

# Sindhī Translations And Commentaries Of The Qur'ān In The 19<sup>th</sup> And 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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## Abstract

The Holy Qur'ān, has been translated in various languages of the world. According to the sources, it was first translated in Sindhi Language in Sindh during the Arab Rule in third/ninth century. This Sindhi translation is not extant at present. This paper studies the various Sindhi translation works rendered by the local Sindhi scholars particularly in nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some widespread and widely read Sindhi translations of the Holy Qur'ān have been studied in terms of their linguistic style and scope for the understanding of this great religious holy scripture. Fourteen other Sindhi translations of the Holy Qur'ān have been mentioned to the extent of their authors, year of publication or year of manuscript. This will pave way to future researchers to study Sindhi translation and commentary work rendered by the scholars in the twenty first century, which will bring to the fore new insights in the historical development of the translation work.

**Keywords:** Quran Translation, Sindhi Translations, 19<sup>th</sup> Century, 20<sup>th</sup> Century

## Introduction

Sindh - currently second biggest province of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan- is known in the history of Islam as “the gateway of Islam” to the South Asia region, whereas Sindhī language is known as a member of Indo-European languages, which is now spoken in Pakistan and India and in diaspora.<sup>1</sup> Although Muslims stepped in this region just after the demise of the Prophet Muḥammad (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) and to some other historical sources, contacts of Sindhī people with the Arabs are also traced back in the life of the Prophet himself, yet

this region administratively and politically came into the fold of Islam in Umayyad Dynasty in the year 93 AH /711 CE and remained under the Muslim Rule about two centuries. It is firmly believed that native people - who are now called “Sindhī” due to the attribution to this region- must have felt the need of understanding of the newly revealed book i.e., the Qur'an, as is mentioned by the famous Muslim historian and travelogue Buzurg b. Shāharyār. According to the statement of ibn Shāharyār, in the year 270 AH, the Hindū ruler of “Alor”<sup>2</sup> wrote to Muslim ruler of Maṣūrah Sindh ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Umar al Habārī, expressing his need for the book on

Islamic beliefs and teachings written by well-versed Muslim scholar. ‘Abdullāh handed over this responsibility to one of the Iraqi scholars -unfortunately name of this scholar is not recorded in history- who spent well enough time in Sindh, thus, he possessed good command on Sindhī language in addition to other native languages. It is really interesting to know that this Iraqi scholar has produced a translation of the Qur’ān in Sindhī verse which is, of course, quite difficult task to do as some scholars believe.<sup>3</sup> The Hindu ruler impressed by his work to the extent that he requested al-Habārī to let him stay with him for couple of years.<sup>4</sup> This earlier translation of the Qur’ān is lost due to unrest and continuous foreign invasions on this region and presumably nowhere found at present.

The long stay of the Arabs in Sindh and earlier contacts between Sindhīs and the Arabs- as mentioned above- have influenced Sindhī grammar and language to a noticeable extent. This influence could be observed in the book of “Muqaddamah al-ṣalāt” written by Makhdūm Abū al-Ḥasan Thatwī, which is also known as “the Sindhī of Abū al-Ḥasan Thatwī”. This form of Sindhī is called in Sindhī literature as “Kabt”.

In this earlier form of Sindhī language, many Sindhī scholars produced remarkable religious literature such as Makhdūm Diyā’ al-Dīn Thatwī and Abū al-Ḥasan Thatwī. This work of translation of the Qur’ān begun in Sindh from the very early days of Muslim rule and of course continues up to date. This is why some Sindhī Muslim scholars hold view that the Qur’ān was first translated in Sindhī such as, ‘Allāmāh Ghulām Muṣṭafā Qāsmī, Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī and Sayyid Abū Zafar Nadwī.<sup>5</sup> It is also worth-mentioning here to state that in Sindhī language the number of translations and commentaries of the Qur’ān are greater than any other language of this region. According to the Dā’irah-e-Ma’rif-e-Islāmiyyah (Encyclopaedia of Islam in

Urdu published by the University of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan) the number of these translations & commentaries exceeds sixty-seven and this was recorded about 45 years ago, after which many other similar works are produced up to date.<sup>6</sup>

It seems important to note here that the issue of the exact translation of the Qur’ān is also debated among Muslim theologians and research scholars. It is almost agreed that the exact translation of the word of God is not possible in any human language. However, there is difference of opinions among the scholars as to how this sensitive- and at the same time the most important work as the understanding of it is believed to be religious obligation- work of translation could be undertaken. These discussions continued until the assembly of the Grand Ulema of al Azhar issued a Fatwā in 1355/1936,<sup>7</sup> explaining the possibility of translating the Qur’ān an interpretive translation and in the impossibility of transferring its meaning along with the characteristics of Arabic composition to other languages. As a matter of fact, this difference of opinion ultimately resulted in the work of translation, hence variety of translations were produced aiming at drawing closer to the meanings of the word of God. In addition, this difference and variety of work could also be observed in the translations of the meanings of the Qur’ān in Sindhī language.

