



البنيان: مجلة متعددة التخصصات لدراسات القرآن والحديث

Al-Bunyan: Interdisciplinary Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies

ISSN: 3031-3864,

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61166/bunyan.v2i2.29>

Vol. 2 No. 2 (2024)

pp. 145-152

Research Article

A Review of Abul Kalam Azad's Commentary on the Qur'an, "Tarjumān Al-Qur'ān"

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Received : August 05, 2024

Revised : September 28, 2024

Accepted : November 22, 2024

Available online : December 27, 2024

How to Cite: Muhammed Rashid Jalaly. (2024). A Review of Abul Kalam Azad's Commentary on the Qur'an, "Tarjumān Al-Qur'ān". *Al-Bunyan: Interdisciplinary Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, 2(2), 145-152. <https://doi.org/10.61166/bunyan.v2i2.29>

Abstract. Since its earliest revelation, the Qur'an has continued to serve as Muslims' primary source of intellectual inspiration and contemplation. With the help of the Qur'an, the Prophet helped his companions modify their perspectives. In addition to reciting the Qur'an to his companions, the Prophet also used to explain its meaning to them. The guidelines for reading the Qur'an were created to enlighten future generations on how their forefathers arrived at a certain interpretation so that they wouldn't overlook the problems unique to their own eras. Among the distinguished Qur'anic exegetes that India has produced, Abul Kalam Azad has a noteworthy position. It is an Urdu commentary on the Qur'an written by Azad between 1915 and 1945, a turbulent time when he was imprisoned by the British government multiple times for extended periods of time. In the lengthy list of his writings on many themes, his Tarjumān al-Qur'ān is actually his Magnum Opus. The most notable contribution to Islamic scholarship made by Abul Kalam Azad was Tarjumān al-Qur'ān, a sincere endeavour to explain the message as it was understood by the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) followers' during his lifetime. According to him, commentators in more recent times have diverted from the previous accurate

understanding under the influence of foreign culture and ideas. It is more detailed than a simple translation, but it is by no means complex. One of the greatest translations of the Quran was considered by Arabic academics to be the original "Tarjumān al-Qur'ān " Maulana Azad was a renowned Arabic scholar who was well-known throughout the Muslim world in addition to being a freedom fighter and national leader. Everyone agrees that Maulana's greatest work is the Tarjumān al-Qur'ān. In doing so, he has attempted to give the Qur'anic text its intended meaning—or the interpretation that the Prophet's followers had during his lifetime—or the meaning that it originally intended to have. It takes the form of a translation of the Qur'an with explanations, accompanied where appropriate by footnotes and comments. This study goes on the library mode of data analysis. The literary masterwork of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in Urdu, Tarjumān al-Qur'ān, has been translated into several languages and is known for standing out above other comments of a similar nature.

Keywords: Tarjumān al-Qur'ān, Maulana Azad, Qur'anic exegesis, Methodology

INTRODUCTION

The translation of the Qur'an from Arabic into other languages has long been a difficult subject in Islamic theology. Muslims believe that because they hold the Qur'an in such utmost respect as being wonderful and exceptional, it should not be detached from its original language or standard text, at least not without keeping the Arabic text along with it. However, since it is necessary, translations into languages other than Arabic are regarded as interpretations of the Quran not as Holy Quran. Quranic tafsir seeks to clarify, explain, contextualise, or remark on the text in order to let readers fully comprehend and be convinced of God's intention. The subjects of linguistics, law, and theology are all covered in tafsir. Tafsir can be broadly categorised into two categories in terms of perspective and methodology: tafsir by opinion, which is reached through introspective thought or independent rational reasoning and received tafsir, which is passed down from the early days of Islam through the Islamic prophet Muhammad and his companions. Each of the tafsirs, which reflect certain schools and ideologies like Sufism, Shia Islam, and Sunni Islam, has its own traditions and peculiarities. There are also broad differences between traditional tafsirs, which were written throughout the early periods of Islam by eminent personalities in Muslim learning, and contemporary tafsir, which aims to speak to a wider audience, including the general public. Muhammad is credited with the creation of the first tafsir instances. Islamic tradition holds that once the Quran was revealed to Muhammad, he read the verses to his companions. The duty of interpretation was taken up by Muhammad's associates and other notable masters after his passing, ushering in a new era of tafsir. *One of these is the Tarjuman Al-Qur'an, translated by the illustrious exegete Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.*

Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad

Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad was a well-known poet and academic. He was a very good leader who persuaded many people to join the Indian freedom movement¹ as he was proficient in many languages. Azad worked in India for Indian nationalism and Hindu-Muslim harmony. He is recognised not just as an Indian independence warrior, but also as the country's first education minister, serving from 1947 to 1948. And he was honoured by the country by earning the Bharath Ratna², the country's highest civilian accolade. Maulana Abdul Kalam assumed leadership as minister of education during the actual interim government, serving in that capacity until his passing in 1958. So, on November 11, which is the anniversary of Maula Abdul Kalam's birth, we have been celebrating National Education Day every year since 2008.

