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Qur'anic Studies in Colonial South Asia: Evolution and Intellectual Transformations

Sömürge Dönemi Güney Asya'da Kur'ân Araştırmaları: Gelişim ve Entelektüel Dönüşümler

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ABSTRACT

Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi's (d. 1999) statement, "The Qu'ran was revealed in Arabia, recited in Egypt, and comprehended in India," highlights South Asia's pivotal role in Qur'anic scholarship. The colonial power not only greatly weakened the political authority of the Muslim community in the Indian Subcontinent, but also deeply affected its social structure. This led to a transformation in intellectual traditions over time. In this context, thinkers such as Shah Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī advocated the reinterpretation of the Qur'an as a strategic means of resisting Western epistemological influence. Particularly following 1857, this *tajdid* movement, systematized by subsequent generations (specially Deoband-rooted *ʿulamāʾ*, sometimes Aligarh and Ahl-i Hadith rooted *ʿulamāʾ*), sought to restore the Qur'an's connection to its historical context and to revitalize its social relevance. During this period, Qur'anic studies expanded beyond the intellectual elite, with translations into vernacular languages enhancing accessibility. While classical exegetical traditions continued, certain interpretations began to incorporate Western epistemological and methodological influences, particularly those of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his followers. Moreover, some *ʿulamāʾ* actively sought to integrate traditional Islamic scholarship with contemporary intellectual frameworks, fostering a nuanced reconfiguration of Qur'anic interpretations. This study contends that these transformations were intrinsically linked to the colonial milieu, wherein shifting socio-political structures and intellectual encounters with Western epistemologies necessitated novel approaches to Qur'anic interpretation and dissemination. This article explores the profound impact of colonialism on Qur'anic studies in South Asia, analyzing how the colonial environment shaped the development of Qur'anic thought, influenced interpretations, and transformed the intellectual landscape of Muslim scholarship.

Keywords: Qur'an, Interpretation, South Asia, Colonialism, ʿUlamāʾ, Politics

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ÖZ

Ebü'l-Hasan Ali en-Nedvî'nin (ö. 1999) "Kur'ân Arabistan'da indirildi, Mısır'da okundu ve Hindistan'da anlaşıldı" ifadesi, Güney Asya'nın Kur'ân ilmi üzerindeki önemli rolünü vurgulamaktadır. Sömürgeci güç, Hint Alt Kıtası'ndaki Müslüman toplumun siyasi otoritesini derinden sarsmış ve toplumsal yapıyı çok boyutlu bir zayıflama sürecine sokmakla kalmayıp aynı zamanda entelektüel geleneklerin yeniden şekillenmesine de yol açmıştır. Bu süreçte Şah Veliyyullah ed-Dihlevî (ö. 1762) gibi mütefekkirler, Batı'nın epistemolojik nüfuzuna karşı Kur'ân'ın yeniden anlamlandırılmasını stratejik bir direniş aracı olarak öne çıkarmışlardır. Özellikle 1857 sonrasında, sonraki nesiller tarafından sistematik bir nitelik kazanan bu tecdit hareketi, Kur'ân'ın tarihsel bağlamla ilişkisini yeniden tesis etmeyi ve onun toplumsal canlılığını ihyayı hedeflemiştir. Bu dönemde, Kur'ân çalışmaları entelektüel elitlerin ötesine geçerek genişlemiş ve yerel dillere yapılan çeviriler, erişilebilirliği artırmıştır. Klasik tefsir gelenekleri sürdürülürken bazı yorumcular, Batılı epistemolojik ve metodolojik etkileri entegre etmeye başlamışlardır. Ayrıca bazı ulema, geleneksel İslami ilimleri çağdaş entelektüel çerçevelerle bütünleştirme çabasıyla, Kur'ân yorumlarını ince bir şekilde yeniden yapılandırmayı teşvik etmişlerdir. Bu çalışma söz konusu dönüşümlerin, değişen sosyo-politik yapıların ve Batılı epistemolojilerle olan entelektüel karşılaşmaların; Kur'ân'ın yorumlanması ve yayılması için yeni yaklaşımlar gerektirdiğini ve bunların sömürge ortamı ile derin bir şekilde bağlantılı olduğunu savunmaktadır. Makale, sömürgeciliğin Güney Asya'daki Kur'ân çalışmaları üzerindeki derin etkisini araştırarak bu ortamın Kur'ân düşüncesinin gelişimini nasıl şekillendirdiğini, yorumları nasıl etkilediğini ve Müslüman ilim dünyasının entelektüel manzarasını nasıl dönüştürdüğünü analiz etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kur'ân, Tefsir, Güney Asya, Sömürgecilik, Ulema, Siyaset

