MUFTI MUḤAMMAD TAQĪ ‘USMĀṆĪ AND HIS SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTION TO THE QUR’ĀNIC STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Mufti Taqī Usmani of Pakistan is one of the most prominent contemporary Muslim scholars from Deobandi and Waliyullah’s School of Thought. He is not only a leading living scholar of Islamic Jurisprudence and Islamic finance, but also a scholar and an intellectual of the Qurʾān, the Hadith, Islamic law, and comparative religion. He has always been placed among the top fifty in “The 500 Most Influential Muslims” in the world since 2009 until 2016. His works on the sciences of Qurʾān and the interpretation of the Holy Qurʾān show his scholarship in this field. The writing of “Ulūm Al-Qurʾān” (An Approach to the Qurʾānic Sciences in Urdu), “The Meanings of the Noble Qurʾān” (English translation of the Quran) and “Āsān Tarjamah Qurʾān” (The simple translation of the Qurʾān with notes in Urdu) are his major works in the field of Qurʾān. His supervision of translating the “Maʾāriful Qurʾān” of his father, Maulānā Mufti Syafi’, from Urdu to English is considered as his magnificent endeavor and contribution to this field. This paper aims to discover the biography of Mufti Taqī Usmani and his scholarly contribution towards the interpretation of the Holy Qurʾān in the above-mentioned works. The paper uses a descriptive analytical approach to discuss his biography and his contributions. The analysis shows that Mufti Taqī Usmani is a continuity of Waliyullah’s tradition and Deobandi scholars’ in contributing Quranic teaching to ordinary people as well as scholars through his writings and his other scholarly works.

Keywords: Tafsīr, Translation, Deobandi, Indian Sub Continent, Urdu

(MUFTI MUHAMMAD TAQI ‘USMÂNİ DAN SUMBANGAN ILMIAHNYA DALAM BIDANG AL-QURAN)

ABSTRAK

Mufti Taqī Usmani merupakan tokoh ulama Pakistan kontemporari yang paling menonjol di kalangan ulama aliran Deobandi yang mendokong pemikiran Shah

Kata Kunci: Tafsîr, Penterjemahan, Deobandi, Benua India, Urdu

1. Introduction

The commitment of Indian religious intelligence towards the quest for common Muslims, guided by the Quranic teaching was shown predominantly by Shâh Waliyullah’s (1702-1763) tradition from as early as the eighteenth century. Beginning from Shâh Waliyullah himself who translated the Holy Qur’ân into Persian language and wrote Fauz Al-Kabîr, a Persian booklet of the principle of the Qur’anic science, the work was continued by his progeny Shâh Râf‘uddîn (1750-1818) and Shâh ‘Abdul Qâdir (1753-1814) who had translated the Qur’ân into Urdu language (Qâdîrî, 2007: 23). There came Shâh ‘Abdul ‘Azîz Muhaddith Dehlawi (1745-1823) who wrote Fath Al-Azîz or Tafsîr ‘Azîzî in Persian by revising, updating and annotating Shâh ‘Abdul Qâdir Dehlawi’s translation of the Qur’ân.

Later, their works have been inherited by the so called Deobandi ‘Ulamâ’ who were inspired by Waliyullah’s movement and gained their title from the madrasah of Darul Ulum Deoband which is located in the state of Uttar Pradesh, northern India (Rizvi, 1981: 1: 69-77, 98). Darul Uloom Deoband’s influence had produced more than eight thousand madrasahs in India alone (Ansari, 1997: 11). Such Urdu works like Tarjama Sheikhul Hind of Maulânâ Mahmûd Hasan Deobandî (1851-1920), Bayân Al-Qur’ân of Maulânâ Ashraf ‘Alî Thânawî (1863-1943) and Tafsîr-e-‘Usmânî of Maulânâ Syabbîr Aḥmâd ‘Usmânî (1886-1949) portrayed the contribution of Deobandi scholars in the field of Qur’ân.

After the partition of the Indian Sub Continent and the formation of Pakistan in 1947, many Deobandi scholars moved to Pakistan and continued to call themselves Deobandis, making the influence of Waliyullah’s tradition networks expanding
speedily to the South Asia and later to all over the world through the production of thousands of madrasahs in Pakistan (Jamal Malik, 2008: 87). Hence, the work of Mufti Muhammad Syafi’ (1897-1976), the grand Mufti of Pakistan, Ma’āriful Qur’ān had once again showed the intimacy of Pakistani ‘Ulamā’ with Shah Waliyullah and Deobandi’s tradition.

Maulānā Mufti Taqī ‘Usmānī, the son of Mufti Muhammad Syafi’ is one of the prominent Deobandi products of Pakistani madrasah of Darul Uloom Karachi. His rising fame in the Islamic finance which is known all over the world exemplifies the Waliyullah tradition in modern days. Beside economic and law, he is also an expert in ḥadīth where he holds position as Sheikul Ḥadīth in his madrasah and has produced several books in this field. Many prominent scholars such as Professor Yūsuf Al-Qardāwī, Sheikh Abd Al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah, Sheikh Muhammad Al-Mukhtar (the Grand Mufti of Tunisia) and Sheikh Abu Al-Ḥasan Al-Nadwī extol his works in the field of ḥadīth and Islamic jurisprudence (Muhammad Taqī, Takmilah, 2004: 3-21). However, his contribution towards the Qur’ān is unfamiliar to many. Maulānā Taqī Usmānī having a background in the Qur’ānic sciences is undoubted. He has been working and teaching in the madrasah of Darul Uloom Karachi since his graduation from it at the age of only sixteen. In Deobandi seminary, a lecture is obliged to teach and master Qur’ānic sciences first before being given a chance to teach ḥadīth sciences or to give fatwā in Islamic Jurisprudence (Zunaidah, 2016: 44, 50). Thus, this paper will disclose his association with the work of the Qur’ān aiming to reflect his dedication to educating the mass to the teaching of the Qur’ān. The paper will use a descriptive analytical approach to discuss his biography and his contributions.

