

Selections from Akram Khan's Tafsirul Qur'an



Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought

Selections from Akram Khan's Tafsirul Qur'an

By an Editorial Board

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TRANSLATION AND EDITORIAL NOTES

Originally my job with regard to this noble project was to have a quick look at an already translated draft for possible language correction and improvement. However, eventually I had to re-translate the entire work.

While translating selections from Akram Khan's Tafsirur Qur'an, I have had to take the role of an editor as well. There were some errors, and incomplete and faulty references in the source text, which I have tried to address according to my ability and the resources available to me. In some cases, I have added my ideas in square brackets mainly for clarification purposes and for adding relevant information. I have also provided complete quotes from the Bible in relevant places. I have retained key Arabic terms as they were in the source text and explained them. Needless to say, my translation of the Qur'anic verses is in compliance with the way Akram Khan translated them into Bangla.

I want to apologize and seek readers' forgiveness for my inability to decipher the significance of few expressions even after consulting books and approaching scholars. Those terms are: dorjon, patara. However, I have provided their meanings in brackets with question marks which suggest my misgiving as well as inability.

For readers not familiar with key Islamic, technical terms and some names, with the help of my wife Raudah Mohd Yunus, I have appended a glossary.

I also want to admit my inabilities and limitations. Despite several readings, there may still be typos and other mistakes in the work, for which I seek forgiveness from Allah and readers' cooperation to correct them in subsequent editions.

May Allah increase our understanding of the Qur'an and forgive us all!

Md. Mahmudul Hasan

INTRODUCTION

When Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) died, Kazi Abdul Wadud said at a memorial conference organized at Albert Hall in Calcutta: "If such intelligence, culture, and independence could have been reared in a person who grew up and lived in the dark confines of the home with its many restrictions and suppressions, what have Bengali Muslims to be fearful about?"² At the dawn of the twenty-first century when Muslims in this part of the world are still lagging behind other communities³ and are suffering from the loathsome syndrome of self-defeatism, a look back at the life and work of Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1969)⁴ – popularly known as Maulana Akram Khan – may give rays of hope and bonfires of inspiration to the people at large, especially the Muslims, of this region. As is the case with Rokeya and with many other Muslim luminaries of former Bengal, a research on Akram Khan gives us surprises and disbelief that this land can be the fertile ground of such great scholars and that their successors can be oblivious of their rich cultural and intellectual tradition to such an awful extent! When we find ourselves mesmerized by the seemingly superior achievements of other societies and communities both local and foreign – some of

² Cited by Susie Tharu, "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain." In S. Tharu, & K. Lalita (Ed.), *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*, vol I (pp. 340-343). London: Pandora, 1991, p. 342.

³ Remarkably, Akram Khan discusses this issue of the deplorable, underprivileged condition of the Muslim community in this region, and it is acknowledged by scholars across religious denominations that Muslims in the South Asian subcontinent have suffered discrimination, prejudice, and differential treatment since the colonial period. As Amalendu De states in the Indian context: "It is quite well-known that due to the uneven growth of the two major segments of population, [...] the Muslims lagged behind the Hindus." ("The Social Thoughts and Consciousness of the Bengali Muslims in the Colonial Period," *Social Scientist*, 23[4-6], 1995, p. 16)

⁴ Some scholars mention his lifespan as 1868-1968.

whom perhaps for reasons known to them cannot accept Muslims as equals – and engage ourselves in the vicious cycle of self-hatred, the legacy of Akram Khan and the like stares us in the face with a strong feeling of pity and commiseration. While our predecessors in the region left an indelible mark of devotion, selflessness, altruism, profound intellectualism and great scholarship, and above all, self-respect and confidence, we have indulged in flippancy, selfishness, insularity and narrowness, greed and avarice, conceit and narcissism, intellectual pretension, and the worst of all, a fatalistic tendency of self-defeat and self-hate. Studying great figures like Akram Khan may help us wake up from this confused slumber and intellectual disorientation, as it may augur the revival of the lost era of glory and confidence especially in the Muslim community.

