

THE REFULGENT TREASURE

On the Superiority of Kanz al-Iymān among Urdu Translations of the Qur'ān

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله رب العالمين والصلاة والسلام على سيد الأنبياء والمرسلين وعلى آله الطاهرين وصحبه الطيبين

ON THE SUPERIORITY OF KANZ AL İYMĀN

The Holy Qur’ān is the final message to mankind revealed by the Creator, and given to humans through His final messenger, our master Muḥammad ﷺ. The Qur’ān was revealed to the Prophet ﷺ in Arabic as proclaimed in the Book itself:

“We have revealed the Qur’ān in Arabic, so that you may understand”¹

“...in the lucid Arabic tongue”²

The Prophet ﷺ was sent among Arabs and he spoke the same language; naturally, the message was revealed in a language clearly understood by those whom the Prophet ﷺ addressed and invited towards Islām. However, this message was not restricted to Arabs; Islām is universal and the message had to be spread to every corner of the world. The Companions were at the forefront in fulfilling this noble task and their successors followed their lead. Thereafter, scholars in every generation, from every ethnic community, learned Arabic and learned the Qur’ān and its meaning in Arabic, as conveyed to us by the Companions. They acquired the knowledge of valid interpretations of the Qur’ān as

¹ Sūrah Yūsuf v2.

² Sūrah Al-Shuārā, v195.

explained by pious and upright elders and taught it to people in their local languages. As literacy increased and more people began to read books, scholars deemed it necessary to produce translations and commentaries in local languages for the commonfolk to understand the Word of Almighty Allāh.

Background

Urdu had become a prominent language and the language of common folk in India by the 18th century. It had also gained prominence as a literary language. Many books were being translated into Urdu, often with royal patronage. While researchers have identified partial translations and commentaries of the Qur'ān prior to the 19th century, the first complete translation of the Qur'ān in Urdu is deemed to be that of Shāh Ábdu'l Qādir Dihlawī³ which was completed in the year 1790 [1205AH] and named *Mūziḥ e Qur'ān*. His elder brother, Shāh Rafi'yuddin Dihlawī⁴ also composed a literal word-to-word translation [which is published by the name *Fā'iqu'l Bayān fī Máānī Kalimāt al-Qur'ān*] and is considered to have been completed around 1807 [1222 AH]. Many translations then followed, among which were rehashed translations (based upon earlier ones) and new approaches. By the start of the 20th century, a number of Urdu translations were available. These translations were either lacking in clarity, or were too literal, or paraphrased in such a manner that a non-specialist reader would not be able to place the idioms or their purport. This also provided a good

³ He was the son of Shāh Waliyullāh Dihlawī; born in 1167 AH and passed away in 1230 or 1242 AH [1753-1815 or 1826 CE].

⁴ He was born in 1165 AH and passed away in 1233 AH [1750-1818 CE].

pretext for innovators to push their heretical ideas under the garb of a Qur'ān translation. Many words and idioms used in the translation of Shāh Ābdu'l Qādir had become archaic and a clear and modern translation was direly needed.

It was in these conditions that Ṣadru'sh Shari'ah Mufti Amjad Āli Aāzamī,⁵ requested Imām Aḥmad Ridā Khān, famously known as *Alahazrat*, to undertake this important work and took it upon himself to have it inscribed and published. The translation of the Holy Qur'ān was completed in the year 1911 [1330 AH] and was named *Kanz al-Iymān* (The Treasure of Faith).

Imām Aḥmad Ridā Khān

Alahazrat (1272-1340AH / 1856-1921 CE) is a famous imām of Ahl al-Sunnah and the Ḥanafī madh'hab. He has written nearly a thousand books, more than 250 of which have been published. His magnum opus is his *Al-Fatāwā al-Ridāwiyyah*, published in 30 volumes and in which 206 monographs have been included. He has written in Arabic, Persian and Urdu on almost every Islamic subject. His command of languages, erudition and eloquence is visible in both his prose and poetry. His eulogies in praise of the Prophet are recited all over the world, especially his "Ode of Salutation," the *Salām* is the most recited poem in the Urdu language. Perhaps, every Urdu speaking Muslim has heard of this ode, including those who are inimical to the Imām.