Introduction

South Asia, with its rich history and intellectual traditions in religion, language, and culture, plays a key role in the Islamic scholarly tradition. The region has made significant contributions and has a deep academic discourse in this field. Scholars who grew up on this famous ground have contributed to almost all fields of religious sciences such as Qur'an-Tafsīr, Hadith, Fiqh, Qalam and Sufism. The Indian subcontinent, which has a rich Muslim civilization, has produced great scholars such as Imam Rabbani Ahmed Sirhindi (d. 1624), Shah Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1762), Qādi Thanā'ullah Pānipatī (d. 1810), Abdul Aziz al-Dihlawī (d. 1823), Siddiq Hasan Khan (d. 1890), Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898), Shaykh al-Hind Mahmud Hasan Deobandi (d. 1920), Hamiduddin Farahi (d. 1930), Ashraf Ali Thānawī (d. 1943), Ubaydullah Sindhi (d. 1944), Abul Kalam Azad (d. 1958) and Abū al-Aʿlā Mawdūdī (d. 1979), who are widely recognized in Islamic scholarship for their studies of Islamic thought as well as the Qur'an. The Qur'anic scholarship of scholars trained in this region has evolved through distinct stages, leaving a significant impact on the global history of Qur'anic studies. Moreover, it can be argued that they played a pioneering role in shaping certain aspects of contemporary Qur'anic thought.

However, religious schools of thought that emerged in the colonial environment, such as Deobandi, Ahl-i Qur'an, Ahl-i Hadith, Nadwat al-ʿUlamāʾ and Barelvi, made important contributions to Qur'an studies. Each of these schools has made significant contributions to Qur'anic studies, whether by adhering to traditional interpretations, adopting modern perspectives, or seeking a synthesis of both. These schools emerged in response to social, political and religious developments following interactions with colonialism. They played a significant role in the history of Qur'anic studies by seeking to disseminate their perspectives and mobilize the Muslim masses. Initially, nearly every school focused on translating the Qur'an. This was followed by efforts in Qur'anic exegesis, leading to the development of various interpretive works by scholars from different schools. In addition, scholars who were not affiliated with any school also translated the Qur'an or wrote Qur'anic interpretations to awaken Muslim society with their personal efforts. Consequently, many scholars concur with the perspective of the renowned regional scholar Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (d. 1999), who observed that "The Quran was revealed in Arabia, recited in Egypt, and comprehended in India."[1] Ali Nadwi made this assessment based on the Qur'anic studies that emerged during the colonial period. The colonial context significantly influenced the expansion and intensification of Qur'anic scholarship in South Asia, marking a critical juncture in the region's intellectual history. It is also important to note that the history of Qur'anic scholarship in South Asia traces its origins to the late 7th and early 8th centuries AH. Early foundational contributions came from scholars such as Shaikh Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad Shurayh Marikli (d. 684 AH) and Abu

1 Muhammad Riza al-Islam Nadwi, *Bar-i Saghir Mayn Mutala'a-yi Qur'an: Ba'z 'Ulama' Ki Tafsiri Kawishon Ka Ja'Iza* (Lahore: Maktaba Qasim ul-'Ulum, 2008), 9.

Bakr Ishaq Ibn Taj al-Din Abul Hasan (d. 736 AH), whose intellectual endeavors established the groundwork for subsequent advancements in Qur'anic studies.

