

Problems, Illusions and Challenges Faced by a non -Arabic Speaker in Understanding Quran: A Sub-Continental Study

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Abstract

Quran is the book of Allah which was revealed to Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). The book was revealed in Arabic language because the prophet belonged to Arab which is Saudi Arabia now. Although the book was revealed for the whole humankind on the earth, yet its language is Arabic, so that people of Makkah (A place in Saudi Arabia), the birthplace of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), could understand the message of Quran properly. In the lifetime of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), the religion of Islam spread all around the Arab, but for them it was easy to understand Quran because they were also Arabs, the main problem of understanding of Quran arose when Islam reached to the houses of the non-Arabs, who were unknown to the Arabic language.

In this research paper an objective study would be done about the problems faced by people specially belonging to India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Although this research and problem is not new, the new generation, “what do they think about Quran?” and “what is their strategy to read and understand Quran?” will be the focus of research. The current study would be based on one tool which is questionnaires. 50% of the questionnaires would be taken for assessment, which would be suitable for eliciting suitable response.

Keywords: Quran, Prophet Mohammed, understanding, Subcontinent, Arabic, Language.

INTRODUCTION

Quran is the book of guidance for the whole mankind. Although many non- Muslims reject this book saying that it is not the word of Allah, yet most scholars of the non-Muslims are also convinced to accept the fact that there is no doubt this book is full of wisdom and guidance. Quran was originally revealed in Arabic language, later it was translated in many languages to understand thoroughly. Prophet Mohammed PBUH was an Arab, so the language of conversation at that time was Arabic. The prophet Mohammed PBUH was an unlettered man, yet he explained all the messages from this book to his companions which we have in the form of another book called Hadith. Some of the non-Muslims

accused Prophet Mohammed PBUH that he has written all the text of Quran. But the language of Quran is so classic that the Arab scholars of that day were surprised that the language of Quran was neither prose nor poetry yet has the monotony and soothing effect on the ear and the heart, which was impossible for an unlettered man to construct such type of sentences. A Muslim will never doubt the Quran of being the book of Allah which is revealed to Prophet Mohammed PBUH and will always be unchanged till the day of resurrection.

Since the time, Islam started to spread throughout the world, the Quran has been heard, read, learnt, memorized, and recited all over. However, there came out many translations and transliterations of Quran, the reading and

memorizing of Quran has always been in its original text. Even the non-Arabic speakers learn the basic alphabet and part of classic Arabic to learn to read and memorize the Quran. Thus, in this context most of the time the reciter is not aware of what they are reciting but they do recite accurately and fluently. The emphasis and relevance of learning basic alphabet and rules of spelling of Arabic language to learn to read and memorize the Quran is well established and rooted in all Muslim families irrespective of place they belong or race or gender. This tutoring of Arabic language to read Quran starts in early childhood for all Muslims. Thus, the Quran becomes part of a Muslim's life since childhood and remains all through at least in daily five times' prayer. Therefore, reading and reciting the Quran becomes central to a Muslim's life and is considered as an act of worship. This makes reading of Quran to be dealt with great amount of reverence and caution to avoid errors or neglect. This attitude becomes even more strong and rigid in the subcontinent, giving rise to many debatable ideas, restrictions, opinions centering reading and reciting of Quran.

Background of the Research:

Arabic Quran, no doubt has a miraculous attraction to its listener, whether someone understand its meaning or not, they are compelled to listen to it more. Present research focuses on a different issue of understanding of Quran. As the Quran is the book of guidance, it becomes compulsory for all of Muslims to understand the meaning of Quran properly to apply the principles and values mentioned in it in day-to-day life. As non-Arabic speakers, the Muslims of the sub-continent do not completely comprehend the Quran and its implied meaning, they tend to read the Quran in Arabic language in a traditional way, without knowing what they are reading. This becomes the premises of study and discussion in this paper

This research examines non-Arab Muslims who read the Quran in Arabic, as well as their ideology, beliefs, and doubts, as well as the limits they face when reciting the Quran in its original language. Since numerous related research articles and books have already been published about the Arabic language and its intricacies, this study will not go into great detail about them. While interpreting the Quran through its translation is possible, the emphasis

is on the limitations of doing so. Finding a Quranic translation is necessary simply because reading it in Arabic does not benefit someone who does not grasp what is being said in it. Following this declaration, the paper continues to its central topic, which is why reciting the Quran in Arabic is prioritized and why there is so much dogma around approaching the Quran in translation.

