

Abdel Haleem as a Translator of the Holy Qur'ān

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Abstract

This paper covers brief history and evolution of Qur'ānic translation, short biographical sketch of the translator and his approach to the translation of the Holy Scripture of Islam. Abdel Haleem is an Egyptian Muslim scholar of Arabic language, literature and Islamic studies. He has been teaching in different universities of the UK since 1966. Presently he is serving as professor of Islamic Studies at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies), University of London. He produced his English translation of the Holy Qur'ān titled as “*The Qur'ān: A New Translation*” in 2004 published by Oxford University Press. The translation received appreciation from the modern reader of the Qur'ān because it has been presented in brief and simplified language, easy style, accurate rendition and balanced approach.

Key words: *The Qur'ān, Translation, Abdel Haleem*

First incident of the translation of the Qur'ān into any foreign language was when some Muslims migrated from Makkah to Abyssinia under the leadership of Ja'far bin Abī Tālib. He recited a few verses of the sūrah Maryam to the Negus, the king of Abyssinia, and these verses were translated to him, as a result he converted to Islam.¹

“This incident which occurred before the Hijrah is probably the first incidence of the Qur'ān being translated.”²

The messengers sent by the Holy Prophet (upon be peace and greeting) to different rulers of the neighbouring countries had mastered the languages of the countries to which they were delegated. The letters contained a couple of verses of the Qur'ān.³ Heraclius was the Byzantine emperor who was corresponded by the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) and Dihya al-Kalbī was sent as messenger.

“When Dihya al-kalbī delivered the letter of the Prophet to the Emperor of Byzantium, the Emperor commanded his interpreter to translate the letter, which he did.”⁴

Muqawqis (Cyrus) was the governor of Egypt at that time. The letter sent to him by the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) contained the verse 64 of the sūrah Āl-‘Imrān.⁵ Similarly, the letter to Negus of Abyssinia contained the verse 23 of the sūrah al-Hashr and the verse 171 of the sūrah al-Nisā.⁶ According to Dr. Hamidullah, it is reported that ‘Amr bin Umayyah, the messenger of the Prophet (ﷺ) to Negus, translated the letter into the language understood by the king.⁷

After the demise of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ), the translation process continued and even grew more direct and widespread as the people belonging to different communities started to embrace Islam as their religion. New lands were continuously joining Muslim state and the need to learn the Qur'ān, to read and understand it arose. This was one of the reasons of translating the Qur'ān into foreign languages. We find an example of translating Sūrah al-Fatiha into Persian by the honourable companion of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) Salman the Persian for the people who converted to Islam and wanted to say the prayer.⁸

There are some other examples of translating the Qur'ānic meanings into the language other than Arabic in later times. Jahiz (d.255 A.H) a well-known Islamic scholar of 3rd century, reports in his book ‘al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn’ that Mūsā bin Sayyār al-Aswārī was proficient in both the languages Arabic and Persian. The people belonging to his circle of studies were the Persians as well as the Arabs. The Arabs sat on his right and the Persians on his left. He recited the verses of the Qur'ān in Arabic. He explained their meanings in simple Arabic first and in Persian later turning his face towards the Persians.

When he explained the meanings of Arabic text in Persian with the same eloquence and lucidity, nobody could judge in which language he was more capable.⁹

“...it indicates the possibility that portions of the Qur'ān or the whole of it were translated.”¹⁰

Narshakhi (d.348A.H) has reported that Qutaiba built a congregation mosque. Each Friday he sent for the inhabitants of Bukhara for the prayers with the promise to give two dirhams to each after prayer. He taught the meanings of the Qur'ān in Persian until they were able to read Arabic.¹¹

“World Bibliography of Translations of the Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān” published by the OIC Research Center in 1986 at Istambul is a comprehensive work which has covered 1380 complete and 1292 incomplete printed translations of the Qur'ān in 65 different Asian, European, African and Islamic languages. But the non-printed unavailable translations have not been taken into account and Ekmeleddin, editor of the work, comments on them briefly as:

“There are Syriac translations made by non-Muslims, in the second part of the first century A.H. in the period of Hadjaj Ibn Yusuf. There is also a possibility of the existence of a Berber translation written in 127 A.H. There was a Persian oral translation made by Mūsa Ibn Sayyar al-Aswarī before 255 A.H. and a complete Indian translation before 270 A.H. According to T.W. Arnold a Chinese translation also possibly existed. A Chinese annalist of the period 713-742 A.D. recorded that Muslims coming to China from the West brought their sacred books and deposited them in the hall set apart for translations of sacred and canonical books in the Imperial palace.”¹²