The above remark I have made is instigated by my humble observation of the current Muslim intellectual culture particularly in Bangladesh and by my research on Akram Khan's and Rokeya's life and work.⁵ It is also inspired by a great sense of pride I have gathered while working on this tafsir project. It is gratifying to observe that our land is not at least bereft of greats and giants especially when it comes to scholarship. Here is a great man who stands out both in 'secular' and Islamic learning – though there may not be much difference between the two branches of knowledge as long as both are well-intentioned and directed to the wellbeing and service of humanity – and houses in himself a unique combination of journalism and scholarship. Akram Khan was an eclectic scholar being at the height of expertise in journalism, shining in political and social activism, and excelling in Islamic learning in this region at his time. The depth of his Islamic knowledge as manifested in *Tafsirul Qur'an* and in other works especially *Mostafa Charit*⁶ puts him on a par with classical Islamic scholars in terms of both profundity and originality. His tafsir bears testimony to the fact that Islamic scholarship is not confined to the Arab world and that Muslim Bengal is not a barren

⁵ There is a lack of adequate research on Muslim scholars of the region, Akram Khan included. For example, I have recently read an encyclopedia entry on Akram Khan, where the writer seems to be unaware of his great work *Tafsirul Qur'an*.

⁶ Two other important works by Akram Khan are: *Samasya O Samadhan* (Problems and Solutions) and *Moslem Banglar Samajik Itihas* (The Social History of Muslim Bengal).

land with regard to producing towering scholars. This luminary Muslim figure will remain as a source of pride and inspiration for the people in general, especially the Muslims of this region.

His life

This great man was born in a village called Hakimpur in the district of Chabbis Pargana in what is now the state of West Bengal, India at a time of social, political and economic decadence of the Muslims of the subcontinent. Being an orphan at early age, he suffered negligence and adversities, and did not have much institutional education though he managed to appear in the Madrasah Final Examination of Calcutta Alia Madrasah in 1901; and soon after he had to enter the world of work to earn a living. He was well-versed in Arabic literature right from the beginning, and had a deep passion for Persian literature and wrote poetry in the language. Through personal studies, he earned expert knowledge of Bangla, English, Arabic and Persian languages and had profound knowledge of Islam and contemporary society and culture. After the creation of Pakistan and India in the wake of independence from British colonialism in 1947, Akram Khan moved to Dhaka and made it the center of his journalistic, intellectual, and political work. In this region, he is most celebrated as the father of Muslim journalism and as a beacon for subsequent journalists. An institution by himself, Akram Khan contributed to the betterment of the Muslims of former Bengal and Assam during a long period, spanning the British and Pakistan regimes, mainly through his intellectual and political activism.

He began his journalistic career in the early twentieth century and edited major periodicals like *Mohammadi* and *Al-Eslam*. He turned the *Mohammadi* from a monthly into a fortnightly and then into a weekly. What is more, before he took the responsibility of editing *Mohammadi*, it had been a sectarian newspaper of the Ahl Hadith group; but Akram Khan gradually distanced it from the monopoly of one segment of Muslim society. Previously it was a spokesperson of one community, and now under his editorship it turned into a national paper.⁷ Through his continuous endeavors he established Anjuman Ulama Bangla and brought out *Al-Eslam* as its official paper. Both the

⁷ Mohammad Monsuruddin, "Akram Khan'r Sahitya Sadhona" (Literary Practice of Akram Khan). In Abu Jafar (Ed.), *Maulana Akram Khan* (pp. 138-145), Dhaka: The Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986, p. 140.

*All quotations from Bangla source texts are translated into English by me.

Anjuman and *Al-Estam* created an enormous awakening and awareness among the Muslims of Bengal. Later on he brought out dailies like the *Zamana* and *Sebak* from Calcutta, which was followed by the *Daily Azad* that played a paramount role in creating a vibrant political culture among the Muslims. The pioneer daily of Muslim Bengal and Assam, the *Daily Azad* played an important part also in realizing the Pakistan dream which eventually facilitated the creation of two homelands – Pakistan and Bangladesh – for the Muslims of the South Asian subcontinent. In 1946, Indian politics took a different turn, and Akram Khan felt the need to bring out an English newspaper. Mujibur Rahman's *The Mussulmans* had been closed down long ago. Akram Khan bought the ownership of Maulana Mohammad Ali's *Comrade* and revived the English newspaper.

