copy of the biography which has a photograph of the grave. By some good luck I met a gardener who recognized the leaves pictured behind the grave. “Those leaves are of a special kind of tree,” he said, “I know where it is.” The positive identification of the plant took us to the exact spot. “Here’s Mr. Ali’s grave,” pointed the gardener. The grave is the second one from the path, in the third row of Muslim graves

⁷⁸ One of the British Lords of Cambridge Highly inspired by Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s translation and commentary notes. Eventually embraced Islam in 1951, Died in 1984.

starting from the Parsee plot.

The plain tombstone is in the shape of an arch, about three feet high, and reads:

ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

CBE, MA, LL.M, FRSL, ICS

BORN: SURAT, INDIA, 4th April, 1872

DIED: LONDON, 10th December, 1953.

Ah! Sighed the heart, here lies the man who gave us the most popular English translation of the Qur'an. May Allah bless him. He was a distinguished literary figure as well as top ICS (Indian Civil Service) man, but his magnum opus is without doubt his translation-cum-commentary of "The Holy Qur'an".

The grave of Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, the other distinguished translator of the Qur'an, is near Abdullah Yusuf Ali's. Absolutely amazing! Here, so close, you have two great figures associated with opening up the Qur'an to the English-reading world."⁷⁹

Abdullah Yusuf Ali is best known to English-speaking Muslims as the man who produced a translation and commentary of the Holy *Qur'an*. Just as well. Though a man of great intellect and wide interest, his personal and public lives do not leave a very favorable impression.

Who was Yusuf Ali? ⁸⁰

⁷⁹ The daily Times, London: July 13th 1982.

⁸⁰Though the first name is "Abdullah". But he is widely known by his sir name "Yusuf Ali". The name was to be subject to many variations at many different stages of his career (See: Sherif, M.A., "*Searching for solace*" A biography of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad, 2000, 4-6). Sheief has rightly observed that it clearly reflects the uncertainty of his mind.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali was born on 4 April 1872/ 1289 A.H in *Surat*,⁸¹ in a family of the *Bohra*⁸² community. He was the second and younger son of Yusuf Ali Allah Buksh⁸³, an official in Surat's Police Force⁸⁴. On retirement in 1885, Allah Buksh was given the title of *Khan Bahadur*⁸⁵. His religious family made sure that the young Yusuf Ali learned Qur'an before anything else. Upon completion of young Yusuf's committing the entire Qur'an to memory, his father celebrated the occasion with a grand banquet⁸⁶.

Though the main *Dawudi Bohra's* religious seminary, the *Jamia Saifiya* located in *Surat*, Allah Buksh chose a separate route for his son's education. Young Abdullah Yusuf Ali was sent to Bombay to attend the new school of *Anjuman-e-Islam*⁸⁷ and then Wilson

⁸¹ A textile town in Gujrat, Western India, which formed part of the "presidency of Bombay" in the days of British rule. (Edward, Collin James, ed. "*Designing Geography of sub-continent*". London: Bell and Harly, 1978. 163).

⁸² A mercantile community, traces its muslim ancestry to the efforts of preachers dispatched by the Fatmid caliphs in Cairo. Religious doctrine required the community to be led by a supreme leader. The *da'i*, though succession of this office was a frequent source of dissension. One such dispute led to the Dawudi and Sulaimani split, around the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar in sixteenth century. The Bohras in general were deeply involved in trading activities in Surat and Bombay, though in 1920, Abdullah Yusuf Ali and his father were sufficiently well-known to be cited as examples of Dawudi Bohras who were an exception to this rule, (Also see: A.A. Engineer. *The Bohras*, New Dehli: Tareekh publishers, 1987, 56-59).

⁸³ Khan Bahadur, Yusuf Ali Allah Buksh, the full name & title of Abdullah Yusuf Ali's father.

⁸⁴ Allahbuksh's rank and status remained in subject to many variations as well, When he died in July 1891, Yusuf Ali described his father's profession as "formally government Inspector of Police", However, by November 1891 this occupation had changed to "Deputy commissioner" and in 1894 Yusuf Ali would prefer "municipal Commissioner". When Yusuf Ali died in 1953, an obituary notice even described his father as a "former chairman of Surat municipality".

⁸⁵ An award the Raj, (British Rule of that time) bestowed on Muslims for some act of public service or philanthropy. (See: Hammer, P.B, "*Great Britain*" (Oxford: Walles & Co, 1962, 93-94) True to form, the young Yusuf Ali incorporated the honorary title "khan bahadur", given to his father into his own name. The British seemed to be charitable, at least to those who pledged unquestioning loyalty to them, to allow such an indiscretion to pass. This could not have been an oversight, Yusuf Ali used the name Abdullah ibn Khan Bahadur Yusuf Ali while applying to register at Cambridge university, the Lincoln Inn in London as well as when applying for the Indian Civil Service. The Indian Office administrator responsible for processing ICS applications deemed the double-barrelled surname in order and Abdullah ibn Khan Bahadur Yusuf Ali came about.

⁸⁶ Ali, Abdullah Yusuf, Preface to the first edition, *The Holy Quran: Translation and commentary*, (Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1983), iii.

⁸⁷ (Organisation of Muslims)'s school opened in 1880, aimed the amelioration of Muslim community and to effect some improvement in their educational, moral and social state.

College⁸⁸ around 1882, so he was barely eight or nine years old when first dispatched from home. He attended Wilson till the age of 15, matriculating in 1887⁸⁹, before moving to the senior section, which was affiliated to the University of Bombay.

He proceeded to obtain first class BA from Bombay University in 1891, possibly in Classics because he won a Latin Prize and was appointed to the Dakshna Fellowship in Greek history at his old college.⁹⁰ Yusuf Ali was awarded a Bombay Government Scholarship for further studies in England, under a scheme instituted in 1868, so in September 1891, Yusuf Ali, still a teenager arrived in England⁹¹. He studied Law at St. Johns College, Cambridge from the Michaelmas term of 1891. In 1895 he was awarded a Tripos with a good Second, coming seventh in part one exam and fourth in part two exams.⁹²

While still based in Cambridge, Yusuf Ali applied to be a candidate in the ICS open Competition examination held in August 1849⁹³. Yusuf Ali sat for the Code of Civil Procedure, Indian contract Act, Arabic and Horsemanship. He came top of the list gaining 385 out of 400.

He was a superior student who excelled in academic achievement and won the much coveted Indian Civil Service Award, a prestigious honor resulting from the extremely competitive entrance examinations for high positions in the Indian Civil Service. Abdullah was easily able to absorb English literature and was considered to be among the best of his fellow countrymen in writing English. Many of the most well-known scholarly

⁸⁸ A missionary institute named after its Scot founder, John Wilson., a noteworthy linguist, specialist in antiquities of Western India and translator of Bible in Marathi language.

⁸⁹ He was the Top of his year from Bombay..

⁹⁰ Sherif, M.A, "*Searching for solace*" A biography of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2000), 15.

⁹¹ It was his first visit to England ... The land, proven to be his home later.

⁹² Philips, C.H, "*Muslims in India*" A biographical dictionary, (Lucknow: United printers, Date not mentioned), 321-322.

⁹³ The legendary Indian Civil Service, The prized Career of that period, the carder which truly ruled India.

magazines in India published his works and expressed their appreciation for his beautiful literary style⁹⁴.

Yusuf Ali's first appointment commenced on 23 January, 1896, as an Assistant Magistrate and Collector in Saharanpur district of United Province, then he received a transfer to Bareilly.

Yusuf Ali visited Britain in 1900, and wed Teresa Mary Shalders. The marriage took place on 18 September in Bournemouth, following the Church of England rites. They had four children:

- 1- Edris (November 1901)
- 2- Asghar Bloy (October 1902)
- 3- Alban Hyder (December 1904)
- 4- Leila Teresa (August 1906)

However this marriage met a very pathetic end. Even the rapid succession of children did not strengthen the faltering marriage and eventually in 1911, after the birth of Teresa's illegitimate child, Yusuf Ali divorced Teresa in London on the grounds of proven infidelity. The ages of four children ranged from barely five to ten years old and Yusuf Ali won the case of their Custody. This personal Dilemma and hurt caused by Teresa was deep and still I evidence when he wrote the preface to the Qur'anic commentary in 1934:

“A man's life is subject to inner storms far more devastating than those in physical world around him... such a storm, in the bitter anguish of personal sorrow which nearly unseated my reason and made life seem meaningless.”⁹⁵

He remained in the service of crown until February 1914, when he decided to Leave ICS mainly due to some personal reasons, the most obvious is the responsibilities of his

⁹⁴ Zahid ul Husain, Muhammad Qazi, *Commentators of the Holy Quran*. (Lahore:Ferozsons Private Limited, 1992), 102-103.

⁹⁵ The Holy Qur'an: Preface to the First Edition, iv.

children in their tender age as a single parent⁹⁶. He moved to reside in Britain but, as the years passed the children grew astringed and resentful of their father. Yusuf Ali was to disclaim all of them in the will he drew up in 1940;

“ In spite of all I have done for them, they have to my sorrow persistently maintained an attitude of ill-will and hostility towards me, and have insulted and annoyed me and spoken to others against me, indeed my son Bloy, has gone so far as to abuse, insult, vilify and persecute me from time to time⁹⁷”.

He returned to India in 1920, and at the age of 47, married Gertrude Anne Mawbey.⁹⁸ It was his second and Anne's first marriage. They had a son named, “Rashid”⁹⁹. Yusuf Ali seemed to be satisfied of this marriage until, he and *Masuma* were separated in 1941 for unknown and unexplained reasons.

Later, Yusuf Ali continued to travel between Britain and India, he was designated on many different positions¹⁰⁰, visited many European capitals and eventually resided in London for a considerable period of time. While in London, he was exposed to many translations of the Qur'an and continued to have a tremendous interest in it and its studies. He then began to closely study the Qur'an giving special attention to its various interpretations, both old and new.

Yusuf Ali officially opened the first mosque in Canada in Edmonton in December 1938. It was Yusuf Ali who named it Al-Rashid Mosque, perhaps after his son.

⁹⁶ Sherif, M.A, “*Searching for solace*” A biography of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2000), 29-33.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, : 29 & 63.

⁹⁸ Daughter of a Derby magistrate and printer, Thomas Mawbey, Yusuf Ali gave her the Islamic name “*Mausuma*”, the innocent, a touching choice given Teresa's infidelity.

⁹⁹ Born , August 1922.

¹⁰⁰ For example: Principal ship of Islamiya College Lahore, Member ship of Executive committee of Senate of the University of Punjab, served the Court of the University of Aligarh, Lectured at London University and Islamiya College Lahore.

Much of Yusuf Ali's activities for the rest of his life are a mystery. He did speak at the 1941 World Congress of Faiths held in Oxford in October and also attended meetings of the Royal Society of Arts. Sometimes in 1942 he prepared a further feature article against Nazism with the title "Oppression in Muslim Countries". The full story of these years may lie somewhere in his missing papers. He was certainly fit and well in February 1943, because he led the "*Eid ul Fitr*" prayers at Shah Jahan Mosque in Woking, of which he was a trustee. At the end of Second World War in 1945, Ali was still living in Wimbledon, separated from his wife, with no children around. Almost all his long-standing friends were dead.

A young Muslim scholar from Comoros, Omar Abdullah, tried to locate Yusuf Ali in 1951. He remembered the reaction when he asked the staff of Empire Club¹⁰¹ about Yusuf Ali: "Are you looking for that old man who just sits there alone doing nothing? The one who never talks to anyone?", still Omar managed to conduct a few conversations with Ali. Omar narrates "He was in a confused state and had problems remembering details of the past". The two met once more in 1953, the year of Yusuf Ali's death. (Perhaps it was his last on the record activity). Omar Abdullah left Yusuf Ali, retaining in his mind the memory of a Muslim Scholar, who had reached the highest of "Spiritual levels". In fact Poor Yusuf Ali was mentally ill and badly in need of care.¹⁰²

The last of his days were spent in London, Unknown and unclear! He was a pathetic wreck. Disoriented and confused, One day he was found by the police lying outside the steps of a house in Westminster. Taken to hospital, where he spent that night, (though unrecognized). Later he was admitted to a local elderly house where he once again fell seriously ill, suffering from severe pneumonia, he was immediately taken to St. Stephen's Hospital in Fulham, where on 10th December 1953, he died unsung and unmourned. Three hours after admission he died, unusually, there were no relatives to claim the body and arrange for the funeral. However, the deceased was known to the Pakistan High Commission and as soon as the Coroner for the Country of London had completed the

¹⁰¹ Yusuf Ali remained a member of this club, since he was in England.

¹⁰² Searching for Solace: 138-39.

inquest, an Islamic Burial was arranged in the Muslim section of Brook wood cemetery, Surry.

So! In these enigmatic circumstances, ended the remarkable life of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, at the age of 81. A man of such intellect and promise should end up in so sad a state is tragic indeed. M A Sherif concluded his note about Yusuf Ali's life in a very thought provoking way. Summing up Ali's life in a nut shell, Sherif writes;

*“Yusuf Ali's life began with promises swung between moments of darkness and summits of achievements and ended in tragedy. In a sense it was like the history of British India”.*¹⁰³

“Inna Lillah, wa Inna ielaihi, Ra'jeon”

¹⁰³ Ibid.,: 192.

PART 2:

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Writings

Apart from his Monumental scholarship on Qur'an, Yusuf Ali wrote other books, pamphlets, journal articles, book review, formal addresses and other literary works.

Some of his important writings are;

- 1.1900: A *Monograph on Silk Fabrics produced in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*. Allahabad: N.W.Provinces and Oudh Government Press.
- 2.1906: Civic Life in India, *Empirical and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, January-April.
3. Goethe's Orientalism. *The Contemporary Review*, Vol.XC, August.
- 4.1907: The Indian Muhammadanas: Their Past, Present and Future. *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, No.2824, Vol. LV, 4 January.
5. *Life and Labour of People of India*. London: John Murray.
6. 1914: Indian troops and Moneylenders, *The Times*, 5th October.
7. Indian Bazaar Rumors, *The Times*, 17th November.
8. 1916: Our Immediate Future. *Hindustan Review*, Vol.33, No, 197, January
- 9.1917: Muhammad- A towering Personality. *Islamic Review*, Woking, Vol. V, February-March.
- 10.1925: *India and Europe: A Study of contrasts, with a view to discovering avenues of Cultural cooperation*, London: Drane Press.

11. *Greatest Need of the Age* (Progressive Islam Pamphlets No.1.).Luzac & Co., London.
- 12.1926: *Islam as a World Force* (Progressive Islam Pamphlets No.2), Lahore.
13. 1929: *The Fundamentals of Islam* (Progressive Islam Pamphlet No.3), Geneva.
14. *Personality of Muhammad* (Progressive Islam Pamphlet No.4), London.
15. *Moral Education* (Progressive Islam Pamphlet No.5), Sorbonne.
16. 1930: *The Key of progress*, London: Oxford University Press.
- 17.1933: *Religious Polity of Islam* (Progressive Islam Pamphlet No.8), Hyderabad Deccan.
- 18.1934: *Muhammad in History* (Progressive Islam Pamphlet No.9), Jullundur.
19. *Beauties of the Qur'an* (Progressive Islam Pamphlet No. 10), Lahore.
20. 1941: *Modern India and the West* (London: Oxford University Press).
21. *The Idea of Salvation in Islam* (Progressive Islam Pamphlet No.14), London.
22. The Prophet's Services to the Cause of Human Morality, *Islamic Review*, Woking, Vol. 27, July.

PART: 3

THE HOLY QUR'AN: Text, Translation & Commentary

(An Introduction)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali is recognised and acclaimed as a great scholar who had rendered a great service to the Qur'an by enabling the English readers, throughout the world, to understand its meanings and message better. Ever since the time when it was first published in 1938, his work has been published and distributed on a mass scale and its circulation far exceeded any other translation and commentary of the Qur'an up to the very recent time. While searching for an electronic version of Ali's translation on World Wide Web, I found many interesting, thought provoking and sometimes surprising reviews about his translation and commentary.

For example: Jane Coopers, 25, is a Harvard Law College's graduate. She posted her review about Ali's translation in the following words, to the publisher and book seller;

"I converted to Islam right after reading Yusuf Ali's translation three times! And as you can see I have no qualms about posting the same review over and over again in an attempt to raise the ratings of this great book. I see where Ali's rewriting may serve our purpose temporarily, and may also be necessary. Then, after we have prevailed, the true words may be restored. Ali conveyed us the Magic of "Divine words". I owe him a great debt! Thanks you Ali".¹⁰⁴

Alford Rock, 39, a system analyst by profession posted his view;

¹⁰⁴ www.amazonbooks.com/reviews.Gtr/1432/coopers/jewter34.

*“The best method to study the Qur'an is of course to study the Arabic language since it is a complex language. However, reading Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation is a very good place to start. Though not a Mozlem, but still I have the translation of the Qur'an by many authors; none came close to the excellent work by this author. Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation of the Qur'an comes with the Arabic text alongside with the English translation. It is faithful to the text, and the commentary accompanying the text is well written and balanced. This translation is long regarded as the best book to consult by most Muslims”*¹⁰⁵.

Yusuf Ali's scholarship on the Qur'an was first published in 1934 from Lahore by *Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf*, publishers and book sellers. Though he continued to write articles and reviews on a variety of topics for at least seven more years, this was to be his best known work. It has made his name instantly recognisable in the English-speaking Muslim world. The commentary took the form of over six thousand (Precisely 6310 in Original work), footnotes to the translation, numerous appendices and a running interpretation written in the style of blank verse. It was a monumental effort that records the encounter of an intelligent and contemplative mind with the majesty of the Qur'an. Its hallmark is its emphasis on the spiritual dimensions of Islam and message of moral revival and upbringing.

The first edition was in 30 installments, it also contained a brief index. The Second Edition was the Consolidation of 30 installments into three volumes. The third and the most famous and widely circulated edition had more than fifteen prints and reprints. Amana & IIT edition of USA and *Dar al-Ifta & King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex* editions are also very well known for their circulation.

Several Muslim scholars have built upon the Yusuf 'Ali translation. In 1989, Saudi Arabia's *Ar-Rajhi* banking company financed the U.S.-based Amana Corporation's project to revise the translation to reflect an interpretation more in conjunction with the line of Islamic thought followed in Saudi Arabia. *Ar-Rajhi* offered the resulting version

¹⁰⁵ www.alibris.com/review/ali/yusuf.

for free to mosques, schools, and libraries throughout the world. The footnoted commentary about Jews remained so egregious that, in April 2002, the Los Angeles school district banned its use at local schools¹⁰⁶.

Yusuf Ali was quick to point out that there can be no absolute or perfect translation of the Qur'an, and at best, only an interpretation of its understanding of the meaning can be offered. Probably, he never envisaged how universal his work would someday become; his intentions were initially to his fellow English speaking men. From a consensus view from the scholars and the general public, we today have been privileged to access such distinguished work in eloquent detail.

The Origin for this orientation can be traced back to Yusuf Ali's Life experiences, aspirations and ideological commitments. We may conclude the factors affecting his Qur'anic scholarship as following;

1. Service of the Crown:

Yusuf Ali's transformation into a self-assured Edwardian gentleman, one of the very first Indian Muslims to attain executive rank in the elite Indian Civil Service played a vital role in his mental reformation when he intended to translate the Qur'an. His education at the best British institutions, admission to the bar as well as selection in the ICS all reinforced his loyalty to Britain. He was an unabashed spokesman and ambassador for the crown all his life.

Ali was also much inspired by Sir *Sayyid Ahmed Khan*. His idea that Islam had to change and adjust to the "New world" received Yusuf Ali's support. Just like Sir *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Yusuf Ali sees the bodily resurrection, heaven and hell are symbolic. These are mainly states of mind and have lesser or no physical significance.

¹⁰⁶ L.A. Lloyd, Schools Review Donated Korans, Citing Derogatory Commentary," *Magazine of the American Library Association*, Feb. 11, 2002, 52-69.