In the west, the Qur'ān was first time translated into English by Alexander Ross, a grammar school teacher at Southampton in 1649. But this translation was not direct from the Arabic text, rather it was based on a French translation by Andre' du Ryer. George Sale (1697-1736) was the first who rendered the Qur'ān directly from the Original Arabic. Then he was followed by other orientalists like J.M. Rodwel (1808-1900), E.H. Palmer (1840-1882), Richard Bell (1876-1952) and A.J. Arberry (1905-1969). Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936) and Muhammad Asad (1900-1992) were the converts to Islam

who too published their translations which gained a handsome popularity. Not only Western but some Eastern scholars also rendered Islamic Scripture into English. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872-1953) of India and an Iraqi Jew N.J. Dawood are remarkable in this regard. Some Ahmadis like Moulavi Muhammad Ali (1874-1951) and Sir Zafrullah Khan (1893-1985) translated the Qur'ān into English too. This practice is in progress till the date. This shows that the scripture of Islam was not only translated by the Muslims but non-Muslims as well.

None of the above mentioned western scholars was the Arab by birth. They learnt Arabic as second language. As a result a number of blunders were committed knowingly and unknowingly while translating because they lacked in understanding the Arabic idiom, phraseology, context and stylistic features of the Qur'ān.

Prof. Dr. Abdel Haleem, however, is an Arab-English Muslim scholar, born in Egypt and educated at al-Azhar and Cambridge Universities, and has been teaching in different Universities of the U.K since 1966. Presently he is serving as professor of Islamic Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.¹³ He has translated the Holy Qur'ān into English with the title, "*The Qur'ān: A New Translation*" which was published in 2004.

The work carries much importance due to a number of distinguishing qualities. It has been presented in modern and easy style and to the point English not neglecting the glory of Arabic text. Brevity is his unique quality and this is the outcome of mastery in both of languages, Arabic and English. The work comprises a useful introduction which contains the life of Muhammad (ﷺ), the compilation of the Qur'ān, the structure of the Qur'ān (sūrahs and ayas, Makkan and Madinan sūrahs), stylistic features, and issue of interpretation, short history of English translations and finally the characteristics of this very translation. He has also given a chronology and select bibliography. The translation is followed by an index of eighteen pages. Introduction to each sūrah and foot-notes are also the part of the work.

Abdel Haleem's Approach towards Translation

"The Qur'ān: A New Translation" is adorned with the merits of brevity, flow, currency and clarity of language. It has been presented in modern and easy style avoiding complex sentence structure, cryptic diction and archaism. It is neither literal nor explanatory rather the

chosen methodology is to provide the rendered meaning in English often with a footnote of the literal translation. Prof. Dr. Sultan Shah has aptly appreciated this translation:

“The English Translation of the Qur'ān by Abdel Haleem is a unique work because its author is an Arabic-Speaking Muslim who has been living in England since 1966. No other translator of the Holy Qur'ān has such a mastery of both the languages. Further-more, he is a lexicographer fully equipped with both the classical and modern Arabic. He does not lag behind in having full command over English. Most of his predecessors rendered the Qur'ān into English using the King James Idiom that had been considered as the standard Idiom for translating any religious scripture. That is why his rendering manifests originality which is lacking in many other translations. He always opts for contemporary usage and sentence structure and avoids confusing phrases. His translation is an attempt to convey the timeless nature of the Qur'ān.”¹⁴

Originality

While translating the Qur'ānic verses Prof. Abdel Haleem has not strictly followed his predecessors neither in style, nor in language. His translation project was motivated by the comments passed by some of his students who had found themselves in difficulty to understand the Qur'ān through available translations. He says:

“One day, when they (students) told me that other translations of the Qur'ān were difficult to follow. It prompted me to begin my own translation in a language people can understand and find accessible. It took me seven meticulous years to translate the Qur'ān, alongside teaching...”¹⁵

He has put his best effort to make the Qur'ān accessible and understandable for English speaking community of the world. The originality of his translation may be observed simply in translating the '*Basmalah*' when he differs from almost all his predecessors. In various translations of the Divine Epithets '*al-Rahmān*' and '*al-Rahīm*' most of the translators have used same words but Abdel Haleem deviates from traditional rendition and translates them as:

‘The Lord of Mercy, The Giver of Mercy’.