### **Sindhī Translation and Commentary in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

This period comprises two eras: first, the era of local rulers who are called Tālpurs. Second, the era of foreign rulers i.e., the British Rule. The era of Tālpurs came to end when Britishers defeated the Tālpurs in the war of Miyānī, Hyderabad in 1843 CE. Although in the era of Tālpurs the official language was Persian in Sindh, yet they

were ardent to Sindhī language and were famous for patronizing research scholars. Richard Burton, in his book, noted that in the era of Tālpurs the children were used to be sent to Madrasah at the age of four, where they learn the Qur'ān from Molwī or Akhūnd (teacher). We discuss below the features of some important Sindhī translations and commentaries of this era and try to analyse this contribution of Sindhī scholars in the field.

### **I. The Commentry of Akhūnd 'Azīzullāh Matyārwi**

Akhūnd 'Azīzullāh b. Muḥammad Zākir Matyārwi is regarded a profound and eminent scholar of Sindh in this era. He was born in the city of Matyārī -previously the district of Hyderabad, now a separate district- in 1746 CE. His elders originally hailed from Thatta- once it was a great centre of education and literacy in Sindh- and were affiliated with teaching and, thus, were called in Sindh 'Akhūnd'. He learnt reading the Qur'ān at his home and completed his religious education from Maulānā Muḥammad 'Uthmān Matyārwi. After being graduated in religious education, he started teaching at the madrasah of his spiritual master of Lanwārī Sharīf. He is reported to be passed away in the year 1273 AH.

Little before Akhūnd 'Azīzullāh, another versatile scholar of Sindh Makhdūm Muḥammad Hāshim Thatwī wrote a commentary of just last Juz' (part) of the Qur'ān in the form of "kabt". Akhūnd 'Azīzullāh was first Sindhī scholar who wrote the translation and footnotes "hāshiyah" on the Qur'ān in the form of prose other than the poetry namely 'Kabṭ'. From the technical point of view, this translation is first complete prose translation that is now extant.<sup>8</sup> According to Sindhī scholars this translation is one of the best of its kind due to the style of Akhūnd,

which was followed by his successors such as the translation of Maulānā Muḥammad Ṣiddīq, Mardān 'Alī Shāh and Qaḍī Faṭḥ Muḥammad Nizāmānī. 'Allāmah Ghulām Muṣṭafā Qāsmī states that "this translation was widely spread in Sindh that it was available almost in every mosque of Sindh".<sup>9</sup> It appears from the note on the last page of this translation that it is very close-if not entirely- to the translation of the meanings of the Qur'ān and not the literal translation.

One of the interesting things is that Akhūnd 'Azīzullāh gave Persian translation of Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī underneath his Sindhī translation which is most probably due to make it easy to understand it as Persian was very wide spread and commonly understood language at that time. In addition, Akhūnd has also precisely given in footnotes the causes of revelation by Shaikh Sa'dī Shīrazī in Persian language which makes it far more useful for understanding the Qur'ān. The author seems to be much more influenced by Arabic grammar and language in his style of writing Sindhī as he has used I'rāb in his Sindhī script. This translation was first published by Qaḍī M. Ibrāhīm at Muḥammadī Printing Press, Gujrat 1870.<sup>10</sup>

### **2. The Commentary of Maulānā Muḥammad Faḍl and Muḥammad Fāḍil Shāh**

It is regrettable to know that very little about the life and works of Maulānā Muḥammad Faḍl is recorded in the history. What we know about him is that he was born in Hyderabad, Sindh and is regarded as a great religious scholar and expert in Arabic language. He could write the commentary on the Qur'ān from sūrah Fāṭīḥah to surah Yūsuf and did not complete it due to his death. After his death his student Muḥammad Fāḍil Shāh completed unfinished work of his teacher like Jalalayn- a famous commentary on the