His penchant for titles notwithstanding, it was his obsessive loyalty to the crown that set him apart from many of his contemporaries. While he got along well with Iqbal, their views were diametrically opposite. Iqbal saw Islam as a global religion and the Muslims of India as a distinct community who could get nothing either from the British or the Hindus. For Yusuf Ali religion was a matter for personal salvation. The 'Indian nation' in which both Hindus and Muslims lived amicably, pledging loyalty to the crown, was how he viewed things in life. Just as well that Yusuf Ali was proved so thoroughly wrong.

2. Emotional setbacks & Traumas.

A troubled domestic life, full of emotional traumas altered Yusuf Ali's perceptions and his bond with the Qur'an was forged in these times of anguish and distress when *Searching for Solace*¹⁰⁷. The Rude shocks of his wife infidelity first and then the children's intolerable reaction against him with a vengeance provided him the precious opportunity of discovering the Qur'an.

Yusuf Ali's discovery of Qur'an in those distressful times is not only referred to directly in the Preface to the First Edition¹⁰⁸, but also indirectly at various places in the commentary.

"There is a description of how many violent settlements of the spirit are but heralds to the refreshing showers of spiritual understanding that come in their wake. They purify our soul and produce spiritual life where there was a parched spiritual desert before"¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁷ M.A.Sherif, the scion of a religious and educated family of South Asia, resided and settled in UK, a system analyst by profession, chose the title "Searching for Solace" for Yusuf Ali's biography. Ali suffered the shock of two successive broken marriages, and the ensuing agony was further exacerbated by the disrespect shown to him by his children, his career too was riddled with hassles. After all these traumas he was finally intended to search for a solace and peace of mind. (Ansari, Zafar Ishaq, Foreword to "Searching fir Solace", IV (f&g).

¹⁰⁸ The Holy Qur'an: iii-viii

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Note:3107.

Elsewhere there is a biographical ring to a comment on children who's 'conflict with your ideals may vex your spirit', but this behaviour 'may at the same time search out your fidelity to God'.¹¹⁰

Yusuf Ali's sense of hurt ran deep and surfaced as late as 1940 when he castigated his estranged children from maintaining an attitude of ill will and hostility 'in spite of all I have done for them'.¹¹¹

The question rose by him "If there were no Hereafter, how could you reconcile the inequalities of this world?"¹¹²

3. Academic Training

An important factor affecting Yusuf Ali's work was his academic training. He lectured in Greek history immediately after graduation and retained a lifelong love of Hellenic culture. His fascination with Hellenic heroes led him to dwell at length in the commentary on *Dhul-Qarnain*, and the possibility of this historical character being Alexander the Great.¹¹³

He also identified closely with the search for the mysterious and unseen in Hellenic thought: "Each verse is but a sign or symbol: What it represents is something immediately applicable, and something eternal and independent of time and space- the form of ideas in Plato's philosophy. The wise man will understand that there is an "essence" and illustrative clothing given to the essence, throughout the Book".¹¹⁴

While Yusuf Ali generally put his Hellenic influences to good use, it did bequeath to his scholarship a suggestion that the "mysteries" were only accessible to the select. There is a

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Note:5496.

¹¹¹ Sherif, M.A, "*Searching for solace*" A biography of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2000), 174.

¹¹² The Holy Qur'an : Note:4180.

¹¹³ Ibid., Appendix VII, "Who was *Dhul-Qarnain*?", 760-65.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Note: 347.

touch of exclusiveness in the comment, “A crowd mentality is not best for the perception of the final spiritual truths”.¹¹⁵

4. Principal Ship of *Islamiya* College, Lahore

Another important factor exerting an influence on both the style and content of Yusuf Ali’s commentary was his employment as principal of Islamiya College, Lahore, through the 1935-37 period which saw publication of the work in monthly installments, It was a major experiences of residing in an Islamic state practically for the very first time in his life time, which intertwined with his vision of the meaning and interpretation of the Holy Qur’an.

Yusuf Ali was a well-liked and conscientious headmaster, who mixed with the boys in class and on the sports field. He had an empathy with the young, whose ‘glory is enthusiasm, without self-interest’.¹¹⁶

There was a great display of support in Yusuf Ali’s favour when he offered to resign in January 1937. He also lectured in English Honours Class, thrice a week, obtaining exceptional results.

His commentary reflects a principal’s urge to instruct and impart, for example;

“In all things be moderate .Do not go to the pace, and do not be stationary or slow or halfhearted. Do not be too confident and do not be cowed down”.¹¹⁷

It was, in fact, the affection and commitment of some Lahore kids who pushed Abdullah Yusuf Ali to get on with his translation of the Qur’an. This is something that Abdullah Yusuf Ali acknowledges in the preface to the first edition (1934) of “The Holy Qur’an: Text, Translation and commentary”. He says, “At length, in the city of Lahore, I

¹¹⁵ Ibid., Note: 3857

¹¹⁶ The Holy Qur’an: Note: 5058

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Note: 3604

happened to mention the matter [of the translation] to some young people who held me in respect and affection. They showed an enthusiasm and an eagerness which surprised me. They almost took the matter out of my hands”.

The Lahore kids pleaded for immediate publication and even got Abdullah Yusuf Ali to promise to complete one juz (or 30th portion) before he left Lahore. “As if by magic,” says Abdullah Yusuf Ali, a publisher, a – *katib* – (calligraphist for writing the Arabic Text), an engraver of blocks for such text, and a printer were found, all equally anxious to push forward the scheme. Blessed be youth, for its energy and determination! ‘Where others flinch, rash youth will dare.

His guidelines to his students for good conduct are to be found in other places as well; “We must not speak unseasonably and when we do speak we must not beat about the bush, but go straight to that which is right, in deed as well as in word”.¹¹⁸

Yusuf Ali’s References

In the introduction of the Holy Qur’an, Yusuf Ali discusses the “Commentaries on the Qur’an” in a very brief and comprehensive manner. Here at the end he provides a list of the most important *tafsir* works, he referred to. Ali state:

“Let me set out the names of the most important *Tafasirs*, especially to those which I have from time to time referred, They are not, however, in any sense my authorities. They belong to widely different schools of thought, and some of them express extreme views with which I do not agree. I only adopt the general sense of accepted Commentaries.

-The monumental work of Abu *Ja-far Muhaamad Ibn Jarir Tabari* d.310.

- *The Mufridat*, by *Abul Qasim, Husain Raghīb of Isphan*, d,503.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., Note: 3775.

- The Kashaaf. by Abul *Qasim, Muhaamad Zamakshari of Khawrism* d.538.
- Tafsir kabir by *Fakhr ud din Muhammad Razi*, d.606.
- Anwar ut tanzil by *Qadhi Nasir ud Din Abu said Baidhawi*, d.685.
- The tafsir of *Abu fida Ismail Ibn Kathir*, d.774.
- Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran, by *Jalaud din as-Syuti*, d.911.
- Tafsir jalalin_ written by two *Jalauddins*.
- Our country had produced some notable scholars in the realm of *tafsir*. They wrote in Arabic and Persian and the later ones wrote in Urdu. The earliest I can trace is *Sheikh Ali Ibn Ahmad Mahimi*, author of **Tafsir Rahmani**.
- During the nineteenth century, the famous *Muhaaddith* of Delhi, *Shah Wali-ullah* and his two sons *Shah Abdul Aziz* and *Shah Abdul Qadir*, wrote both translations and commentaries in Persian and Urdu.
- The Urdu commentary of Sir *Sayyid Ahmad Khan* of Aligarh has not met the approval of Ulema.
- The most recent Urdu commentary of *Maulvi Abdul Haqq*, the *Tafsir Haqqani*, has passed through several editions, is quite modern in tone and manageable in bulk, and is widely circulated in India. I have derived much instruction from it and used it constantly.
- The Commentary of *Mauvi Abul Kalam Azad* has been planned on a spacious scale and has not yet been finished.

- The Modernist school in Egypt got wise lead from the late *Sheikh Muhaamad Abduh*, whose unfinished Commentary is being completed by *Muhaamad Rasheed Ridha*, the talented editor of *Manar* Newspaper.
- The work of *Sheikh Tanatawi, Jauhri*, a pupil of *Abduh* finds the “jewels” of the **Qur’an** and of the sciences mutually illuminative, and suggests many new lines of thought.
- *Allama Farid Wajadi* is also spoken of as a good modern Commentator: though I have not yet been able to get a copy of his book.
- It has been said that Qur’an is its own best Commentary. As we proceed with the study of the Book, we find how true this is. A careful comparison and collection of passages from the Qur’an removes many difficulties”¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁹ The Holy Qur’an: Commentaries on the Qur’an, X, XI.

PART 4:

General Methodology

Multiple English translations of the Qur'an, The Islam's scripture, line shelves at book stores. The world's renowned Amazon.com sells more than a dozen. Because of the growing Muslim communities in English-speaking world, as well as greater academic interest in Islam, there has been a blossoming in recent years of English translations. Muslims view the Qur'an as Allah's direct words revealed in Arabic to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Because the Qur'an stresses its Arabic nature; Muslim scholars believe that any translation cannot be more than an approximate interpretation, intended only as a tool for the study and understanding of the original Arabic text. Since fewer than 20 percent of Muslims speak Arabic, this means that most Muslims study the text only in translation. So how accurate are the Quran's renderings into English? The record is mixed. Some are simply poor translations. Others adopt sectarian biases, and some others, often insert political annotation. Since translators seek to convey not only text but also meaning, many rely on the interpretation (*tafsir*) of medieval scholars in order to conform to an appropriate reading

Indian Muslims were the first from within the faith to translate the Qur'an to English according to *Abdur Rahim Kidwai*¹²⁰. Among such translations by Indian Muslims, perhaps the most renowned is the one by Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Qur'an translations which found a tremendous favour and, therefore, wide distribution, from its first appearance in 1934 until very recently .It remained the most popular English version not only among Muslims but with in the Non-Muslims as well. While not a typically trained Islamic scholar in any formal sense, Yusuf 'Ali, had studied classics at Cambridge University, graduated as a lawyer from Lincoln's Inn in London, and was gifted with an eloquent,

¹²⁰ Professor of English at Aligarh University, India. Professor *Kidawi* is famous for his academic interest in English translations and commentaries of the Holy Qur'an. See for example: www.soundvision.com/articals

vivid writing style. He sought to convey the music and richness of the Arabic with poetic English versification. While his rendering of the text is not bad, there are serious problems in his copious footnotes; in many cases, he reproduces the exegetical material from medieval texts without making any effort at contextualization. Writing at a time both of growing Arab animosity toward Zionism and in a milieu that condoned anti-Semitism, Yusuf 'Ali constructed his oeuvre as a polemic against Jews.

Ali speaks about the general methodology of his Qur'anic Scholarship, in the Preface of his translation and commentary;

“I spoke of general meaning of the verses. Every earnest and reverent student of the Qur'an, as he proceeds with his study, will find, with an inward joy difficult to describe, how this general meaning also enlarges as his own capacity for understanding increases. It is like a traveler climbing a mountain: The higher he goes, the farther he sees. From a literary point of view the poet Keats¹²¹, has described his feelings when he discovered Chapman's Homer:-

Then felt I like some watchers of the skies

When a new planet swims into his ken,

He stared at the Pacific, ...and all his men

Looked at each other with a wild surmise, ...

Silent upon a peak in Darien.

Such meaning it is most difficult to express. But where I can, I have indicated, with the help of rhythm and the elevated language of the text”¹²²

¹²¹ John Keats (1795-1821), a Medical School graduate by profession and a very well-known English Poet, famous for his emotional sensitivity. (Wolfson, Susan, J, *KEATS*, Cambridge Classics, 2001, xxxiii).

¹²² The Holy Qur'an: Preface, V, VI.

Yusuf Ali explains the methodology he adopted while translating the Holy Qur'an in the following words;

“In translating the text I have aired no views of my own, but followed the received Commentators. Where they differ among themselves, I have had to choose what appeared to me the most reasonable opinion from all points of view. Where I have departed from the literal translation in order to express the spirit of the original better in English, I have explained the literal meaning in the notes. In choosing an English word for an Arabic word, a translator necessarily exercises his own judgment and may be unconsciously expressing a point of view, but that is inevitable”¹²³.

About the Commentary notes Yusuf Ali, explains his views:

“.. I prepare the atmosphere in a running commentary. Introducing the subject generally, I come to the actual *Surah*. Where they are short, I give one or two paragraphs of my rhythmic commentary to prepare for the text. Where the *Surah* is long, I introduce the subject matter in short appropriate paragraphs, from time to time, each indicating the particular verse to which it refers. The paragraphs of the running commentary are numbered consecutively, with some regard to the connection with the preceding and the following paragraphs. It is possible to read this rhythmic Commentary by itself to get a general bird's-eye view of the contents of the Holy Book before one proceeds to the study of the Book itself. Where it is question merely of words, I have not considered the question important enough to discuss in the notes, but where it is the question of substance, I hope adequate explanation will be found in the notes.”¹²⁴

Ali also describes;

“Let me explain the scope of the Notes. I have made them as short as possible consistently with the object I have in view, viz, to give to the English reader, scholar as well as the general reader, a fairly complete but concise view of that what I understand to

¹²³ Ibid.,: IV,V.

¹²⁴ The Holy Qur'an: IV.

be the meaning of the text. To discuss theological controversies or enter into polemical arguments, I have considered out of my scope. Such discussions and arguments may be necessary and valuable, but they should find a place in separate treatises, if only out of respect to the Holy Book. Besides such discussions leave no room for more important matters on which present day readers desire information On questions of law, the Qur'an lays down general principles, and these I have explained. I have avoided technical details, nor have I devoted much space to grammatical or philosophical notes. On these points I consider that the labours of the vast body of our learned men in the past have accepted their conclusions without setting out the reasons from them."¹²⁵

Following the above mentioned methodology, Yusuf Ali sometimes sought to depart from the traditional exegetic approaches and reflect independent thought

Yusuf Ali's close contact with students, both in Lahore and at meetings of the progressive Islam Association in London, led an awareness of the doubts and sense of skepticism that coloured the new generation's attitude towards the religion. He time to time refers in his notes (Not always in a direct mode), that the Muslim Youth were in intellectual crises, unsure where they stood on great questions, whether religion was holding them back from 'Progress', or if religious faith could be reconciled with Science. He prepared to engage in the debate between religion and modern attitudes, unlike many of the traditional scholars who were hopelessly out of touch.

Ali, in his own lifetime witnesses a scientific and technological revolution in the west and understood perfectly the new hope that Indian society too should move with the time;

"The Scientist now holds in his hand, the key to every kind of future advance in human culture"¹²⁶.

The publication of his commentary was a boon to educated Muslims because for the very first time ever, it was Yusuf Ali, who assured them that Islam had nothing to fear from

¹²⁵ Ibid.,: V.

¹²⁶ Presidential address to the University Section, All India Muslim educational Conference, Golden Jubilee Session, Aligarh, March, 1937.

Science. I him they had a person, not only quoting from Scientific textbooks but was able to relate the latest scientific observations to the verses in the Qur'an with brilliance. As he quotes;

“As man’s intellectual gaze over the physical world expands, he sees more and more how Unity is the dominating note in God’s wonderful Universe. Taking the solar system alone, we know that the maximum intensity of sun-spots corresponds with the maximum intensity of magnetic storms on this earth. The Universal law of gravitation seems to bind all mass together. Physical facts point to the throwing off of planets from vast quantities of diffused nebular matter, of which the central condensed core is sun”.¹²⁷

Yusuf Ali’s creative impulses were fired not just by a sense of public service but by the need to make Muslims good citizens of the Empire and less susceptible to the siren song of the Anti-British freedom movements. In retrospect the one aspect of Yusuf Ali’s interpretation of the Qur’an that was, and remains, deeply controversial has to do with his ambivalence towards the socio-political role of Islam in contemporary society. Ali’s commentary shows awareness that “Islam makes no sharp division between sacred and secular affairs”¹²⁸.

Such occasional references however, are peripheral in comparison with the dominant themes in the commentary. It seems that Yusuf Ali was far more in his element presenting the message of the Qur’an as a message of an individual hope rather than a source of guidance for the government and management of society.

A second strand to his thinking on the subject was support for the view that Muslims must obey, as religious duty, the ruler of the day. The commentary contains a careful statement of this position;

“All ultimate authority rests in God. Men of god derive authority from Him. As Islam makes no sharp division between the sacred and secular affairs, it expects ordinary

¹²⁷ The Holy Quran: Note: 2690, 828 & for a reference to a scieitific textbook see Note: 3021, 912.

¹²⁸ Ibid., : Note: 580,198.

governments to be imbued with righteousness and stand in place of the righteous Imam, and we must respect and obey such authority; otherwise there will be no order and discipline. Where in actual fact , there is a sharp division between law and morality, between secular and religious affair, as is the case in most countries at the present day, Islam still expects secular authority to be exercised in righteousness, and on that condition, enjoins to such authority”¹²⁹.

¹²⁹ Ibid,

CHAPTER 2:

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Methodology

Regarding *Tafsir Bil Ma'thur*

(Tradition- Based Tafsir)

Introduction to *Tafsir*

Meaning of “*Tafsir*” & “*Tawil*”:

The word *tafsir* is derived from the root “*fassara*¹³⁰” which means, to explain, to make clear, and to expound¹³¹. The Qur’an also quotes the word “*tafsir*” in this meaning, stating:

وَمَا يَأْتِيَنَّكَ بِمَثَلٍ إِلَّا جِئْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَأَحْسَنَ تَفْسِيرًا

*And no similitude o they bring, but We reveal to you the truth and a better explanation thereof.*¹³²

According to another opinion the *tafsir* is a transposition from “*sfr*”¹³³ which means, 'to expose, to uncover. Thus, a woman who uncovers her face is called a '*saafirah*', and the act of uncovering her face is called '*sufur*¹³⁴.' Therefore, according to this definition, '*tafsir* would mean uncovering the meanings and exposing the secrets of the Qur'an. However, the stronger opinion is the first one, even though both of these meanings are correct¹³⁵.

¹³⁰ Ibn Manzoor, Abu al-Fadl, Jamal al-Din, Muhammd Ibn Mukrim, *Lisaan al-Arab*, vol: II, (Beirut: Dar al- Fikr, 1979), 249.

¹³¹ Al-Mu'jam al-waseet li'majma'm al- luggha al- Arabiyya, (Istanbul: Dar-al-Dawah, 1995).2/688.

¹³² *Al-Furqan*: 33.

¹³³ Zarkashi, Badruddin Muhaamad ibn Abd, Allah, *Al-Burhan fi Ulum al-Quran*, Vol: 1. (Beirut: Dar al-Marifah), 33.

¹³⁴ Isfahani, al-Rahgib, al- Imam, *Mufrida'at fi ghreeb al-Quran*, (Karachi: Dar al-Ieshaat, 1985), 76-77

¹³⁵ Doi, A, AbdurRahman I., *Introduction to the Quran*, (Lagos: Islamic publication Bureau, 1979), 163.

In technical language¹³⁶ the word *tafsir* is used for explanation, interpretation and commentary on the Qur'an, comprising all ways of obtaining knowledge, which contributes to the proper understanding of it, explains its meanings and clarifies its legal Implications¹³⁷. The word *mufassir* (pl. *mufassirun*) is the term used for the person doing the *tafsir*, i.e. the 'exegete' or 'commentator'¹³⁸.

The word *ta'wil*, which is also used in this connection, is derived from the root '*awwala*'¹³⁹ and also means 'explanation and interpretation'. Technically it refers to interpretation of the Qur'an¹⁴⁰. *Tafsir* explains the 'outer' (*zahir*) meanings of the Qur'an. *Ta'wil* is considered by some to mean the explanation of the inner and concealed meanings of the Qur'an, as far as a knowledgeable person can have access to them¹⁴¹. For example, Prophet (SAW) made du'a in the favour of Abdullah ibn Abbas (RA) the knowledge of ta'wi¹⁴².

According to *Shah Wali Allah Dehlawi*,¹⁴³ an exegesis writer should bear in mind the following three conditions when he seeks to interpret the Qur'an:

¹³⁶ Of those who deal in Quranic Studies.

¹³⁷ Suyuti, Jalal al-Din, *Al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran*, (Beirut: Maktabah al-Thaqaafah. 1973), 196.