In addition, he has given very reasonable interpretation using the same root word 'Mercy' in translation of the two. The reason is that both the Arabic words 'Al-Rahman' and 'Al Rahim' are derived from the same root 'Rahm' so it should be observed in translation as far as possible. Abdel Haleem clarifies it in the following words:

“Because ‘*Rahmān*’ and ‘*Rahīm*’ derive from the same root, translating them into two words with different roots, like ‘Compassionate and Merciful’ loses the connection.”¹⁶

Critics of the translation have appreciated it. Andrew Rippin comments:

“Abdel Haleem goes for “in the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy”, which while it has the merit of using “mercy” in both instances, does seem like rather a mouthful in comparison.”¹⁷

Prof. Dr. Sultan Shah praises it at full length

“He has used ‘mercy’ in translating both divine epithets... Before him, Muhammad Asad has also rendered both these Divine attributes with the same word. His translation of *Basmalah* reads: “In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace.”¹⁸

In the light of previous discussion it can be said that the translation by Prof. Abdel Haleem has a remarkable quality of originality which may be observed throughout. Even he has “avoided using King James Idiom that had been considered as the standard idiom for translating any religious scripture”.¹⁹

Language and Style

The most important feature of Prof. Abdel Haleem’s translation is its language. The language used by him is brief, simple, current, contemporary, modern, accurate and easily understandable even for a common reader. Simultaneously, special care has been taken in maintaining the majesty and grandeur of the Arabic text at possible level. The translator has definitely utilized all his faculties and capabilities of linguistic nuances and stylistic methodologies as he is an Arab, hafiz of the Qur’ān, lexicographer, learned Muslim, teacher and author of several Qur’ānic works. Being in England as a faculty member of SOAS and a head of editorial board of the Journal of Qur’ānic studies of Edinburgh University, he digested different

linguistic shades of English language and its idiom.

The style adopted by the translator is also remarkable that it is modern and easy. Paragraphing and application of contemporary punctuation structure of English has also played its role in making the Qur'ānic concepts accessible and understandable.

Andrew Rippin draws a comparison between “An Interpretation of the Qur'ānic English Translation of the Meanings” by Majid Fakhry and “The Qur'ān: A New Translation” by Abdel Haleem and comments on the language used by both translators as:

“Both translations claim to "update" the English used; this may be seen in many ways. For example, Fakhry's "People of the Thicket" is rendered by Abdel Haleem as "Forest Dwellers" (Qur'ān 26/176), which is more transparent in modern English.”²⁰

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Sultan Shah appreciates the language used by the translator saying:

“Abdel Haleem's translation is in modern and plain English that flows nicely. Such language is easy to read and comprehend. He always opts for contemporary usage and sentence structure and avoids confusing phrases. His translation is an attempt to convey the timeless nature of the Qur'ān.”²¹

Halal Monk, a Christian scholar, in an interview with Haleem included in his book, “*A Christian on a Journey through Islam*” seems to be much impressed by it and comments showing full appraisal.

“One of the most remarkable aspect of the translation is the fact that it does not use any verse structure but is written as if it were fluent prose. In accordance to this stylistic choice, the language itself is free from archaisms or awkward grammatical structures that are often found in other translations.”²²

Naiyerah Kolkailah in her review of the Abdel Halmeem's translation titled “Review of the Qur'ān- a New Translation’ by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem” says:

“The Language used in this translation is probably one of Abdel Haleem's greatest accomplishments. Other older translations have used Shakespeare language or direct and

literal translation that trap the text in confusing and complicated diction, which hinders the readers from understanding and connecting with Allah's words. Abdel Haleem however uses clear and simplified modern English that makes the text reader – friendly and very easy to follow.”²³

Another scholar of Christian theology and Director of Cambridge Inter-faith Program, Professor of Divinity, Prof. Dr. David Ford declaring Abdel Haleem's translation a good effort for the students of interfaith harmony comments on the language of the translation.

“Written in strong, vigorous, clear and flowing language that is, I respect, the most hopeful way to try to achieve that extraordinarily difficult task of rendering the Qur'ān into English or any other language.”²⁴

The translator's approach towards the text of the Qur'ān in general and the use of language in particular is very impressive. In the very beginning of the second Sūrah, titled al-Baqarah, he translates the phrase “hudan li al-muttaqīn” as: “guidance for those who are mindful of God”.

The translation of “Taqwa” as ‘mindfulness of God’ is commendable and touchy because it covers all the other meanings of it and refers to a spiritual consciousness in a believer whether Muslim or non-Muslim. The translator explains this important term in footnote as under:

“The root w-q-y in this morphological form has the meaning of being mindful or being wary of something. The opposite of being mindful of God is to ignore Him or have no reference to Him in your thought, feeling or action. This is a fundamental concept about God and the believer's relation to Him. Many translators read the term as those who fear God, but this is an over expression of the term and does not correctly convey the meaning of the concept which is a very common one in the Qur'ān”²⁵

Prof. Abdel Haleem remained close to the most popular English translations of the Holy Qur'ān by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, and Muhammad Asad. However Abdullah Yūsuf Ali went to the unpopular rendition. The translation by Pickthall reads: “this is the scripture whereof there is no doubt, a guidance to those who are pious”.²⁶

Abdullah Yusuf Ali translates:

“This is the book: in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah.”²⁷

Muhammad Asad's rendition is as under:

“Let there be no doubt it is [meant to be] a guidance for all the God-Conscious”.²⁸