2. The Biography of Sheikh Mufti Taqī ‘Usmānī

2.1 His Background

Justice Mufti Muhammad Taqī ‘Usmānī’s full name is Muhammad Taqī ‘Usmānī Ibn Muhammad Syafi’. Justice because he served as a judge of the Federal Shariat Court of Pakistan from 1980 to 1982 and the Shari’a Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan from 1982 to 2002. Sheikh Taqī was born in 5th Syawwal 1326 A.H corresponding to 3rd October 1943 A.D, in Deoband, India. His father took him and his family to Pakistan in May 1948, after the Independence of Pakistan in 1947. He was just five years old at that time. He was the youngest of five children. His mother was a housewife, and his father, Mufti Muhammad Syafi’, the late Grand Mufti of Pakistan was a son of Syleikh Muhammad Yaseen, a famous teacher of Persian language in Deoband Madrasah (Luqman, 2001: 11-24).

He studied Urdu and Persian language from his parents from an early age. Formally, he received an Islamic education through Nizāmi Curriculum (Dars -i-Nizāmi) when he was eight in Madrasah Darul Ulum Karachi, a religious Deobandi educational system. At this level, he studied primarily all subjects of traditional Islamic studies, like Tafsīr, Ḥadīth, ‘Ilm Kalām, Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh, Farāʾīd and Arabic literature. He graduated from this school in 1959 excellently. He had developed his interest in reading since he was young. During his school time, he spent his school holiday in reading or lending his hand in academic matters to his father (Luqman, 2001: 25).

His enthusiasm in higher learning is proven when he gained a Bachelor Degree in Economy and Politics in 1964, and Degree of Law in 1967 from the University of Karachi. Then, he pursued his Master Degree in Arabic Language and
Literature with First Class Honor from University of Punjab in 1970. His main aim in pursuing modern higher learning is not solely for certificates. Rather, he was eager to have a deep knowledge in coping with current issues which he could not gain from his previous study level. Therefore, he has made an extensive reading in Economy, Law, and Politic besides his formal study of those fields (Luqman, 2001: 26).

Since he was originated from Deobandi school of thought, he follows the path of Deobandi Ulama to be guided spiritually by a guided sheikh of tasawwuf. By the instruction of his father, he finally pledges allegiance to Dr. Abdul Hayy ‘Ārifi, a khalifah of Maulānā Ashraf ‘Ali Thānawī. Dr. Abdul Hayy ‘Ārifi was a homeopathic doctor by profession and a former lawyer. After his sheikh passed away, he took bai’ah from Maulānā Masechullah Khān who was staying in India and also a khalifah of Maulānā Ashraf ‘Ali Thānawī (Muhammad Taqī, 2005). He was authorized by both of his mentors in Sīsīla Ashrafīa: Chistiyyah, Naqshbandiyah, Qādiriyah and Suhaarwardiyah. Despite his busy schedule, he himself became a mentor to numerous spiritual aspirants all over the world. Recently he has been a vice president of Madrasah Darul Uloom Karachi where he is teaching Šāhīth Bukhārī to the final students and holds the position of Sheikhul Hadīth.

2.2 His Scholarly Contribution and Position

From his background, we may summarize that his main source of scholarly contribution is influenced by his scholarly lineage. His major contribution is in Islamizing economics and laws. He has produced many writings on this field. Some of the important works written by him in this field are “Introduction to Islamic Finance” and The text of the Historic Judgement on Riba (Interest). Most of his writings are in Urdu, and some have been translated into English or Arabic. He was actively involved in seminars and conferences as to highlight and promote Islamic values and frameworks worldwide.

Worth to mention, he is not only among the main figures of Islamic Economics and Finance, but he is an all-encompassing scholar of Islamic Jurisprudence, Ḥadīth, Qurān, and Taṣawwuf. He has 16 positions in Islamic Finance institution till 2010 (Murat Hasan, 2010: 6). The Important works of him in the field of Islamic Jurisprudence include Buhāth Fī Qaḍāyā Fiqhīyyah Mu`āṣirah (in Arabic), Ahkām az-Zhabāḥī, Rules of I`tikāf (originally Ahkām I`tikāf in Urdu) and the Legal Status of Following a Madhab (translated from Urdu Taqleed Ki Shara`ee Hesiyaat). Among his writings in the field of Ḥadīth are Takmilah Fath al-Mulhim (in Arabic), Dars Tarmizi (in Urdu), Taqrīr Tarmizi (in Urdu) and Authority of Sunnah (in English). His writings in the Sciences of the Quran which are to be discussed in this paper in detail are ‘Ulūm al-Qur`ān, The Meanings of the Noble Qur`ān, an English translation of the Holy Qur`ān and Āsān Tarjamaq Qur`ān, a translation of the Holy Qur`ān in Urdu. He wrote more than a dozen of books on the field of Taṣawwuf all of which are in Urdu language like Zikr -o- Fikr, Fard ki Islāh and Islāhī Majālis, to name a few (Zunaaidah, 2016: 61-63, 67-70, 74-77). Apart from that, he is also known for his comprehensive excellent personality of Islamic preaching and writing. He is a prolific writer and has a capability to write in Urdu, Arabic and English. He wrote more than forty books in Urdu. His famous Arabic book is Takmilah Fath Al-Mulhim in six volumes, a complement of Maulānā Syabbīr Āḥmad Usmānī’s Fath Al Mulhim which is a commentary of Šāhīth Muslim.
His wide knowledge and big contribution deserves him to be placed in a high position. He has always been placed among the top fifty out of 500 most influential Muslims, and at 22nd place in 2016 (John Esposito, 2016: 80-81). His national and international influence and contribution is the main factor of his being ranked among the world figures.