To systematically analyze the research problem, this study is structured into three main sections, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The first section examines the colonial policies imposed on Muslim societies and their broader socio-political ramifications. This section provides the necessary contextual background by exploring the structural transformations that influenced the evolution of Qur'anic studies, which will be discussed in subsequent sections. The second section offers a historical overview of the Qur'anic exegetical traditions before the 19th century. By tracing the trajectory of pre-colonial Qur'anic scholarship, this section aims to establish a comparative framework for assessing the intellectual shifts that occurred with the advent of colonial rule. This historical analysis serves as a foundation for understanding the epistemological and methodological transformations in Qur'anic studies during the colonial period. The third and central section of the study focuses on the evolution of Qur'anic scholarship during the colonial period, analyzing key intellectual transformations and the impact of colonialism on exegetical approaches and methodologies. This section critically examines how colonial encounters shaped the trajectory of Qur'anic thought and the reconfiguration of Islamic intellectual traditions.

The study employs a historical and socio-political contextual approach, integrating primary and secondary sources alongside existing academic scholarship to develop a comprehensive analysis. In terms of methodology, discourse analysis and content analysis are utilized to examine textual sources and scholarly debates, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the shifts in Qur'anic studies during the colonial era.

While South Asian Qur'anic scholarship has been widely explored in academic discourse, the prominence of Qur'anic studies during the colonial period and the underlying reasons for its intellectual evolution remain underexamined. Although scholars such as Muhammad Qasim Zaman, SherAli Tareen, Johanna Pink, and Kamran Bashir have addressed aspects of this issue, their works have only partially engaged with the broader implications of colonialism on Qur'anic thought. By bridging this gap, this study aims to contribute to the scholarly discourse on the historical evolution of Qur'anic studies in colonial South Asia.

1. Colonial Politics and South Asian Muslims: Background of Intellectual Transformations

Historically, despite the absence of a direct land border between the Indian Subcontinent and the Arabian Peninsula, Islam began to spread in the region as early as the era of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad. The long period of Muslim dominance in the Indian Subcontinent holds substantial religious and political significance in global history, affecting both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The conquest of Muhammad ibn Qasim al-Sakafi (d. 715) in the early 8th century marked the beginning of Muslim influence in the region. This influence

gradually expanded across the region, establishing a lasting presence that continued formally until 1857. However, from the late 17th century, this influence faced gradual erosion with the advent of British colonial interests. Meanwhile, the British had taken control of the Bengal region of the Indian subcontinent as a result of the Battle of Plassey in 1757, and by 1857 they had controlled almost the entire region, including Bengal-Calcutta and Delhi.[2]

Consequently, Muslim political power experienced a rapid decline, culminating in the complete transfer of regional control to the British following the defeat of indigenous forces during the 1857 independence struggle. In the aftermath of this period, Muslims faced a deep sense of despair and an increasing inferiority complex concerning their religious, cultural, and civilizational identity. This sentiment was shaped by a combination of socio-political and economic factors, some of which will be illustrated below. Moreover, the presence of superstitions and religious innovations (bid'ah) contributed to an intellectual stagnation among Muslims, further deepening their setbacks in the social and political spheres. The British capitalized on this vulnerability, strategically shaping the religious, cultural, educational, and political landscape of the Muslim community to align with colonial interests, thereby consolidating their influence and control.[3] To achieve this objective, the British colonial authorities effectively utilized various strategies, including the extensive expansion of missionary schools, the shift of the official language from Persian to English, the imposition of political pressure on Muslims, and the systematic removal of Muslims from official state positions.

The decline of the Muslim community can be partly attributed to internal factors, but the British colonial policies to maintain control over the region also played a crucial role and should not be overlooked. Unlike the Muslim population, other religious communities in the region were largely unopposed to British colonial activities. This response was partly due to a weakened adherence to their own religious traditions and a willingness to capitalize on the political shift. For instance, a report prepared in 1838 by the English Baptist missionary William Adam (d. 1881) on the Bengal region, where the Muslim population was concentrated, reveals stark disparities in educational representation. Of the 24,211 teachers employed in institutions offering instruction in the local language, only 1,260 were Muslims, whereas the remaining 22,951 were Hindus.[4] Another government survey, analysing data from 1850 to 1878, highlights a profound disparity in professional and academic attainment among religious groups. The survey identified 3,155 Hindus who had achieved professional qualifications as doctors, engineers, and lawyers or who had completed undergraduate and postgraduate

2 Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 19–20.

3 For the situation of the Muslim community after the 1857 incident, see. Aftermath of 1857's Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*, 19–30; Belkacem Belmekki, "The impact of British Rule on the Indian Muslim Community in the nineteenth Century," *ES: Revista de filología inglesa* 28 (2007), 27–46.