The word ‘al-Muttaqin’ has been rendered into English by the most popular Muslim translators of the Qur’ān as ‘Those who are pious’, ‘those who fear Allah’, ‘All the God-Conscious’ and ‘those who are mindful of God’ respectively. Only Abdullah Yusuf Ali has translated it with ‘those who fear Allah’. On the other hand ‘mindfulness of God’, ‘God consciousness’ and ‘piety’ are more positive connotations. David F. Ford is attracted by this expression and says,

“This is important for Muslim readers, but also for other ‘people of the Book’, for other religious traditions and for anyone, agnostic or atheist, who is concerned with what is most important for fellow human beings. In that lovely phrase of professor Haleem’s translation that recurs many times: “Be mindful of God.”²⁹

This recurring expression throughout the Qur’ān is definitely intended to make man God-conscious and help him make his relation with his Creator stronger and stronger. For this, Abdel Haleem’s chosen language is the most appropriate one, which has inspired even a non-Muslim to think about God, the Creator of the universe.

Brevity and preciseness of Language

‘Brevity is the soul of wit’ a famous maxim has truly been applied by Abdel Haleem in rendering the Qur’ānic expressions into English. He has successfully used minimum words to convey maximum possible meanings of the Qur’ānic verses. Brevity of language may be observed throughout his translation and it contains only five hundred pages of a pocket size book. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Sultan Shah comments on this aspect of the translation as: “One of the main characteristics of this translation is the brevity exercised by the learned translator that is not possible without mastery of both the languages. Professor Abdel Haleem has used minimum words in his translation and exegetical notes. He has added footnotes where there is

extreme need of clarification or further explanation.”³⁰ Even Khaleel Muhammad could not help appreciating this feature of the translation by Abdel Haleem, and remarked, “The preciseness of English is certainly commendable.”³¹

The Translator's Approach towards Arabic Rhetorics

Every developed language has such beautifying techniques as are used by writers, scholars and specially poets in order to enhance the beauty of language. They utilize different figures of speech to decorate their diction. Such rhetorics are also used to give various shades to the meaning of an expression or a word. It is observed that only native speakers or the people, who develop taste in it by studying it more and more, feel and enjoy this figurative use. The Holy Qur'ān is a master piece of Arabic literature. It is full of such techniques.

Unfortunately, mostly the non-Arabic speaking translators and critics particularly the westerners remained unable to comprehend these rhetorical features of the Qur'ān and finally regarded them as awkwardness and complexity of language and structure. Often they mistranslated or distorted such rhetorical expressions.

Grammatical Shift (*Itifāt*)

One of the most marked features of the Qur'ānic rhetorics is '*Itifāt*'. Almost all the orientalist who turned their attention to this aspect of the Qur'ān did not even use the term '*Itifāt*' in their writings. Abdel Haleem in a Chapter, “Dynamic Style” of his book, ‘Understanding The Qur'ān: Themes and Style’, refutes Noldeke as: “Noldeke remarks that ‘the grammatical persons change from time to time in the Qur'ān in an unusual and not beautiful way’.”³² He further explains: “Not only Noldeke but many other orientalist avoided mentioning the term '*Itifāt*' which has been used as decorating tool for the language of the Arabic Poetry and the Holy Qur'ān.”³³

On the other hand, the Muslim scholars perceived the importance of Qur'ānic rhetorics and appreciated it on every level. They, like other branches of Qur'ānic sciences, played their key role in developing Arabic Rhetorics. Many produced books on the subject “Ibn al- Athir, for instance, after studying this stylistic feature as we shall see below, classed it among the ‘remarkable things and exquisite subtleties we have found in the Glorious Qur'ān’.”³⁴

The translator is fully aware of the importance of the themes

and style of the Holy Book. He has given place to the chapter titled 'Dynamic Style' in his famous book 'Understanding the Qur'ān: themes and style'. He has produced a separate article on this topic with the title "Grammatical shift for Rhetorical purposes: *Ilṭifāt* and Related features in the Qur'ān" in the Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1992. Consequently, he applies all rhetorical figures in translation of the Holy Qur'ān and explains them in footnotes.

Rhetorical Question (*al-Istifhām-al-Inkāṛī*)

This device also belongs to the Arabic Rhetorics and is used to show disapproval. The Rhetoricians have named it '*al-istifham al-inkarī*' (Question showing refusal). But the translators particularly those who tried to render the literal meaning of the original Arabic, remained unsuccessful to convey the intended meaning. Thus, they distorted the Qur'ānic text. Prof. Abdel Haleem is fully conscious of this and has chosen the word '*how*' to show intended disapproval. His own words about this are as follow:

“Also problematic can be a particular kind of rhetorical question, frequent in the Qur'ān which expresses disapproval through its grammatical structure rather than by any lexical addition. It was decided for this translation to use 'How' to convey this sense of disapproval.”³⁵

Let's see the Qur'ānic expressions like, “How can they believe in falsehood and deny God's blessings?”³⁶ It would convey the sense that they should not believe in falsehood and deny God's blessings, the verse “How could God have sent a human being as a messenger?”³⁷ would mean that God can't send a human being as a messenger and the sentence “How can you put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed?”³⁸ implies that God should not put a successor on the earth as he would cause damage and bloodshed.