¹³⁸ Von Denfer, Ahmad, *Ulum al Quran: An introduction to the Sciences of the Quran*, Revised edition, (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1983), 32.

¹³⁹ Mir, Mustansir, *Dictionary of Quranic Terms and Concepts*, (New York: Milestones, 1987), 45.

¹³⁹ Zaqani, Muhammad Abd al-Azeem, *Mahahil al- Irfan fi Ulum al-Quran*, Vol:2 (Cairo: Maktabah

¹⁴⁰ Suyuti, Jalal al-Din, *Al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran*, (Beirut: Maktabah al-Thaqaafah. 1973), 197.

¹⁴¹ Zaqani, Muhammad Abd al-Azeem, *Mahahil al- Irfan fi Ulum al-Quran*, Vol:2 (Cairo: Maktabah Wahabah, 1989), 67.

¹⁴² Qattan, Mann'aa Khalil, *Mabahith fi Ulum al- Quran*, (Lahore :Dar al-Nashr,1993), 312. The both words encircle some close meanings in Qur'anic context, Therefore it has always been in traditions of Muslim scholars who deal in Quranic studies to mention the difference between *tafsir* & *tawil* after describing the both, in classics of *Ulum al- Quran*.

¹⁴³ The popular name of *Qutub al-Din Ahmad Abul Fayyad* (1703-1762).a revolutionary Indian thinker, theologian, pioneer of Persian translation of the Holy Qur'an and a traditionalist. (The Encyclopedia of Islam, Vol: II, p. 780, Neitherlands, The Brill, 1997).

- (1) Every word should be explained with its literal and figurative meanings so that its reality is manifested. In order to achieve this, the scholar has to employ his linguistic knowledge and apply grammatical rules.
- (2) Everything should be explained with reference to the context, of the main theme.
- (3) The interpretation should not be contrary to the sayings of the *sahabah*, who had witnessed first hand the descent of the Revelation.¹⁴⁴

Difference between *Tafsir* and *Tawil*:

With the mentioned definitions in mind, there are five main opinions as to the difference between *tafsir* and *ta'wil*, as follows

1. They are equivalent in meaning. This was the opinion of *at-Tabari*¹⁴⁵, as his commentary of the Qur'an uses these two terms interchangeably.¹⁴⁶
2. *Tafsir* is used in explaining a word which carries only one meaning, whereas *ta'wil* is used in choosing one of the connotations of a word that possesses many connotations.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Dehlawi, Waliullah Shah, *al-Fauz al- Kabir fi usul al-tafsir*, (Lahore: Dar al-Nashr, 1992), 22.

¹⁴⁵ Abu Ja'afar, Muhaamad Ibn Jarir, Ibn Yazid (224-310 AH), famous as the Supreme Universal Historian and the very first on record Qur'anic commentator.

¹⁴⁶ Tabari, Abu Ja'afar, Muhammad Ibn Jarai, *Ja'me al-biyan un tawil ayee al- Quran*, (Beirut: Dar al-fikr, 2001), 56-57

¹⁴⁷ ¹⁴⁷ Zarqani, Muhammad Abd al-Azeem, *Mahahil al- Irfan fi Ulum al-Quran*, Vol: 2 (Cairo: Maktabah Wahabah, 1989), 73.

3. According to *al-Maturidi*¹⁴⁸, when the interpretation is based on certain knowledge, this is called *tafsir*, whereas when it is based on personal reasoning (*ijtihad*), it is known as *ta'wil*.¹⁴⁹
4. *Abu Talib at-Tha'labi*¹⁵⁰ held the view that *tafsir* was the explanation of the literal meaning of the verse, whereas *ta'wil* was the actual intent behind the verse. For example, the *tafsir* of the verse,

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِالْمُرْصَادِ

Verily, your Lord is ever-Watchful¹⁵¹

is that Allah is aware of all that man does, but the *ta'wil* is that the verse is a warning to man not to lapse into sins or to be little the commandments of Allah.

152

5. *Tafsir* is meant to give the meanings of the individual words in a verse, whereas *ta'wil* gives the meaning of the verse as a whole.¹⁵³

Shortly we can derive that there is no authoritative opinion amongst these five, since various authors use these two words in all of these meanings. However, the most common understanding in modern usage of the two words is the second one, namely that *tafsir* is used to explain the meaning or intent of a verse which has only one connotation,

¹⁴⁸ Abu Mansur, Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Mahmood, al-Samarqandi, A *hanafi* theologian, jurist and the commentator of the Holy Qur'an, founder of a doctrinal school. (Encyclopedia of Islam, VI/ 587).

¹⁴⁹ Hamadiyyah, Muhammad, Abu, *The Quran- An Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 79.

¹⁵⁰ Ahmad, Ibn Muhaamad Ibn Ibrahim, al-Nisapuri (d.427AH), Qur'an exegete and collector of stories.(Encyclopedia of Islam, X/ 434.

¹⁵¹ Al-Fajr: 14.

¹⁵² Philips, Abu Ameenah, Bilal, *Usool at-Tafseer, The Methodology of Quranic explanation*, (UAE: Dar Al Fatah, 1997). 37.

¹⁵³ Von Denfer, Ahmad, *Ulum al Quran: An introduction to the Sciences of the Quran*, Revised edition, (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1983), 43-44.

whereas *ta'wil* is used when one of the possible connotations of a verse or word is chosen over the others due to external factors.¹⁵⁴

Need and Importance of *Tafsir* writing:

The entire life of the prophet (SAW), his wise words and counsels to his companions & followers, were in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. The treasure of the Prophetic Traditions offers a valuable help in the explanations of some of the verses of the Qur'an. Besides this, the Qur'an itself helped in interpreting some of the verses as there exist, cross references of some verses in different chapters of Qur'an. The Qur'an for example mentions a thing as a general principle in one place and it is further explained in another chapter.¹⁵⁵

In spite of these, it was necessary to update the Quranic exegesis as and when new circumstances arose with the spread of Islam far and wide in the Arab as well as the non-Arab world.

Far as long as Prophet (SAW) was alive, the Muslims did not need any other guide. During the period of four rightly guided caliphs of early Islam, the early Muslim still lived with the memory of their Master, the Holy Prophet (SAW) to be shy of, and even to be opposed to, any interpretation of the Qur'an. Soon this attitude gave way to all books of interpretation which were to some extent coloured by the faiths and "old notions", of the new converts of Islam, some of whom still clung to their past. Such wild interpretations, which sometimes diverged much from the obvious meaning of the text and some of which had an arbitrary character, were denounced, as, "*tafsir bil ra'y*"¹⁵⁶. The need, then, was felt for developing a scientific instrument, to guide the process of the Quranic *Tafsir*. The principles laid down were for the development of the discipline called "*Ilm al- tafsir*" or "Science of Interpretation".

¹⁵⁴ Hawtyny, G.R & Muhammad, Abdul Qadir, ed., *Approaches to The Quran*, (New York: Routledge, 1993). 134

¹⁵⁵ Doi, A, AbdurRahman I, *Introduction to the Quran*, (Lagos: Islamic publication Bureau, 1979), 180.

¹⁵⁶ For detail discussions see: Rippin, Andrew, ed., *Approaches to the History of the interpretation of the Quran*, (Oxford: Cleareandon press, 1988), 143-44.

*Jalal ad-Din as-Suyûti*¹⁵⁷ also discusses the necessity of tafsir in *al-Itqân*. He begins by stating:

“It is a known fact that Allah (SWT) communicates with man in a way that he will be able to understand. This is the reason that every messenger has been sent in the language of his people. However, there are three basic reasons why tafsir is necessary; Firstly, Allah uses most clear, eloquent and concise language, and in doing so the meaning is clear to those who are well-grounded in the Arabic language, but not so clear to those who are not. Secondly, the Qur’an itself does not always mention the events or references for which each particular verse was revealed, and these must be known in order for the verse to be fully and totally understood. Lastly, some words may have multiple meanings, and it is the job of the person that does tafsir to explain what is meant by the word. It can be said that the purpose of *tafsir* is to elaborate the principles which the Qur’an came to clarify:

- 1) The elaboration of a perfect set of beliefs with regards to the Creator, and the relationship of the created with the Creator.
- 2) The perfection of personal conduct and good morals.
- 3) The establishment of a set of laws and code of conduct to govern individual and familial relations.
- 4) The establishment of laws governing societal and political dealings between communities and nations.

¹⁵⁷ Abul Fadl, Abdurrahman Bin Abi Bakr, Muhammad al- Khudayri (1445-1505), famous Egyptian Scholar who of Persian origin recognized as the most prolific author in the whole Islamic literature(for details see: Encyclopedia of Islam, Vol: IX, 913).

- 5) The narrations of the history of the previous nations, so that the pious among them may be followed, and the impious to act as a warning.
- 6) To give the good news of Paradise and the blessings in store for the believers, and the evil tidings of the punishment of Hell in store for the disbelievers.
- 7) To prove the truthfulness of the Prophet (SAW), and this is done by explaining the miraculous nature of the Qur'an (*i'jâz*).¹⁵⁸

The Requisites for Tafsir Writing:

The tafsir writing is a very serious matter because it is so intimately concerned with the faith. The scholars of Islam have laid down certain basic conditions for sound tafsir. Any tafsir, which disregards these principles, must be viewed with great caution, if not rejected altogether. Before a person should take up tafsir- writing he should:¹⁵⁹

1. Be sound in belief (*'aqeedah*)
2. Well-versed in the knowledge of Arabic and its rules as a language.
3. Well-grounded in the disciplines which are connected with the study of the Qur'an.

¹⁵⁸ See, Suyuti, Jalal al-Din, *Al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran*, (Beirut: Maktabah al-Thaqaafah. 1973), 201-206. (Translated and summarized).

¹⁵⁹ See: McAuliffe, Dammem, Jane, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Quran*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001_ on going), 233-35. Von Denfer, Ahmad, *Ulum al Quran: An introduction to the Sciences of the Quran*, Revised edition, (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1983), 56. Watt, W, Montgomery & Bell, Richard, *Introduction to the Quran*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 57-58 & Draaz, M.A., *Introduction to the Quran*, (London: I.B.Tauris Publishers, 2001), 43.

4. Have the ability for precise comprehension.
5. Abstain from the use of mere opinion¹⁶⁰.
6. Begin the tafsir of the Qur'an with the Qur'an.
7. Seek guidance from the words and explanations of the Prophet (SAW).
8. Refer to the reports from the *sahaba* & *tabi'un*.(R.A).
9. Have a sound knowledge of *asbab al-nuzul* (Reasons for Revelation).
10. Have a through knowledge of *Nasikh & Mansukh* (Abrogation in Qur'an).
11. Possess good knowledge of *Usul al-fiqh* (Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence).
12. Possess knowledge of *Ilm al-Tajwid* (Science of Recitation of Quran).
13. Consult the opinions of other eminent scholars.
14. Be a man of *taqwah* (piety and Allah Consciousness).¹⁶¹

Grades of Authentic *Tafsir*:

¹⁶⁰ Khalifa, Muhammad, *The sublime Quran and Orientalism*, (London: Longman. 1983), 133.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 136.

Allah, Blessed and Exalted, sent the Qur'an down to the heart of His Messenger Muhammad (SAW), in order to bring mankind from out of the darkness of disbelief and ignorance to the light of Islam. Allah (SWT) says:

الر كِتَابَ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ

“This is a Book which We have revealed unto you (O Muhammad) in order that you may lead mankind from out of the darkness (of disbelief) into the light (of Islaam), by the permission of their Lord, to the path of the All-Mighty, the Most Praiseworthy¹⁶².”

And He placed His Messenger (SAW) to clarify, interpret and explain what is in the Qur'an. Saying;

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“And We revealed to you (O Muhammad), the Reminder (i.e. the Sunnah), in order for you to explain to mankind what was (already) revealed to them, and so that they may reflect.¹⁶³”

So the Sunnah came in order to explain and clarify what is found in the noble Qur'an, and it is (also) a revelation sent by Allah, as Qur'an explains it clearly:

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ

“And he (i.e. Muhammad) does not speak from his own desire. Rather, it is just revelation that is revealed to him.¹⁶⁴”

¹⁶² Ibrahim:1

¹⁶³ An-Nahl: 44.

¹⁶⁴ An-Najm :3-4.

So the first source that must be used to interpret the noble Qur'an is the Qur'an (itself) along with the Sunnah, which consists of the Prophet's statements, actions and silent approvals. Then after that, it must be interpreted using the interpretations of the people of knowledge, at the head of whom are the Companions of the Prophet (SAW):

Dr. Subhi Saleh narrates;

“The best tafsir is the explanation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an itself. Then comes the statues of explanation of the Qur'an by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), who, truly acted in accordance with what he understood from the Qur'an. If nothing can be found in the Qur'an nor in the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, one turns to the reports from the *sahabah* (the companions). If nothing can be found in the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* and the reports from the *sahabah*, one turns to the reports from the *tabi'un* (Successors of the Companions).”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Salih, Subhi, *Mabahith fi ulum al-quran*, (Birut: Dar al-kutub al - ilmiyyah, 1998), 35.

Kinds of Tafsir

Tafsir is a very wide discipline. Keeping in view the various aspects, it has different classifications. However two basic & widely known classifications are as follows;

First Classification

According to this classification, *Tafsir* as a discipline and approach can be divided into four categories:

- 1- *Tafsir*, for ignorance of which no one will be excused.¹⁶⁶
- 2- *Tafsir*, the aspect, the Arabs know, in context of their language.¹⁶⁷
- 3- *Tafsir*, the aspect, the scholars know exclusively.
- 4- *Tafsir*, the, aspects/dimensions that one knows except Allah (SWT).¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Concerning *Haram & Halal* (Legal & Illegal) in Qur'an.

¹⁶⁷ Concerning Linguistic details.

¹⁶⁸ Smith, Wilfred Cantwell, *The True Meaning of Scripture: An empirical Historian Nonreductionist Interpretation of the Qur'an*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Press, 1981), 316.

Second Classification

According to the most popular, Classical, and traditional classification the, *Tafsir* may be divided into three basic groups¹⁶⁹:

1. *Tafsir bi'l-riwayah* , (By transmission), also known as *tafsir bi'l-ma'thar or tafsir bi'l manqul*.
2. *Tafsir bi'l-ra'y* (By sound opinion), also known as *tafsir bi'l-dirayah or tafsir bi'l ma'qul*.
3. *Tafsir bi'l-isharah* (By indication, from signs), Often known as *tafsir al-sufi*.

Third Classification:

According to a relatively new classification, *tafsir* has been divided into four kinds¹⁷⁰:

1. *Tafsir Tahleeli* (Analytical exegesis).
2. *Tafsir Ijmali*. (General / Brief exegesis).
3. *Tafsir Muqarun*. (Comparative exegesis).
4. *Tafsir Mau'dui*. (Thematical/ Subject based exegesis).

¹⁶⁹ Von Denfer, Ahmad, *Ulum al Qur'an: An introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*, Revised edition, (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1983), 67-75.

¹⁷⁰ Saeedi, Abdus- Sattar Fath Allah, *Al-Madkhal ila tafsir al-Maudui* ,(Riyadh: Dar at-Tab'a li an-Nashr al-Islamiyyah, 1986), 12-13 & Ravi, Ahmad Lu'i, "*Tafsir- A new Exposition*" at www.soundvision.com/arti,

Tafsir bi'l-Ma'thur/ bi'l -riwayah **(Exegesis through Transmission):**

There is no doubt that there are various types of exegesis and different schools founded on their basis. Most often they diverge in approach and the aspect emphasised. There is a type of exegesis that emphasises the philological and literary aspects of the Qur'anic text. Another type concentrates on meaning and content. There is a type of exegesis that is largely based on hadith and which interprets Qur'anic texts in accordance with the traditions narrated from the Prophet (SAW), The *Sahabah* and the *Tabi'un*. Another type is the one which applies reason as an instrument for comprehending the meanings of the Qur'an.

There is a partial and biased kind of exegesis that seeks to make the Qur'anic text conform to the prior views of a particular school. Opposed to this is another kind which is unbiased in its approach and seeks the view of the Qur'an in order to fashion its own views accordingly, without attempting to make the Qur'an conform to its views. Apart from these, there have been other modes of exegesis in the Islamic exegetic tradition.

But what is especially important for us at the outset of this Qur'anic study is to focus on the principal methods of tafsir which developed with the growth of Islamic thought. The first of these we will call the 'Tradition based tafsir.

Tafsir bi'l Ma'thur is the first and the far most type of Qur'anic exegesis. It is also known as *tafsir bi'l- riwayah* or *tafsir bi'l -manqul*. The word "*Ma'thur*" is a derivation from "*al-Athar*" which means literally means, "A print or a sign".¹⁷¹

Technically *Tafsir bi'l- ma'thur* means the explanations of the Qur'an which can be traced back through a chain of transmission to a sound source¹⁷², i.e.:- The Qur'an itself. -

¹⁷¹ *Al-Mujam al-Wasset* 1/5.

The explanation of the Prophet (SAW) - The explanation by Companions of the Prophet and their successors. Naturally, the explanation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an and the explanation of Qur'an by Sunnah are the two highest sources for *tafsir*, which cannot be matched nor superseded by any other source. Next to these rank the explanations by the *sahabah*, since the *sahabah* were witnesses to the revelations, were educated and trained by the Prophet himself and were closest to the period of the first Muslim *ummah*. Of course all reports of explanations by the Prophet or by a *sahabi* must be sound according to the *Ilm al-riwayah* in *'ulum al-hadith* (Hadith Sciences).

1. Tafsir of Qur'an by Qur'an

(Tafsir Al- Qur'an bi'l Qur'an):

The Qur'an explained by the Qur'an. The interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an is the highest source of *tafsir*. Many of the questions which may arise out of a certain passage of the Qur'an have their explanation in other parts of the very same book, and often there is no need to turn to any sources other than the word of Allah, which in itself contains *tafsir*. To seek to explain an *ayah* from the Qur'an by referring to another *ayah* from the Qur'an is the first and foremost duty of the *mufasssir*. Only if this does not suffice, he will refer to other sources of *tafsir*.

While summarizing the principles of Tafsir, Imam As-Suyuti, said:

“The scholars have said: Whoever wishes to interpret the Qur'an, he should first turn to the Qur'an itself. This is because what has been narrated succinctly in one place might be expounded upon in another place, and what is summarized in one place might be explained in other place.

If he has done that, then he turns to the *Sunnah*, for it is the explainer of the Qur'an, and a

¹⁷² As-Sabuni, Muhammad Ali, *Al-Tibyaan fi Ulum al-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Maktabah al-Ghazali, Dated not mentioned), 152-53.

clarifier to it. Imam as-Shafi¹⁷³, said, All that the Prophet (SAW) said is based on his understanding of the Qur'an.' And Allah said,¹⁷⁴

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِمَا أَرَاكَ اللَّهُ

“Verily, We have revealed to you the Book, in truth, so that you may judge between mankind by that which Allah has shown you”¹⁷⁵

If he does not find it (*the tafsir*) in the Quran and *Sunnah*, he turns to the statements of the Companions, for they are the most knowledgeable of it, since they witnessed the circumstances and situations the Qur'an was revealed in, and since they were blessed with complete understanding, and true knowledge, and pious actions¹⁷⁶.

Included in the interpretation of the Qur'an with the Qur'an is the knowledge of *asbâb an-nuzûl*, the knowledge of *makkî* and *madanî* verses, the *nâsikh* and *mansûkh* verses, the various *qira'ât*, and the knowledge of the different categories of verses (the *muhkam* and *mutashâbih*, the *'âm* and the *khâs*, the *mutlaq* and the *muqqayad*, the *mantûq* and the *mafhum*, the *haqîqî* and the *majâzî*, and other categories.

This is because a general ruling (*Aâm*) in one verse might be specified (*khâs*) in another verse, and so forth. In addition, all the different *qira'ât* of a verse must be considered to arrive at a proper understanding of a verse. All the relevant verses must be taken into account to form a complete picture, as all the verses of the Qur'an complement one another.

¹⁷³ Muhammad Ibn Idrees Ibn Abbas, Abu Abdullah, A very well-known scholar of Fiqh and Hadith, Founder of Shaf'i school of thought.