4 William Adam, *Third Report on The State of Education in Bengal* (Culcutta: Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1838), 17–33; Azizur Rahman Mallick, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal, 1757 - 1856* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1977), 188.

education. In stark contrast, only 57 Muslims had similar qualifications.[5]

The above-mentioned figures clearly show the poor educational status of Muslims at that time. This significant imbalance reflects the limited access to advanced education and professional opportunities available to Muslims during this period. This picture of the backwardness of Muslims was equally valid for the entire region of the Indian Subcontinent. British colonial policy favoured Hindu communities over Muslims, and the figures discussed above illustrate how this strategy was effective in reshaping the region's social hierarchy. Previously well represented in state institutions, Muslims were systematically displaced by policies favouring Hindu appointments. For instance, during that period, when job advertisements were given, it was stipulated that the candidate should not be Muslim.[6]

At one time, Indian Muslims achieved significant progress in education and various fields, with few communities worldwide placing as much emphasis on education. Access was highly egalitarian, as even individuals earning a modest income of twenty rupees per month could provide their sons with an education comparable to that of high-ranking officials, including prime ministers.[7] A society once marked by advancement soon faced profound decline due to the British Empire's meticulous colonial and occupation policies.[8] As the primary focus of this study lies elsewhere, the discussion will be limited to these examples of the conditions encountered by Muslims during the colonial period. It is contended that the preceding analysis offers adequate context for comprehending the socio-political realities under colonial rule.

The British, initially arriving with the primary objective of trade, soon expanded their activities to include Christian missionary endeavours as circumstances permitted. Over time, they deepened their influence by establishing educational and research institutions within predominantly Muslim regions, embedding themselves within the local society. This presence provided Western orientalists, who had previously lacked direct access to such environments, with the opportunity to conduct extensive studies on Islamic thought and practices. In this context, prominent Orientalists specializing in Qur'anic and Prophetic studies, including Aloys Sprenger (d. 1893), Karl Gottlieb Pfander (d. 1865), William Muir (d. 1905), Edward Sell (d. 1932) and Elwood Morris Wherry (d. 1927) are noteworthy figures who spent substantial periods in British South Asia.[9] Muslim scholars and thinkers did not remain silent in response to the works of these Orientalists; rather, they sought to produce intellectual rebuttals. For example, in response to Karl Gottlieb Pfander's *Mīzān al-Ḥaqq*, a work critical of Islam, Raḥmat Allāh Kayrānwī (d. 1891) authored *Iẓhār al-Ḥaqq*. Likewise, in response to William

5 Tariq Hasan, *The Aligarh Movement and the Making of the Indian Muslim Mind* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2006), xxvi–xxvii.

6 Abbas Ali Khan, *Banglar Musulmander Itihash (History of Bengal Muslims)* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Islamic Centre, 1994), 286.

7 Charles Creighton Hazewell, 'British India', *The Atlantic* I/I (November 1857), 85–93.

8 Belmekki, 'The impact of British Rule on the Indian Muslim Community in the nineteenth Century', 27–46.

9 Abdulhamit Birışık, *Oryantalist Misyonerler ve Kur'ân: Batı Etkisinde Hint Kur'ân Araştırmaları* (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2004), 92–127.

Muir's *Life of Mahomet*, Sayyid Ahmad Khan wrote *Khuṭabāt-i Aḥmadiyya*, and Sayyid Amir Ali (d. 1928) produced *The Spirit of Islam*, offering alternative perspectives and defences of Islamic principles.

In this overview, we examined the colonial policies directed at the Muslim community, with a particular focus on the domains of education and research. In response to these policies, the Muslim *ʿulamāʾ*/scholars shifted towards scholarly endeavours, with a renewed focus on the Qur'an. This study will examine the nature, scope, and distinctive features of the intellectual transformations in Qur'anic studies produced by Muslim scholars and thinkers in these circumstances. Therefore, before delving into Qur'anic studies during the colonial period, it would be logical to first provide a brief historical overview of Qur'anic studies in the region.