⁵ The author of *Bahar e Shariat*, an encyclopedic reference of Ḥanafī fiqh in Urdu. He was a prominent teacher and the founders of almost all the important Sunni institutions in the subcontinent are his students and their students.

The Excellence of *Kanz al-Iyman*

The major objective of a Qur'ān translation is to convey the meaning as best as possible without veering away from the original text, and at the same time handle abstruse verses [*mutashābihāt*] in a manner that does not cause doubts in the reader's mind. The Qur'ān uses figurative language [*majāz*], and a shallow translation of such verses might contradict the fundamental tenets of Ahl al-Sunnah. Therefore, a translator should be mindful of these pitfalls, lest the Message be distorted.

Kanz al-Īmān is arguably, the finest explanatory translation of the Holy Qur'ān in Urdu. Its major highlight is the meticulous use of appropriate language, when referring to Allāh tāālā and His Messengers and utmost caution in the translation of abstruse verses. This is also unique because explanations are woven in the translation itself, and still, as far as possible, they remain close to the literal word. Arabic idioms are dexterously translated with similar or equivalent Urdu idioms. Another highlight of the translation is *sahl mumtaniy* – impossibly simple expressions – which Ghālib has extolled as “*the apex of beauty in poetry and the apogee of eloquence*”.⁶

An in-depth analysis of the technical brilliance and linguistic beauty of *Kanz al-Īmān* would fill volumes, and indeed, more than 25 works on this topic are in print already, including multiple doctoral theses and short articles in periodicals on the superiority of *Kanz* as a Qur'ān translation. I will briefly summarise a few important aspects of the translation below.

⁶ *Urdu e Muāllā*, Letter to Ghulām Ghaus.



1. It is an **idiomatic translation** [*bā-muhāwarah*]: The sentence structure in Urdu is different to that in Arabic. A verbatim translation will sound jumbled, which is why translators sometimes paraphrase the translation to sound natural in the target language. It is a self-evident fact that *Kanz* is an idiomatic translation.
2. Yet at the same time, it is also a **literal translation** [*lafzī*]: One can match the words, the tenses, the mood and the tone in the Arabic to the words and tenses used in the translation. Indeed, it is a fantastic tool for someone who is learning Arabic to improve comprehension skills. For example, the second verse of Sūrah Al-Najm:

مَا ضَلَّ صَاحِبُكُمْ وَمَا غَوَىٰ

تمہارے صاحب نہ بکے نہ بے راہ چلے

In fact, the entire translation of this Sūrah is a good example to prove that it is both literal and idiomatic at the same time.

غوی	ما	و	کم	صاحب	ضل	ما
بے راہ چلے	نہ	-	تمہارے	صاحب	بکے	نہ
bey-rāh chaley	na	-	tumhare	sahib	bahkey	na

3. It is an **explanatory translation**: the translator uses such words and idioms that capture the explanation of the verse within the translation obviating the need to resort to additional clauses or

clarifications in parantheses. In the case of apparently problematic verses [*mushkilāt*] Imām Aḥmad Ridā’s translation can be explained according to any of the prominent commentaries on the Qur’ān.

4. The translation is free from coarse expressions employed by certain translators. For example, the last verse of Sūrah al-Taḥrīm:

وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا

Māḥmūd al-Ḥasan Deobandī translated it as: “***And Maryam, the daughter of Ímrān, who had withheld her part subject to lust***”

اور مریم بیٹی عمران کی جس نے روکے رکھا اپنی شہوت کی جگہ کو
aur maryam, beti ímrān ki, jis ne rokey rakha
apni shahwat ki jagah ko [Mahmūd al-Ḥasan]

Alahazrat uses a demure description that conveys the meaning effortlessly: “***And the daughter of Ímrān, Maryam, who preserved her chastity***”