Some Major Problems and Illusions in Understanding Quran:

A common belief in the contemporary subcontinental area is that learning to read and recite the Quran in Arabic is fundamental to being a Muslim, and that one must read the Quran at least once in one's lifetime and memorize a minimum of a few or ten chapters of the Quran in order to perform daily five daily prayers. Of course, it is a no-brainer. Of course, Islamic education, which lasts six years or longer, includes learning a portion of the Arabic alphabet and classical grammar, as well as the Urdu language and knowledge of Fiqh, among other things. However, Islamic education is not limited to this. This includes a variety of Islamic courses such as Hifz, Aalim, Mufliyah, and others, which are offered in various madrassas throughout the world by various sects/schools of thought and in various regions. That is not the subject of discussion in this paper, nor do the researchers believe they are qualified to provide an opinion on it. The mention of madrassas is included to draw attention to the fact that while madrassas provide most of the Islamic education, not all Muslim parents send their children to madrasas. As a result, they prefer to send their children to schools that offer a comprehensive curriculum that includes other branches of study such as mathematics, science, and history, as well as economics and commerce, as these subjects are more promising in terms of preparing them for a career and raising their living standards. Students who do not attend madrassas learn to read and recite portions of the Quran through personal tutors or through evening courses offered by Arabic centers or masjids or mosques in their communities. You only learn about basic Islamic knowledge and how to read the Quran on the syllabus, which is extremely limited.

The important point to note here is that all students, regardless of whether they are enrolled in madrassas or evening courses, are not

encouraged to learn the translation of the Quran, which is something that should be done in order to appreciate and cultivate the teachings of the Quran in everyday life.

In Muslim communities across the subcontinent, different schools of thought have come up with different ways to look at the Quran. This has led to a preference for not translating the Quran rather than encouraging it.

Different schools of thought and opinions on reading Quran translations exist, ranging from completely avoiding reading the translation of the Quran to memorizing a few chapters and basic lessons in Arabic along with their translations to leaving it entirely up to an individual's discretion on whether or not to read a translation at all.

The latter case's motivation and willingness to read may be prompted by an individual's doubts and questions about Islam, or by the environment, which prompts one to pick up a translation and read it.

Many of the stories echoed the idea that the first time you read a translation, it made no sense.

We saw that some people gave up after their first try at reading the translation, but others kept going and learned more about the holy book over time.

Within this range, we can see that even today, there are many people in the subcontinent who believe that reading the Quran with a translation is not a good thing to do because "these are Allah's words, so it should be read as it is" is their devout intention and fear of being disobedient to their lord, Allah, in doing so is their devout intention and fear of being disobedient to their lord, Allah, in performing this act.

When people attempted to translate the Quran in the beginning, they were subjected to public wrath and admonition.

Some Indian families are still discouraged from understanding the meaning of the Quran, as demonstrated by Shama Khan, who was given a Quran by her family when she got married, but only the Arabic translation.

When her father was approached about giving her a Quran with a translation, he flatly refused, stating, "Reading a translation is bad."

This type of thinking could have developed as a result of the instruction that the Quran translation would never be complete in and of itself.

Although time has passed, the blessed book of all Muslims throughout the world has remained unchanged. Its language, literary style, and pattern of unmatched sound and language are unparalleled, and a mere translation cannot do justice to the book's unparalleled beauty.

Our first and most important realization is that the Qur'an, in its original Arabic text, is God's word.

Its translation is an expression by the translator of what he has understood to be the meaning of the Qur'an in its original Arabic.

As a result, it is susceptible to error.

It is possible that translations into other languages will contain errors.

Allah has chosen the words and the language that will be used.

The impact of reading in Arabic Reading in Arabic or another language does not have the same impact as reading in English.

It is possible that different translations will convey different meanings.

The purpose of the tafseer and the commentary that will be included here

When it comes to prayer (salath/salah), another issue that highlights the importance of understanding the Quran comes up.

When people offer salah behind the Imam (the person who leads salah in the mosque), they may be reciting or listening without even realizing what they are doing.

In addition, during Ramadan (a pious month in which Muslims fast for the entire month), when people offer special taraweehtarawih salah for hours in the night prayer but don't understand or know the meaning of the very words they are reciting, there is a problem.