2. Pre-colonial Trajectories of Qur'anic Exegesis

This section aims to provide a concise summary, rather than an exhaustive review, of the origins and development of Qur'anic translation and interpretation efforts in South Asia. It will highlight key works and prominent approaches to understanding and interpreting the Qur'an that emerged before the colonial period. From the earliest periods until the mid-18th century, during the time of Shah Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, Qur'anic exegeses and related works in the Indian Subcontinent were primarily authored in Arabic or Persian. However, as Persian gradually declined in prominence following the weakening of Muslim political authority, the production of Qur'anic scholarship shifted towards Urdu. This linguistic transition was significantly influenced by the efforts of Dihlawī's sons, who contributed to the establishment and spread of Urdu as a scholarly language within the Muslim community. Salim Kidwai's doctoral thesis, *Hindustan Mufassirīn Aur Un Ki Arabi Tafsīrein*[10] (Indian Mufassirs and Their Arabic Commentaries), and Zubaid Ahmad's work, *The Contribution of India to Arabic Literature,* provide us with significant insights into the historical development of the Arabic Qur'anic exegesis in the region. Additionally, Salih Abdulhakim Sharafuddin's work, *Qur'an-i Hakim ke Urdu Tarajim*, along with Muhammad Arif Omari's Urdu text, *Tazkire-i Mufassirin Hind*, published by the Shibli Academy in 1995, are exceptionally informative contributions to the study of the history of Qur'anic exegesis in the Indian Subcontinent.

Regarding the historical works of Tafsīr mentioned above, while it is certain that the earliest exegetical works in the region were composed in Arabic, the exact chronology of these initial contributions remains a subject of scholarly debate. Salim Kidwai and Muhammed Arif Omari identify the works *Kashshaf al-Haqāiq Wa Qamus al-Daqāiq* by Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Shureyhi Marikli (d. 1285) as the earliest examples of Tafsīr in the region.[11] In contrast, Zubaid Ahmad regards the exegesis *Tabsir al-Rahmin wa Taysir al-Mannan* by

10 Published as a book under the same title in 1993 at Lahore.

11 Muhammad Salim Kidwai, *Hindustani Mufassirin Aor Un Ki Arabi Tafsirain* (Lahore: Idara-i Maârif-i Islami, 1993), 1.

Ala'uddin Aḥmad al-Mahāʾimī (d. 1432) as the region's inaugural work in Tafsīr.[12] In addition, Abdulhamit Birışık, recognized as the pioneering Turkish scholar on Indian Tafsīr studies, posits in his work, that the earliest Tafsīr produced in the region was *Jawahir al-Qur'an,* authored by Abu Bakr Ishaq Ibn Taj al-Din Abul Hasan (d. 736 AH). Birışık references this assertion through *ʿUlamāʾ-i Panjab ki Tafsīr-i Khidmat*, underscoring the foundational role of this work in the tradition of exegesis in the Indian subcontinent.[13] However, Omari gives third place to this commentary in her Tazkira/anthology. What is interesting here is that Omari mentions the interpretation of *Garāʾibu'l-Qurʾān wa ragāʾibu'l-furqān* by Nizam al-Dīn al-Nīsāpurī (d. 1329-30) in the second place in his work. Umari, in fact, based his assertion on a note found in a compilation copy of the exegesis, where it is stated that "Nisāpurī mentions at the conclusion of his exegesis of Surah Nisa that it was written in Dawlatabad, India, in the year 730 AH". However, he also posits the view that this statement may not have originated from Nisāpurī himself, but rather from the compiler of the work. Furthermore, he argues that this information alone is insufficient to conclusively establish that the commentary was composed in India.[14]

Given the available information, it remains challenging to assert definitively which Tafsīr represents the earliest work within the region. However, an analysis based on chronological evidence, specifically the date of death, would position Shureyhi Marikli's (d. 1285) *Kashshaf al-Haqāiq Wa Qamus al-Daqāiq* as a potential candidate for the earliest regional exegesis. While a definitive conclusion regarding the earliest tafsīr in the region remains elusive, evidence suggests that exegetical studies likely commenced in the late 7th and early 8th centuries of the Hijri period. This timeframe marks the initial development of interpretative scholarship in the region, laying the foundation for subsequent contributions to Qur'anic exegesis. This divergence in scholarly perspectives underscores differing interpretations of the origins of regional exegesis and points to a complex historiography that warrants closer examination for a clearer understanding of the early development of tafsīr literature in this context.