It is true that there were few newspapers run by Muslims before the emergence of Akram Khan; but those few were mainly concerned with petty, divisive theological issues such as whether Muslims should shake one hand or both when they meet one another and whether they should brush the teeth from the right or left.⁸ But Akram Khan was above these trivial issues and addressed real problems Muslims were facing. His efforts were directed to create not division but bridges by way of spreading proper knowledge and expanding networks. He diagnosed the condition of the Muslim community and accordingly addressed their moral and intellectual diseases to elevate their standing both nationally and internationally. Mohammad Nasiruddin, a contemporary of Akram Khan and the editor of *Saugat*, pays homage to him thus:

I respected him as a good writer, a thinker, accomplished journalist, powerful orator and a person of generous heart. The difference in our work strategy and methodology could not hinder our shared ideological struggle. My belief was that differences of opinion could not stop those who wanted to work sincerely for the development of society, literature and culture. Both of us succeeded in building up the nation while remaining unswerving in our own opinions.⁹

⁸ Muhiuddin Khan, "Monishar Alokey Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan" (Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan in the Criterion of a Genius). In Abu Jafar (Ed.), *Maulana Akram Khan* (pp. 191-197), Dhaka: The Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986, p. 193.

⁹ Cited by Abu Jafar, "Bhumika" (Introduction). In *Maulana Akram Khan*, Dhaka: The Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, December 1986, p. x.

In his capacity as an editor, Akram Khan promoted contemporary Muslim writers and intellectuals and their ideas. For example, many of Rokeya's works especially her *Aborodhbasini* (Secluded Ones) were published in Akram Khan's *Mohammadi*, and this makes the reformist ideas of Rokeya more relevant when discussing the life and work of Akram Khan. Importantly, many people who entered journalism especially through his *Mohammadi* and *Azad* succeeded and thrived in this profession.

Before Akram Khan appeared in the political scene, the Muslims had launched several anti-colonial, independence movements such as, Faqir Andolon, Mujahid Andolon, Sipahi Biplob and Forayeji Andolon to liberate the people from the clutch of colonialism. Hence, they were already known as the marked enemies of the British. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Great Rebellion in 1857, the marginalization of Muslims and their exclusion from spheres of public influence were quite obvious.¹⁰ Hence, the British became involved in a conspiracy to cripple the Muslims socially, politically and economically with the collaboration of the Hindus.¹¹ In such a political climate Muslims were at the receiving end of colonial oppression and communal prejudice. While the people of British India were oppressed by the foreign rulers, the local Hindus coined derogatory terms to refer to the Muslims, such as: Mlechchha and Joban.¹² In such a sorry state of the Muslims, Akram Khan along with others devoted himself to rescue the community from the joint conspiracy of the British and the local Hindus. He used *Mohammadi*, *Al-Eslam*, *Daily Jamana*, *Daily Sebak*, and *Daily Azad* to give hope to the Muslims and thus prompted them to compete with other communities in the world of work. He tried not only to secure an honorable place for them in the subcontinent but also in the wider Muslim world at large.

Along with his deep, continuous engagement in the profession of journalism, he was hugely active in national and Muslim politics that he mainly used to protect the rights of Muslims who were as a matter of course discriminated against by the colonizers and by their Hindu neighbors. He was also deeply involved in the anti-colonial and

¹⁰ Muhiuddin Khan, p. 193.

¹¹ Abu Jafar, p. xiv.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. xv.

Khilafat movements and thus fought against colonial rule and struggled to defend the Khilafat in Turkey. The Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) was a pan-Islamic as well as all-India movement dedicated to defend the Khilafat.¹³ Despite being a liberal Muslim thinker who wanted to work with the Hindus in national politics, Akram Khan was disillusioned by the lukewarm response of the Hindu politicians to the cause of Muslim interests, especially to the issue of Khilafat. This disappointment led him to fully devote himself in Muslim politics, and finally he engaged himself in the service of the Muslim League.¹⁴ However, Akram Khan was first and foremost a journalist and a thoughtful writer who took the career of politics later on as a necessary means of the overall welfare and development of the people.