Despite a bounty of praises having received by him, there are still some who have criticized his writing and thought. The example of critic towards his writing is the critic by Syeikh Gibril Fouad Haddad on his fatwa on the illegality of celebrating mawlid (Haddad, 2017). There was also some misquotation of his writing due to misunderstanding of his objective of writing as shown in an article published by Mc.Cormick Foundation to prove that he supported violent jihad against non-Muslim states (Mc.Cormick, 2008: 10-11). Nevertheless, he does not like to be involved in controversy.


Maulānā Taqī Usmānī’s contribution to the interpretation of the Qur’ān lies in the presentation of four major works related to the Qur’ān for readers of different background. Firstly, translating the Urdu version of Ma’āriful Qur’ān into English. Secondly, writing a book of principles of the Qur’ānic sciences, Ulūm Al-Qur’ān. Thirdly, writing an English translation of the Qur’ān. Fourthly, writing an Urdu translation of the Qur’ān. All these works will be discussed below.

3.1 Ma’āriful Qur’ān

3.1.1 A synopsis of Ma’āriful Qur’ān.

The Ma’āriful Qur’ān of late Mufti Muhammad Syafi’i is considered a magnificent work of Urdu commentary of the Holy Quran by Deobandi Ulama in modern days. Born in 1896 at Deoband India, Mufti Syafi’i was educated in Darul Uloom Deoband, where he studied all branches of Islamic sciences, especially tafsīr, hadith and fiqh under eminent scholars such as Sheikul Hind Maulānā Mahmūd Ḥasan Deobandi, Muḥaddith Anwār Shāh Kashmīrī, Muḥaddith Ḥusain Ahmad Madanī, Mufti ‘Azīzū Rahmān and Maulānā Shabbīr Ahmad ‘Usmānī. He was elected as the grand mufti of Darul Uloom Deoband in 1926 when he was just 35 years old. In the field of tasawwuf, he became the successor (khalīfah) of Maulānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thanawī, the author of Urdu Tafsīr Bayān Al-Qur’ān. After the formation of Pakistan, he left India and settled in Pakistan until his death. He was the founder of the madrasah of Darul Uloom Karachi, and became the grand Mufti of Pakistan (Muhammad Taqī, Al-Balāgh, Biyād -i- Faqīh, 2005). After Ma’āriful Qur’ān was complete in 1972CE/1392H, it has been widely admired by the Urdu-knowing Muslims throughout the world and is proven to be beneficial for an average Muslim as well as for a scholar. The fact that it is widely accepted is shown by it being reprinted many times with thousands of copies by various publishers, both in India and Pakistan with colorful size of books.

Theoretically, regardless of any specific qualities, one tafsīr emerges dominant over another when communities change the ways it was presented before. This is another reason why Ma’āriful Qur’ān took its popularity. Long before the advent of Ma’āriful Qur’ān, Urdu Tafsīr of Fath al-Mannān known as Tafsīr Haqqānī
by Abdul Haq Haqqani (d.1820) has represented a new methodology of writing Urdu tafsir which leads to its remain survival with the advance of the time (Yusuf Ali, 1989: xviii; Hafiz Iftikhar, 1996: 6). Despite its abundant information and being accepted by Deobandi scholars, no work has been done to render it into English language or at least rewrite it in contemporary Urdu language as what has been done to Mazahir -e- Haq of Nawab Muhammad Qutubuddin Khân (d. 1872), an Urdu commentary of the book of hadith Mishkat Al-Masabih. Nawab Muhammad Qutubuddin Khân was a disciple of Shâh Muhammad Ishâq who was a grandson of Shâh Abdul 'Aziz, the son of Shâh Waliullah Dehlawi. His book of Mazahir -e- Haq was first revised with a new language in 1960 and published gradually in portions. Its new revised edition in the shape of complete book was later published in 1979 after 19 years of struggle (Qutubuddin Khân, 1986: 3-4). On a contrary, this has not happened to Ma‘ariful Qur'ân.