The earliest Qur'anic exegeses referenced *Kashshaf al-Haqāiq Wa Qamus al-Daqāiq*, and *Tabsir al-Rahmin wa Taysir al-Mannan fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾân* by Mahāʾimī (d. 1432) represent significant contributions to Sufi Tafsīr literature. Mahāimi, a renowned Sufi from Maharashtra, was deeply influenced by the philosophical and metaphysical ideas of Muhyiddīn Ibn Arabī (d. 1240).[15] Abu Bakr Ishaq Ibn Taj al-Din Abul Hasan (d. 736 AH), the esteemed author of *Jawahir al-Qur'an*, was a distinguished scholar affiliated with the Hanafi school of jurisprudence.[16] His work reflects the intellectual rigor and methodological approaches characteristic of the

12 Zubaid Ahmad, *The Contribution of India to Arabic Literature* (Lahore: Maktaba-i Din-o-Danish, 1946), 15.
13 Abdulhamit Birışık, *Hind Altkıtası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri* (İstanbul: M.Ü. İFVY, 2019), 23.
14 Muhammad Arif A'zami Umari, *Tazkira-i Mufassirin-i Hind,* (A'zamgarh: Dar ul-Musannifin Shibli Academy, 2006), 12. (Upon examining the 1997 Beirut edition published by Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiya, we did not find the information that Umari had encountered)
15 SherAli Tareen, 'South Asian Qur'an Commentaries and Translations: A Preliminary Intellectual History', *ReOrient* 5/2 (2020), 233–256.
16 Birışık, *Hind Altkıtası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri*, 23.

Hanafi tradition, positioning him as a significant contributor to Islamic scholarship within this doctrinal framework. After this information, it would be appropriate to mention some other Qur'an studies that were prominent before colonial times.

An examination of Zubaid Ahmed's work reveals his analysis of fifteen Arabic texts encompassing Tafsīr, Ulūm al-Qurʾān, and various other studies on the Qur'an composed up to 1857. In contrast, Muhammad Arif Omari identifies twenty-four individuals engaged in Qur'anic studies and provides an account of their contributions. Notably, except for Mawlana Qutbuddin Dihlawī (d. 1872), all of these scholars and compilers passed away before 1857. Kidwai identifies fourteen comprehensive works of tafsīr composed before 1857. In addition, he also references several texts that take the form of partial exegeses or surah-specific tafsīr produced within the same timeframe.[17]

In addition to the commentaries, *Tafsīr al-Multaqat* by Sayyid Muhammed al-Husayni-i Gisudaraz (d. 1422) merits particular attention. Gisudaraz, a prominent scholar and member of the Chishti Sufi order, is recognized for his extensive intellectual contributions to the region. This Tafsīr, characterized by its incorporation of Sufi thought, reflects his profound engagement with Islamic mysticism. Portions of the work are preserved in the Nasiriyya Library in Lucknow, while other sections are housed in the India Office Library in London.[18]

The *at-Tafsīr al-Muhammadi* by Shaikh Muhammad b. Ahmed Miyanji (d. 1547) made a significant contribution to Qur'anic exegesis. This commentary is notable for its methodological focus on elucidating the interrelationships between the Qur'anic verses, thereby offering a cohesive interpretive framework. In addition to his exegetical work, Ahmed Miyanji, who embodied both a Sufi and a scholarly disposition, authored an important gloss (hashiyah) commentary on *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī*, further cementing his intellectual legacy in the field of Qur'anic studies.[19] Another significant commentary of this century is the Arabic work of Shaikh Mubārak Nāgorī (d. 1593), titled *Manbaʿ ʿUyūn al-Maʿānī wa Maṭlāʿ Shamūs al-Mathānī*. Mubārak Nāgorī, the father of Abū al-Faydi (d. 1595) and Abu al-Fadl Allami (d. 1602)—both prominent statesmen and scholars during the reign of Akbar Shah—produced a Tafsīr distinguished by its methodological approach. A notable feature of this work is its structured presentation, with each surah's content and thematic significance outlined at the beginning. The Tafsīr also provides a detailed analysis of the *Naskh* (abrogating) and *Mansukh* (abrogated) verses within the exegetical framework.[20] The commentary *Sawāṭiʿ al-Ilhām* by Abū al-Fayḍi, son of Mubārak Nāgorī, is another renowned exegetical work. Notably, it is written entirely in letters without diacritical dots.[21]