¹⁷⁴ Al-Albânî, Muhammad Nâsir ad-Dîn, *Manzilat as-Sunnah ft al-Islâm* (Dar al-Hayah al-Islâmiyah, Egypt, n.d.), 15.

¹⁷⁵ An- Nisa: 105.

¹⁷⁶ Suyuti, Jalal al-Din, *Al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran*, vol: II (Beirut: Maktabah al-Thaqafah. 1973), 225.

To conclude, it is essential that every verse of the Qur'an be looked at in light of its sister verses; no interpretation of any verse can contradict another verse.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's methodology regarding *Tafseer al Qur'an bi'l Qur'an*:

Imam Al-Zarkashi¹⁷⁷ says, "The most beautiful *tafsir* of Qur'an is by Qur'an itself, at times it specifies a general running and other times it elaborate a summerised commentary".¹⁷⁸

Abdullah Yusuf Ali adopted the same methodology while interpreting the Qur'an in its own light, but such a kind is somehow rare to find in his work. In his commentary notes, Yusuf Ali does not mentions the Ayahs, rather he only points towards their places. His general methodology in this regard can be observed in the preface of his translation and commentary;

"It has been said that the Qur'an is its own best Commentary. As we proceed with the study of the Book, we find how true this is. A careful comparison and collection of passages from the Qur'an removes many difficulties."¹⁷⁹

Examples:

- 1- While explaining the promise of *Abraham* (AS) to pray for his father in Surah *At-Taubah*:

مَا كَانَ لِلنَّبِيِّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ يَسْتَغْفِرُوا لِلْمُشْرِكِينَ وَلَوْ كَانُوا أَوْلِيَا قُرْبَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهَا أَسْحَابُ الْجَحِيمِ

¹⁷⁷ Muhammad Ibn Bahadur, Badr ad- Din abu Abdullah, as-Shafa'I (1344-1392), Of Turkish origin, he was a famous Egyptain writer, *Muhaddith* and a Jurist , (See: *Muj'am al- Muallafeen, Tarajum Musannafi al- Kutub al-Arabiyyah, Umar Radha Kahallah, 9/121*).

¹⁷⁸ Zarkashi, Badr ad-Din, *Alburhan Fi Ulum al-Quran, Vol:II* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'arifah, Revised Edition, 1972), 175.

¹⁷⁹ The Holy Qur'an: Commentaries on the Qur'an, XI.

It is not fitting, for the Prophet and those who believe, that they should pray for forgiveness for Pagans, even though they be of kin, after it is clear to them that they are companions of the Fire¹⁸⁰

Ali mentions the verse from Surah Maryam;

قَالَ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكَ سَأَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكَ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِي حَفِيًّا

(Abraham) said: "Peace be on thee: I will pray to my Lord for thy forgiveness: for He is to me Most Gracious¹⁸¹

As an evidence. By stating:

“Apparently when *Abraham* was convicted that the conditions applied to his father, he gave up praying for him, as the physical bond was cut off by the spiritual hostility, for the promise to pray for his father see, xix, 47.”¹⁸².

2- In Surah *Al- Ana'am*;

لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَارَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things¹⁸³,

while explaining the word” *Latif*”, Yusuf Ali gives the reference from Surah *Al-Haj*;

¹⁸⁰ *At-Tauba*: 113.

¹⁸¹ *Maryam*: 47.

¹⁸² The Holy Qur'an , Note 1365. (Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1983), 475.

¹⁸³ *Al- Ana'am*: 103.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَتُصْبِحُ الْأَرْضُ مُخْضَرَّةً إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ

*Seest thou not that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and forthwith the earth becomes clothed with green? For Allah is He Who understands the finest mysteries, and is well-acquainted (with them).*¹⁸⁴

by stating:

“*Latif*: fine, subtle, as to be invisible to the physical eye. So pure as to be above the material or spiritual vision of ordinary men, the active meaning should be understood: ‘one who understands the finest mysteries’ as mentioned in xxxii, 63”.¹⁸⁵

3- Sometimes he mentions more than a place while explaining a verse.

For example: In Surah *Al- Anbiyah*;

وَزَكَرِيَّا إِذْ نَادَى رَبَّهُ رَبِّ لَا تَذَرْنِي فَرْدًا وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْوَارِثِينَ

*And (remember) Zakariyh, when he cried to his Lord: "O my Lord! Leave me not without offspring, though thou art the best of inheritors"*¹⁸⁶,

While explaining of the verse about *Zakariyyah* (AS), Yusuf Ali mentions the verses from Surah *Aal- Imran*;

هُنَالِكَ دَعَا زَكَرِيَّا رَبَّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ ذُرِّيَّةً طَيِّبَةً إِنَّكَ سَمِيعُ الدُّعَاءِ فَنَادَتْهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَهُوَ قَائِمٌ يُصَلِّي فِي الْمِحْرَابِ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكَ بِيحْيَى مُصَدِّقًا بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَسَيِّدًا وَحَصُورًا وَنَبِيًّا مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ قَالَ رَبِّ أَىُّ يَكُونُ لِي

¹⁸⁴ *Al- Haj* : 63.

¹⁸⁵ The Holy Qur'an: Notes 931& 2841

¹⁸⁶ *Al- Anbiyah* : 89.

غُلَامٌ وَقَدْ بَلَغَنِي الْكِبِيرُ وَأُمْرَأَتِي عَاقِرٌ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ قَالَ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ لِي آيَةً قَالَ آيَتُكَ أَلَّا تُكَلِّمَ النَّاسَ ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ إِلَّا رَمْزًا وَاذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ كَثِيرًا وَسَبِّحْ بِالْعَشِيِّ وَالْإِبْكَارِ

There did Zakariya pray to his Lord, saying: "O my Lord! Grant unto me from Thee a progeny that is pure: for Thou art He that heareth prayer! While he was standing in prayer in the chamber, the angels called unto him: "(Allah) doth give thee glad tidings of Yahya, witnessing the truth of a Word from Allah, and (be besides) noble, chaste, and a prophet,- of the (goodly) company of the righteous." He said: "O my Lord! Give me a Sign!" "Thy Sign," was the answer, "Shall be that thou shalt speak to no man for three days but with signals. Then celebrate the praises of thy Lord again and again, and glorify Him in the evening and in the morning." ¹⁸⁷

and from the beginning of *Surah Maryam*;

ذَكَرُ رَحْمَةً رَبِّكَ عَبْدَهُ زَكَرِيَّا إِذْ نَادَى رَبَّهُ نِدَاءً خَفِيًّا قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَهَنَ الْعَظْمُ مِنِّي وَاشْتَعَلَ الرَّأْسُ شَيْبًا وَلَمْ أَكُنْ بِدُعَائِكَ رَبِّ شَقِيًّا وَإِنِّي خِفْتُ الْمَوَالِيَ مِنْ وَرَائِي وَكَانَتِ امْرَأَتِي عَاقِرًا فَهَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ وَلِيًّا يَرِثُنِي وَيَرِثْ مِنْ آلِ يَغُوثٍ وَأَجْعَلْهُ رَبِّ رَضِيًّا يَا زَكَرِيَّا إِنَّا نُبَشِّرُكَ بِغُلَامٍ اسْمُهُ يَحْيَى لَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ سَمِيًّا قَالَ رَبِّ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ وَكَانَتِ امْرَأَتِي عَاقِرًا وَقَدْ بَلَغْتُ مِنَ الْكِبَرِ عِتِيًّا قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَيَّ هَيِّنٌ وَقَدْ خَلَقْتُكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَمْ تَكْ شَيْئًا قَالَ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ لِي آيَةً قَالَ آيَتُكَ أَلَّا تُكَلِّمَ النَّاسَ ثَلَاثَ لَيَالٍ سَوِيًّا فَخَرَجَ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ مِنَ الْمِحْرَابِ فَأَوْحَى إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْ سَبِّحُوا بُكْرَةً وَعَشِيًّا يَا يَحْيَى خُذِ الْكِتَابَ بِقُوَّةٍ وَآتَيْنَاهُ الْحُكْمَ صَبِيًّا وَحَنَانًا مِنْ لَدُنَّا وَزَكَاةً وَكَانَ تَقِيًّا وَبَرًّا بوالدِيهِ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ جَبَّارًا عَصِيًّا وَسَلَامٌ عَلَيْهِ يَوْمَ وُلِدَ وَيَوْمَ يَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ يُبْعَثُ حَيًّا

This is) a recital of the Mercy of thy Lord to His servant Zakariya. Behold! he cried to his Lord in secret, Praying: "O my Lord! Infirm indeed are my bones, and the hair of my head doth glisten with grey: but never am I unblest, O my Lord, in my prayer to Thee! "Now I fear (what) my relatives (and colleagues) (will do) after me: but my wife is barren: so give me an heir as from Thyself,- "(One that) will (truly) represent me, and represent the posterity of Jacob; and make him, O my Lord! One with whom Thou

¹⁸⁷ Aal- Imran: 38-41

art well-pleased!" (His prayer was answered): "O Zakariya! We give thee good news of a son: His name shall be Yahya: on none by that name have We conferred distinction before." He said: "O my Lord! How shall I have a son, when my wife is barren and I have grown quite decrepit from old age?" He said: "So (it will be) thy Lord saith, 'that is easy for Me: I did indeed create thee before, when thou hadst been nothing!'" (Zakariya) said: "O my Lord! give me a Sign." "Thy Sign," was the answer "Shall be that thou shalt speak to no man for three nights, although thou art not dumb." So Zakariya came out to his people from his chamber: He told them by signs to celebrate Allah's praises in the morning and in the evening. (To his son came the command): "O Yahya! take hold of the Book with might": and We gave him Wisdom even as a youth, And piety (for all creatures) as from Us, and purity: He was devout, And kind to his parents, and he was not overbearing or rebellious. So Peace on him the day he was born, the day that he dies, and the day that he will be raised up to life (again)!¹⁸⁸

as a reference.¹⁸⁹

4- Regarding An-Naskh (The Abrogation):

Yusuf Ali mentions the phenomenon of Abrogation in Quranic verses too,

For example, while explaining the verse of *Al-Baqarah*;

وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا وَصِيَّةً لَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ مَتَاعًا إِلَى الْحَوْلِ غَيْرَ إِخْرَاجٍ فَإِنْ خَرَجْنَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي مَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ مِنْ مَّعْرُوفٍ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

Those of you who die and leave widows should bequeath for their widows a year's maintenance and residence; but if they leave (The residence), there is no blame on you

¹⁸⁸ Maryam: 2-15

¹⁸⁹ The Holy Qur'an: Note: 2745.

*for what they do with themselves, provided it is reasonable. And Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise.*¹⁹⁰

Regarding the provision of widows, he states;

“Opinions differ weather the provision for a widow is abrogated by the share which she gets as an heir (IV, 12). I do not think so, the bequest takes effect as a charge on the property, but the widow can leave the hose before the year is out, and presumably the maintenance then ceases.¹⁹¹”

¹⁹⁰ *Al- Baqarah: 240*

¹⁹¹ Note: 273.

2. Tafsir of Qur'an by Prophetic traditions.

(Tafsir Al Qur'an bi'l Sunnah):

The Arabic word *Sunnah* literally means "The way or a Habit"¹⁹² while in Islamic disciplines it means "The prophetic traditions"¹⁹³. According to Hadith scholars the terms "*Sunnah*" & "*Hadith*" stand as synonyms.

The Qur'an was directly revealed to Prophet (SAW), Therefore he was the first person to explain it. There are numerous examples of explanation of the Qur'an by the Prophet, who either himself asked the Angel Gabriel for explanation of matters not clear to him, or who was asked by the Companions about the Qur'an. The Prophet (SAW) said,

*"Indeed, I have been given the Qur'an and something similar to it"*¹⁹⁴,

That is, the *Sunnah*.

After the tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an itself the second source is *tafsir* by the *Sunnah*. It must be mentioned that even though the *Sunnah* is taken to be the 'second' source of tafsir, it is in fact of equal importance to the Qur'an. In other words, a person wishing to understand the Qur'an must turn to the *Sunnah* in order to understand it correctly. The Qur'an and *Sunnah* must be taken together to arrive at a proper understanding¹⁹⁵

In fact, one of the primary roles of the Prophet (SAW) was to explain the meanings of the Qur'an to mankind. Allah says,

¹⁹² Mir, Mustansir, *Dictionary of Quranic Terms and Concepts*, (New York: Milestones, 1987), 139..

¹⁹³ Albani, Muhammad Nasir al-Din, *Manzilat as-Sunnah fil Islam*, (Cairo: Dar al-Hayah al-Islamiyyah, , 1999), 5.

¹⁹⁴ Reported by Abû Dâwûd in his *Sunan*, Chapter, Luzum as- *Sunnah*, Vol: IV, Hadith: 4604, (Dar ahyaa As- *Sunnah an- Nabiyyah*, 1993), 200.

¹⁹⁵ Azzam, Saleem, ed., *Islam and contemporary society*, (London: Islamic Council of Europe, Longman, 1982), 123.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“And We have sent down to you (O Muhammad (saws) the Remembrance, so that you may clearly explain to mankind what has been revealed to them, and so that they may give thought ¹⁹⁶”

Therefore, not only was the job of the Prophet (SAW) to convey the literal text of the Qur’an, he also had to convey its explanation as well.

Here a question arises, that how much of the Qur’an was actually explained by the Prophet (SAW)? In other words, do there exist narrations from the Prophet (SAW) concerning the interpretation of every single verse, and if not, then how are the previous quoted verses were understood?

The scholars of Islam divided into two opinions with regards to this issue. *Sheikh al-Islâm Ibn Taymiyyah*¹⁹⁷ was of the view that the Prophet (SAW) explained all of the Qur’an, whereas *Jalâl ad-Dîn as-Suyûtî* claimed that the Prophet (SAW) only explained a small portion of it¹⁹⁸. In fact, both of these opinions are correct once the intent of both sides is understood. Those who claimed that the Prophet (SAW) only explained a small portion of the Qur’an meant that there do not exist very many verbal narrations from the Prophet (SAW) concerning the detailed explanation of every single verse in the Qur’an. On the contrary, *as-Suyûtî* only managed to find a few hundred narrations from the Prophet (SAW) (including weak and fabricated ones) in which he (SAW) explicitly interpreted a verse.

¹⁹⁶ *An-Nahl*: 44

¹⁹⁷ Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Abd al-Haleem, (1263-1328),. Born in Harrah and grew up in Damascus, Ibn Taymiyyah is one of the principal figures in Qur’anic studies and Islamic Jurisdiction.

¹⁹⁸ This lengthy debate is translated and summarized from *Al-Itqan*, 2/ 132.

On the other hand when it was said that Prophet (SAW) explained most of the Qur'an, its in the light of evidences as 'Aa'ishah¹⁹⁹ (RA) reported,

“The Prophet's (SAW) character embodied the Qur'an”²⁰⁰

Therefore, even though there might not exist many explicit statements from the Prophet (SAW) concerning *tafsir*, the Prophet (SAW) did leave us with the information and methodology necessary for understanding the Qur'an. Therefore, it is essential to understand the Qur'an not only in light of the explicit narrations of the Prophet (SAW) on the Qur'an, but also in light of all of the *hadith* of the Prophet (SAW), whether they are concerning beliefs or laws, and in light of the actions of the Prophet (SAW), since his sayings and actions can be considered to be embodying the laws of the Qur'an.

In addition to explicit examples of *tafsir*, there exist numerous examples from the life and sayings of the Prophet (SAW) which explain certain verses of Qur'an, but are not recorded as explicit statements of *tafsir*.

The Prophet (SAW) explained the Qur'an in the following basic manners:

- 1) By his implementation of general or vague commands. For example, the Qur'an orders the believers to pray and perform Hajj. The Prophet (saws), by his actions and statements, showed the believers the exact procedure.
- 2) By explaining unclear concepts in verses
- 3) By specifying the exact connotation of a word or phrase.
- 4) By constraining a general ruling or verse.
- 5) By generalising a specific ruling or verse.

¹⁹⁹

²⁰⁰ Sahih Muslim, Chapter: Salat al Musaferrin, Vol: 4 (Cairo:Dar al- Arabi, 1985), 134.

- 6) By explaining the intent of a verse.
- 7) By adding extra commands or prohibitions to the verse.
- 8) By emphasizing the meaning of the verse. In other words, by practicing and affirming the laws in the Qur'an. For example, all *Hadith* stressing good treatment to wives merely affirm the verse.
- 9) By showing that the verse was abrogated.²⁰¹

These few aspects should be sufficient to illustrate that the Sunnah is of equal importance to the Qur'an in deriving laws and understanding the Qur'an. The Qur'an can never be understood properly without the Sunnah. Even the Companions, whose knowledge of the Arabic language was unparalleled, had difficulty understanding many verses until the Prophet (SAW) cleared up the exact meaning for them²⁰².

These two sources of *tafsir*, are the ultimate sources for understanding the Qur'an. Neither is allowed to contradict itself or the other, and both sources must be taken simultaneously in order to arrive at a correct understanding. These two sources are also the final authority on the interpretation of the Qur'an - no interpretation is allowed to contradict or supersede the interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an and the Sunnah

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's methodology regarding *Tafsir Al-Quran bi'l Sunnah*:

Yusuf Ali states,

²⁰¹ Al-Albānī, Muhammad Nāsir ad-Dīn, *Manzilāt as-Sunnah ft al-Islām* (Cairo: Dar al-Ahyah al-Islāmiyah.), 7-10 (Translated and altered).

²⁰² Ayoub, Muhammad, *The speaking Qur'an And the Silent Qur'an*, (Oxford: Bill Gray, 1988), 21.

“The hadith literature dealt with all sorts of matters, Theology, Ethics and Exegesis. Then Exegesis soon became an independent science by itself and was called *tafsir*.²⁰³”

Unlike his saying, Yusuf Ali very rarely mentions a hadith while explain the Quranic verses; this is very of his own style which of course has never been practiced by a vast majority of Quranic commentators. In the introduction of his translation & commentary he provides the details of the references he consulted and at the top of the list he mentions the monumental work of *Ibn Jarir at-Tabari*, who is truly famous for his narration based *Tafsir*, so its not always very easy to understand that why Yusuf Ali did not opt the way of mentioning the hadith, its chain and grade.

Though this is does not go with his permanent methodology but still at a few places Yusuf Ali mentions a hadith: for example:

- a. Appendix viii deals with “ Mystic Interpretation of the verse of Light in *Surah an-Noor*;

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ
دُرِّيُّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى
نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: Allah doth set forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things²⁰⁴”, Ali states,

²⁰³ The Holy Quran: Introduction: VII.

²⁰⁴ *An-Noor*:35

“... and the saying of Prophet (SAW) from the hadith “ God has Seventy Thousand Veils of Light and Darkness, were He to withdraw, their curtain, then would the splendors of His Aspect (or Countenance or Face, *Wajh*), surely consume everyone who apprehended Him with his Sight”.²⁰⁵

This statement contains a reference from *Al-Ghazali's "Mishkat al-Anwar"*, which of course is not a first hand sourcebook for *Hadith* literature.

2) In the same Appendix, Yusuf Ali mentions another hadith, by quoting ,

“In the *Mishkat Sharif* (Babul Masajid, end of section 2), *Jabril* says, “Between me and Him are seventy thousand veils of Light²⁰⁶”.

Though this hadith has its favorable meanings in the classical authentic works of Hadith literature²⁰⁷ but the reference quoted here is not very strong, *Mishkat al Masabeeh* is a well know collection of hadith been taught in Islamic Schools of sub-continent since ages, but still its not a first hand reference book of hadith anyways.

3) Sometimes Yusuf Ali mentions a hadith (Of course without mentioning its chain of narrators) while stating the excellence of certain *Surahs* of Quran, For example: In the introduction of *Surah Yasin*, he writes,

“This Surah is considered to be “the heart of Qur’an”, as it concerns the central figure in the teachings of Islam ...”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ The Holy Qur'an : 920.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ See for example, *Sahih Muslim*, with the commentary of Imam an- Nawawi, Book of Ieman, Vol:I, (Beirut: *Muassasa Manahil al-Irfan*, 1982), 139-40.