Abdul Kalam Azad, sometimes referred to as Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad or Maulana Azad, was an independent activist, Indian academic, and theologian of Islam who served as a prominent member of the Indian National Congress during the Indian Independence struggle. His full name is Abdul Kalam Ghulam Muhiyuddin Ahmed bin Khairuddin Al-Hussaini Azad, and he was born in Mecca on November 11, 1888. He chose Azad as his pen name³ and is more usually referred to as Maulana Azad, where Maulana is an honorific that meaning "our master."

Azad's father, Muhammad Khairuddin, was a Bengali Muslim scholar of Afghan ancestry who wrote twelve books and had thousands of disciplined followers who claimed noble ancestry, and his mother, Sheikha Alia bint Mohammad, was the daughter of Sheikh Mohammad bin Zaher Alwatri, who was also a renowned Medina scholar. He was schooled at home by his father, and then, as the years passed, he was taught by teachers from a variety of areas. And this might be the reason for the adaption of Muslim renovators as his inspiration. Maulana Azad was schooled and prepared to be a cleric, and he published several works, including a reinterpretation of the Holy Quran. During his adolescence, he studied Arabic and Persian languages, followed by geometry, mathematics, philosophy, and algebra and other educational fields.

When Azad was twelve years old, he also penned a biography of Al-Ghazali⁴, and by the time he was fourteen, he was already contributing essays to the literary journal Makhzan⁵. He began instructing pupils who've been twice his age when he was fifteen years old, and at sixteen he finished the conventional course of study. He published the monthly periodical Lissan-us-Sidq in 1903 after launching the weekly publication Al-Misbah in the year 1900.

¹ Indian independence movement was a series of historic events with the ultimate aim of ending British rule in India. It lasted from 1857 to 1947.

² Bharat Ratna is conferred "in recognition of exceptional service/performance of the highest order", without distinction of race, occupation, position, or sex. The award was originally confined to the arts, literature, science, and public services.

³ Name chosen by a writer to use instead of using his or her real name when publishing books.

⁴ The author of 'The Revival of the Religious Sciences'

⁵ An academic and literary journal published from Lahore in British India

Azad also became interested in Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's⁶ and Jamal Uddin Afghani's⁷ ideas and their pan-Islamic beliefs. To learn more about the beliefs, he travelled to nations including Iraq, Egypt, Syria, and Afghanistan under the influence of the pan-Islamic spirit. He was influenced by the ideas of pioneers of the new Islamic movements like Ahmed Raza Khan⁸ and the Egyptian Islamic philosopher Muhammad Abdu⁹.

In the world of politics, Maulana Azad was a charismatic figure. Along with working in the president's and general secretary's offices of different organisations and also he was a member of the Congress working committee. Maulana Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru became close friends in 1928, at which point Maulana Azad started to endorse socialism because he thought it would aid in addressing issues of inequality, poverty, and other societal ills. The Muslim political party Majlis-e-Ahrar-ul-Islam was likewise decided upon by Maulana Azad. In 1930, when Mahatma Gandhi began the Dandi Salt March, which launched the Salt Satyagraha, Maulana Azad was the one who organised and led the national raid in a nonviolent manner on the Dharasana salt works to protest against the rising salt tax and the restriction of its sales and production. Azad accepted the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and believed that nonviolence is the only way that India can be independent of British rule. He was inspired to make India Independent of British rule. He joined the revolutionary movement against British rule after he returned from Egypt by going to study at Al Azhar University in Cairo but he never got admitted for his formal education. Maulana Azad within two years was able to set up secret revolutionary centres all over North India and Bombay this helped many people joining the revolutionary movement to fight the British.

With the launch of his weekly newspaper, Al Hilal, in 1912, Abdul Kalam Azad began his career as a journalist. This newspaper's permission was revoked by the government after its readership surpassed 25,000. Al-Balagh, which he edited until 1930, was the name of the second weekly he promptly launched. Azad was driven from Bengal in 1916 and detained in Ranchi, where he started translating Tarjuman al-Qur'an into Urdu and adding commentary. The manuscript for this work was often seized and destroyed throughout his sporadic incarceration. The project's completion was put off until 1930 as a result. As far as we know, Azad intended to publish his writings under three different titles, but his incarceration forced him to stop writing everything save Tarjuman, which was still unfinished at the time of his death.

⁶ A South Asian revolutionary Muslim reformer, philosopher, and educationist in the nineteenth-century Subcontinent during British colonial rule.