Furthermore, the works, *Al-Tafsīrāt al-Aḥmadiyya fī Bayan al-Ayat al-Shar'iyyah* by Ahmed b. Abu Said (d. 1717) stands out as a significant contributor to the field of jurisprudential

17 Kidwai, *Hindustani Mufassirin Aor Un Ki Arabi Tafsirain*, 21–96.
18 Birışık, *Hind Altkıtası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri*, 24.
19 Ahmad, *The Contribution of India to Arabic Literature*, 16–17.
20 Birışık, *Hind Altkıtası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri*, 26.
21 Umari, *Tazkira-i Mufassirin-i Hind,* 94.

interpretation (Tafsīr al-Ahkam). This commentary, which focuses exclusively on verses related to Islamic rulings, continues to hold relevance in the study of legal exegesis. The author, widely known in scholarly circles as Molla Jiwan, was a distinguished teacher of the Mughal Sultan Alamgir Aurangzeb. As indicated by the title, the work is devoted solely to the analysis of legal verses, emphasizing their application and interpretation.[22] Another important work in the field of Qur'anic exegesis is the Arabic commentary *Tafsīr-i Maẓharī* by Thanā'ullah Pānipatī (d. 1810). This work remains widely recognized and respected within the international scholarly community. Thanā'ullah was also a distinguished student of Shah Walī Allāh. Pānipatī, a prominent Hanafi scholar of his time, is renowned for his erudition and methodological rigor. Shah Abdul Aziz al-Dihlawī (d. 1823) famously referred to him as the "Bayhaki of India," underscoring Pānipatī's intellectual stature and his pivotal contribution to Islamic scholarship in the region.[23] In the exegesis of Pānipatī, the interpretative approach is predominantly rooted in the method of narration (*riwāyāt*). His commentary consistently draws upon and aligns with the principles of Hanafi jurisprudence.[24]

Besides the Arabic Qur'anic studies previously mentioned, it is important to acknowledge the contributions of Persian commentaries from this period. Among these, the work of Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Hajegi (d. AH 809?), titled *Bahr al-Ma'ani*, is the earliest known Persian commentary. This work, preserved in the Khudâ Baksh Oriental Library in Patna, is notable for its frequent engagement with theological and philosophical issues.[25] An early Persian commentary, *Bahr ul Mawwaj*, was written by Qazi Shahabudin Dawlatabadi (d. 1445). Honored with the title "Master of Scholars" (*Mālik al-ʿUlamāʾ*) by Ibrahim Shah Sharqi (d. 1443), the Sultan of Jaunpur, Dawlatabadi focused on linguistic and jurisprudential issues in this work.[26] Among the Persian commentaries, *Manhaj al-ṣādiqīn fī ilzām al-mukhālifīn* holds a distinguished place. Its author, Hakim Fath Allah Shirazi, a renowned scholar and philosopher of the Shia tradition, was appointed to the council of wazirs by Akbar Shah, a testament to his scholarly prestige and intellectual contributions. His commentary, much like his other works, exhibits a pronounced influence of Shia theological thought.[27]

It is important to highlight that the first translation of the Qur'an in India was rendered into Persian. The earliest complete translation of the Qur'an, titled *Fath al-Raḥmān bi-tarjamat al-Qurʾān*, was undertaken by Shah Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī.[28] His Qur'anic thought would become a major influencing factor in the development of Qur'anic studies in colonial South

22 Ahmad, *The Contribution of India to Arabic Literature*, 19.
23 Ahmad, *The Contribution of India to Arabic Literature*, 17.
24 Birışık, *Hind Altkıtası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri*, 28; Umari, *Tazkira-i Mufassirin-i Hind,* 204–217.
25 Birışık, *Hind Altkıtası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri*, 30.
26 Umari, *Tazkira-i Mufassirin-i Hind,* 54–64; Tareen, "South Asian Qur'an Commentaries and Translations," 233–256.
27 Birışık, *Hind Altkıtası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri*, 30–31.
28 Umari, *Tazkira-i Mufassirin-i Hind,* 57; Amin Venjara, "Qurʾān Translation in South Asia," *Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism*, ed. Zayn R. Kassam et al., Encyclopedia of Indian Religions (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2018), 573–576.