One way to understand how Ma‘ariful Qur’ân gains such popularity among Deobandi followers is from the close relationship between its author and Maulana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanaawi, an important figure and the most respected teacher of Deobandi School. Maulana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanaawii’s influence throughout India-Subcontinent and among Urdu-speaking people all over the world is undoubtedly recognized by western modern researchers (Fuad, 2009: 439). He is not only considered as a spiritual master (sheikh or mursyid) by Deobandi scholars, but also a mujaddid (revivalist) who mastered many Islamic sciences, especially Fiqh, Tafsir and Tasawwuf (Fuad, 2009: 439). He produces almost one thousand books on those fields and other subjects. Like other Deobandi Ulama, Maulana Mufti Shafi’i grasped at this opportunity by taking bai’ah from Maulana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanaawi and later became one of his successors (khalifah). During this relationship, beside his own talent, Mufti Shafi’i had acquired the skill of writing as a medium to serve the public from his sheikh. His talent on writing finally produces many scholarly books in collaboration with his sheikh (Muhammad Taqi, Al- Balagh, Biyad -i- Faqih, 2005: 1: 373, 487, 507, 590). Despite his sheikh’s demise, Mufti Shafi’i continues this scholarly relationship that was vividly portrayed through his choice to base his commentary on his sheikh’s Bayan Al-Qur’ân. Thus, Ma‘ariful Qur’ân exists side by side with the continued silsilah (chain) between sheikh and his murid. Perhaps this is the hidden factor why Ma‘ariful Qur’ân won its laurels among those who admire Maulana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanaawii’s personality.

3.1.2 The Characteristics of Ma‘ariful Qur’ân

There are some exegetical characteristics mentioned by the author himself that make Ma‘ariful Qur’ân perhaps superior than other Urdu tafsir (Muhammad Shafi’, 1991: 1: 14). It can be summarized as follows:

1) Its translation of the Qur’ân based on Maulana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanaawii’s Bayan Al-Qur’ân, and Maulana Mahmud Hasan Tarjamah Sheikul Hind with slight changes where he felt necessary. For example, the translation of the first and second verse of the chapter of Al-Baqarah is given in Urdu as “Alif Lâm Mim, is kitâb men kuch shâk nahin, râh battâli hai darne walun ko”. This translation is precisely the same as what is in the Tarjamah Sheikul Hind (Muhammad Syafi’, Urdu Version, 2008: 1: 105; Mahmud Hasan, 1989: 3).
2) Introducing summary of the subject after the translation of a group of āyāt. The summary is in fact of Bayān Al-Qurān except that its language has been facilitated. The author introduces the summary of the tafsīr under the title of Khulāsah -i- Tafsīr (Brief Tafsīr). The Khulāsah contains the translation of the āyāt marked by a line drawn on it and then followed by a brief commentary marked by parenthesis. For example, after translating a group of verses containing verse 1 to 5 of Sūrah Al-Baqarah the brief tafsīr given is like this: “This is such a book where there is no doubt in it (meaning the Holy Quran being from Allah, is being no room for doubt, although the ignorant is in doubt because in reality the truth will always be the truth even if one doubts it) (Muhammad Syafī’, Urdu Version, 2008: 1: 105-106).

3) Explaining the vocabularies of the Quran by referring to the classical Arabic lexicons and reliable books of tafsīr. For example, the author writes in Sūrah Al-Fīriḥah: “The word Mālik has been derived from the root, milk (مَلْكٌ) which signifies possessing a thing in such a manner that one has the right and power to dispose of it as one likes (see Qamus)” where after giving the meaning of the word Mālik he mentions its source as from Qamus which refers to Al-Qāmus Al-Muhīt of Al-Fairuzābādī, a classical Arabic lexicon (Muhammad Syafī’, English Version, 2009: 1: 66).

4) Following the principle of Usūl al-Tafsīr precisely. For example, the author constantly follows the principal of Nāsikh and Mansūkh throughout his work. His explanation about the obligatory of making will or wasiyyah in verse 180 of Sūrah Al-Baqarah as being abrogated by “the verse of inheritance” shows that he agrees with the fact that there are such āyāt in the Quran that are subjected to abrogation (Muhammad Syafī’, English Version, 2009: 1: 450).

5) Relying on the opinion of ṣahābah (companions) and tābi‘īn (successors) in giving commentary to the verses of the Qur’ān. For example, the author relies on the opinion of companion Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī in explaining the meaning of the word ُتَلِكَ (تَلِكَ) from the verse of 195 of Sūrah Al-Baqarah which means abandoning jihad, then he continues saying that “The same approach to the meaning of this verse has been reported from the earliest authorities in Tafsīr, such as, Sayyidinā Ibīn ‘Abbās, Ḥudhayfah, Qatādah, Mujāhid and Dāhḥāk” (Muhammad Syafī’, English Version, 2009: 1: 488).

6) Mentioning the books of tafsīr or hadīth quoted as references. For example, while discussing about ribā the author mentions the book of tafsīr by saying that “Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharīnī, the famous commentator from Andalusia (Spain) has, in his commentary, Al-Baḥr Al-Muhīt, reported the same form of ribā prevailing in pagan Arabia....” and further mentioning that “The same subject has been authentically narrated in all reliable books of Tafsīr such as Tafsīr Ibīn Kathīr, al-Tafsīr

7) Referring to some books of Tafsîr such as Tafsîr Al-Qurtubî, Ahkâm Al-Qur‘ân by Jassâs, Ahkâm Al-Qur‘ân by Ibn ‘Arabî, Tafsîrât Ahmadiyah, Al-Bahr Al-Mu‘îth by Ibn Hayyân, Rûh Al-Ma‘ânî, Tafsîr Al-Mažharî and Bayân Al-Qur‘ân in explaining verses containing legal judgments. For example, while determining the legal status of marrying the women from among the People of the Book in verse 5 of Sûrah Al-Mâ‘idah the author refers his view from the book of Ahkâm Al-Qur‘ân, Jassâs and Mažharî (Muhammad Syafî‘, English Version, 2009: 3: 77-78).