Elision (*Hadhf*)

The people at the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān were definitely the native speaker fully conscious of preciseness of their language. They also had adequate knowledge of the context in which the Qur'ān was to be revealed. There lived the idolaters, the Jews, the Christians and the hypocrites. The Muslims knew their habits, beliefs and objections raised by them. That's why it was easy for them to understand the Qur'ānic expressions but the people of today will have to learn concepts like elision before they study the Qur'ān.

Elision is that sometimes the part of a sentence is omitted as the meanings are understood from the context. It takes place “in conditional sentences, in oaths, and in contrasts. In some cases it is possible to use dots to indicate that something is missing. In others it is better to supply the omitted clause.”³⁹

In order to demonstrate the concept, some examples are going to be quoted: “Can they be compared to those who have clear proof (-) from their lord, recited by a witness (-) from Him, and before it the book of Moses, as a guide and mercy?”⁴⁰

In the empty brackets the elided words are ‘the Qur’ān’ and ‘the angel Gabriel’ respectively. Prof. Abdel Haleem has mentioned them in separate footnotes instead of brackets. But if these words are not supplied to the meant place, the meanings will be confused and difficult to understand. For instance,

“Qaf! By the glorious Qur’ān!”⁴¹

Here in the verse the thing which is sworn is not mentioned but it may be understood by studying the verses that come next. Prof. Abdel Haleem clears the oath and puts a foot note to explain it, “That which is sworn that mankind will be raised from the dead is omitted but is evident from the verses that follow.”⁴²

In the following example Prof. Abdel Haleem undertakes the use of brackets to supply the omitted clause. “If there were ever to be a Qur’ān with which mountains could be moved, the earth shattered, or the dead make to speak (they still would not believe). But everything is truly in God’s hands.”⁴³

In this conditional sentence main clause is omitted which is supplied by the translator as ‘they still would not believe’. It means that only literal translation is not sufficient, rather some supplies are inevitable. Elision is one of them.

Homonyms in the Qu’ran (*Wujūh al-Qur’ān*)

‘*Wujūh*’ is the plural form of ‘*wajh*’ which signifies one of the various meanings of a term. In the Qur’ān there are many words and terms which have various connotations in different contexts. It is inevitable for a translator and interpreter of the Qur’ān to have depth in *Wujūh al-Qur’ān* as well as other rhetorical techniques. Allama Jalal al-Din Suyuti has given a list of such terms with number of their ‘*Wujūh*’. For example the term ‘*al-Hudā*’ has been used in seventeen *Wujūh*, ‘*al-*

Sū in eleven, '*al-Salāh*' in nine, '*al-Rahmān*' in thirteen, '*al-hudā*' in fifteen, '*al-Fitnah*' in fifteen, '*al-Ruh*' in nine, '*al-Dhikr*' in twenty, '*al-Duā*' in six and '*al-Ihsān*' has been used in three *Wujūh*.⁴⁴

Not only this, there are many other words which have been used in the Holy Qur'ān in different meanings other than their usual meanings. So it is necessary for a person who is going to study the Qur'ān, translate, or interpret it to know about these certain terms and their various connotations.

Prof. Abdel Haleem is not only aware of this but he has declared his translation adorned with the observance of *Wujūh al Qur'ān*. He also feels that many of the previous translations lack the application of *Wujūh-al-Qur'ān*.

“Key terms are frequently used in the Qur'ān with different meanings for different contexts, a feature known in Arabic as *Wujūh al-Qur'ān*. These were recognized from the early days of Qur'ānic exegesis and have been highlighted in many publications. As will be shown later, ignoring this feature and forcing upon a word one single meaning for the sake of consistency results in denial of the context and misrepresentation of the material.”⁴⁵

It shows that the translation under discussion is well-equipped with full consideration of *Wujūh al-Qur'ān* too, along with other tools of Arabic Rhetorics, a strong feature of Qur'ānic language.