The pan-Islamic ideas of Jamal-al-Din Afghani (1838-1897) created a widespread political consciousness among the Muslims of the subcontinent whose political sentiments were spurred by a number of events – both national and global – detrimental to the interests of Muslims, such as, the revocation of the Partition of Bengal in 1911, the Italian (1911) and Balkan (1911-1912) attacks on Turkey, and later Great Britain's participation in the First World War (1914-18) against Turkey.¹⁵ The Turkish Khilafat was the last Muslim nation which could possibly challenge and check the imperial rise of Europe. The belligerent attitude of the British government toward it greatly worried the Muslim leaders of this region like Akram Khan, as it also created a comprador class and some local lickspittles who worked as collaborators or intermediaries in the service of the British Raj. Conversely, Akram Khan not only gave intellectual support to the movement to protect the Khilafat, but also toured the rural areas of Bengal and organized meetings especially in Dhaka and Chittagong to rally public support. In 1920 when the Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee was organized, he became its General Secretary. His

¹³ The Turkish sultanate that was the last Muslim rule assuming the title of Khalifah of Islam came to an end in November 1922, and Turkey was transformed into a republic in October 1923; the Khilafat was finally abolished in March 1924.

¹⁴ Rana Razzaq, "Mohammad Akram Khan." In *Banglapedia*, retrieved on June 17, 2009 from http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/K_0164.htm

¹⁵ Sufia Ahmed, "Khilafat Movement." In *Banglapedia*, retrieved on May 10, 2009 from http://banglapedia.net/HT/K_0236.HTM.

Mohammadi also played a prominent role in triggering political consciousness and an anti-colonial feeling among the Muslims throughout the region under his and other great figures like Maulana Azad's and Maniruzzaman Islambadi's leadership.

The colonial administration was markedly perturbed by the widespread response and public support that the Khilafat movement received from people of all walks of life. Hence, it cracked down on the Khilafat leaders and establishments, and many leaders including Akram Khan were arrested in 1921. Akram Khan started working on his tafsir and completed translating Ampara (the 30th juz of the Qur'an) while he was in prison, and he kept translating and interpreting the entire Qur'an throughout the rest of his life and fortunately was able to publish it during his lifetime. However, he wrote *Mostafa Charit*, his most outstanding work besides the tafsir, before the imprisonment.

During the height of the Khilafat and non-cooperation movements when big newspaper headlines were stirring up political agitation and influencing public opinion, the colonial government obviously followed a carrot-and-stick strategy. A section of society that was benefitted by colonial rule supported the British policy against the Sultan in Turkey. An executive council comprising mainly nawabs and local zamindars used to rule this country at the behest of the colonial government. One nawab of that executive council once called for Akram Khan who he thought belonged to the sect of Ahl Hadith and the sultans of Turkey were followers of Ahl Sunnat wal-Jama'at. The nawab requested him to write for the British policy and against the 'sunni' Khalifah, Akram Khan refused to comply. Then that Muslim member of the executive council tried to entice him through various ways. After presenting his arguments in favor of British policy, he offered all possible monetary assistance to turn Akram Khan's *Mohammadi* into a daily. Akram Khan was in dire financial difficulties at that time and, in such a condition, his moral strength and commitment to his community was put on trial. Readers can guess what would be the response of many of our editors and journalists of the present time who have obviously polluted the noble profession of journalism and seem to be at the forefront of serving foreign interests, especially by pursuing falsehood and creating mistrust and division among the people, and thus aggravating their

misery. Akram Khan could grab the covetous proposal of government patronization to publish a daily and to become its editor. But he rejected the offer outright and said to the nawab:

Listen, Sir! Let my brain be impaired before I even think of harming the Khalifah Sultan! Let my hand be paralyzed before I start writing against him! Let my corporeal body be put to an end before I try to damage him! — this is my supplication to Allah.[...] Look, Sir! I have gone out hunting many times in life and shot many birds dead. I know very well that if a gun-bullet is shot at me, I may die. But you should know for sure that if I am killed by the bullet of a gun, every drop of blood from my body will recreate one Akram Khan each.¹⁶

This was the response of Akram Khan in the face of enticement and threats – carrot and stick – of the colonial government, and this was his moral strength; and Allah blessed him with a long life of 99 years. Indeed, our editors and journalists have much to learn from Akram Khan to whom they owe an enormous debt.