As the author of Ma‘âriful Qur‘ân was a jurist, he touches many problems of fiqh in various lengths in his tafsîr. However, there are 25 contemporary issues in Islamic Jurisprudence discussed in detail by the author. Among those legal judgments issued and discussed by Muftî Syafî‘ in Ma‘âriful Qur‘ân are: 1) hunting with bullet, 2) blood donation, 3) western allopathic medicine, 4) women’s position in Islam, 5) the different between Islamic politics and others, 6) divorce rule in Islam, 7) interest or riba 8) liquor or alcohol, 9) gambling, 10) nationalism (Muhammad Taqî. Al-Balâgh, Biyâd -i- Faqîh, 2005: 609).

3.1.3 Factors behind the work of translation

In his foreword to Ma‘âriful Qur‘ân in English version, Maulânâ Taqî Usmüî portrays that there are three main factors that had driven him to undertake the task to render Ma‘âriful Qur‘ân into English language (Muhammad Syafî‘, English Version, 2009: 1: xvii). They are as follows:

i. There is no comprehensive commentary of the Holy Qur‘ân despite a huge number of its translation in the English language available in the market. Some brief footnotes found with some English translations cannot fulfill the need of a detailed commentary.

ii. The English translations of the Holy Qur‘ân are generally written by the people whose backgrounds are not in the Qur‘ânic sciences; hence their explanatory notes do not always reflect the authentic interpretation of the Holy Qur‘ân, thus, may mislead common readers. On the other hand, Maulânâ Taqî Usmüî ability and experience in the field of the Qur‘ân and other Islamic sciences as previously mentioned in the introduction of this paper may be regarded as a safeguard against any wrong interpretation of the Holy Qur‘ân.

iii. The correct message of the Holy Qur‘ân in an authentic manner which conform the standardized principles of tafsîr (the exegesis of the Holy Qur‘ân) will give much benefit to the increasing population of Muslims in English speaking countries. This is because the Ma‘âriful Qur‘ân has been proven to be beneficial for a layman as well as for a scholar. Therefore, it has been advised by different circles that its English translation may fulfill the need of detailed commentary of the Holy Qur‘ân in English language.
It is important to note, however, that Deobandi scholars are not in favors of the commentary written by Maulānā Abū Al-Aʿla Al-Maudūdī (1903-1979). His Tafhīmul Qurʿān, though an exegetical commentary of the Holy Qurʿān, and is also available in English version, has been criticized by Deobandi scholars especially of having disputing the Prophets` infallibility. There are at least six important points mentioned by Deobandi scholars about the errors committed by Tafhīmul Qurʿān of Maudūdī, one of which is about the ambiguous language used by him to show the weakness side of the prophets as human beings that can lead to the rejection of the prophetic infallibility (Abd Al-Khāliq, 1415H: 17). Moreover, he was also considered by Deobandi as not a pure traditionalist scholar. Thus, perhaps, Maulānā Taqī’s statement of “There is no comprehensive commentary of the Holy Qurʿān despite of a huge number of its translation in the English language available in the market (Muhammad Syafī, English Version, 2009: 1: xvii)” refers to unavailability of the work of reliable traditionalist scholars.

3.1.4 The genesis of the translation

An early attempt to translate Maʿāriful Qurʿān was made while its author Mufti Syafī was still alive. The work of translation in the beginning involves three leading characters, Maulānā Taqī himself, Prof. Muhammad Hassan Askari and Prof. Muhammad Shamim including Muhammad Wali Razi as their assistant. Thus, the translation of Maʿāriful Qurʿān was not the effort of Maulānā Taqī alone. Prof. Muhammad Hassan Askari and Prof. Muhammad Shamim were well-known scholars of English literature and criticism. In fact, they were the main translators of Maʿāriful Qurʿān, while Maulānā Taqī stood as their supervisor. The work was entrusted to Prof. Muhammad Hassan Askari at the beginning. Later on, it was interrupted by the hurtful tragedy of his sudden demise in 1977. His work reached only 400 pages of the original Urdu Maʿāriful Qurʿān which covered 156 verses of the Sūrah Al-Baqarah.

After twelve years of interval, the work of translating Maʿāriful Qurʿān resumed in 1989 when Prof. Muhammad Shamim had offered to Maulānā Taqī his service to continue the translation from where Prof. Askari had left it (Muhammad Syafī, English Version, 2009: 1: xvii-xviii). It was he who had brought the translation of the first volume into its final station. Prof. Muhammad Shamim continued to translate second, third, fourth, fifth and most part of seventh volume. Another part of seventh volume was translated by Shamsād Siddiqi and Ahmad Khalil ‘Azīz (Muhammad Syafī, English Version, 2008: 7: 20). Due to Prof. Muhammad Shamim`s illness, the sixth volume was translated by Muhammad Ishrat Husain. After Prof. Muhammad Shamim passed away in 2002 Ahmad Khalil ‘Azīz took the task to translate the eight volume, i.e the last volume of Urdu Maʿāriful Qurʿān. By 2004 the whole volumes of Maʿāriful Qurʿān had been completely translated and published after more than thirty years of struggle.