²⁰⁸ The Holy Qur'an: 1168.

3. Tafsir of Qur'an by Statements of Companions

(Tafsir al-Qur'an Bi Aqwa'l as-Sahabah):

The word “*Sahabi*” pl., “*Sahabah*” in Arabic language means “Companion or companions, fellow or fellows”²⁰⁹, while in Islamic terminology *Sahabah* are “Trustworthy companions of Prophet (SAW), who witnessed him and died in the state of belief.”²¹⁰

After the Qur'an and Sunnah, the next important source for understanding the Qur'an is the understanding of the Companions. The statements of the Companions are taken as a fundamental source of *tafsir* for the following reasons:

- 1) The primary reason is that the Companions are a generation that was chosen by Allah to accompany the Prophet (SAW), and to pass on the religion and teachings of Islam to later generations. Their character and religious knowledge has been testified by Allah and the Prophet (SAW), for Allah says in the Qur'an,

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ تَرَاهُمْ رُكَّعًا سُجَّدًا يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا

*“Muhammad (saws) is the Messenger of Allah. And those who are with him (i.e., the Companions) are severe against the disbelievers and merciful amongst themselves. You see them bowing and falling down in prostration, seeking the Bounty of Allah and His Pleasure.”*²¹¹

²⁰⁹ *Almunjad fi al-Lugha wal Aalaam* (Cairo: Al- Kutub al arabuyyah, 1988), 416.

²¹⁰ Al-Asqalani, Ahmad Ibn Hajr, *Al- Iesaba fi tamyeez as- Sahabah*, Vol:I, (Beirut: Dar al- kikab al- arabi) 10-11.

²¹¹ *Al-Fath*: 29.

Also the Qur'an states:

رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ

*"Allah is well pleased with them, and they with Him"*²¹².

Thus clearly showing the superiority of the Companions over other generations. The Prophet (SAW) said,

"The best of all mankind are my Companions, then those that will follow them, then those that will follow them".²¹³

2) The Companions actually witnessed the revelation of the Qur'an. Many of its verses were revealed to cater to problems that had risen amongst them. As such, they were familiar with the *asbâb an-nuzûl*, with the *makî and madanî* verses, and with the *nâsikh and mansûkh*, and did not need to go searching for this knowledge, as later generations would have to do.²¹⁴

3) The Qur'an was revealed in the Arabic that the Companions spoke. Therefore, many words and phrases that later generations had difficulty understanding were clear to the Companions²¹⁵.

4) The Companions were the most knowledgeable of generations with regards to pre-

²¹² *Al-Bayyinah*: 8.

²¹³ Sahih Bukhari: Chapter, Excellence of Sahabah, Hadith: 3650, narrated by Umran Ibn Hussain, Vol: 3 (Riydh: Dar as- Salam, 1997), 61.

²¹⁴ Faruq, Sherif, *A guide to the contents of the Quran*, (Reading: Garnet publishing, 1995), 24-25.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

Islamic customs. Therefore, they understood the references in the Qur'an to such customs.²¹⁶

Among them, the following were best known for their knowledge of and contribution to the field of tafsir: *Abu Bakr, 'Umar, Uthman, Ali* (though not much has been reported from them), *Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, Ubai ibn Ka'b, Zaid ibn Thabit, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, & Abdullah ibn Zubair (RA)*.²¹⁷

Among the Sahabah, *Abdullah ibn 'Abbas* is considered to be the most knowledgeable of the Companions in *tafsir*. He has been called '*tarjuman al-qur'an*', the interpreter of the Qur'an. Since he was related to the Prophet (SAW), being his cousin, and his maternal aunt Maimuna²¹⁸ (RA), being one of the Prophet's wives, he was very close to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Apart from his detailed knowledge of everything concerning *tafsir*, he is also given the credit for having emphasized one of the basic principles of '*ilm al-tafsir*', which has remained important to this day, namely, that the meaning of words, especially of unusual words in the Qur'an ought to be traced back to their usage in the language of pre- Islamic poetry. There is a long list of such explanations quoted by Suyuti.²¹⁹

There is a difference of opinion whether the interpretation of a Companion is of definitive authority. In other words, once a Companion has given an interpretation of a verse, must that interpretation be accepted, as is the case with the previous two sources of *tafsir*?

²¹⁶ Bay, Idem, *The Event of the Qur'an: Islam in its scripture*, (Oxford:1994), 123.

²¹⁷ McAuliffe, Dammem, Jane, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Quran*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001_ on going), 251.

²¹⁸

²¹⁹ Suyuti, Jalal al-Din, *Al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran*, vol: II (Beirut: Maktabah al-Thaqafah. 1973), 225.

*Al-Hâkim an-Naisapûri*²²⁰, considered any interpretation by a Companion to be equivalent to a Hadith of the Prophet (SAW), for he believed that all such interpretations must have originated from the Prophet (SAW). However, this opinion is not accepted in its generality, and the majority of scholars, held the view that the interpretation of a Companion is equivalent to a Hadith of the Prophet (SAW) only when it concerns matters which are not based on personal reasoning (*ijtihâd*), such as reports concerning *sabab an-nuzûl*, or the knowledge of the unseen.

This is because such knowledge could not have originated from the Companions' *ijtihâd*, and must have come from the Prophet (SAW), A report from a Companion not concerning these topics cannot be taken as equivalent to a Hadith of the Prophet (SAW); rather, it is given a status below that of a Hadith.²²¹ However, this does not diminish the status of the *tafsir* from the Companions. The Companions were the most knowledgeable of this nation, and as such their personal reasoning (*ijtihâd*) occupies a status above that of any later scholar.

Zarkashi summarised this point when he said, "As for the interpretation of the Companions, it is investigated into: if this interpretation was based upon language, then they are the scholars of the language, and there is no doubt that they should be given credence to in this interpretation. If this interpretation relies upon what they saw of *asbâb an-nuzûl*, or other circumstances (i.e., of pre-Islamic customs), then again there is no doubt concerning this type of interpretation.

After the interpretation of the Qur'an by itself and by the Hadith of the Prophet (SAW), the Companions relied upon four primary sources to interpret the Qur'an:

²²⁰ Muhammad ibn Abdullah Ibn Muhammad al-Biyyi (933-1014), a traditionalist of note, the author of renowned *al-Mustadrak*, heard from about 2000 scholars as he held the office of Qadhi. (*Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol: III, 82).

²²¹ Jeffery, Arthur, *Materials for the History of the text of the Quran* (Leiden, E.J.Brill,1937), 49.

- 1) Their knowledge of Arabic language, rhetoric, grammar and pre-Islamic poetry.
- 2) Their knowledge of the pre-Islamic customs of the Arabs.
- 3) Their knowledge of the habits of the Jews and Christians at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an.
- 4) Their personal reasoning and their keen intellect (which, of course, was based upon knowledge).²²²

When the Companions agreed to an interpretation of a verse, that interpretation must be accepted, since it qualifies as *ijmâ'*. On the other hand, if there exist narrations from one Companion concerning the interpretation of a verse, and there does not exist any narrations to the contrary from other Companions, this interpretation is also accepted, but is not equivalent in strength to the interpretation given by the Prophet (SAW).²²³

If there exist various narrations from different Companions which are not contradictory in nature, then all such interpretations are accepted. If there exist contrary narrations from different Companions concerning the same verse, in this case the researcher can choose between the different interpretations, depending on which interpretation seems to have the strongest evidence to support it.

²²² -Khui, Abul Qasim Al_Musawi, Sayyid, *The Prolegomena to the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford university press, 1998), 87-88.

²²³ Zarkashi, Badruddin Muhaamad ibn Abd, Allah, *Al-Burhan fi Ulum al-Qur'an*, (Beirut: Dar al-Marifah, 1984), 129.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's methodology regarding *Tafsir* of Qur'an by the sayings of Companions:

Here again Yusuf Ali while explaining the Qur'anic verses does not quote the sayings of *Sahabah*, though at times he mentions the difference of opinions in various issues but does not mention the names or schools of *Sahabah*. The Reason behind might be the sheer lack of interest in traditional style of writing Qur'anic exegesis.

For example: While explaining Surah *Hud*;

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا وَفَارَ التَّنُّورُ قُلْنَا احْمِلْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا مَن سَبَقَ عَلَيْهِ الْقَوْلُ وَمَنْ آمَنَ وَمَا
آمَنَ مَعَهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ

*At length, behold! there came Our command, and the fountains of the earth gushed forth! We said: "Embark therein, of each kind two, male and female, and your family - except those against whom the word has already gone forth,- and the Believers." but only a few believed with him.*²²⁴

in the foot notes he states,

“ *Far- at-Tannur*”.. Two interpretations have been given (1), the fountains or the springs on the surface of the earth bubbled over or gushed forth: or (2), the oven of God's wrath boiled over. The former has the weight of the best authority behind it...”²²⁵

Here we see that he not only quoted the both opinions but also preferred one of them without exactly referring to their origins,

²²⁴ *Hud*: 40.

²²⁵ The Holy Qur'an: Note: 1533, 524.

Yusuf Ali meant to address the “English speaking world” through his translation and Commentary notes, and there he never felt the need of Tradition based Classical style of tafsir writing. This is the reason the he does not quote the sayings of Sahabah, Though he always tries to elaborate the clear meanings of the Qur’anic verses , adapting a unique style which is undoubtedly appealing but at the same time lacks in an academic approach towards the discipline.

4. Tafsir by the Statement of the Successors

(Tafsir al-Qur’an bi Aqwa’al at-Tabie’n):

Tabi’un literally means “the Successors or the followers²²⁶”, In Islamic terminology, those who witnessed and learned from the Companions of prophet (SAW) “*Sahabah*” are called Tabi’un²²⁷.

Some scholars took the *tafsir* of the Successors to be the next source of tafsir after the tafsir of the Companions. As proof for this stance, they relied on the statements of certain prominent Successors concerning their knowledge of the Qur’an. *Qatadah*²²⁸ (d. 110 A.H.) said,

“There is not a single verse in the Qur’an except that I have heard something concerning it.

*Mujahid*²²⁹ said,

²²⁶ *Al- Mujam Al- waseet*, 1/ 81.

²²⁷ Suyuti, Jalal al-Din, *Tadreeb ar- Rawi*, Explanation of *Taqreeb an- Nawawi* , (Multan: Farooqi Kutub Khana, date not mentioned), 2/234.

²²⁸ Ibn Da’amah, as-Sadoosi, (d., 118 AH), of Basra, was blind and handicapped, still a great scholar of Arabic linguistics. (See: *Tazkirat al-Huffaz* 1/131-32).

²²⁹ Ibn, Jabr, Abu Hajjaj Al-Makki, (d., 103 AH), heard from Ibn Abbas, Ayesha and Sa’ad Ibn abi Waqqas, The Crown head of his time. (See: *Seyr A’alam an- Nubala*, 4/ 449-457).

"I recited the Qur'an to *Ibn Abbas (RA)*, three times. In each recitation, I stopped at every verse, asking him concerning its interpretation.²³⁰

A famous quotation in the books of *Ulum al- Qur'an* says,

"When you hear an interpretation from *Mujâhid*, this should be sufficient for you."²³¹

Other scholars, however, rejected this view. They claimed that an interpretation of a Successor could not have originated from the Prophet (SAW), as could the interpretation of a Companion, since they never saw the Prophet (SAW). Also, they did not witness the revelation, as did the generation before them, and their trustworthiness is not guaranteed specifically for every one of their generation, unlike the Companions.²³² In other words, the trustworthiness of every single Companion is guaranteed by the Qur'an, whereas this is not the case for the Successors, for they have been praised as a generation, and not individually²³³.

Therefore, the correct view in this matter, as *Ibn Taymiyyah*, said, is that if the Successors give the same interpretation to a verse, then their interpretation must be accepted, but if they differed among themselves, then the opinion of one group will have no authority over the other group, nor over the generations after them. In such cases, one must resort to the Qur'an, the Sunnah, the Companions, and the Arabic language in order to obtain the correct interpretation²³⁴.

There are many more persons from among the tabi'un known for their preoccupation with tafsir, because many more people had embraced Islam and the need for knowledge about the Qur'an had increased manifold.

²³⁰ Ibn Taymeeyah, Ahmad Ibn, Abdul Haleem, *An Introduction to the Principles of Tafseer*, Translated by Muhammad Abdul Haqq Ansari, (Birmingham: Al-Hidaayah, 1993), 45.

²³¹ Asad, Muhammad, *The Message of the Quran*, (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andulus, 1980), 12.

²³² Doi, A, Abdurrahman I., *Introduction to the Quran*, (Lagos: Islamic publication Bureau, 1979), 144.

²³³ Ibid.,.

²³⁴ Ibn Taymeeyah, Ahmad Ibn, Abdul Haleem, *An Introduction to the Principles of Tafseer*, Translated by Muhammad Abdul Haqq Ansari, (Birmingham: Al-Hidaayah, 1993), 44

Also, the Prophet (SAW) himself and many of his Companions were no longer available to give this guidance, and therefore greater efforts had to be made to satisfy this need for proper understanding of the book of Allah. Of the *mufassirun* from among the *tabi'un* one distinguishes three groups, according to their origin and area of activity.²³⁵

1- **The Makkan Group.** According to many scholars, this group of *mufassirun* from among the *tabi'un* is the most knowledgeable in *tafsir*, because they learnt about it from 'Abdullah bin 'Abbas. They are many in number, and among the best known out of many others are *Mujahid* (d.104/722), 'Ata' (d.114/732) and 'Ikrima (d.107H).

2-**The Madinan Group.** The *mufassirun* among the *tabi'un* from Medina had many Companions as their teachers, among the best known being 'Ubai' bin Ka'b. The following are some of the well-known Qur'an exegetes among them: *Ammad b. Ka'b al-Qurazi* (d.117/735), *Abu-l 'Alliya al-Riyahi* (d.90/708) and *Zaid bin Aslam*(d.130/747)

3- **The Iraq Group.** There were also many *mufassirun* among the *tabiun* in Iraq. Their principal teacher was *Abdullah ibn Mas'ud*. Their main centers were Basra and Kufa. The best known among them are: *Masruq b.al-'Ajda'* (d.63/682), *Ibrahim al-Nakha'i* (d.95/713).*Al-Hasan al-Basri* (d.121/738)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's methodology regarding *Tafsir* of Qur'an by the sayings of Successors:

Yusuf Ali's methodology regarding *tafsir* of Qur'an by the sayings of successors remains almost the same as the pattern he follows regarding the sayings of companions, with only a very rare exception found in his notes,

While explaining the different readings of *Aal- Imran's* verse;

²³⁵ Zarqani, Muhammad Abd al-Azeem, *Mahahil al- Irfan fi Ulum al-Quran*, (Cairo: Maktabah Wahabah, 1989), 2/154.

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَلَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord:" and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding²³⁶,

Yusuf Ali states

"One reading, rejected by the majority of Commentators but, accepted by *Mujahid* and others,²³⁷ would not make a break at the point here marked *Waqf Lazim*, but would run the two sentences together"²³⁸

²³⁶ Aal- Imran: 7

²³⁷ Though he did not mention who are "others" ..??

²³⁸ The Holy Quran: note: 348, 123.

5 .Asbab an-Nuzul

(Causes for the Revelation of the Qur'an):

The Arabic word “*Sabab*” pl; “*Asbab*”, means “*Causes*”²³⁹, while as a discipline “*asbab an-Nuzul*” provides the knowledge about the reason for the revelations of the verses and chapters of the Qur'an, it is the knowledge about the particular events and circumstances in history that are related to the Revelation of particular passages from the Qur'an.²⁴⁰

*Al-Wahidi*²⁴¹ says, “The Tafsir of an ayah is not possible without knowing the reason behind it, and the description about its cause”²⁴².

The great Muslim scholars like *Bukhari*, *Wahidi*, *Suyuti* and *Ibn Hajr* have tried and developed a methodology for the categorization of the *Asbab an- Nuzul*, since this knowledge helps one to understand the circumstances in which any particular Revelation was revealed, it illuminates its implications and offers guidance to those who wish to understand the tafsir of the Qur'an properly.

Importance of the knowledge of *Asbab an- Nuzul*:

The knowledge of this discipline is very important to those who attempt to deal in Qur'anic Studies, a few aspect of its importance are.

- 1) It offers information and shows the wisdom behind the legal importance of any particular commandment of the Qur'an.

²³⁹ Mir, Mu stansir, *Dictionary of Qur'anic Terms and Concepts*, (New York: Milestones, 1987), 115.

²⁴⁰ Doi, A, AbdurRahman I, *The Sciences of the Qur'an, A study in Methodology and Approach*, (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1997), 87.

²⁴¹ Abul Hasan, Ali Ibn Ahmad ibn Muhaamad, *Al wahidi*, from NeishaPur (d. 468 AH), An Icon name in Arabic linguistics and Qur'anic Studies particularly *asbab an -Nuzul*.

²⁴² Al-Wahidi, *asbab Nuzul al- Quran*, (Beirut: Dar al Kutub al Ilmiyyah, date not mentioned), 10-11.

- 2) It shows the particular cause of the Revelation to learn a lesson from it.
- 3) It removes the doubtful conjecture while interpreting the original text.
- 4) It provides knowledge concerning the name of a person in respect of whom the reference is made in the verse.

A verse is generally revealed due to the following reasons:

- 1- In response to an event.
- 2- In response to a particular occasion.
- 3- Question to the Prophet (SAW).
- 4- Question by the Prophet (SAW).
- 5- Response to general questions.
- 6- Concerning Particular persons, their implication of blame or exoneration thereof.

Specific or General?

A very important question connected with *Asbab an-Nuzul*. When one knows the cause, it is still to be decided whether the revelation has a specific implication for the particular occasion it was connected with, or it is for general implication and needs to be applied by all at all times? The scholars have differed in this regard.²⁴³ The main stream opinion says "The general meaning of the word should be under consideration, not the specification of Reason".

The knowledge of this discipline helps to understand this by:

- * Clarifying the events and circumstances, which are connected with the Revelation.

- * Illustrating, when the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) found them proper and applicable.

²⁴³ See: *Al- Itqan* 1/ 110 & *Manahil* 1/ 118.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Methodology regarding *Asban an- Nuzul*:

Yusuf Ali mentions the *Asbab an- nuzul* while explaining the Qur'anic text, though this methodology does not apply to his entire work but, still a major portion of causes has been discussed without quotations and references. Ali mentions his methodology regarding *asbab an- nuzul* in his preface;

“Where it has been necessary for the understanding of the text to refer to the particular occasion for the revelation of a particular verse, I have done so briefly, but have not allowed absorbing a disproportionate amount of space. It will be found that every verse revealed for a particular occasion has also a general meaning. The particular occasion and the particular people concerned have passed away, but the general meaning and its application remains true for all time. What we are concerned about now, in the fourteenth century of *Hijrah* is: what guidance can we draw for ourselves from the message of God?”²⁴⁴

Examples:

- 1- Yusuf Ali mentions the Cause of Revelation, while explaining the verse of *Surah al-Baqarah*;

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ مَتَعَ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ يُذَكَّرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ وَسَعَى فِي خَرَابِهَا أُولَئِكَ مَا كَانَ لَهُمْ أَنْ يَدْخُلُوهَا إِلَّا خَائِفِينَ لَهُمْ
فِي الدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌ وَلَهُمْ فِي الآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

And who is more unjust than he who forbids that in places for the worship of Allah, Allah's name should be celebrated?-whose zeal is (in fact) to ruin

²⁴⁴ The Holy Qur'an: Preface to first Edition V.