Qur'ān- in Muslim world. Muḥammad Fāḍil Shāh was also born in Hyderabad, Sindh in 1252 AH/1836 CE. He got his early religious education from Maulānā 'Abdullāh Walhārī and graduated by Maulānā Muḥammad Ḥasan. His uncle Muḥammad Yūsuf Shāh was Qāḍī (Judge in Sharī'ah, Islamic Law) of Hyderabad in British government. This commentary was first brought to notice by Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Musāfir, who called it "tafsīr Fāḍliyyah" which seems to us to be incorrect,<sup>11</sup> the correct name of the commentary is "tafsīr Fāḍilayn".<sup>12</sup> This complete commentary in three big volumes is preserved in the library of Maulānā 'Abd al-Raḥmān in Thatta. The year mentioned on the manuscript is 1286 AH.

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

This commentary was written just after the new Sindhī script was introduced by the then British Commissioner of Sindh Sir Bartle Freer in 1853 CE, when Sindhī scholars endeavoured to produce Sindhī literature in general and religious literature in particular in new Sindhī script. It is supposed that the authors of this commentary might have benefited from

their predecessor i.e., Akhūnd 'Azīzullāh Matyārwi's translation. This commentary is not yet published.<sup>13</sup>

## **Sindhī Translation and Commentary in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

### **I. The Translation of Maulānā Sayyid Tāj Maḥmūd Amrotī**

Maulānā Sayyid Tāj Maḥmūd Amrotī was great spiritual and religious scholar and very famous in the history of Indo-Pak for the role that he played in the Khilāfat Movement during 1919 CE before partition of the Sub-continent. His translation was first published in three volumes from Al-Haq Press, Sukkur, Sindh in 1916 CE.<sup>14</sup> Maulānā Amrotī published this translation excluding original Arabic text of the Qur'ān, which was at that time quite a new and different way of translation, upon which some religious scholars of Sindh raised questions and harshly criticized and issued a fatwa of "kufi" (heresy) by Maulānā Qamar al-Dīn Indhar of Pano 'Aqil, Sindh.

After which Maulānā Amrotī was convinced by the opinion and declared that he will not publish it again excluding original Arabic text. This translation is not literal translation rather it is the translation of the meanings of the Qur'ān and it is up to the standards of modern Sindhī prose, which could easily be understood by aboriginal people of this region. For this reason, it is widely spread and read in the province of Sindh that no other translation has been so popular. He has also used explanatory words in the brackets to make readers easily understand the meanings of the Qur'ān.

### **2. The translation and Commentary of Maulānā Muḥammad Madanī**

Maulānā Muḥammad was born in Bhanbhro, the small village in Hālā, district Matyarī n 1897 CE. He embraced Islam through his school teacher. Maulānā got his religious education from renowned religious scholars of India of that time like Maulānā Ḥussain Aḥmad Madanī, Maulānā Kh‘alīl Aḥmad Sahāranpurī, Maulānā Anwar Shāh Kāshmirī and Maulānā ‘Ubaydullāh Sindhī. After the completion of his education, he started his career as a teacher of Arabic language at Sindh Madrasah al-Islām Karachi, during which he translated the Qur‘ān. After retiring from Arabic teaching at Sindh Madrasah, he started teaching again at Mazhar al-‘Ulūm of Khadah in Karachi. In addition to this translation, Maulānā did write a commentary on the last four Ajza‘ of the Qur‘ān. It appears from his translation and commentary that he followed the way of his predecessors in the translation and commentary of the Qur‘ān. He has not given forward at the beginning of the translation and commentary. Furthermore, he gave causes of revelation and summary of every sūrah in the beginning of each sūrah. He seems to be much more influenced by the philosophy of Shāh Walī Allāh, which could be evident throughout his commentary. This was first published in Karachi 1953.<sup>15</sup>

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

### Overview of some other translations and commentaries

1. The translation and commentary of Makhdūm Muḥammad Shafī‘ Siddīqī, published by Hyderabad: Idārah Pat House A’in Publishers in 1994.
2. The commentary of Sūrah Yāsīn and Sūrah Raḥmān by Maulānā Tāj