عمران کی بیٹی مریم جس نے اپنی پارسائی کی حفاظت کی

ímrān ki beti maryam, jis ne apni
pārsā’i kī ḥifāzat ki [Alahazrat]

5. Even though the language employed by Alahazrat is stylish and refined, common among the literati of the time, it is still simple, straightforward and easily accessible to the laity, which is why it remains endearing more than a hundred years after its first edition.
6. It is **lucid and flows** well. The translation runs like a contiguous passage without breaking or appearing as random words thrown in or disjoint clauses put together. Even in the above example, the

translation could have been ‘*and Maryam, daughter of Ímrān, who preserved her chastity*’ instead of the other way; however, if the name of Ímrān came before the word ‘chastity’ the sentence would appear ambiguous. [Note: *jis ne* in Urdu is asexual as it can be used for either man or woman, unlike the specific ‘her’ in English.] Alahazrat, swapped the order and removed possible ambiguity: “*and the daughter of Ímrān, Maryam who preserved her chastity*”.

7. It is **succinct and precise**, unlike verbose translators who introduce words and add needless parentheses. In the same example, Ashraf Áli Thānawī translates it as: “*And (thus, for the consolation of Muslims, Allāh táālā) describes the state of the daughter of Ímrān, (Lady) Maryam (peace upon her); she safeguarded her honour.*”

اور (نیز مسلمانوں کی تسلی کے لئے اللہ تعالیٰ) عمران کی بیٹی (حضرت) مریم
(علیہا السلام) کا حال بیان کرتا ہے انہوں نے اپنے ناموس کو محفوظ رکھا

Aur (neez musulmanoñ ki tasalli ke liye Allāh táālā) Ímrān ki beti (hazrat) Maryam (alayha’s salām) ka hāl bayān karta hai, unhoñ ne apne nāmūs ko mahfūz rakha. [Thanawi]

The euphemism fails to capture the core message (i.e., chastity) and fumbles into verbosity, and strays far away from being a translation of the verse! *Nāmūs* means reputation or honour, and does not directly imply chastity. Compare this with Alahazrat’s precision: “*And the daughter of Ímrān, Maryam, who preserved her chastity*”.

اور عمران کی بیٹی مریم جس نے اپنی پارسائی کی حفاظت کی

aur ímrān ki beti maryam, jis ne apni pārsā’i kī hifāzat ki [Alahazrat]

A word-to-word match can be found even in this verse:

و	مریم	ابنت	عمران	التي	أحصنت	فرج	ہا
اور	مریم	بیٹی	عمران کی	جس نے	حفاظت کی	پارسائی کی	اپنی

8. It is **mindful of respect** due to Allāh táālā. This is a major topic in itself – and most translators make blunders. I will present one example to illustrate the acute awareness of this aspect evident in *Kanz*. In Urdu, the pronoun ‘you’ has different forms: ‘*tu*’ for someone lower in status or younger and is considered rude outside of poetry. ‘*tum*’ which is also informal and used among peers or to address inferiors; and the word ‘*aap*’ which is a term of respect for elders, or used in a polite manner, or as courtesy, even when addressing people younger to oneself or lesser in status. In Arabic there is only *qul*, which most of them translate as ‘*tu*’ or ‘*aap farmā dijiey*’. The former is blunt and the latter does not befit the Majesty of the Almighty, as ‘*aap*’ is often a mode of respectful address towards superiors. Alahazrat uses: ‘*tum farmāo*’, which is mindful of the high station of the Messenger ﷺ (eschewing the *tū*) and at the same time, in the manner of the Lord commanding His slave. In other verses, where words such as *yukhādiy*, *makr*, *nasiy*, *istihzā* are used, all other translators have recklessly translated the words in a manner disrespectful to Allāh táālā except Imām Aḥmad Riḍā, who translates these words in accordance with the Sunni creed, yet being linguistically correct.