⁷ He is one of the founders of Islamic Modernism as well as an advocate of Pan-Islamic unity in Europe and Hindu-Muslim unity in India against the British.

⁸ A reformer in north India who wrote extensively in defence of Muhammad and popular Sufi practices and became the leader of a movement called "Ahl-i Sunnat wa Jamàat"

⁹ A central figure of the Arab Reforms and Islamic Modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Tarjuman Al-Quran

The term specifically denoted two things in Tarjuman Al-Quran. They both have to do with the exegesis of the Quran. The first one is Abdullah bn Abbas¹⁰, the Prophet's companion's pet name. He was known as the Tarjuman Al-Quran in the Muslim world for his expertise in the Quran, particularly in its comments. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a native of the Indian Subcontinent who struggled for Indian independence from British domination, is the latter. However, his name and pet name were different from the first, but the title of the book he composed was Tarjuman Al-Quran.

As we go through this commentary on the Qur'an, we ought to be forced to access some notes that Abul Kalam wrote on the struggles and hardships the government and those individuals who seek to prevent him from creating such comments had to go through. As a result of Gandhi's participation in the liberation fight and the emergence of the non-cooperation movement, Indians had more clout with the British administration in the early 1900s when he started writing this essay. To write this commentary on the Quran, Kalam had to overcome several challenges. After finishing the planned commentary on the Holy Quran, he took some time to write about the challenges and limitations he encountered. The most crucial aspect is that he expounded on this from the outset of his composition. It seems and seems as though his underlining called attention to the suffering he underwent. He used and composed some poems in this preface to make the explanations more attractive and to give the readers more dynamism while reading this one. He writes,

"Once the significance of this manner was missed, the true picture of the Qur'an was lost to sight. In the words of a poet:

"That very page was blackened

Whereon had been noted what was desired¹¹."

The following statements are too from the commentary of Kalam's Tarjuman Al-Quran,

"In the year 1916 when the announcement was made in the columns of my weekly journal, Al-Balagh, that I proposed to prepare and publish an explanatory Urdu translation of the Qur'an, styled Tarjum-n al-Qur'an, and a commentary of it called Tafsir-al Bayan, I did not have even the slightest misgiving that I Was undertaking a task which would lie in abeyance for nearly 15 years, keeping the public in a state of tiresome expectation and giving me an acute sense of painful frustration. Such was the course of events that I had to bear!"¹²

After presenting the first paragraph of the proposed commentary, he moves on to some of the headings and their justifications that were previously mentioned, including externment, internment, the seizure of manuscripts, barriers to proper appreciation, and lines of approach to the topic and the commentary of Surat-ul-Fatiha. Given that he exhaustively lists more than 10 barriers from diverse sectors,

¹⁰ One of the cousins of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. He is considered to be the greatest mufassir of the Qur'an. He was the son of Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib, an uncle of Muhammad, and a nephew of Maymunah bint al-Harith, who later became Muhammad's wife

¹¹ English translation of Tarjuman Al-Quran by Syed Abdul Latheef

¹² English translation of Tarjuman Al-Quran by Syed Abdul Latheef

particularly those on the political and religious fronts, Kalam provides in-depth explanations under each of these topics. The meaning, justification, and distinctions between the terms "commentary" and "translation" are then examined by Kalam. This is a crucial element of the commentary, and we may learn this information or understanding of these words from any genuine Tafseer written in any one of a number of different languages by any number of different writers. In a remark, this portion is crucial. The fundamental characteristics and many kinds of Tafseer will be covered in this section.

The complex and thorough explanations, elucidations, and illuminations of Sura al-Fatiha are the commentary's most important and prominent aspects. He inhaled deeply to make his point clear. He left no opportunity for more explanation, other than theological disputes. As a scholar who is not Muslim, we are unable to even guess how much time he spent on the one translation of a surah from the Quran. The first volume of the commentary is divided into around seven to ten sections, starting with the significance of surah Al-Fatiha and concluding with the relevance of surah Al-Fatiha and the appendices of the main book. As we understand, it gained popularity among Muslims because of its clarity, particularly after the English translation of Syed Abdul Lateef's. Kalam himself says about his willingness and commitment towards this commentary. We can access his commitment while we understand the fact that he wrote its preface and exordium of the commentary at the District Jail, Meerut. He says,

"Whatever I could gather in this lengthy period of my life in my search of the Qur'anic truth, I have tried to understand to the best of my ability, and spread over the pages of this volume:

"This is no new tale of fiction, but a confirmation of previous scriptures, and an explanation of all things, and a guidance and mercy to those who believe." (Q: 12: 111)¹³

As compared to the first half of this commentary, the second portion, which began with the second surah, had a completely different literary style. We can observe the fundamental translation or interpretation of other parts while just seeing a thorough explanation of the first section. Using this strategy, we may correlate it with some of the most well-known comments on the Holy Quran, like those of Imam Baydawi¹⁴, who employed a similar methodology, and Imam Abu Al-Saud Effendi¹⁵, who also did so. But if we critically examine these approaches, it becomes clear that the first one uses a broad sort of explanation for several verses in the first portion, while the second and third ones take a more in-depth approach. Additionally, it was mentioned that he provided the meaning of each verse of Surah Al-Fatiha rather than giving any commentary.