Paragraphing and Structure of the Translation

Paragraphing is an important stylistic feature of the translation. He has divided *sūrahs* further into paragraphs according to thoughts and sub-themes meant in the text. Normally a long *sūrah* is divided into sections (*rukū's*) and a section is considered to be a paragraph and conventionally not divided into further small paragraphs. This may make the modern reader of English feel troubled to understand the intended meaning. Prof. Abdel Haleem divides the material into small paragraphs “In order to clarify the meaning and structures of thoughts and to meet the expectation of modern readers.”⁴⁶

He has maintained verse numbering specifying each verse with its own number but the new thing is to put the verse number in its start instead at the end as usually found in conventional Arabic scripture. He remarks “We have also marked the beginning of each verse with its

number in superscript small type so as to aid those who wish to consult specific passages.”⁴⁷

To him his translation is distinguished with a remarkable characteristic that he has divided the material of the sūrah into paragraphs. Some translators have given a new line to each verse and others have formed passages of five verses. Both the methods have not convincing approach and do not prove to be enough helpful to understand the meanings of the text. His words are as under:

“Among the current translations there are two conventions, either to break each sūrah into individual verses given on separate lines, or to use free-flowing paragraphs but to give the verse numbers only at intervals of five or ten verses. Neither of these two systems is satisfactory: the first makes the translations look, in places, more like a list than a text and interrupts the flow and indeed the understanding of the text as a whole, while the second system leaves the reader unable to ascertain where the intervening verses begin and something which is extremely important for the referencing and cross-referencing which contributes so much to understand the meaning of the text.”⁴⁸

In order to maintain the paragraphing based on separate thoughts, he sometimes divides even from the middle of the verse. It seems strange but properly introduced by Abdel Haleem. At places half of the verse is in a paragraph and the second half is in the other one. “Sometimes it happened that a new paragraph was even started mid-verse in an attempt to solve stylistic difficulties.”⁴⁹

Classical and Modern usage of Arabic

The translator claims to present the meaning of the Arabic Qu'ārn into English in simple, modern and contemporary idiom of English language. But at the same time, he has managed to maintain the classical meaning. He is fully conscious of classical use of Arabic as well as of modern. For this, he frequently quotes classical dictionaries of Arabic in the foot notes to his translation. He says:

“The present translation has placed great emphasis on information gleaned from classical Arabic dictionaries, including ‘Lisān al-‘Arab’ by Ibn Manzūr, ‘al-Qāmūs al-Muhīt’ by al-Fay-ruzabadi, and al-Mu’jam al-wasīt’ by the Arabic Language Academy in Cairo.”⁵⁰

He quotes the word '*walad*' used repeatedly in the Holy Book of Islam. "It is important to identify the meaning of Arabic words used at the time of revelation of the Qur'ān rather than the ones they have acquired in modern Arabic.' '*walad*' in classical (Qur'ān) Arabic means the non-gender specified 'child' or 'children', while in modern Arabic it can only mean 'boy' or 'son'." ⁵¹

Similarly in the Qur'ānic expression describing paradise '*tajrī min tahtiha al-anhār*' the word '*anhār*' means 'running water' of any kind but in modern Arabic it has been restricted only to river. Therefore, most of the translators have rendered it in English as 'rivers' which is not meant in the Holy Qur'ān.

"In classical Arabic, the term '*nahr*' applies to any body of running water, from the smallest of streams to the widest of rivers. In modern Arabic the term has become restricted to rivers and this may in some cases have led to a misunderstanding of the term." ⁵²

It shows that a translator must be aware of the classical Arabic as well as modern so that he may not mistranslate any Qur'ānic term that has undergone a change in its use and that he may not mislead any reader of the Qur'ān about the meaning intended by Allah the Almighty. It may be said that Abdel Haleem is one of them who have full command not only on the classic and modern Arabic but also on English.

Inter-Textuality

It is an admitted fact that the Qur'ān explains itself. And the best interpretation of the meaning of any verse is the interpretation which it itself provides. For example the verses six and seven of sūrah al-Fatiha prove this concept. In the verse six a Muslim prays to God to bless him with 'Straight Path' but this straight path is not clear, so the next verse explains that the straight path is the path of those people who were blessed by God and they did not incur any wrath and anger nor did they go astray. ⁵³ We can say that the interpretation of the verse 6 is the seventh verse which clears the ambiguous meaning of the previous one.

Similarly, the term 'blessed people' is still ambiguous that who are the people blessed by God? So the sixty-ninth verse of the Sūrah al-Nisā is the interpretation of the seventh verse of sūrah 'al-Fatiha' in which the 'blessed people' have been enlisted that they are 'The

messengers' the truthful, those who bear witness to the truth and the righteous.' ⁵⁴

The conclusion may be drawn that the Qur'ān explains itself too and such type of interpretation is definitely the most absolute and the most authentic. Inter-textuality should necessarily be the part of one's study while trying to understand the Qur'ān and then translate or interpret it into the language other than Arabic.