9. It is mindful of the **respect due to Allāh’s Messengers** ﷺ. A well-known example is the verse from Sūrah Al-Ḍuḥā:

وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَىٰ

All other translators resort to undesirable descriptions such as: “*you were astray, and We gave you way*”. Only Alahazrat uses the tone and the meaning befitting the lofty stature of the Prophet ﷺ: “***We found you drowned in our love and lost to yourself [khud raftā] and We led you on the path leading to Us***”. One of the meanings of the word *ḍāll* is explained as someone who is distraught and lost to oneself in love, as it is used to describe the state of Sayyidunā Yāqūb ؑ in Sūrah Yūsuf.

10. It meticulously follows the **concept of ‘address’** [*khiṭābāt*]. That is, the Qur’ān addresses various people all across the book – the meaning varies according to whom the verse addresses. Imām Zarkashi has listed 33 different kinds of ‘addressing’, one of which is “addressed to the Prophet ﷺ, but the actual addressee [*mukhāṭab*] is the common Muslim.” For example when the verse says: “do not follow the polytheists”, almost all translators translate the verse as if it is addressing the Prophet, whereas numerous commentaries clarify that it actually addresses the common Muslim. Imām Aḥmad Riḍā here adds the explanatory: “O listener!” and where the verse is addressed to the Prophet ﷺ, he adds: “O beloved” [*ay maḥbūb*].
11. The translator skillfully employs **equivalent Urdu idioms** where Arabic idioms are used in the Qur’ān. For example, verse #91 in Sūrah Yūnus:

ءَاكُنَّ وَقَدْ عَصَيْتَ قَبْلُ

“Now?” When Firáwn realised that he would drown, he cried out that he now believed, the reply to him was an interrogative: “**Now? and you wert disobedient from the beginning**”. All others translate this verse as an affirmative sentence sans the emphatic and forceful interrogative tone.

12. The translator is a foremost Ĥanafī *faqīh* and therefore draws attention to the verses as **interpreted by Ĥanafī Imāms**, where it is relevant. For example verse #6 of Sūrah al-Mā'idah:

أَوَلَمْ تَسْتَمِ الْأُنثَىٰ فَلَمْ يُحْدُوا مَاءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا

Here, *lāmastum* literally means: ‘when you touch women’. But in the Ĥanafī madh’hab, merely touching a woman, even if she is a non-maḥram,⁷ does not invalidate the ablution. According to Ĥanafī imāms this verse refers to one who is required to do the major ablution, and the ‘touching women’ is a euphemistic reference⁸ to being in the state of ritual major impurity after

⁷ *Maḥram* = those women who are permanently forbidden to marry – such as mothers, sisters etc; non-maḥram is a woman who doesn’t fall into the previous category, i.e. a woman whom one is permitted to marry.

⁸ Maḥmūd al-Ĥasan goes to the other extreme and translates: “if you go near a woman,” which may be an idiomatic translation, but since it does not consider the word ‘touch’, one can question whether sitting next to a woman invalidates the ablution. However, Ashraf Āli has used a similar phrase: ‘*bibiyoñ se qurbat ki ho*’, ‘after intimacy with your wives’. One could interpret this to mean that it excludes slavegirls or when one has illegal intercourse [we seek Allāh’s refuge]. Even though, the word *bibi* is used to mean either women or wives in Urdu, it certainly does not include *bāndhī*, or a slavegirl. This was unnecessary because *aurat* sufficiently explains the verse and is an apt word.

intercourse. Alahazrat clarifies it and describes it without ambiguity: “*after intimacy [coition] with women*”

تم نے عورتوں سے صحبت کی

tum ne aurton se suhbat ki [Alahazrat].