Those who brought forward the lie are a body among yourselves: think it not to be an evil to you; On the contrary it is good for you: to every man among them (will come the punishment) of the sin that he earned, and to him who took on himself the lead among them, will be a penalty grievous. Why did not the believers - men and women - when ye heard of the affair, - put the best construction on it in their own minds and say, "This (charge) is an obvious lie"? Why did they not bring four witnesses to prove it? When they have not brought the witnesses, such men, in the sight of Allah, (stand forth) themselves as liars! Were it not for the grace and mercy of Allah on you, in this world and the Hereafter, a grievous penalty would have seized you in that ye rushed glibly into this affair. Behold, ye received it on your tongues, and said out of your mouths things of which ye had no knowledge; and ye thought it to be a light matter, while it was most serious in the sight of Allah. And why did ye not, when ye heard it, say? - "It is not right of us to speak of this: Glory to Allah. This is a most serious slander!" Allah doth admonish you, that ye may never repeat such (conduct), if ye are (true) Believers. And Allah makes the Signs plain to you: for Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom. Those who love (to see) scandal published broadcast among the Believers, will have a grievous Penalty in this life and in the Hereafter: Allah knows, and ye know not. Were it not for the grace and mercy of Allah on you, and that Allah is full of kindness and mercy, (ye would be ruined indeed).²⁴⁷

Ali describes the back ground of these verses;

“The particular incident here referred to occurred on the return from expedition to the Banu Mustaliq in 5-6 AH, When the march was ordered Aisha was not in her tent, having gone to search for a valuable necklace.....²⁴⁸”

3- In Surah al Baqarah's verse;

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ النَّاهِلَةِ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَنْ تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهَا وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقَى
وَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

²⁴⁷ An- Noor: 11-20.

²⁴⁸ The Holy Qur'an: Note 2962, 898.

*They ask thee concerning the New Moons. Say: They are but signs to mark fixed periods of time in (the affairs of) men, and for Pilgrimage. It is no virtue if ye enter your houses from the back: It is virtue if ye fear Allah. Enter houses through the proper doors: And fear Allah. That ye may prosper*²⁴⁹,

Yusuf Ali narrates the reason for the revelation of these particular verses by saying, "There were many superstitions connected with the New Moon, which have been condemned by this ayah, as there to the present day".²⁵⁰

4- In *Surah an-Nisa*;

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِمَا أَرَاكَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَكُنْ لِلْخَائِنِينَ خَصِيمًا

*We have sent down to thee the Book in truth, that thou mightest judge between men, as guided by Allah. so be not (used) as an advocate by those who betray their trust;*²⁵¹

Verse, Ali explains the reference in which the verse was revealed;

"The Commentators explain this passage with reference to the case of *Taima ibn Ubairaq*, who was nominally a Muslim but really a Hypocrate, and given to all sorts of wicked deeds. He was suspected of having stolen a set of armour, and when the trial was hot, he planted the stolen property into the house of a Jew, where it was found. The Jew denied the charge and accused *Taima*, but the sympathies of Muslim Community were with *Taima* on account of his nominal profession of Islam. The case was brought to Apostle, who acquitted the Jew according to the strict principle of Justice."²⁵²

²⁴⁹ *Al-Baqarah*: 189

²⁵⁰ The Holy Qur'an: Note: 202, 75.

²⁵¹: *An-Nisa*: 105

²⁵² The Holy Qur'an: Note 621

5. *Al-Isra'iliyaat*

(Jeudeo- Christian traditions)

Al-Isra'iliyat is the plural of *Isra'iliyah* (Israeli). This term is recognized to be derived from one of the names of the Prophet Ya'qub (AS).²⁵³

Ibn Kathir and others have shown that Ya'qub is in fact *Israil* due to the hadith reported by *Abu Dawud, at-Tayalisi* in his *Musnad* that, *Ibn Abbas (RA)*, said that a group of Jews presented themselves to Prophet (SAW) and he said to them: *Do you know that Israil is Ya'qub?* They responded saying, *“By ALLAH (SWT), yes we do!* He said to them, *O Allah! Be witness!*²⁵⁴

Linguistic Definition:

Israil is a word that is composed from the union of two separate words. Some have said that half of the word is Arabic in origin while the other half is Hebrew in origin. The first part of the word “*Isra*” is from the word “*Isra*” migration and setting upon a journey. The second half of the word “*il*” is a word that means “Allah” in Hebrew. As such it has been said that Ya'qub was given the name *Israil* because he migrated to his Lord.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Draz, MA, *Introduction to the Quran*, (London: I.B.Tauris Publishers, 2001), 52.

²⁵⁴ This hadith has in its chain of narration a man named *Shahr bin Hūshab* who used to report narrations from *Ibn Abbās*. *Shahr* is a man whom the scholars have spoken negatively about. Some of the scholars place his narration at the level of *Hasan* (good and accepted but not the level of *Sahih* authentic). *Al-Hafidh Ibn Hajr* in *at-Taqrīb* has judged him to be *Sadūq* (truthful in general) but full of errors (in his reports) and known for *Irsāl* (reporting directly from the Prophet and not mentioning the name of the *Sahābi* whom he is reporting from). *Imam Muslim* said regarding him in the Introduction to his *Sahih*, *Shahr* has been criticized. Therefore those who deem his narration to be *Hasan* or *Sahih* accept this hadith through this particular transmission. Those who deem *Shahr* to be weak reject this particular chain of narration with regards to this particular Hadith.

²⁵⁵ *As- Sadan, Abdul-'Aziz,*, *al-Isrā'iliyāt - The Tales of the Tribes of Israel in Exegesis*, www.quran.net

Others have said that the whole word is Hebrew in origin. They state that “*Isra*” means “a slave” and therefore the word means “The Slave of Allah” in Hebrew²⁵⁶.

Legal Definition

In Islamic jurisprudence and terminology the term al-Isra’iliyat is used to describe a narration that originates from Jewish (Biblical) sources. This initial definition was expounded upon by the scholars of *Tafsir* who said that any narration reported in *Tafsir* or books of *Seerah* that does not have an (Islamic) origin (and foundation Chain of narration) and discusses the Prophets in a lewd way or discusses the essence of (our belief) in Allah or discusses matters that cannot be fathomed with logic are to be termed as al-Isra’iliyat. Examples of this are the description and dimensions of Nuh's (Noah's) Ark and the numbering of Sulaiman's (Solomon's) army and so on²⁵⁷.

How al-Isra’iliyat entered into the Books of *Hadith and Tafsir*?

There are many reasons why al-Isra’iliyat entered into the Books of *Hadith and Tafsir*. These reasons can be condensed into the following points:

A large contingent of Jews & Christians lived in the Arabian Peninsula

It is commonly known that assimilation in society causes intermingling of cultures and narratives. The cultures absorbed from each other. Therefore the presence of a large Jewish population in the Arabian Peninsula caused the inclusion of narration heard from them. These narrations eventually, after many generations, find their way into the books of *Tafsir* and so forth.

²⁵⁶ The Brill Dictionary of Religion, Vol: III, 1434.

²⁵⁷ Abu Shabah, Muhammad Ibn Muhammad, *Al-Israeeliyat wal mau' duat fi kutub at- Tafsir*, (Cairo: Maktabat as-Sunnah, 1408), 12-13.

Jews & Christians traded extensively in the Arabian Peninsula

This is also an important reason even if it is attached in part to the first point there is a point of distinction that needs to be pointed out. The distinction being that the caravans arriving steadily from Jewish lands returned back to their home lands while the other Jews lived in the peninsula.

The Hijrah (Migration) of Muslims to Lands wherein Jews reside

The Sham (present-day Jordan, Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon) and other regions saw a large amount of Muslim conquests and thus the possibility of trade. This led to migrations and conquests that eventually resulted in assimilation between the varying cultures. The cultures absorbed from each other narratives and stories. With the passing of time the once foreign narrations soon became engrained in the minds of the Muslim populations to the point that some falsely declared them Muslim traditions.

Jewish & Christian Scholars entering into the Islam

From the things that had a tremendous impact upon the dissemination of al-Isra'iliyat in Tafsir was the entrance of numerous Jewish scholars into Islam. When a scholar speaks his words have more impact and weight than those of the regular lay-man. The words of scholars are at a high level of acceptability with the proper conditions being met.

Spellbinding stories are intriguing

A person narrating exotic stories that were never heard before can spellbind an audience and hold them captive with his narrative. The more exotic the tale the more the listeners led an ear. All of us seek to hear exotic tales. Due to these reasons and others similar to them, al-Isra'iliyat spread and eventually made their ways into the books of Tafsir. This was most evident amongst those who had little insight into the inner workings of the sciences of Hadith and knowledge of the Isnad (Chains of Narration).

The Categorization of al-Isra'iliyat:

Al-Isra'iliyat can be categorized into three levels.

First: Al-Isra'iliyat based on the Authenticity of the Chain of Narration - Isnad

There are two levels of Isra'iliyat when looked at from the perspective of the Isnad²⁵⁸.

1. 1. al-Isra'iliyat that have *Sahih* (accepted) Isnad
2. 2. al-Isra'iliyat that have *Da'if* (unacceptable) Isnad

This categorization of course is simplified. Within the *Sahih* there are levels and within the *Da'if* there are also levels.

Second: al-Isra'iliyat based on their agreement with that which is established in our Laws

There are three levels of Isra'iliyat when viewed from the perspective of their agreement with that which is established in our Shariah.²⁵⁹

1. Al-Isra'iliyat that are in agreement with our Shariah.
2. Al-Isra'iliyat that contradict our Shariah.
3. Al-Isra'iliyat that are neutral not rejected and not affirmed to be truth.

Third: al-Isra'iliyat that viewed from the perspective of Reports of Information regarding particular Issues²⁶⁰:

²⁵⁸ Salih, Subhi, *Mabahith fi ulum al-quran*, (Birut: Dar al-kutub al - ilmiyyah, 1981), 133.

²⁵⁹ Sawwaf, Mujhid, Muhammad, "Early Tafseer – A survey of Quranic Commentry up to 150 AH", in Ahmad, Khurshid & Ansari, Zafar Ishaq, eds., *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of Mawlana Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi*, (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1979), 154

There are three levels of Isra'iliyat when viewed from the perspective of Reports of Information regarding particular Issues:

1 .In matters of *Aqeedah* (Creed):

The previously mentioned incident of the priest is an example of a report from a person from the people of the Scriptures regarding an issue of *Aqeedah*.

2. In matters of *Ahkam* (Rulings and Judgments)

An example of this is the incident wherein the Rabbis tried to conceal the passage in the Torah that stated that an adulterer is to be stoned to death. When the passage was laid bare it served as a report of information from their scriptural sources regarding the punishment of adulterers and thus it relates to the matters of *Ahkam*.

3. In matters of exhortation, biographies and History

An example of this are the descriptions of Nuh's Ark and the type of animals brought aboard into it, the ant which spoke to Sulaiman, and the descriptions of Musa's rod. Stories that do not fit in the matters of *Aqeedah* or *Ahkam* are included in this third category.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's views on al-Isra'iliyat:

Yusuf Ali does quote the Biblical traditions in his commentary notes. Sometimes he mentions the references and other times he just discusses the Biblical traditions with in the Commentary notes.

Examples of al-Isra'iliyat in Yusuf Ali's works:

²⁶⁰ Abu Shabah, Muhammad Ibn Muhammad, *Al-Israeeliyat wal mau' duat fi kutub at- Tafsir*, (Cairo: *Maktabat as-Sunnah*, 1408), 14-15.

1-In *Surah Yusuf* Commentary he quotes,

“For the parable all that is necessary to know about Joseph is that he was one of the chosen ones of God, His father Jacob had four wives. From three of them he had ten sons. In old age he had from Rachel, a very beautiful woman, two sons Joseph and Benjamin.”²⁶¹

Though he does not quote the exact Biblical reference here, but still its obvious that he got the idea either directly from Bible or from previous works containing such traditions.

2-In *Surah Aal- Imran*, Yusuf Ali narrates the story of Jesus as follows:

“Now we begin the story of Jesus. As a prelude we have the birth of Mary and the parallel story of John the Baptist. John’s mother Elisabeth was a cousin of Mary- The mother of Jesus (Lukel: 36), and therefore John and Jesus were cousins by blood, and there was a spiritual cousinhood in their birth and career. Elisabeth was the daughter of Aaron (Lukel:5) of a priestly family which went back to Aaron, the brother of Moses and son of *Imran*. Her husband was actually a priest. By tradition Mary’s mother was called *Hannah* (In Latin, Anna and in English, Anne).”²⁶²

3-Again in *Surah Aal- Imran’s* explanation Yusuf Ali quotes some Biblical references as evidences, saying:

“The ministry of Jesus lasted only about three years, from 30 to 33 years of his age, but the Gospel of Luke (ii, 46) describes him as disputing with the doctors in Temple at the age of 12, and even earlier as a child, he was strong in Spirit, filled with wisdom (Luke ii, 40). Some Apocryphal Gospels describe him as preaching from infancy”²⁶³

²⁶¹ The Holy Qur’an: Note: 1632, 550.

²⁶² The Holy Qur’an: Note: 375, 131.

²⁶³ The Holy Qur’an: Note: 388, 135.

CHAPTER 3

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Methodology

Regarding *Tafsir bil-ra'y/ bi'l- dira'yah*

(Opinion Based Tafsir)

Introduction:

The second kind of *tafsir*, after *tafsir bi'l-riwaya*, is the so-called *tafsir bi'l-ra'y*. This type of *tafsir* is also known as *tafsir bi'l- dira'yah and tafsir bi'l –maq'ul*. Literally “*al-ra'y*” means “an opinion or a belief”²⁶⁴. While as a discipline this kind of *tafsir* means the exegesis of the Holy Qur'an which is not based directly on transmission of knowledge by the predecessors, but on the use of reason and *ijtihad* (Personal reasoning)²⁶⁵.

Tafsir bil-ra'y does not mean 'interpretation by mere opinion', but deriving an opinion through *ijtihad* based on sound sources²⁶⁶. While the former has been condemned already in the hadith, the latter is recommendable, when used in its proper place as sound *ijtihad*, and was also approved by the Prophet (SAW), e.g. when he sent *Muiadh bin Jabal* to Yemen.²⁶⁷

Tafsir bil-ra'y on the other hand has been declared prohibited on the basis of the following hadith: From *Ibn Abbas*: Allah's messenger said:

"He who says (something) concerning the Qur'an without knowledge, he has taken his seat of fire"²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ *Lisan al-Arab*, 14/219-300.

²⁶⁵ As-Sabuni, Muhammad Ali, *Al-Tibyaan fi Ulum al-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Maktabah al-Ghazali, Dated not mentioned), 152-53

²⁶⁶ Ahmad, Ziauddin, “The Science of Quranic Exegesis”, *The Islamic literature*, 319-23.

²⁶⁷ Reputed by Abu Dawod, *Kitab al-Aqdhyyah*, Hadith: 123 (Riydh: Dar as-Salam Publications, 1997), 214.

²⁶⁸ Reputed by at-Tirmidhi, *Kitab at-tafsir*, Hadith: 259 (Dar al- Hadith, date not mentioned), 5/199.

The obvious meaning of the hadith is that one should not say something about the Qur'an without having the proper knowledge and sources. However this hadith has been explained in two ways:

- That no one should say of the Qur'an what is not from the *Sahabah or tabi'un*.
- That no one should say of the Qur'an what he knows to be otherwise.

Imam al-Ghazali²⁶⁹ however, qualifies this tradition, with the following understanding,

"The truth is that prophetic Traditions (*akhbar*) and statements of the Prophet's companions and of other pious Muslims in early Islam (*athar*) prove that *for men of understanding there is wide scope in the meanings of the Qur'an*. Thus 'Ali (RA) said, "*Except that God bestows understanding of the Qur'an upon a man.*" If there is no meaning other than that which is related [from *Ibn 'Abbas* and other exegetes] what is that understanding of the Qur'an [which is bestowed upon a man]? This is also reported by *Ibn Mas'ud* on his own authority and he is one of the scholars of Qur'anic explanation. 'Ali (RA) said, "*If I so will I can certainly load seventy camels with the exegesis of the Opening Surah of the Book.*" What then is the meaning of this statement of 'Ali, when the outward exegesis of this *Surah* is extremely short²⁷⁰."

The Qur'an, the utmost authority on Islam asserts that the word was sent to all of mankind and it is up to the whole of mankind to receive it and sincerely ponder upon its meaning. Islam acknowledges no "clergy" nor monopolisation of "The Word of God", Islam only acknowledges the "knowledgeable" ones from among a community of people, the "Ulama" or scholars. In the Qur'an, God exhorts mankind to "think" and "ponder" and "realise" for themselves, thereby awakening true belief inside each and every human being.

²⁶⁹ Zain Ud- din, abu Hamid, Muhammad Ibn Ahmad, At-Tusi, As-Shafa'i, (d. 505 AH), Famous Muslim revivalist and theologian.

²⁷⁰ Quasem, Muhammad Abdul, *The Recitation and Interpretation of the Qur'an – Al-Ghazali's Theory*, (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaysia Press, 1979), 87.

Kinds of tafsir bi'l-ra'y

In view of this, it is obvious that tafsir bil-ra'y should not be rejected in total, but is acceptable if based on sound *ijtihad*²⁷¹.

Scholars have grouped tafsir bil-ra'y into two kinds:

1- Tafsir bil-Ra'y al-mahmu'd (Praiseworthy opinion –Based Exegesis), which is in agreement with the sources of tafsir, the rules of shari'a and the Arabic language.

2- Tafsir bi'l-Ra'y al- madhmum (Blameworthy opinion-Based Exegesis), which is done without proper knowledge of the sources of tafsir, shari'a and the Arabic language. It is therefore based on mere opinion and must be rejected.²⁷²

Sahabah²⁷³ and Tabi'un shun mere opinion. While the tafsir bil-ra'y based on sound sources was accepted, it is reported that from the outset the Sahabah had refused to involve them in giving explanations based on mere opinion:

Once a man asked *Ibn 'Abbas* about the day (mentioned in the Qur'an) which measures 50 years, and *Ibn 'Abbas* replied: 'They are 2 days which Allah has mentioned in His book, and Allah knows best about hem', and he disliked that he should say concerning the book of Allah, from mere his opinion.

The same attitude is also found among the tabi'un:

²⁷¹ Someone who practices *tafsir bil-ra'y* must have sound knowledge in the following fields: '*ilm al-balagha*, '*ilm usul al-fiqh*, '*ma'rifat asbab al-nuzul*, '*ma'rifat al-nasikh wa-l-mansukh*, '*ilm al-qira'a*' Also, he must be inclined towards faith, which is a gift from Allah, and not a skill to be acquired.

²⁷² Von Denfer, Ahmad, *Ulum al Qur'an: An introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*, Revised edition, (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1983), 87.

²⁷³ Mawdudi, Abul A'la, Sayyid, *Introduction to the Study of the Qur'an*, (Delhi: Jama'at-e-Islaimi Hind, 1971), 31

'We used to ask *Sa'id b. al-Musayyib*²⁷⁴ about *halal and haram*, and he was the most learned man, but when we asked him about tafsir of a verse of the Qur'an, he kept silent, as though he did not hear.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ A renowned Ta'bai.

²⁷⁵ Haqqani, Muhammad Abdul Haqq, *An Introduction to the commentary on the Holy Qur'an, being an English translation of al-Bayan*, (Lahore: Oriental Reprints, 1975), 111-114.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Methodology Regarding *tafsir bi'l- ra'y*

Yusuf Ali's Qur'anic commentary is truly based upon a reason –Based Exegesis. As one can rightly observed in the previous chapter that he almost tried his level best to avoid (deliberately or otherwise), the traditional style of tafsir writing. The reason might be that he was new to this discipline, was not fully versed in Classical Islamic literature and above all the entire medium he was using had its unique requirements.

Being one of the pioneers of English commentators of the Holy Qur'an he must had gone through some very difficult phases of interpretation. It is obviously not an easy task to blend the traditions with Modern issues and, in case of Yusuf Ali; one must celebrate his success in this regard. In this scenario he was ought to adopt a very of his own methodology which truly falls in the category of Tafsir bil-ra'y. Yusuf Ali himself explains his methodology in this regard,

“I have made my commentary notes as short as possible, consistently with the objective I have in view viz., to give English reader, scholar as well as general reader, a fairly complete but concise view of what I understand to be the meaning of the text. To discuss theological controversies or enter into polemical arguments, I have considered out of my scope”²⁷⁶

On Linguistics of Qur'an:

Human Language, its spoken and written words, resembles a bottomless sea of vocabularies. Obviously, spoken and written word from languages and language is a vehicle for human thoughts. From the ocean of any language comes a constant flow of messages, all these messages wrapped in sounds, sentences and signals. Man speaks to

²⁷⁶ The Holy Qur'an: Preface to First edition, v.

man, and for the guidance of men, The Divine speaks to man which in religion parlance is known as "Revelation".