3.1.5 Methodological contribution

The methodology of translation Maʿāriful Qurʿān worked by the team led by Maulānā Taqī can be briefly divided into three categories:

1. Methodology of translating the Holy Qurʿān.
3. Methodology of translating the main text.

The above-mentioned methodologies will be discussed as below.

1. Methodology of translating the Holy Qur’ān

One of the important contributions made by Maulānā Taqī and his colleagues while translating Ma‘āriful Qur’ān was preparing a new English translation for the Holy Qur’ān on their own instead of translating the existing Urdu translation of the Holy Qur’ān in Ma‘āriful Qur’ān. This was because the author of Ma‘āriful Qur’ān had adopted the Urdu translation Tarjama Sheikul Hind of Maulānā Mahmūd Hassan Deobandī and Bayān Al-Qur’ān of Maulānā Ashraf ‘Ali Thānawī instead of his own. Though their translations are remarkable to some extent, to depend to a secondary translation of the Qur’ān would have made the English translation become more complicated and distant from the closeness to the Qur’ānic text. This is a contrast to their aim of translation for the easiness of the readers. Fortunately, this effort has yielded another separate book of the translation of the Qur’ān, which later being named as The Meanings of the Noble Qur’ān by Maulānā Taqī. This translation will be counted as another contribution of Maulānā Taqī in the field of the Qur’ān.

To fulfill the task of preparing a new translation, with the hope of being authentic and more accurate, the team formulated guidelines to help them throughout their work. Their regards are as follows (Muhammad Syaﬁ, English Version, 2009: 1: xx):

i. The translators have tried their best to preserve not only the literal sense of the Holy text, but also the order of words and sentences, yet, while translating the idiomatic expressions, it is sometimes felt that the literal translation may distort the actual sense or reduce the emphasis embodied in the Arabic text. At such places effort, has been made to render the Qur’ānic sense into a closer English expression. For example, the translation given in verse 93 of Sūrah Al-Baqarah is “And when We took pledge from you, and raised high the (Mount of) Tur above you: “Hold fast to what We have given you, and listen” – they said, “We have heard and disobeyed.” And, on account of their denial, they were soaked with love of the calf in their hearts (Muhammad Syaﬁ, 2009: 1: 256)” where the translation of “they were soaked with love of the calf in their hearts” is a translation for the idiomatic expression of the Qur’ān that many translators fail to accurately give its meaning.

ii. Both in the translation of the Holy Qur’ān and in the commentary, a uniform scheme of transliteration have been adopted. The transliteration scheme is summarized in the beginning pages of the book. For example, the translation of verse 58 of Sūrah Al-Baqarah which contains the word Ḥiṭṭah written in transliteration as: “And when We said, “Enter this town, and eat there to your heart’s content wherever you will. And enter the gate prostrating and say: Ḥiṭṭah (we seek forgiveness) so that We forgive your errors. And We shall give much more to those who are good in deeds. (Muhammad Syaﬁ, 2009: 1: 217-221)” and in the section of commentary, this verse and other Arabic words are written with transliteration throughout five pages of its discussion.
iii. The names of the prophets have been transliterated according to their Arabic pronunciation, and not according to their biblical form. However, in the names other than those of the prophets, like Pharaoh, their English form has been retained. For example, the biblical name of Joseph is written as Yūsuf and Jacob as Ya`qūb in the whole of Sūrah Yūsuf in Ma`āriful Qur`ān while the name of Fir`aun in verse 103 of Sūrah Al-A`rāf and others is used as Pharaoh (Muhammad Syafi, English Version, 2008: 5: 1-177; 2009: 4: 9-10).

2. Methodology of translating Khulās-e- Tafsīr of the text

Another noteworthy aspect of Urdu Ma`āriful Qur`ān is its Khulās-e- Tafsīr which functions as summary of every group of āyāt that the author has chosen to render his commentary. This Khulās-e- Tafsīr is actually taken from Bayān Al-Qur`ān of Maulānā Ashraf `Ali Thānawī. A little scrutiny may show that Khulās-e- Tafsīr is not totally different from the main translation of the Qur`ān except that it has been adorned with some explanation. Perhaps this is the main reason why it has not been translated by the translators. However, those of important points in Khulās-e- Tafsīr which are not expressly mentioned in the commentary has been inserted in the main commentary as to ensure the readers may not be deprived of them (Muhammad Syafi, English Version, 2009: 1: xxi). For example, in verse 49, Sūrah Al-Qalam, the translator has inserted a note from Khulās-e-Tafsīr in explaining the meaning of the āyat concerning the condition of prophet Yūnus being cast by the fish by saying that “According to the explanation given to this verse by Maulānā Ashraf `Ali Thānawī, `Favour from His Lord` means the acceptance of his repentance, and `wilderness` refers to the place where he was thrown by the fish….. (Muhammad Syafi, English Version, 2008: 8: 548)”.