13. The translator is a foremost theologian [*mutakallim*], and hence expertly translates the abstruse verses [*mutashābihāt*] in a manner that **does not contradict the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah**. This is a vast topic and in fact, the major reason why Alahazrat’s translation stands apart, where other translations stumble, falter and fail. In every instance of an apparently-problematic⁹ verse, Imām Aḥmad Ridā adroitly translates it in a way that a reader has no doubt concerning the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah.
14. This translation is compatible with both approaches of interpreting abstruse verses – that of *tafwīd* and *ta’wīl*. There are two schools of thought concerning the abstruse verses of the Qur’ān [*mutashābihāt*]. The scholars who choose ***tafwīd***, that is refuse to explain and say “Allāh knows its meaning, we choose not to explain this, but we only have faith and believe in it to be the Word of Allāh”. The second group is that of ***ta’wīl***, who present explanations and interpret verses in a manner that does not contradict established tenets of faith, within linguistically accepted norms. The fundamental belief is that Allāh is free from being a body or having

⁹ As Muslims, we do not consider any verse as problematic; however, it may **appear** to contradict established creed and other verses. Therefore we call these as ‘apparently problematic’ verses [*mushkilāt*] which are explained in detail by theologians.

property of bodies. So any verse that mentions a part of body such as hand or eyes must be interpreted in a manner that is not anthropomorphic. This is figurative usage [*majāz*] and linguists have written plenty on such usage. So ‘hand’ is a metaphor for power or generosity; eyes are a metaphor for knowledge or supervision.

15. The translator **avoids literalisms and crude idioms** and instead uses phrases that are both linguistically accurate, and stylistically elegant, yet verbatim at the same time! For example, the first verse of Sūrah Al-Balad:

لَا أَقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ

Allāh mentions oaths in the Qur’ān which some have translated as “*main qasam khata hooñ is shahr (makkah) ki*”. Literally, this translates to ‘eat an oath’; a well-known idiom in Urdu for ‘taking an oath’ and is acceptable in all cases, except when this is said by Allāh táālā. Because Allāh táālā is transcendent [*munazzah*] from eating and drinking. Imām Aḥmad Ridā avoids these words even as a figurative description and translated the same verse as:

مجھے اس شہر کی قسم

mujhe is shahr ki qasam [Alahazrat]

16. The translator removes **ambiguity by inserting explanatory** words only where necessary, and these words are either derived from variant readings or from well-known and reliable commentaries.

17. The translation astutely considers the **reasons for revelation** [*asbāb al-nuzūl*]. For example, verse #64 of Sūrah Maryam:

وَمَا نُنزِّلُ إِلَّا بِأَمْرِ رَبِّكَ

Most translators do not consider the background and just translate the verse as: “**We do not descend except by the Command of your Lord Almighty.**” Whereas Imām Aḥmad Riḍā not only included the word ‘angel,’ he also captured the manner of Jibril ﷺ addressing the Prophet ﷺ and answering him.

The background of this verse is explained in the ḥadīth of Bukhārī¹⁰ narrating from Ibn ʿAbbās ؓ. “**We angels, do not descend except by the command of your Lord Almighty**”. The ‘you’ in Urdu is phrased in the manner of a servant speaking to his master:

ہم فرشتے نہیں اترتے مگر حضور کے رب کے حکم سے
ham farishte nahin utarte magar
ḥuzūr ke Rabb ke ḥukm se [Alahazrat]

18. **Literal translation** where needed, such as the famous self-referential translation of the *basmalah*:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

There is not a single translation prior to Alahazrat that considered this aspect; the verse proclaims: “I begin with the name of Allāh...” and Alahazrat put that into practice, as the translation literally STARTS with the name of Allāh:

¹⁰ Bukhārī, #4731.

اللہ کے نام سے شروع جو بہت مہربان رحمت والا

Allāh ke nām se shurūū jo bahut mihrbān, rahmat wālā

Notice that the sentence is not only grammatically correct, but also spares the irregular verb ‘is’ or ‘hai’ in Urdu which is not present in Arabic. Similarly, the word *nabiy* – translated as Prophet – is retained as *nabiy* in almost all translations. A *nabiy* as explained in lexicons and by commentators is one who brings news of the unseen; that is unseen by humans. Imām Nasafi explains the word *al-ghayb* thus:

(الغيب) بما غاب عنهم مما أنبأهم النبي ﷺ

من أمر البعث والنشور والحساب وغير ذلك

[Unseen] that which is hidden from them, which the Prophet ﷺ informs them among matters of Resurrection, the Assembly, the Reckoning and other such things.¹¹

Alahazrat translates this word as: *Ay ghayb ki khabaren batāney wāley*, ‘One who informs of the unseen’ which is the actual meaning of the term.