Revelation sent to Prophets came in spoken words which were adapted to the languages or dialects of various groups of mankind. The Qur'an testifies this:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانِ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ فَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

"And We sent not a Messenger, except to each in the language of his own people , in order to make things clear to them"²⁷⁷

Therefore, the Divine Message, being universal, can be expressed in all moulds and forms, and is equally valid for all grades of humanity, and must therefore be explained to everyone. The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic language, which has been universally recognized as an unmatched language in its style and diction.

Yusuf Ali, while translating and explaining the Qur'an seems quite familiar and conscious of this fact. He considers the beauty of Arabic language in following words,

"The English shall be. Not a mere substitution of one word for another, but the best expression I can give to the fullest meaning, which I can understand from the Arabic text. The rhythm, music and exalted tone of the original should be reflected in my work, it may be a faint reflection, but such beauty and power as my pen can command shall be brought to its service".²⁷⁸

Considering truly what he intended to write in his preface, Yusuf Ali tries his level best to convey the exact meaning of Arabic words in his own expression. Perhaps this is the best aspect of his translation and commentary notes.

Examples:

²⁷⁷ Ibrahim: 4.

²⁷⁸ The Holy Qur'an: Preface to First edition, IV.

1. While explaining *Surah Aal- Imran's* verse;

زَيْنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْبَنِينَ وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ
وَالْحَرْثِ نَلِكُ مَتَاعِ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَآبِ

Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: Women and sons; Heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to Allah is the best of the goals (To return to). ²⁷⁹

Yusuf Ali describes the word “*Qanatir*” as following;

“The Arabic word translated “Hoard” is “*Qanatir*”, plural of “*Quintar*”, which literally means “a talent of 1,200 ounces of solid gold”. The quantity of pure gold would coin into 5,097 sterling gold sovereigns, each containing 123,274 grains of gold 22 carats fine. The present prices would be worth more than a lakh of rupees (These lines were written almost 70 years ago), Heaped hoards would therefore be boundless wealth “as wish can claim”.²⁸⁰

2. In *Surah Aal- Imran's* verse:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيِّينَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ وَيَقْتُلُونَ الَّذِينَ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْقِسْطِ مِنَ النَّاسِ فَبَشِّرْهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ
أَلِيمٍ

As to those who deny the Signs of Allah and in defiance of right, slay the prophets, and slay those who teach just dealing with mankind, announce to them a grievous penalty. ²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ *Aal- Imran: 14*

²⁸⁰ The Holy Qur'an: Note: 354, 125.

²⁸¹ *Aal- Imran: 21.*

Ali explains the word “*Haqq*” very profoundly by stating:

“Right: *haqq* has many shades of meanings in Arabic language, 1, right: in sense of having a right to something; 2, right: in sense of straight conduct as opposed to wrong; 3, truth; 4, justice. All these shades are implied here”.²⁸²

3. In *Surah Hud*'s verse;

إِنِّي تَوَكَّلْتُ عَلَى اللَّهِ رَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمْ مَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ آخِذٌ بِنَاصِيَتِهَا إِنَّ رَبِّي عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

*I put my trust in Allah, My Lord and your Lord! There is not a moving creature, but He hath grasp of its fore-lock. Verily, it is my Lord that is on a straight Path*²⁸³,

Yusuf Ali describes the Arabic idiom, he says,

“Grasp of the fore-lock: An Arabic idiom referring to a horse’s fore-lock. The man who grasps it has complete power over the horse, and for the horse the fore-lock is as it were the crown of his beauty, the sum of his power of self-assertion. So God’s power over all creatures is unlimited and no one can withstand his decree.”²⁸⁴

4. In *Surah Al-Humazah*:

الَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى الْفَافِئَةِ

*The which doth mount (Right) to the Hearts*²⁸⁵

²⁸² The Holy Qur’an: Note: 363, 128.

²⁸³ *Hud*: 56.

²⁸⁴ The Holy Qur’an: Note: 1551, 529.

²⁸⁵ *Al-Humazah*: 7.

The word “*afe’dah*” has been explained,

“The fire of punishment mounts right up to the hearts and minds of such men, and shouts them out of the love of their fellows, “Heart” in Arabic means not only the seat of Affection, pity and charity, but also of understanding and intelligent appreciation of things”²⁸⁶.

5. While explaining *Surah Al-Hashr*’s magnificent last verses

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيْمِنُ الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

²⁸⁷ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْخَالِقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصَوِّرُ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

In his commentary note, Yusuf Ali tries his best to convey the beautiful meaning of

Allah’s attributes, “*As-Salam*”, “*Al-Mumin*”, and “*Al-Muhaimen*”,

“How can a translator reproduce the sublimity and the comprehensiveness of the magnificent Arabic words, which mean so much in a single symbol? 1) “The Sovereign” in our human language implies the one undisputed authority which is entitled to give commands and to receive obedience, the power which enforces law and justice. 2) Human Authority may be misused but in the title “The Holy One” we postulate a Being free from all stain or evil, and replete with the highest purity.

3) “*Salam*” has not only the idea of peace as opposed to conflict, but wholeness as opposed to defects, hence our paraphrase is “source of Peace

²⁸⁶ The Holy Qur’an: 6268, 1789.

²⁸⁷ *Al-Hashr*: 22-24.

andperfection".4) *Mumin*, one who entertains Faith, who gives faith to others, who is never false to Faiths that others place, so he is "Guardian of Faith".5)" Preserver of safety": Guarding all from danger, corruption and loss. These are the attributes of love and benevolence."²⁸⁸

Ali's expression of Arabic language and style is begotten²⁸⁹, as he was not a traditionally trained and well versed scholar of Islamic disciplines, however his efforts in this regard are extremely praiseworthy as he seems a very knowledgeable in particular from his preface.

Yusuf Ali's employment as principal of *Islamiya* College, Lahore, through 1935-37 was a period which saw publication of the work in the monthly installments for the very first time. Ali lectured an English Honours Class three times a week, as he had a keen interest in English language and literature since his childhood.

The sophistication of English style can easily be observed in his work. The commentary notes are replete with quotations from luminaries and legends of English Classics in Prose and poetry like Shakespeare²⁹⁰, Milton²⁹¹, Tennyson²⁹², Dickens²⁹³, Shelly²⁹⁴, Keats²⁹⁵, Wordsworth²⁹⁶, Bunyan²⁹⁷, Spenser²⁹⁸, Burns²⁹⁹, Coleridge³⁰⁰, Kipling³⁰¹, Wolfe³⁰² and Carlyle³⁰³.

²⁸⁸ The Holy Qur'an: Note: 5402, 1528.

²⁸⁹ It has been said that Yusuf Ali learned Traditional Arabic from a teacher who belonged to *Qadiyani* group, but this is not confirmed any ways.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*,: Notes 47, 284, 493, 1308, 1662, 3354, 3866, 3987, 5202, 5919, 6262.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*,: Notes 1343, 1881m 4035, 4203, 4440.

²⁹² *Ibid.*,: Notes 456, 1021, 2481.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*,: Note 862.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*,: Notes 2514, 3196.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*,: Preface to First Edition, V.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*,: Notes 68, 298, 4865.

On issues of *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence)

The term “*Fiqh*” is used in the literal sense to mean “understanding” and “discernment”. In this sense the word *fiqh* and *fahm* are synonymous. As a discipline “*fiqh*” implies an understanding of Islam in a general way. It also means what a prudent person is likely to conclude from obvious evidences.³⁰⁴

While going through, Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s commentary a reader’s frequent observation concludes that, Ali does not discuss the details and differences while explaining the Qur’anic verse related with practical matters (*Al-Ahkaam*). The well-known methodology of discussing the variant sayings of scholars from different schools of Islam legal thought is almost absent in Ali’s Qur’anic scholarship .

Yusuf Ali’s prime motive was to present his Qur’anic project to English speaking world (Both Muslims and Non Muslims).He was to answer the “newly arose questions” and meet the “challenges of hour”, therefore he did not adopt the traditional way of tafsir writing as he clearly states in his preface;

²⁹⁷ The Holy Qur’an: Note 581.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.,: Note 3271.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.,: appendix VI & Note 181.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.,: notes 4572, 5498.

³⁰¹ Ibid.,: Note 1694.

³⁰² Ibid.,: Note 2352.

³⁰³ Ibid.,: Note 1008.

³⁰⁴ Nyazee, Imran Ahsan Khan, *Islamic Jurisprudence*, (Islamabad: IIIT & IRI, 2000), 18-19.

“...To discuss theological controversies and Polemical arguments, I have considered outside my scope.³⁰⁵”

Though Ali does not show up his inclination towards a particular School of thought in the matter of *Fiqh*, nor does he seem to disagree with main-stream Schools of Islamic legal thought in major issues. Rather he tries to give a brief extract of Islamic ruling regarding a particular matter.

Examples:

1- While explaining the Issue of divorce in *Surah at-Talaq*:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِذَا طَلَقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَطَلِّقُوهُنَّ لِعَدَّتِهِنَّ وَأَحْصُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ رَبَّكُمْ لَا تُخْرِجُوهُنَّ مِنْ بُيُوتِهِنَّ وَلَا يُخْرِجُنَّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَنَّ بِقَاحِشَةٍ مُبَيَّنَةٍ وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ لَا تَدْرِي لَعَلَّ اللَّهَ يُحْدِثُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ أَمْرًا

O Prophet! When ye do divorce women, divorce them at their prescribed periods, and count (accurately), their prescribed periods: And fear Allah your Lord: and turn them not out of their houses, nor shall they (themselves) leave, except in case they are guilty of some open lewdness, those are limits set by Allah. and any who transgresses the limits of Allah, does verily wrong his (own) soul: thou knowest not if perchance Allah will bring about thereafter some new situation³⁰⁶,

Ali explains the ruling in the following words;

“*Iddat*”, as a technical term in divorce law, means ‘a prescribed period’. It is in the interests of the wife, of the husband, of an unborn child (if there is any), and therefore the elementary dictates of refined human society. In English law the six months interval

³⁰⁵ The Holy Qur’an: Preface to first Edition, V.

³⁰⁶ *At-Talaq*: 1

between the decree nisi and the decree absolute in divorce attains the same purpose in a round- about way. The Commentators suggest that the divorce should not be pronounced during the courses. This implies that any incipient differences between husband and wife should not be forced. The parties are to think seriously in a mood of piety, keeping the fear of God in their minds. Islam treats the married woman as a full juristic personality in every sense of the term.”³⁰⁷

2- While explaining the ruling of shortening the prayers in state of travel and fear in Surah an- Nisa:

وَإِذَا كُنْتَ فِيهِمْ فَأَقَمْتَ لَهُمُ الصَّلَاةَ فَلْتَقُمْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْهُمْ مَعَكَ وَلْيَأْخُذُوا أَسْلِحَتَهُمْ فَإِذَا سَجَدُوا فَلْيَكُونُوا مِنْ وَرَائِكُمْ وَلْتَأْتِ طَائِفَةٌ أُخْرَى لَمْ يُصَلُّوا فَلْيُصَلُّوا مَعَكَ وَلْيَأْخُذُوا حِذْرَهُمْ وَأَسْلِحَتَهُمْ وَذَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ كَفَلُونَ عَنْ أَسْلِحَتِكُمْ وَأَمْتِعَتِكُمْ فَيَمِيلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَيْلَةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنْ كَانَ بِكُمْ أذىٌ مِنْ مَطَرٍ أَوْ كُنْتُمْ مَرْضَى أَنْ تَضَعُوا أَسْلِحَتَكُمْ وَخُذُوا حِذْرَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ أَعَدَّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُهِينًا

When thou (O Messenger. art with them, and standest to lead them in prayer, Let one party of them stand up (in prayer) with thee, Taking their arms with them: When they finish their prostrations, let them Take their position in the rear. And let the other party come up which hath not yet prayed - and let them pray with thee, Taking all precaution, and bearing arms: the Unbelievers wish, if ye were negligent of your arms and your baggage, to assault you in a single rush. But there is no blame on you if ye put away your arms because of the inconvenience of rain or because ye are ill; but take (every) precaution for yourselves. For the Unbelievers Allah hath prepared a humiliating punishment. When ye pass (Congregational) prayers, celebrate Allah.s praises, standing, sitting down, or lying down on your sides; but when ye are free from danger, set up Regular Prayers: For such prayers are enjoined on believers at stated times. . And slacken not in following up the enemy: If ye are suffering hardships, they are suffering similar hardships; but ye

³⁰⁷ The Holy Qur'an: Note 5505-07.

*have Hope from Allah, while they have none. And Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom.*³⁰⁸,

Ali states;

“Verse 101 gives permission to shorten congregational prayers when people are on a journey. Verse 102-104 deal with case when they are in danger at war, in face of enemy. The shortening in both cases is further governed as to details by the practice of Apostle (SAW) and his companions, as to journeys, two questions arise:

- What constitutes a journey for this purpose?
- Is the fear of an attack is an essential condition for the shortening of congregational prayers?

As to the first question, it is best to leave the matter to discretion, having regarding to all the circumstances of the journey, as in case of journeys which excuse a fast, and as to the second, the practice of Apostle (SAW) shows that the danger is not an essential condition. It is merely mentioned as a possible incident. The Apostle (SAW) usually shortened the four *Ra'akahs* to two, in *Zuhar, Asr and Isha*, and In case of *Fajr*, two *Ra'akahs* and I case of *Maghrib*, the three.”³⁰⁹

In some cases Yusuf Ali does not agree on the interpretation of a given ruling with the rest of jurists. There can be a number of reasons for this; the most important ones are the following:

- 1- Use of unsound materials, as Ali does not provide us with exact references.
- 2- Conscious misrepresentation, based on a pre conceived belief or other ulterior motives, particularly his idea of presenting Qur'an as a “Modern clad” revelation.

³⁰⁸ *An-Nisa*: 101-104.

³⁰⁹ The Holy Qur'an: Note 617.

3- Possibility of multiplicity of meanings in the revelation.

Perhaps, the most obvious example of such a difference is Ali's unique views about Usury³¹⁰. In *Surah Al-Baqarah's* verse;

الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ الرِّبَا لَا يَقُومُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَقُومُ الَّذِي يَتَخَبَّطُهُ الشَّيْطَانُ مِنَ الْمَسِّ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا الْبَيْعُ مِثْلُ الرِّبَا
وَأَحَلَّ اللَّهُ الْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ الرِّبَا فَمَنْ جَاءَهُ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ فَانْتَهَى فَلَهُ مَا سَلَفَ وَأَمْرُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَمَنْ عَادَ فَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ
النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

Those who devour usury will not stand except as stand one whom the Evil one by his touch Hath driven to madness. That is because they say: "Trade is like usury," but Allah hath permitted trade and forbidden usury. Those who after receiving direction from their Lord, desist, shall be pardoned for the past; their case is for Allah (to judge); but those who repeat (The offence) are companions of the Fire: They will abide therein (for ever).³¹¹

Regarding *Rib'a*, Ali quotes his views in Commentary;

"Usury is condemned and prohibited in the strongest possible terms. There can be no questions about the prohibition. When we come to the definition of Usury, there is a room for difference of opinion. *Umar* (RA), according to Imam *Ibn Kathir*, felt some difficulty in the matter, as the Apostle (SAW) left this world before the details of the questions were settled. Our Ulema, ancient and modern, have worked out a great body of literature on Usury, based mainly on economic conditions as they existed at the rise of Islam. I agree with them on the main principle, but respectfully differ from them on the definition of Usury, as this subject is highly controversial. The definition I would accept would be: Undue profit made, not in the way of legitimate trade, out of loans of gold and silver, and necessary articles of food, such as wheat, barley, dates and salt (According to

³¹⁰ It should be kept in mind that this view has been corrected in many later Reprints and Revised editions of Yusuf Ali's translation and Commentary of the Holy Qur'an.

³¹¹ *Al-Baqarah: 275.*

the list mentioned in Hadith). My definition would include profiteering of all kinds, but exclude economic credit, the creature of modern banking and finance.³¹²

Though the issue of Usury has a lot of aspects, resulting in the difference of opinions of many modern scholars regarding its definition and conditions, but still the classical interpretation remains vastly practiced and understood.³¹³

³¹² The Holy Qur'an: Note 324.

³¹³ For Detail discussion on the Issue of *Riba*, see: Usmani, Muhammad Taqi, *An Introduction to Islamic Finance*, (Karachi: Maktaba Ma'aruful Qur'an, 2002), Foreword & Nayazee, Imran Ahsan Khan, *The Concept of Riba and Islamic Banking*, (Islamabad: Niazi Publishing house, 1995), 8-31.

On Mystical Interpretation of the Holy Qur'an

The mystical Interpretation of the Qur'an applies to the introspective approach to the study of the Holy Qur'an. Briefly it means that the Qur'an applies two ways of interpretation³¹⁴;

- 1- A literal or exterior meaning, known as *zahir*.
- 2- A spiritual or interior meaning, known as *batin*.

This dimension of tafsir writing is also known as *tafsir b'il ishara* (Through signs and indications) or *tafsir as-sufi* (practiced by Religious saints). The scholars practicing it concern themselves with meanings attached to verses of the Qur'an, which are not visible to anyone, but only to him whose heart Allah has opened. This kind of *tafsir* is often found with mystically-inclined author's works.

It's an interpretation of the Qur'an which includes attribution of esoteric or mystic meanings to the text by the interpreter³¹⁵. In this respect, its method is different from the conventional exegesis of the Qur'an. Esoteric interpretations do not usually contradict the conventional (in this context called exoteric) interpretations; instead, they discuss the inner levels of meaning of the Qur'an. A Hadith from Prophet Mohammad (SAW), which states that the Qur'an has an inner meaning, and that this inner meaning conceals a yet deeper inner meaning, and so on (up to seven levels of meaning), has sometimes been used in support of this view.³¹⁶ Islamic opinion imposes strict limitations on esoteric interpretations especially when interior meaning is against exterior one.

³¹⁴ Dhabī, Muhammad Hussain, *At-Tafsir wal- Mufasssirun*, (Cairo: Dar al-kutub al-haditha, 1976), 2/ 209-18.

³¹⁵ Doi, A, Abdur Rahman I., *Introduction to the Qur'an*, (Lagos: Islamic publication Bureau, 1979), 69.

³¹⁶ The Prophet (SAW) said, "*Surely the Qur'an has revealed in seven letters, each verse out of them contains an outward aspect, and an inward aspect, a limit and a prelude.*" Though this narration is proven

Esoteric interpretations are found mainly in Sufism and in the sayings of *shi'atic* and *Isma'ili* traditions. While it must not be denied that Allah guides to the understanding of the Qur'an whom He pleases and as He wills, it has to be said that *tafsir bi'l ishara* is not a matter of science and scientific principles, which may be acquired and then used, as are the other branches of *'ulum al-Qur'an* and of *tafsir*. Some scholars have therefore rejected it from the viewpoint of general acceptability and said it is based on mere opinion. However *Ibn al-Qayyim*³¹⁷ is reported to have said that results achieved by *tafsir bi'l ishara* are permissible and constitute good findings, if the following four principles are jointly applied:

1. That should be no disagreement with the plain meaning of the verse.
2. That it is a sound meaning in itself.
3. That in the wording there is some indication towards it.
4. That there are close connections between it and the plain meaning.
5. That a commentator shall not claim it the only possible meaning of the text³¹⁸.

The hallmark of Yusuf Ali's Qur'anic scholarship is its emphasis on spiritual dimension of Islam and message of moral revival. The second half of twentieth century has witnessed a struggle for reassertion of "Spiritual Islam", and Ali's monumental work proved to be a landmark of this effort.

Ali states in his preface;

authentic, the scholars have differed in views containing this. (See: *Al-Ehsan fi taqreeb sahih Ibn Habban*, Revised by: Shuaib al-Arnaot, with a quotation (Its chains are praise worthy).

³¹⁷ Abu Abdullah, Shams- ad- Din, Muhammad Ibn Abu Bakr, ibn Ayyub Ibn Saad Az-Zari (691-751 AH), of Damascus, a scion of Islamic revival, a renowned student of *Ibn-Taymiyah*.