When he talks about the significance of Surah Al-Fatiha, he adds that the other aspect of his composition may indeed be supported by Quranic data.

¹³ Surah Yusuf, verse no:111

¹⁴ One of the most popular classical Sunni Qur'anic interpretational works composed by the 13th-century Muslim scholar al-Baydawi, flourished especially among non-Arab Muslim regions.

¹⁵ a Hanafi Maturidi Ottoman jurist and Qur'an exegete

"The Surah Al-Fatiha is the first chapter of the Quran and is for that reason styled Fathihathul kithab or the opening of the book. Because of its intrinsic value, it has been assigned a place of honour in the Quran and allowed to appear on the very first page of it. Indeed, the Qur'an endorses its importance in the following term:

"o Prophet! It is a fact that we have given thee seven oft-repeated verses and the great Qur'an. "(Q: 15: 87)"¹⁶

Despite the fact that classical exegesis had strong and unquestionably substantial debates concerning this surah's verse counts, Kalam presents fragments of evidence from it and firmly asserts that it has seven verses. He claims,

"It has been established by Hadith and Athar that the reference here is to this chapter; for, it not only consists of seven verses but is repeatedly recited in daily worship. It is also called Sabaul Mathani, (the Oft-repeated Seven)"¹⁷

A variety of techniques are employed by commentators in the Quranic commentary to improve the accuracy of their descriptions. In addition, he attempted to explain jurisprudence while they attempted to provide some explanations from the Quran and Hadees (traditions). He discussed the 40th verse of Surah Al-Tauba, which is a verse from the Prophet Muhammad's tradition that he spoke when he was forced to flee his native Mecca, according to his commentary, which provides evidence of this. What he says is

"The prophet noticing this state of Agony in the mind of his companion went on allaying his fears saying: "Do not give; God is with us". At one moment when the enemy pursuers had come very close to the cave and Abu-Bakr whispered to the prophet; "if any of us two should raise himself even to the slightest degree, the enemy will catch sight of us:" The Prophet said quietly: "why think of us two? God himself is with us, the third." (Anas in Bukhari and Muslim). The Qur'an adds that God eased his () mind. The prophet's own mind was at the rest already."¹⁸

Kalam had tried to explain some verses of the Holy Quran by some other verses in the Quran, there are many methods of that interpretation, in the opening Surah of the Quran, while he describes the last verse of the Quran, the divine guidance, he brings other verse of the Holy Quran. He says,

"The distinction is emphasized when the suppliant asks to be shown 'the path of those to whom God has been gracious, and not of those who have incurred his displeasure nor of those who have gone astray'. Such is the picture of the Straight Path which the Quran furnishes, and advises every man to ask of God to show it to him.

The question now arises: "Who are those on whom God has bestowed his favours?" Answers the Quran:

Whoso obey God and the messenger, they are with those unto whom God hath shown favour, - the prophets, and the truth-and-fact-loving, and the martyrs, and the righteous. The best of company are they! (Q: 4: 69)

¹⁶ Surah Al-hijr, verse no: 87

¹⁷ English translation of Tarjuman Al-Quran by Syed Abdul Latheef

¹⁸ English translation of Tarjuman Al-Quran by Syed Abdul Latheef, PART 3

And later he gives brief notes about these names, Anbiya, Shuhada, Sidheeain and Salihin. By doing this, he also highlights several Sharia rulings. If we want to see an illustration of this, we can look at the final verse of Surah Al-Nisa²⁰, where he describes the nature of the Al-Kalala dilemma in a not-bad way.

According to the aforementioned arguments, Azad's reading of the Qur'an is primarily affected by his distinctive ideological and philosophical viewpoint. But in his Tafsir, he has counted on the technique of cross-functional and cross-interpretation as well as Hadith and juridical arguments. Tarjumanul Quran is a good commentary which explains the meaning and interpretations of the Holy Quran. Its main feature is the elaborate and broad explanations of Surah Al-Fathiha and he tried to give explanations of each word and its surroundings as well as possible.

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²⁰ The fourth chapter of the Quran, with 176 verses. The title derives from the numerous references to women throughout the chapter.