One important aim of Akram Khan's intellectual activism was to address the deplorable condition of the Muslims and to put them in an equal standing with other communities. Another important objective of his work was to remove superstitions and wrong notions mixed with the teachings of Islam. Through his writings he tried to spread the true message of Islam, wrote and spoke against religious wrong notions, and worked hard throughout his life to inspire the Muslims to follow the true teachings of Islam, to reject all forms of shirk, to unlearn misconceptions about Islam, and to become responsible citizens. In his book *Moslem Bonger Samajik Itihas*, Akram Khan says :

It is a historical truth that many Sufis came to our land and this caused the conversion of many non-Muslims into Islam. But who embraced Islam at that time? No satisfactory answer to this question is being found. So far we have discovered, it suggests that the Buddhists and the Jains who were oppressed by the caste system and persecuted by the Brahmins accepted Islam. But this is very much true that they brought their age-old

¹⁶ Mohammad Wajed Ali, *Dilruba*, 1960, pp. 589-90. Cited by Mohammad Monsuruddin, pp.143-44.

superstitions and cultural practices with them. But we have no reliable historical evidence to suggest that our revered Sufis tried to free those Muslims from the wrong notions they carried. Hence, the Muslims in general were gradually contaminated by those erroneous and blind beliefs. Perhaps, this is why un-Islamic practices made inroads into Muslim society, and as a byproduct, like their religious life, their political and economic life also turned into irreligiosity.¹⁷

Since Muslims came under the multifarious influences of Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Christians and other faith communities, they internalized many ideas of these religious groups and incorporated them in their own religion. In such a cultural backdrop, Akram Khan had to take the role of a Mujaddid (reformer) and point his finger at the Muslim community in order to rescue them from many semi-religious, un-Islamic practices. However, the orthodox religious establishment of his time did not like his ideas and work; but that did not swerve him from his resolve to remove foreign and flawed elements that entered into Islam. He was determined in his work, as he was steadfast and optimistic. He tolerated antagonism from both Muslims and Hindus in silence. Hindus' antagonism to his work was mainly communal, but the opposition he faced from the Muslims was more complex and wrapped in ignorance and misunderstandings.

In his noble task of fighting against cultural mythologies mixed with Islam and of spreading the teachings of Islam, Akram Khan employed two weapons: knowledge and rationality. And on both these fronts Muslims were in a shameful condition, and they wanted to cling to their age-old beliefs and superstitions. Syed Sajjad Husain recounts Muslims' opposition to Akram Khan's reformist ideas in the following way: "I remember during my childhood, the religious tutor of our home forbade us to read [Akram Khan's] *Mostafa Charit*. Upon query, it was said that *Mostafa Charit* makes people's belief in Islam weak because Akram Khan [in this book] did not support many of conventional beliefs."¹⁸ This was mainly because the traditionalists did not like his rationalist analysis of the life of the Prophet,

¹⁷ Cited by Abu Jafar, p. xxi.

¹⁸ "Maulana Akram Khan Sworoney" (In Memory of Maulana Akram Khan). In Abu Jafar (Ed.), *Maulana Akram Khan* (pp. 129-132), Dhaka: The Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986, p. 130.

especially with regard to chest dissection and other miracles.¹⁹ Some other reasons why people, especially the shirk-ridden Muslims, did not like him was his opposition to worshipping saints, visiting shrines, and similar other customs and practices. After all, Akram Khan was brought up in a climate of tariqa Muhammadi,²⁰ which was against all forms of shirk and social mythologies. More importantly, he held many unconventional views. For example, he was opposed to the summary ruling that Islam prohibits music.²¹

Akram Khan struggled tenaciously to end colonial oppression and to rescue the Muslims from communal slurs and from their underprivileged condition. He worked on multiple fronts – journalism, politics, and scholarship – to realize his goals. And he faced antagonism from three groups of people: the British, Hindus and Muslims. As mentioned above, the last group's opposition to his work was caused mainly by his attack on many of their long-held beliefs and practices that are extraneous to Islam. His unconventional ideas are passed on to us chiefly through his *Mostafa Charit* and *Tafsirul Qur'an*. As was the case during his lifetime, his ideas are still controversial to many people, while they help many others to look at the teachings of Islam rationally and with evidence fully in compliance with the spirit and teachings of Islam. For both the groups, his work opens new avenues of thought and revolutionary ways of interpreting Prophet's life and the Qur'an.