3. Methodology of translating the main text

Since the translation began when the author of Ma`āriful Qur`ān was still alive he himself had given instruction and guidance of how the translation of his tafsīr should be done (Muhammad Syafi, English Version, 2009: 1: xix). The translators themselves also have their own guideline to be followed. The agreed guidelines upon methodology of writing are:

i. The translation should not be too literal to keep the natural flow of the text. For example, it has been translated in the first paragraph of Ma`āriful Qur`ān in Sūrah Al-Nās as “This Sūrah, the second of the Mu`awwadhatain, constitutes an extension of its predecessor and is in a way complementary to it, in that in Sūrah Al-Falaq the believers were enjoined to seek refuge with Allah against hardship and privations of life in this world, while in the current Sūrah protection is sought from the trials and tribulation of the Hereafter (Muhammad Syafi, English Version, 2008: 8: 926)”. The translation given is in fact longer than original text and some words are added like “the second of the Mu`awwadhatain” perhaps, like what has been claimed, to ensure the natural flow of the text.
ii. To keep in mind the requirement of English readership by avoiding some discussions and paragraphs where necessary. For example, there are many paragraphs being left by the translator while translating eleven qualities that make the Qur’ān a miracle especially from the first quality under the explanation of verse 23, Sūrah Al-Baqarah (Muhammad Syafi, English Version, 2009: 1: 143 -147).

iii. To authorize Maulānā Taqī to decide on crucial matters, especially of no ii above. For example, the above-mentioned example shows that the translation has been made brief and comprehensive. Such a work surely cannot be done except by consulting a scholar like Maulānā Taqī.

iv. To be strict in translating juristic discussions of the book as to avoid distortion of the accurate connotation of Islamic injunctions. For example, the translator has translated all the explanation of the injunctions regarding the thing that has been made unlawful (ḥarām) mentioned in verse 173 of the Sūrah Al-Baqarah with careful consideration, for example, in regard to the Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh) terminology by preserving its Arabic terms throughout the discussion (Muhammad Syafi, English Version, 2009: 1: 423 -438).

3.1.6 An overview of the English version of Ma’āriful Qur’ān

The English version of Ma’āriful Qur’ān has eight volumes and first published fully in Pakistan by Maktaba -e- Darul Uloom Karachi in 2004. Concerning the general contents of the book, the specific contents of every volume are given at the beginning of the pages, whereas its indexes are found at the end of every volume of Ma’āriful Qur’ān. However, Foreword, Preface, Introduction and Transliteration scheme are all mentioned in its first volume. All these have been systematically structured to make it user-friendly.

In the preface, Maulānā Taqī has mentioned the contents of the Introduction. The Introduction of Ma’āriful Qur’ān is written by Maulānā Taqī by the request of his father, the author of Ma’āriful Qur’ān himself. In fact, his father wanted to write it by himself, but due to his other involvements and his deteriorating state of health, he was not able to do so. Therefore, he asked Maulānā Taqī to write it. The Introduction is very lengthy covering forty-nine pages. It touches some basic information about the Holy Quran which stands as a brief knowledge about Usūl Al-Tafsīr which the readers are expected to know before reading Ma’āriful Qur’ān or other exegeses. The translators also provide some valuable notes, especially those of Maulānā Taqī to the original text of Ma’āriful Qur’ān.

3.2 ‘Ulūm Al-Qur’ān (An Approach to the Quranic Sciences)

While writing the introduction of his father’s Ma’āriful Qur’ān which touched the knowledge of Qur’ānic sciences, Maulānā Taqī felt the necessity to write a separate Urdu book of this field which would serve as a reference to those who wanted to know detailed discussions on the subject. Perhaps, it is the first comprehensive modern Urdu book on the treatise of Ulūm Al-Qur’ān after Abdul Ḥaq Haqqānī’s Muqaddimah Al-Bayān fi Ulūm Al-Qur’ān, which contains lengthy discussions covering many important topics which are not found in Haqqānī’s Muqaddimah (Muhammad Taqī,
Ulūm Al-Qurān, 2006: 19). Now the book has already been translated into English by Dr. Muhammad Swaleh Siddiq making Maulānā Taqī’s collections of contributions in the field of Quran doubled. The book is divided into two parts:

i. The Holy Qur’ān. It contains eight chapters i.e. Introduction; History of the descent of the Qur’ān; The seven readings of the Qur’ān; Abrogator and Abrogated; History of preservation of the Qur’ān; Doubts about preservation of the Qur’ān and their answers; Truthfulness of the Qur’ān, and Subjects of the Qur’ān.

ii. The Science of Tafsīr. It contains four chapters i.e. The science of Tafsīr and its sources; Unreliable sources of Tafsīr; Some important principles of Tafsīr; Some Mufassirīn of early era.

Maulānā Taqī’s work in collaboration with his father in the field of tafsīr cannot be well conceived by many without referring to the work of Shāh Waliyullah Dehlawī, the founder of Deobandi’s thinking of the same field. It was he who first translated Qur’ān into Persian language. He also wrote Fauz Al-Kabīr, a booklet of Ulūm Al-Qurān designed for his teaching to the public which later became a textbook in Deobandi madrasahs for more than one hundred years. This denotes the influence of Shāh Waliyullah’s endeavor on Deobandi’s scholars in educating the public to the teaching of the Qur’ān.