Prof. Abdel Haleem has utilized this technique also because he is fully aware of the fact that how much useful it may be in explaining one passage of the Qur'ān in the light of the other. He remarks about the use of this method throughout in his footnotes to the translation. He himself highlights the importance of this approach in the introduction to the translation in following words:

“It has frequently been remarked that different parts of the Qur'ān explain each other, and utilization of the relationship between the parts of the Qur'ān was considered by Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328ce) to be the most correct method. He explained: ‘What is stated in a general way in one place is explained in detail in another; what is stated briefly in one place is explained at length in another.’ The reader will find in the footnotes to the translation examples of how useful this technique is in explaining the meaning of ambiguous passages of the Qur'ān. ⁵⁵

In reply to a question asked by Halal Monk as, ‘One of the verses which I find quite exemplary for the somewhat 'softer tone' of your translation is 14:4. In most translations I read “God leads astray” while you translate as “God leaves to stray”. That seemed a small but important difference to me for it implies a lot more choice and less determinism’. ⁵⁶

Prof. Abdel Haleem said emphatically that to him Inter-textuality bore much importance. His reply is given here, let's observe it.

“In my translations I always keep in mind what the Qur'ān says in other passages. In this case, we have to refer to the beginning of chapter 2, verse 26, where it is said that God leads astray only those who already choose to be astray. On top of this, linguistically speaking, this particular form of the verb can also be translated in the sense of “He finds them

misguided or astray”. So yes, it is less direct than is often translated.”⁵⁷

So Abdel Haleem has opted for the technique of Inter-textuality while translating the Qur'ān and definitely it is very useful and authentic approach.

Scientific Approach

Prof. Abdel Haleem is fully aware of the scientific development in every field of life. He has translated the verses pertaining to scientific facts quite accurately. ‘He has translated some verses pertaining to physical or biological worlds in a scientific way.’⁵⁸ Some examples from his translation of such verses are quoted here in order to analyze his scientific approach.

Verse 33 of the sūrah al-Anbiya’ reads: ‘each floating in its orbit!’⁵⁹ The terms ‘Float’ and ‘orbit’ are taken from the vocabulary used in the particular field of Physics dealing with planets and their revolving. The verse 2 of the sūrah 96 titled al-‘Alaq reads as:

“He created man from a clinging form!”⁶⁰

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Sultan Shah’s research concludes that the rendition of the term ‘al-‘Alaq into ‘clot’, and ‘clot of congealed blood’⁶¹ is not correct and he quotes Elmarsafy in his support: “According to Zaid Elmarsafy, Abdel Haleem uses the more accurate ‘the clinging form’ for ‘*alaq*.”

To Prof. Shah the rendition by Pickthall, A.Y.Ali and Daryabadi, ‘is incorrect if modern embryological knowledge is kept in mind. There is no such stage as blood clot in whole development of human embryo!’⁶²

Approach towards the Status of Women

It is gathered from the study of his translation and his other writings that he is distinctive in his views about women, like the issue of witness, and veil etc. He sets a portion in his introduction to the translation titled ‘Issues of Interpretation’ and tries to highlight the verses misinterpreted by Muslim and non-Muslim translators and interpreters. To him, one of the issues of interpretation is the translation or interpretation of the verses related to women. The translators have erred while translating the verse 2: 228 and instead of ‘husbands’ and ‘wives’ they have generally regarded them as ‘men’

and 'women'. He further explains that the verse 2: 282 deals with money matters where the followers are being encouraged to record their loans in written form so that the money of lenders may not be lost fraudulently.⁶³

Prof. Abdel Haleem points out that situation of witness described in the verse as 'if there are not two men, then a man and two women' would be taken in a cultural perspective where women were not literate nor had they much exposure. And now women of today can be witness alone because some women can have more exposure than men in the field of economics and accounting. He says,

"It calls on people to do this in a cultural environment where women generally were less involved in money matters and calculations than men, and less literate. Modern interpreters take the view that the cultural context is different now and that a woman can be as well educated as a man or even better. Therefore they confine this verse to its cultural context and allow a woman now to give witness alone, just as she is allowed to be a judge on her own."⁶⁴

Thus he is convinced that women can give witness alone and differs from the orthodox opinion.

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Sultan Shah has pointed out that Abdel Haleem translates the verse 33:59 differently because it deals with the veil of the Muslim women. He says "His views about veil are different from the orthodox scholars living in Islamic countries. He has translated verse 33:59 as follows:

"Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and women of believers to make their outer garments hang over there so as to be recognized and not insulted: God is most forgiving, most merciful". In the footnote he says that the Arabic idiom *adna al-jilbab* means 'make it hang low, not 'wrap around'.⁶⁵

Approach towards the People of the Book:

One of his modified views is his lenient attitude towards the Christians and the Jews. He has a softer opinion than that of the orthodox Muslim scholars. A general perception prevails among Muslims that when a 'Rasūl' (messenger) is sent after the previous one, the previous 'shariah' is abrogated by the new. Though the basic and fundamental beliefs like to believe in Allah Almighty and His oneness,

in His prophets, Revealed Books, His angels and the Day of Judgment remain the same yet the ritual practices, matrimonial laws, laws of inheritance and the concept of Halal and Haram may change time to time and place to place in the shariahs of different messengers.