Tafsirul Qur'an

Tafsir – translated as 'exegesis' in theological terminology – is actually interpretation, elucidation and commentary of the Qur'an. A Muslim's success is hugely dependent upon the proper understanding of Allah's words and acting upon them. Although the need to explicate the Qur'anic message was always there, for various reasons,

¹⁹ Anisuzzaman, "Sahityik O Sangbadik" (Litterateur and Journalist). In Abu Jafar (Ed.), *Maulana Akram Khan* (pp. 173-180), Dhaka: The Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986, p. 176.

²⁰ Muhiuddin Khan, p. 192.

²¹ About music, Akram Khan made the following comment: "After discussing the three verses the other party quotes to prohibit music, I have shown that these verses have little relation with allowing or prohibiting music." (*Mohammadi*, Aswin, 1335 [Bangla Year]. Cited by Anisuzzaman, p. 176)

Muslims dared not translate and comment on it for long after its revelation. Mustansir Mir mentions two reasons that discouraged attempts at elucidating the word of Allah:

First, coming as it did from God, the Qur'an must be assumed to be clear in its import, thus obviating the need for exposition. Second, how could finite human intelligence claim to be able to discover the true meanings of the texts of a book that emanated from the possessor of infinite wisdom?²²

But the reservations with regard to interpreting the Qur'an had to be compromised in the long run, and this because of the arising of new issues and problems whose answers had to be found primarily in the Qur'an. Few generations after the Prophet, Muslims began addressing new, emerging issues by way of expounding verses of the Qur'an. But this early phase of tafsir literature was conspicuously dependent on reports attributed to the Prophet and his companions. About the development of tafsir literature, Mustansir Mir states:

Until then, tafsir on the whole had been transmitted orally and had not been compiled and written down. Furthermore, the discipline of tafsir was not yet clearly distinguishable from that of hadith (prophetic tradition) but was rather a special domain within hadith. In fact, it was the muhaddithun (scholars of hadith) whose collections of ahadith, which included tafsir reports, paved the way for the development of an independent discipline of tafsir. This development led to the emergence of major mufassirun and their works.²³

Known as 'tafsir bi-al-mathur' or received tafsir, this early tradition of interpreting the Qur'an drew heavily on the transmitted views of the Prophet and of his companions that came through various channels. However, despite the fact that the Qur'an repeatedly advises the Muslims and others to use their intellect and to reflect upon the words of Allah, majority of the early mufassirun like Ibn Taymiyah repudiated 'tafsir bi-al-ra'y' or the rationalist tradition of tafsir which is based on "personal reflection or independent rational

²² Mustansir Mir, "Tafsir." In John L. Esposito (Ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, vol. 4, 1995, p. 170.

²³ *Ibid.*

thinking."²⁴ But, unfortunately, the overly dependence of the early exegetes on transmitted reports later on facilitated the inclusion of Jewish apocryphal reports or Israelites, which in turn led to the adulteration of this discipline by elements foreign to Islam and thus brought about a harm which the early mufasssirin devoutly tried to check.

In *Tafsirul Qur'an*, Akram Khan goes against this tradition of transmitted tafsir and counteracted many 'tafsir reports,' which he shows are contradictory and inconsistent with the normative teachings of Islam. In this respect, he espouses to isolate and reject the Judeo-Christian views which are unacceptable but have been blended with tafsir literature in the name of transmitted reports. For example, the Jews believe that "Moses led the Israelites out of captivity from Egypt, parted the Red Sea through God's miraculous assistance so that his people could escape, and received the divine law in the form of Ten Commandments."²⁵ On the other hand, many Christians hold the belief that "Jesus would return to earth, end human misery, and inaugurate 1,000 years of peace and prosperity."²⁶ Regrettably, both these notions have captivated the Muslims and have received an Islamic coloring and gained an apparently solid foundation in the Muslim mind. Akram Khan tried to eliminate such wrong notions from Muslim society. In doing so, he makes linguistic and semantic analysis of relevant Qur'anic verses and follows chiefly the tradition of 'tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an.' This is not to say that his tafsir ignores prophetic narratives or represents a completely novel approach which does not have any precedents. In fact, he substantiates his arguments by referring to many classical exegetes whose views on some particular issues, though well-founded, have not been popular in Muslim societies, especially in the subcontinent. Readers may not like or agree with some of his views; but unquestionably they must recognize the depth of Akram Khan's research and the strength of his arguments, and I am sure they will appreciate his sincerity and scholarship.