- Maḥmūd Amrotī, published at Maḥmūd al-Maṭābi‘, Amrot, Shikārpur, 1901.<sup>16</sup>
3. The commentary of Juz‘ ‘Amma by Maulānā Aḥmad Naurangpoto, published.<sup>17</sup>
4. The translation and commentary of Qāḍī Sharaf al-Dīn Sewhānī, manuscript, 1907.
5. The Commentary of Maulānā Muḥammad ‘Uthmān Naurangzādah, published at Muḥammad ‘Azīm Kutub Khānah. Shikārpur.
6. The commentary of Qāḍī Faḥ Muḥammad Niẓāmānī, published by Sa‘īd Press Karāchī in 1953.
7. The commentary of Makhdūm Allāh Bakhsh Khuhrawī, published by Lahore: Anjuman Ḥurriyyat-e-Islam, 1912.
8. The translation and commentary of Maulānā Muḥammad Khān Laghārī.
9. The commentary of one fourth part of last Juz‘ of the Qur‘ān by Maulānā ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Magsī, published by Qaumī Kutub Khāno, Karāchī in 1947.<sup>18</sup>
10. The translation of Maulānā Nūr Muḥammad ‘Adilpurī, published by Karīmī Press, Lahore in 1929.
11. The commentary of Maulānā ‘Abd al-Khālīq Kandyārwī, published at Waqf and Masjid Society, Hyderabad 1944.<sup>19</sup>
12. The commentary of sūrah al-Furqān by Faqīr Hidāyat ‘Alī Najfī, manuscript of 1351 AH.
13. The commentary of Maulānā ‘Alī Muḥammad Mughērī.
14. The translation of Maulānā Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Razzāq. This translation was in classical Sindhī language which is now rewritten in modern Sindhī language by Professor Dr Abd al-Hayee Abro, former Director General, Shariah

Academy, International Islamic University, Islamabad, and published by

Dawah Academy, Karachi in 2004.

### Conclusion

From the above literature survey and discussion, it may safely be concluded that Sindh, being gateway of Islam to South Asia and having very early contacts with the Arabs, is reported to have first ever translation of the Holy Qur'ān for local people. Although that translation is not extant, however, Sindhī Muslim scholars

paid considerable attention to make the Holy Qur'ān accessible to common people by translating it in local Sindhī language and dialect. For this reason, local Sindhī scholars made significant arrangements to get the Holy Qur'ān printed with the causes of revelations on its margins so that local people may understand it in an easy way. Some very important translation and commentaries are not yet published which should be published to save Muslim heritage produced in this region as well as to better understand the and trace the historical development of the Sindhī translation work of the Holy Qur'ān.

### References

<sup>1</sup> Ismet Binark, Halit Eren, World Bibliography of Translations of The Meanings of The Qur'an:

printed translations: 1515-1980, Istanbul, 1986, p. 402

<sup>2</sup> Baloch, Nabī Bakhsh, Dr, Sindhī Bolī A'in Adaba jī Mukhtsar Tarīkha, Hyderabad: Pioneer Press, 1962, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Ghānghro, 'Abd al-Razzāq, Qur'ān Majīd jā Sindhī Tarjumā a'in Tafsīra, Shikārpur: Mehrān Academy, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Nadwī, Sulaymān, 'Arab-o-Hind kay Ta'alluqāt, Karachi: Karīm Sons Publishers, 1976, p. 342.

<sup>5</sup> Malkānī Manghārām, Sindhī Nasura jī Tarīkha, Hyderabad: Zaib Adabī Markaz, 1977, p. 7, Nadwī, Sulaymān, 'Arab-o- Hind kay Ta'alluqāt, p. 342, Nadwī Abū Zafar, Tarīkh -e- Sindh, p. 357.

<sup>6</sup> Dā'irah-e-Ma'ārif-e-Islāmiyyah, Lahore: University of Punjab, 1978, 1/16/615.

<sup>7</sup> Baḥṭh fī Tarjamah al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa Aḥkāmihā, Majallah al-Azhar, VII,1 (Muharram 1355

A.H/1936 CE), p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> Ismet Binark, Halit Eren, Op. cit. p. XXXII.

<sup>9</sup> Sindhī, Memon, 'Abd al-Majīd, Muqaddamah Tafsīr Hāshmi, Shikārpur: Mehrān Academy, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Ismet Binark, Halit Eren, Op. cit. p. XXXII.

<sup>11</sup> Musāfir Muḥammad Ṣiddīq, Dīwān Fāḍil, Hyderabad: Muslim Adabī Society, 1937, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> Ghānghro, Op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ismet Binark, Halit Eren, Op.cit. p. 407.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 405.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 414.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 409.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.408.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 408.