Prof. Abdel Haleem has strong opinion that Christians and Jews are allowed to practice their own religion even today and by doing so they may become pious in the eyes of God. The views of Abdel Haleem can be observed in the following lines:

“...it has to be borne in mind that the word islam in the Arabic of the Qur'ān means complete devotion/ submission to God, unmixed with worship of any other. All earlier prophets are thus described by the Qur'ān as Muslim. Those who read this word Islam in the sense of the religion of Prophet Muhammad will set up a barrier, illegitimately based on this verse, between Islam and other monotheistic religions. The Qur'ān clearly defines its relationship with earlier scriptures by saying: ‘He has sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth, confirming what went before: He sent down the Torah and the Gospel earlier as a guide for people’. Indeed it urges the Christians and the Jews to practise their religion. They are given the honorific title of ‘People of the Book’, and the Qur'ān appeals to what is common between them: ‘Say, “People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as Lords”’.

“The Qur'ān forbids arguing with the People of the Book except in the best way and urges the Muslims to say: ‘We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God are one [and the same]’. God addresses Muslims, Jews and Christians with following: We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you matters you differed about’. The Qur'ān allows Muslims to eat the food of the People of the Book and marry their women. These are explicit statements which Muslims involved in interfaith dialogue rely upon.”⁶⁶

He expresses the same views in an answer to a question by Halal Monk in his interview.

“As you know, the Qur'ān recognizes the scriptures sent to Moses and Jesus and acknowledges the prophets of these traditions. It says that all prophets came with the same message: to believe in one God and call people to act according to His law and it confirmed that they would have to account for their deeds on Judgement Day. That certainly affects my view. People often forget that the Qur'ān calls upon Jews and Christians to stick to the teachings sent to them by God. So, as a Muslim, I would also like Christians to be very good Christians and Jews to be very good Jews. Some aren't, but I have also had the good fortune to meet some Christians that truly were living saints. I have met more Christians than Jews, but I'm certain there are saintly Jews as well. So I don't condemn or judge people on the basis of their faith because I know from the Qur'ān and the Hadith that only God has the sole right to judge who goes to hell or paradise. No-one else can claim this right.”⁶⁷

Actually, Dr. Abdel Haleem and Muhammad Asad have taken the terms '*islam*' and '*muslim*' in their literal meanings not in the meanings associated after the promulgation of Islam as a religion proclaimed by the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and the followers of that specific religion. Prof. Haleem has pointed it out in the extract quoted above and Muhammad Asad has also remarked in his preface to the translation by him.⁶⁸

To him, in the verse 62 of sūrah al-Baqarah each of the mentioned communities is promised to have a reward on the deeds done by him. There is no specification of the Muslims only. They all will receive the reward of their deeds today in this world and tomorrow in the next one.

Conclusion

To encapsulate discussion, the translation of the Qur'ān into other languages began in very early days of Islam. The recitation and translation of the verses of sūrah Maryam in the court of Abyssinian Negus and then the translation of the verses written on the letters sent by the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) to the heads of neighbouring lands in their courts are the incidents of Qur'ānic translation in the life of the Prophet

(ﷺ). After his demise, Salman the Persian, Musa Ibn Sayyar al-Aswari and Qutaibah are recorded to translate The Qur'ān. This practice was extended with the passage of time and now the Holy Book has been translated into almost all the languages of the world.

Abdel Haleem translated The Qur'ān into English in 2004. He enjoys a unique position among the translators of the Holy Qur'ān as he is an English-speaking Muslim, an Arab, a linguist and a lexicographer. His translation is marked with the features like brevity, currency and accuracy of language. Archaic and Biblical expressions have been avoided. Structure and style have been made easy. Introductions to sūrahs and brief foot notes make the Qur'ānic themes and meanings accessible. Thematic paragraphing has made the text reader-friendly. He appears quite original in his translation by not following his predecessors blindly. His approach towards Arabic rhetorics is scholarly. Particularly, he stresses grammatical shift refuting the Orientalists like Noldeke. Classical and modern Arabic have also been observed skillfully.

The technique of inter-textuality has been applied aptly. His modern and scientific approaches are also remarkable. His knowledge of scientific issues is up to date. He gives different opinion about women on the issues like *hijab* and witness. He considers *the People of the Book* Muslims if they practice their religion in true way and translates the verses related to them accordingly. Over all, he has been successful in the provision of an accurate, modern and balanced rendition.

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