³¹⁸ *Manahil* 2/58.

“It is the duty of every Muslim, man, woman, or child, to read the Qur’an and understand it according to his own capacity. If any one of us attains to some knowledge or understanding of it by study, contemplation, and the test of life, both outward and inward, it is his duty, according to his capacity, to instruct others, and share with them the joy, and peace which result from contact with the spiritual world. The Qur’an has to be read, not only with the tongue, voice, and eyes, but with the best light that our intellect can supply, and even more with the truest and purest light which our heart and conscience can give us. It is the spirit that I would have my readers approach the Qur’an”.³¹⁹

Also, he writes;

“... Then came Philosophical and Mystic doctrines of the *Sufi* schools. *Tawil* (Esoteric exposition of the hidden or inner meaning) introduced elements on the spiritual sides, based on the sort of transcendental intuition of the expositor. The *Sufi* mysteries at least adhered to the rules of their own orders, which were very strict. But many of the non-Sufi writers on *tawil* indulged in an amount of license in interpretation which has rightly called forth a protest on the part of most sober “*Ulema*”.

Examples

As it has been mentioned earlier that the mystic touch of Ali’s translation and commentary dominates all other styles and touches in his work. In following we are going to mention a few examples, highlighting Ali’s views on mystical exegesis of Qur’an.

1. Appendix VI, titled “Allegorical Interpretation of the Story of Joseph³²⁰” contains a lot of spiritual aspects of the story. Though this spiritual understanding contains a noteworthy and unique interpretation and surely grasps the intellectual interest

³¹⁹ The Holy Qur’an: Preface to First Edition: III.

³²⁰ Ibid.,: 592-599.

of new readers, but the authenticity of such an allegorical interpretation is obviously doubtful in the light of above mentioned conditions laid by the scholars for the acceptance of *tafsir al-ishari*. For example, mystical allegory of *Yusuf*'s story in the light of Persian poet *Jami*'s lyrics, considering the word "*Bushra*"³²¹ as the name of companion to whom the water carrier shouted when he saw *Yusuf* in the depths of well, quoting the base less story of *Yusuf*'s marriage with *Zulikha* (*Aziz*'s wife) are the spiritual conclusions of Ali's intelligent effort, practically meeting no grades of authentic *tafsir* writing.

2. Appendix VIII, titled "Mystic interpretation of verse of Light in Surah An- Noor:

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِثْنِكَاهِ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحُ الْمِصْبَاحِ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ
يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَّا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي
اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ³²²

, is another prominent example of Yusuf Ali's "spiritually inclined Qur'anic intellect'. This interpretation is indeed praise worthy. Here Ali successfully gives us a spiritual enhancement as he always desired. Stating;

"The Ultimate light is the final fountain head, Who is Light in and by Himself, not a light kindled from other lights. The term 'Light' as apply to any other then this primary light is purely metaphorical. But these metaphorical lights have various gradations. The physical eye sees by the sun; spiritual eye sees by Revelation (The Qur'an). There is a world invisible, with a light of its own, is far above the physical world. The five faculties or spirits are symbolized by niche, glass, lamp, tree and oil in the verse. The Niche is a sensory spirit, the Glass is the imagination, The Lamp is

³²¹ Yusuf: 19.

³²² An-Noor: 35

the intelligent spirit, The Tree is the ratiocinative spirit and finally The Oil is the type of transcendental prophetic spirit.”³²³

3. In the explanation of Surah *Al-Qiyamah*

وَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ

And I swear of the blame worthy soul ³²⁴,

Ali describes the “*Nafs*” as follows;

“Our doctors postulate three states or stages of the development of the human soul: 1) *Ammara*, which is prone to evil, and if not checked and controlled, will lead to perdition; 2) *Lawwama*, as here, which feels conscious of evil, and resists it, asks for God’s grace and pardon after repentance and tries to amend, it hopes to reach salvation; 3) *Mutminna*, the highest stage of all, when it achieves full rest and satisfaction.”³²⁵

Many others examples³²⁶ of Yusuf Ali’s Spiritual mind frame can be observed as well.

³²³ The Holy Qur’an: 920-924.

³²⁴ *Al-Qiyamah*: 2.

³²⁵ The Holy Qur’an: Note 5801.

³²⁶ For example. See: The Holy Qur’an: Note 2996-98 (Spiritual Mysteries), Note 1668, 3913 & 5527 (Spiritual knowledge), Note 3913 (Spiritual heaven), Note 5778 (Spiritual lesson), Note 5927 (spiritual forces), Le’nvoi (Spiritual advancement).

Chapter: 4
A Critical Evaluation

Standard of Translation

The Glorious Qur'an is the Book of Allah, the Wise and Worthy of all Praise, Who has promised to safeguard it from any violations in its purity. It becomes incumbent upon each and every person who seeks the dignity of this world and the bliss of the Hereafter to regulate his life according to it, to implement its commandments and to pay homage to the magnificence of the One Who revealed it. This can be an easy task for those favored with guidance from Allah, especially those blessed by an understanding of Arabic, the language of the divine communication. But for those not acquainted with Arabic, their ignorance is a barrier between them and this source of guidance and illumination. A translation of the message of Allah is thus a task not to be taken lightly or performed superficially.

Before the reader begins to study the Qur'an, he must realize that unlike all other writings, this is a unique book with a supreme author, an eternal message and a universal relevance. Its contents are not confined to a particular theme or style, but contain the foundations for an entire system of life, covering a whole spectrum of issues, which range from specific articles of faith and commandments to general moral teachings, rights and obligations, crime and punishment, personal and public law, and a host of other private and social concerns. These issues are discussed in a variety of ways, such as direct stipulations, reminders of Allah's favors on His creation, admonitions and rebukes. Stories of past communities are narrated, followed by the lessons to be learned from their actions and subsequent fates.

The Qur'an enjoys a number of characteristics unique to it alone, some of which are as follows:

1. It is the actual Word of Allah; not created but revealed for the benefit of all mankind.

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفُرْقَانَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ لِيَكُونَ لِلْعَالَمِينَ نَذِيرًا

"Blessed is He Who sent down the Criterion to His servant, that it may be An admonition to all creatures."³²⁷

2. It is complete and comprehensive. The Almighty says:

مَا فَرَطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ

"Nothing have We omitted from the Book."³²⁸

In another place we read,

وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تِبْيَانًا لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ

"And We have sent down to thee the Book explaining all things, It's a Mercy and guidance for Believers."³²⁹

3. It is a theoretical and a practical Book, not only moralizing but also defining specifically the permissible and the forbidden. The importance of understanding the message of the Qur'an is undeniable, but simply reciting it with the intention of seeking Allah's pleasure and reward is also an act of worship and meritorious in itself. Allah Almighty says:

وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

³²⁷ Al-Furqan: 2.

³²⁸ Al-An'aam: 38

³²⁹ An-Nahl: 89.

"So take what the Prophet gives you, and refrain from what he prohibits you."³³⁰

4. Allah has perfected His religion for all mankind with the revelation of this Book.
He says:

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

"This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you and have chosen for you Islam as your religion."³³¹

5. It is Allah's eternal miracle revealed to the Prophet Muhammad for all succeeding generations. In response to those who doubt the authorship of the Qur'an, Allah Almighty has challenged the most articulate Arabs to produce a whole book, ten chapters or even one solitary chapter which can be remotely comparable to the Qur'an. But to this day, no one has succeeded in meeting the challenge of the Almighty. The critics of the Qur'an; have been struck dumb by its ineffable eloquence and surpassing beauty.

قُلْ لَئِن اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا

"Say, if the whole of mankind and jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof; even if they backed-up each other with help and support."³³²

³³⁰ Al-Hashr: 7.

³³¹ Al-Ma'ida: 5

³³² Al-Isr'a / Bani Isra'il : 88.

The Almighty also says:

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِعَشْرِ سُوْرٍ مِّثْلِهِ مُفْتَرِيَاتٍ وَادْعُوا مَنْ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

"Or they may say: 'He forged it.' Say: 'Bring ye then ten chapters forged, like unto it and call (to your aid) whomsoever ye can other than Allah, if ye speak the truth.'"³³³

And again

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِسُوْرَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا مَنْ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

"'Or do they say: 'He forged it'? Say: 'Bring then a chapter like! Unto it and call (to your aid) anyone ye can besides Allah, if it be ye speak the truth.'"³³⁴

6. It has been revealed to re-establish the sincere worship of Allah alone, without association of any partners with Him.

كِتَابٍ أَحْكَمَتِ آيَاتُهُ ثُمَّ فَصَّلَتْ مِنْ لَدُنْ حَكِيمٍ خَبِيرٍ

"This is a Book with verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning), further explained in detail, from One Who is Wise and Well-Aware. (It teaches) that you should worship none but Allah." ³³⁵

"And they have been commanded no more than this: to worship Allah, offering Him sincere devotion, being true in faith, to establish regular prayer and to give Zakat, and that is the religion Right and Straight."³³⁶

³³³ Hud: 13.

³³⁴ Yunus: 38.

³³⁵ Hud: 1-2

³³⁶ Al-Bayyinah: 5

7. It contains a complete code which provides for all areas of life, whether spiritual, intellectual, political, social or economic. It is a code which has no boundaries of time, place or nation.

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ

"Verily this Qur'an doth guide to that which is most right." ³³⁷

8. Allah Almighty has taken upon Himself the duty of preserving the Qur'an for ever in its entirety, as He says:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

"We have without doubt sent down the Message, and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption)." ³³⁸

So well has it been preserved, both in memory and in writing, that the Arabic text we have today is identical to the text as it was revealed to the Prophet. Not even a single letter has yielded to corruption during the passage of the centuries. And so it will remain for ever, by the consent of Allah.

Given the depth as well as the sublimity of the Qur'anic text, a faithful translation of it into another language is virtually impossible. The various translations that exist today, however accurate they may be, cannot be designated as the Qur'an, since they can never hope to imitate the diction or the style of the Book of Allah. But as translation is one of the few ways to export the message of the Qur'an to allow those lacking in knowledge of

³³⁷ Al-Isr'a / Bani Israil: 9

³³⁸ Al-Hijr: 9

Arabic to share this priceless gift, it becomes a duty for those in a position to fulfill this task.

A number of individuals have in the past ventured to translate the Qur'an, but their works have generally been proven to be individual efforts, affected by their pre-occupied notions and prejudices. Yusuf Ali's translation of the Holy Qur'an is also not an exception. He said in the Preface of his translation of the Qur'an;

“The translation was not an easy task, but was in fact “the double task”, of understanding the original, and producing its nobility, its beauty, its poetry, its grandeur, and its sweet practical and reasonable application to everyday experience”³³⁹.

In reality, the aim of a translation is to convey the nearest possible meaning of the text, not the reflection of one's own ideas. Like every other translation of the Holy Qur'an, Yusuf Ali's work is also not a mere substitute for one word for another, but it is his level best expression given to the fullest meaning which can be understood from the Arabic text. He tried so hard that the rhythm, music and exalted tone of the original is to be reflected in the English language. Ali states;

“The English shall be. Not a mere substitution of one word for another, but the best expression I can give to the fullest meaning, which I can understand from the Arabic text. The rhythm, music and exalted tone of the original should be reflected in my work, it may be a faint reflection, but such beauty and power as my pen can command shall be brought to its service”.³⁴⁰

But in doing so, at times he goes very far in meaning.

Besides all his efforts regarding the translation of the Holy Qur'an, Yusuf Ali's Edwardian style makes his translation, unclear and complicated³⁴¹. This translation of the

³³⁹ The Holy Qur'an: Preface to First Edition, III, IV.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.,; V.

³⁴¹ For Example, See:

meanings of the Holy Qur'an does not successfully connect the reader with original Qur'anic text. Some times the archaic language conceals the "real meaning".

Initially, Yusuf Ali intended to make "English itself an Islamic Language"³⁴². To some extent it was a success story but mainly, the Victorian style pre dominates the work. This effort would definitely meet its full bloom success if the frequently used Biblical notions could replace by their Islamic counterparts.

The Language depicts an old style, which is not very much practical at present³⁴³, besides we have a number of other easily understandable, simple and accessible English translations available throughout the globe³⁴⁴. Therefore the present scope of Ali's translations is not very bright for a general reader, though, on academic levels, still it can been seen in quotations. The best possible solution would be a thorough effort to up date its Language and diction so that the interested readers could have an access through it.

³⁴² The Holy Qur'an: Preface to First Edition: III.

³⁴³ A short Survey was conducted to get an updated over view of Yusuf Ali's translation and commentary notes. It included 42 persons (well- acquainted to Yusuf Ali's work) involved in various academic and domestic professions. The Net average of only 2% readers still prefers this translation. Though, the rest majority is very much interested in his valuable commentary notes, but still do not opt for this translation any more, mainly due to its archaic language.

³⁴⁴ For a simple and quite modern style of Qur'anic translation, the most recommended work on scale is Muhsin Khan & Hilal's *The Noble Qur'an*.

CONCLUSION

The Qur'an is Allah's choicest gift to humanity. It is the miracle of miracles testifying to the prophet hood of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the eternal source of divine guidance, healing, light, mercy. It is glad tidings for the Allah-conscious, and a warning for the heedless and the insolent. It contains inexhaustible wisdom; it is the quintessence of the knowledge of both ancients and the moderns, the Decisive Criterion; Spirit from Allah, and revelation from on High on the heart of the Messenger. Finally, it is our rope of salvation, pleader for us or against us on the Day of Final Reckoning. It is therefore imperative that we respond to the Divine Word most appropriately.

Yusuf Ali's translation and commentary notes are a lot different from others of its kind. To many people he is not always very clear, especially when it comes to his mystical interpretations of certain verses. I have gone through a long journey with him Here are a few tips for Yusuf Ali's readers to help them benefit from his words optimally:

- **Visualize the grandeur of the Word and the august majesty of its Speaker:** In order to properly benefit from the Qur'an, it is imperative that our mind and heart be filled with a deep sense of reverence and awe for the Mighty Word and its Author, the Creator and Sovereign Lord of all beings.
- **Keep Your Presence of mind:** We cannot expect to benefit from the Qur'an unless we pay undivided attention to it; so it is imperative that we dispel all distractions. One may do well to take the necessary steps to induce proper concentration, such as purifying oneself both physically and inwardly, sitting comfortably in a relaxed manner, etc.
- **Reflect:** Since the main purpose of reading the Word is none other than reflecting on the message, we ought to reflect upon it. `Ali said, "There is no good in worship without knowledge; there is no good in reading without reflection." That is the reason why we read in the sources that the Prophet, Companions and *As-*

salaf As-salih (righteous early Muslims) often would repeat the same verse continuously in order to better reflect upon the deeper meanings of the verse.

- **Remove veils and obstacles:** Often one is prevented from attaining due reflection because of the many veils and obstacles that stand in the way of appreciating the Qur'an, veils such as the following: (1) Obsession with external rules of recitation/articulation of sounds to such an extent that one is totally pre-occupied with them and is thus distracted from paying due attention to pondering the meanings; (2) Blind imitation of a particular sect or school or ideology and being fanatically attached to it so that one's own preconceived biases or prejudices prevent one from perceiving the deeper meanings of the Word; (3) Persistence in sins or pride whereby the mirror of one's heart becomes rusted so that it is incapable of gaining true spiritual insights; (4) Clinging to a particular work of *tafseer* so dogmatically that one holds the false view that the author has exhausted the entire meanings of the Qur'an in his exposition, no matter how articulate and profound he may be, for the Qur'an is inexhaustible in its depth.
- **Identify with the meanings of the verses read and respond to them sensitively:** When reading the verses about attributes of Allah, bring to mind Allah's incomparable nature and absolute uniqueness. When reading the verses that speak of Allah's creation, think of the manifestation of divine power as revealed in His work, thus being led to recognize Allah's might and glory. When reading the verses describing Paradise, cherish such ardent fervor for it that you spontaneously seek Allah's mercy. When reading descriptions of Hell, you should tremble and pray that Allah keeps you safe from its torments.
- **Visualize that Allah is speaking to you directly through the Qur'an:** As the late Dr. Muhammad Iqbal³⁴⁵ said, "No advice from anyone benefited me as much as I benefited from the advice of my mother who told me, 'My son, when reading

³⁴⁵ Sir Muhammad Iqbal born (November 9, 1877 – April 21, 1938) was a Muslim poet, philosopher and politician born in Sialkot, British India (now in Pakistan), whose poetry in Urdu and Persian is considered to be among the greatest of the modern era,^[1] and whose vision of an independent state for the Muslims of British India was to inspire the creation of Pakistan. He is commonly referred to as **Allama Iqbal**

the Qur'an, visualize in your mind that Allah is speaking to you through it!" **Be sensitive:** Imam Al-Ghazali³⁴⁶

- says: In order to benefit from the Qur'an, three of our faculties must participate in the act of recitation, namely, the tongue, the mind and the heart. Thus the tongue articulates the sounds, the mind translates the meanings, and the heart becomes sensitive and receives admonition or counsel.
- **Develop in yourself the qualities of the Servants of the Merciful:** The ultimate objective of the revelation is to transform our inner personalities in such a way that we personify the ideals and ethics of the Qur'an. This is why the Prophet was described by `A'ishah³⁴⁷ as a walking Qur'an. So one must read, reflect on the message, and act accordingly as the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) did, thus combining knowledge with practice.
- **Salute the Messenger, the medium of the Word:** We cannot detach the Message from the Messenger, for he alone is the interpreter par excellence of the Word and its living exemplifier. Therefore, we ought to consistently send salutations of peace and blessings on him. For without a deep love for the Messenger, we cannot truly appreciate the revelations sent down by Allah to him through the medium of Angel Jibreel. May Allah for ever shower His choicest blessings and peace on His Servant and Messenger Muhammad, his family and companions. And may He grant us all the honor of joining their august company after we depart this transient world. Aameen."

Future Recommendations

³⁴⁶ **Abu Hāmed Mohammad ibn Mohammad al-Ghazzālī** (1058-1111), known as **Algazel** to the western medieval world, was born and died in Tus, in the Khorasan province of Persia (modern day Iran). He was a Muslim Iranian theologian, jurist, philosopher, psychologist and mystic of Persian origin, and remains one of the most celebrated scholars in the history of Sufi Islamic thought. He is considered a pioneer of the methods of doubt and skepticism, and in one of his major works, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, he changed the course of early Islamic philosophy, shifting it away from the influence of ancient Greek and Hellenistic philosophy.

³⁴⁷ **Daughter of Abu Bakr (RA)**, was a wife of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). In Islamic writings, she is thus often referred to by the title "Mother of the Believers".

Whenever a student of Qur'anic studies, intends to simplify the methodology of certain translation and commentary notes, a very common observation appears up that it is not possible to grasp the entire text of the Holy Qur'an, its translation and meanings, then its commentary notes for an individual. I have gone through the same experience. In a limited time and sources one must be given a specific task focusing the certain aspects out of so many.

English translations of the Holy Qur'an are wide spread now in a countless number. It will not be very uncareful to say that not even a single out of these translations is unanimously accepted as a standard one, of course because human efforts cannot be the substitute of divine words. So, there is a lot of room for all those students of Qur'anic studies who have interest in English translations of the Holy Qur'an, to do their research, not only by highlighting the methodologies but also with a critical and comparative approach. In this way we can expect to have fairly neutral and academic out comes. I would particularly like to request Arabic speaking students to initiate such projects, so that the text they prefer would be much closer to real text, hence improving the standard of translation and commentaries. For example, After Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Asad's translation can be on the list as it grades the second most popular after Ali. Then, after wards both works can be compared with for example very recent translation by a native Arab, Dr. Muhammad Abdul Haleem. Also specific studies of only translation and commentaries can be done, particularly done by deviant sects, with the aim of defaming the real Islam.

Also, the very contemporary issues , related directly to Qur'an should bring in consideration, for example, Qur'an and Gender, Qur'an and post modernization, Qur'an and end of time, This way not only thematic Tafsir writing can be introduced to English readers, but also a great number of new readers can be addressed.

May Allah enable us all to spread the divine message in the best possible way. Aameen.

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