However, in the Quran, it is emphasized that it is important to understand the words that are said during prayer, as is clearly stated in Surat Nisa (women), chapter 7, where it is stated in these words:

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَقْرُبُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنْتُمْ سُكَرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَعْلَمُوا مَا تَقُولُونَ وَلَا جُنُبًا إِلَّا عَابِرِي سَبِيلٍ حَتَّىٰ تَغْتَسِلُوا وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مَرْضَىٰ أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ أَوْ جَاءَ أَحَدٌ مِّنْكُمْ مِنَ الْغَائِطِ أَوْ لَمَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا مَاءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا فَامْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَفُوًّا غَمُورًا ﴿٤﴾

Which means “O you who believe! Approach not prayers with a mind befogged until ye can understand all that ye say until ye can understand all that ye say nor in a state of ceremonial impurity(except when travelling in the road until after washing your whole body) if ye are ill or on a journey, or one of you cometh from offices of nature, or you have been in contact with women, then take for yourself clean sand or earth, and rub therewith your faces and hands. For God doth blot out sins and forgive again and again”. Although this Ayat is revealed for those who drink and pray in the state of drunken person whose senses are lost yet it also gives hints to those who even pray consciously yet do not know the meaning of the recitation. So, what is the use of repeating the same words repeatedly while not knowing them. It cannot be applied in a normal life if a person deals with someone, he/she must communicate in the same medium or language, how come people pray and recite Quran all their lives while not try even once to know or learn or understand the meaning of Allah’s words.

Quran is a book which gives reference of History as the people of Aad Thamud lesson from history, those were the mightiest person on the earth but destroyed by Allah SWT because of their pride and arrogance.

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ وَعَادٌ بِالْقَارِعَةِ 4:69 Thamud and 'Aad denied the Striking Calamity.

Quran is a book of guidance where all the rules and conditions have been written for the human being to be followed to lead a successful life but if someone is not aware of the Arabic language at least he/she should try to read the meaning with tafseer (Explanation). Most of the people from sub-continent still believe that reading translation of Quran is not an act of intelligence as a result they prefer their own cultures and creeds instead of following sunnah and qur’anic rules for their personal decisions. Although some of the Muslims in Subcontinent who are somehow educated in Islamic and as well as in professional fields, they prefer to read Quran

with its meaning. Dr Israr Ahmed from Pakistan worked hard in teaching Quran translation in Urdu. He delivered lectures mentioning brief tafseer of Quran. Almost forty years of his life he contributed a lot for an average person to learn at least a basic translation of Quran. Dr Israr Ahmed states in one of his lecture posted by Tanzeem e Islam “The root of Quranic studies is so deep that a life is not sufficient to cover it up and for a human being who has a limited knowledge can ever encompass the knowledge of Quran however some of the Ayats of Quran are still in mutashabihat (not clear) as for examples seven heavens many times mentioned in Quran but still we don’t know the reality of seven heavens”. This institute, Tanzim e Islam offers many courses where people from different professions learn translation of Quran. Ms. Tayyaba, a linguistics teacher from Pakistan mentions that she goes through root words mentioned in Quran and now she can understand some words of Quran also her experience working in Saudi Arabia helped her to learn Arabic more closely.

In India, still people are lagging because of less exposure towards Islamic studies. They prefer to give professional education to their kids to Islamic understanding. This attitude of general people has made the Islamic scholars center of the solution of all the problems of their day today life. For every petty thing they use to go to so called Molana (Islamic counsellor) and sometimes these common people having no understanding of Islamic Sharia are cheated by some misguided people who pretend to be Islamic by their appearance but in real they make fool to people and earn money from them. While is Islam there is no mediator between Allah and the people He created, as in Quran it is mentioned “And We have already man and know what his soul whispers to him, and we are closer to him than (his) jugular vein” (Sahih International)

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعَلْمَا مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ

إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ ﴿١٦﴾

In Islam unlike Christianity Allah and his servants don’t need any pope to come between and explain things for them while Allah has sent down the book of knowledge for us and all the solution are available for every small and big

problems, and he made Muhammed the last prophet PBUH, the best teacher for us who explained each and every aspect of Quran and he applied Quran on his life and presented the best example of a human on the earth ever. Allah made the language of Quran very easy to learn and understand so it's upon the Muslims of sub-continent, if they don't want to spare time for understanding Quran and don't want to get the sweetness of the words of Allah directly, they will always be beating around the bushes and will never get the right path of understanding. This research calls upon the words of Allah:

ولقد يسرنا القرآن للذكر فهل من مدكر

And we have made the Quran easy to remember, is there anyone who will remember it?

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