19. It **accentuates the love** of our Master Muḥammad ﷺ. We have already mentioned that the translation is mindful about the reverence due to Prophets and Messengers. We have also mentioned that Allāh’s love for His Messenger is also indicated

¹¹ *Madārik al-Tanzīl*, v2 of Sūrah Al-Baqarah; Imām Abu’l Barakāt Ḥāfiẓuddīn ‘Abdullāh al-Nasafi [d.710 AH].

where he is addressed and adds “O beloved!”¹² In many verses, other translators gloss over the fact that RasūlAllāh ﷺ is most beloved to Allāh tāālā and translate the verse in a manner of chastising and rebuke, that have undertones that Allāh tāālā is displeased. But Alahazrat translates those verses in such a beautiful manner that the reader will correctly understand that Allāh tāālā is gently reminding His beloved.

عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْكَ لِمَ أَذِنْتَ لَهُمْ

اللہ تمہیں معاف کرے تم نے انہیں کیوں اذن دے دیا

*May Allāh forgive you! Why did you give them permission..?*¹³

عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ أَنْ جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَىٰ وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهِ يُزَكِّيٰ

تیوری چڑھائی اور منہ پھیرا اس پر کہ اسکے پاس وہ نابینا حاضر ہوا

*He furrowed his brows and turned away; because, the sightless man came in his presence*¹⁴

In the numerous verses where Allāh tāālā addresses His beloved and exhorts Muslims to love him and respect him, most translations are

¹² Even Ibn Taymiyyah has mentioned this aspect of RasūlAllāh’s ﷺ superiority in his *Al-Şārim al-Maslūl*; that Allāh tāālā has addressed Prophets by their names in the Qur’ān, except our Master who is addressed by his attributes. [16th aspect of the Section: **The Blasphemer is an Enemy of Allāh and His Messenger** ﷺ bayān anna’s sābb mina’l muhāribina lillāhi wa rasūlihi].

¹³ Sūrah Al-Tawbah, v43.

¹⁴ Sūrah Ābasa, v1-3.

passive, almost bland. Only Alahazrat's translation is imbued with love and spontaneously evokes the love of the Prophet ﷺ in a Muslim reading that translation.

This expression of love is not limited to the verses where the Prophet ﷺ or his loved ones are mentioned. Alahazrat also shows his disgust at the enemies and blasphemers of the Prophet ﷺ in the verses that mention them. For example, '*joru*' is a discourteous word for one's wife. Alahazrat refers to the wife of Abū Lahab, who was an enemy of the Prophet ﷺ thusly:

وَأَمْرَاتِهِ

اور اس کی جو رو

And his wife...

20. It is an **authoritative reference** for Urdu speaking Muslims. Even those who understand Arabic can get confused with some verses and have to refer to commentaries for clarification. Whereas, someone who reads *Kanz al-Īymān* can rest assured that the correct meaning, the context and the implications have all been considered in the translation already.

Allāh táālā knows best.

وصلی اللہ تعالیٰ علی سیدنا محمد وعلی آلہ وصحبہ وسلم



Abū Ḥasan

1st Rabīy al-Awwal 1443

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Abu Hasan is a student of Islamic sciences and Sacred Law. Ḥanafī-Māturīdī and aspirant to the Qādirī path, he is an ardent admirer and follower of Imām Aḥmad Riḍā Khān al-Baraylawī رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ. He translates bits and pieces from classical texts in the course of his learning for his own edification which he shares as helpful notes to beginners like himself. Some of his articles/translations can be found on *tanwir.org* and *ridawi.org*; he also writes on the Islamic forum, *sunniport.com*. His books, translations and infographics can be found on *ridawipress.org*.



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