3.3 The Meanings of the Noble Qurān

By comparing The Meanings of the Noble Qur’ān with the English translation of the Holy Qur’ān in Ma‘ārifūl Qur’ān, it is clear that the former is a reproduction of the latter. Thus, his work in translating the Quran in Ma‘ārifūl Qur’ān produces a separate translation of the Qur’ān. However, several changes in substituting words are found in his work without altering its original. He also adds sufficient explanatory notes. This is consistent with his statement in his introduction to the English translation of Ma‘ārifūl Qur’ān that he wanted to provide a new translation of the Holy Qur’ān instead of translating the Urdu translation from Ma‘ārifūl Qur’ān. The translation was published by Maktaba-e-Darul Uloom Karachi, Pakistan in 2007 in two volumes. This is perhaps the first translation of the Qur’ān into English ever written by traditionalist scholars of Deobandi School. In the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, all translations of the Qur’ān by non-Muslims were biased against Islam. Later, Muslims began to take over their job (Yusuf Ali, 1989: xix-xx). But majority of the translators came from a non-religious background or from different sectarians like Ahmadi, Beralwi and Syiah. This is why Maulānā Taqī’s translation is very important for readers who are looking for such an authentic work by traditionalist Deobandi scholars.

3.4 Āsān Tarjamah Qur’ān: A translation of the Holy Qur’ān in Urdu

The book was written by the author after completing the translation of the Holy Qur’ān into English. As was mentioned, the work of rendering the Qur’ān into Urdu began as far back as the end of the 18th century by Shāh Rafi‘uddīn (d. 1817) and Shāh ‘Abdul Qādir (d.1814) of Shāh Waliyullah’s progeny though there were untraceable work of others prior to them (Qādri: 2007: 23). From there on, the
activities of translation have been accelerating. Hence, we found more than hundreds of Urdu translations of the Qur’ân available in India Subcontinent which were written by translators of different background of education and sectarian (Qâdrî: 2007: 24). Among the translations some are rare found nowadays and some are still widely circulated among Urdu-speaking people. Even the classical translations of Shâh Rafî’uddîn and Shâh ‘Abdul Qâdir to some extent are still of current demand by certain publishers, probably due to the destitute of translations by reliable Deobandi contemporary scholars (Yusuf Ali, 1989: xviii). However, their prosaic dated language and difficult verse structure prevent them from being widely used by not only common readers but also scholars. Similarly, those of Deobandi scholars such as Bayân Al-Qurân by Maulânâ Ashraf ‘Ali Thânawî and Tarjamah Sheikhul Hind of Maulânâ Maḥmûd Ḥassan Deobandî contain the same problem as their elders (Muhammad Syaﬁ‘, Urdu Version, 2008: 68). In the wake of this circumstance, Maulânâ Taqî’s translation appears to fill the need for such an easy translation of the Holy Qur’ân that can be comprehended by many people and can offer new linguistic orientations to the contents of the revelation.

The translation comes in three volumes. As promised by the author, the translation is not absolutely literal or too liberal. It keeps scrupulously close to the original in elegant by using appropriate idioms and paraphrases, but is still in a very plain language. It provides explanatory notes where necessary by avoiding extensive and controversial discussions. Every Sûrah has been adorned with brief introductions which serve as its background information. The translation has kept its style of running link between verses (Muhammad Taqî, Āsân Tarjamah, 2009: 8). Āsân Tarjamah Qurân, on the other hand, is only written mostly while on travelling as told by the author himself. Surely, his experience in preparing Ma‘âriful Qurân and The Meanings of the Noble Qurân contributes such a fast and relaxing way of writing.

4. Conclusion

In a nutshell, Maulânâ Taqî’s supervision of translating Ma‘âriful Qurân and his writing of three books concerning the Qurân as mentioned above could be regarded as a continuity of Waliyullah’s tradition and Deobandi scholars’ in this field. His contributions to the Qurân are somewhat expected to alter wrong attitude of the people towards the traditionalist Islamic scholars who are said to be engaged only in teaching classical tafsîrs in madrasahs’ circles (Ansari, 1997: 123-126, 128-130). His works bridge over difficulties in finding modern traditionalist Islamic works on the Qurân in English language. Apparently, his work is of another approach to attract many people of different background to rely upon reliable works of the Ulamâ on Qurân and hence ensuring the inherited fact that “The vast majority of Muslims worldwide, including 46% in Pakistan, turn first and foremost to local religious leaders for guidance in matters relating to Islam (Peter Madaville, 2010)”.

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Author’s Biography

Zaharudin Nawi is a freelance lecturer and researcher in Islamic studies. He was graduated from Darul Uloom Deoband India known as Al-Azhar of Asia in 1999 where he studied all branches of Islamic disciplines of knowledge, such as Arabic Grammar, Theology (Aqidah), Fiqh, Hadith, Tafsir, Balaghah (Rhetoric), Mantiq (Logic), Falsafah (Philosophy), Adabul Arabi (Arabic Literature) and Muqaranatul Adyan (Comparative Religion). He stayed in India for fifteen years from 1989 to 2004 and is fluent in Urdu, Hindi, Persian, Arabic and English. He holds an MA degree in Islamic Revealed Knowledge (Quran and Sunnah) from the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM). He is the founder of Basooir Online, an Islamic educational website for reviving traditional learning for Malay speaking Muslims. He has taught hadith, Quran and Arabic Language for almost eight years at the University of Malaya for the Short Program of Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah (KPQS). He is also a lecturer of the Al-Quran Courses for the public under the IIUM Centre for Strategic Continuing Education and Training (IIUM CRESENT). He is the author of the commentary of the book Qisasun Nabīyyin Li Al-Atfal written by renowned scholar, Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Al-Nadwi.