Translation and interpretation of the Qur'an in languages other than Arabic started even much later. Diffidence and a sense of impropriety

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Outline of American Literature* (revised edition), United States Department of State, (n. d.), p. 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

stopped the believers to translate the divine word into other languages for many centuries. However, when some western and western-educated Muslim scholars started translating the Qur'an into English, they were heavily influenced by and reliant on the Shakespearean and Biblical style of writing and used archaic expressions, and thus making it not more intelligible for the reader to understand the message of the holy book. What is more undesirable, in their intention to remain closer to the words of the Qur'an while translating, many of the translators and interpreters went for literal rendering largely to maintain the texture of the Arabic language, which did not make the message anymore clearer.

Unfortunately, translation of the Qur'an into Bangla has not been any better in terms of the lucidity of language and the correct rendering of the source text. Comparing Akram Khan's *Tafsirul Qur'an* with other Bangla tafsirs, Syed Sajjad Husain states:

But it can be said without doubt that there is no other tafsir in Bangla which is as understandable and lucid and at the same time able to satisfy the need of the reader as his [Akram Khan's] tafsir is. Other Bangla tafsirs and translations are mostly written in awkward language, hence difficult to comprehend.²⁷

He was free from the wrong notion of following the Arabic texture in translating the Qur'an. He believes that in order to convey the message of the Qur'an, its teachings have to be transferred in lucid terms.²⁸

Most of the Bangla translations of the Qur'an – including the ones published afterward – are amateurish, many of which are done by devout Muslims who undertook such an important task out of necessity and for their love of Islam, but with inadequate training. Some Bangla translations are unnecessarily difficult, as the translators followed a meandering writing style; some others are either faulty or deficient. Akram Khan's tafsir is free from many such deficiencies. In terms of the purity of language and the correctness of sense and translation, his translation of the Qur'an stands out not only as a religious book, but also as a valuable treasure in Bangla literature.

²⁷ Syed Sajjad Husain, p. 130.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

Being his mature work, *Tafsirul Qur'an* bears a potent imprint of Akram Khan's literary flair and artistic mastery. Moreover, in this tafsir a rationalist philosophy is obvious, which is by no means based on his personal whims or capricious notions. His interpretation of the Qur'an is very much intra- and inter-textual. He draws heavily upon verses of the Qur'an and upon the interpretation of early exegetes, and this makes his arguments strong and well-founded. His geographical description in providing the interpretations of the Qur'an tells us about his wide knowledge about the spatial locations mentioned in the Book, as it points to a similarity between his and Maulana Maududi's tafsir *Tafheemul Qur'an*. Needless to say, Akram Khan's tafsir is original both in terms of language and ideas; and, what is more, it is the first full-length tafsir in the Bangla language and is published in five volumes.

Unfortunately, *Tafsirul Qur'an* has not seen its further edition since it was first published many decades ago from Dhaka in 1958-59; hence, it has still remained obscure to a vast majority of the readers. It is imperative that research institutions like the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh bring out its second edition immediately for the benefit of the truth-seeking people. In this *Selections*, we have presented in English only few excerpts of his monumental work on the Qur'an, hoping that it will prompt the readers to do more research on his work and on the issues discussed. One last word: His ideas about few issues, though somewhat controversial, are quite ground-breaking and suggest his intellectual strength and courage to speak up. All the readers may not agree with all of his ideas; but disregarding his hard work, sound scholarship, and in-depth research will smack of complacency and arrogance.

This extraordinary tafsir tells us about our responsibility to look into many widely-held, apparently-accepted views and about the need to conduct such extensive research to review those issues. It also points to a grim aspect of Muslims' intellectual culture and to our conformist approach to israeliates, which we have to address seriously in order to disabuse the wider readership of misinterpretations of various verses as well as prophetic traditions.

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