Asia during the 19th century and beyond. Another significant contribution of Shah Walī Allāh to Qur'anic scholarship is his foundational work on the principles of exegesis, *Al-Fawz al-kabīr fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*.[29] Shah Walī Allāh's Qur'anic thought profoundly influenced Qur'anic studies, especially after 1857, despite the passage of a century. His works gained further prominence during colonial rule, and his sons continued his reformist vision, ensuring its transmission through their intellectual and educational contributions. The Persian translation of the Qur'an by Shah Walī Allāh was later translated into Urdu by his son, Shah Abdul Qadir al-Dihlawī (d. 1815). This Urdu translation is recognized as one of the earliest comprehensive renditions of the Qur'an into the Urdu language.[30] It represents a significant milestone in the intellectual and linguistic history of Qur'anic scholarship in the Indian subcontinent, facilitating broader access to the Qur'anic text for the community and contributing to the evolution of Qur'anic exegesis within the region.

A key aspect of Qur'anic studies during this period was the production of glosses (hashiyah) on classical commentaries, particularly *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī*. Notably, the theologian and logician Abd al-Ḥakīm al-Siyālkūtī (d. 1656) made significant contributions by writing detailed glosses on this commentary.[31] Available sources indicate that before the firm establishment of colonial rule, Qur'an-centered studies were comparatively less prominent than other branches of Islamic scholarship. For instance, Zubaid Ahmad's work identifies only fifteen Qur'anic works produced before 1857, as opposed to twenty-two works on Hadith, eighteen on Fiqh, and twenty-two on Sufism.[32] However, following the intellectual legacy of Shah Walī Allāh and the significant socio-political upheaval of the 1857 War of Independence, Qur'anic studies experienced notable growth. This period saw both an increase in the quantity of works and a marked transformation in their methodological approaches, reflecting the changing intellectual and socio-religious priorities of the era.

3. Evolutionary Portrayal of Qur'anic Studies in the Colonial Period

With the shift in regional power from Muslim rulers to British colonial authority, there was a growing need to rethink the role, function, and accessibility of the Qur'an. This shift reflected the evolving socio-political landscape and the need to adapt Islamic thought and practices to

29 For detailed information on Shah Walī Allāh's Qur'anic works, see. Enayatullah Azimi, *Şah Veliyyullah Dihlevî ve Ailesinin Tefsir İlmine Katkısı* (Eskişehir: Eskişehir Osmangazi University, PhD Dissertation, 2025), 33–45, 171–196.

30 About the early history of Urdu Qur'anic translation. See. Abd al-Ḥakīm Sharf al-Dīn Ṣāliḥa, *Qurʾān-i Ḥakīm Kē Urdū Tarājum: Tāʾrīkh, Taʾāruf, Tabṣara Wa Taqābulī Jāʾiza* (Karachi: Qadīmī Kutub Khāna, 1981), 79–91.

31 Siyālkūtī, *Hasia a'la Anwar al-Tanzil Wa Asrar al-Ta'wil*. His influence on the Ottoman scholarly community was substantial. Siyālkūtī as an Indian scholar, most of his works were published in Istanbul both during his lifetime and afterward. Furthermore, many of his writings were incorporated into the curriculum of the Ottoman madrasahs. For more information, see Abdullah Al Mamun, An Intellectual Biography of '*Abd al-Ḥakīm al-Siyālkūtī (D. 1657): His Place in Hind Intellectual History and Influence upon Ottomans* (Istanbul: Istanbul Medeniyet University, PhD Thesis, 2023).

32 Ahmad, *The Contribution of India to Arabic Literature*, 15–90.

the challenges posed by colonial rule, fostering a renewed emphasis on the Qur'an as a central source of guidance and identity.[33] This trend became more pronounced during intensified colonial dominance, resulting in the emergence of Qur'anic studies that were both quantitatively extensive and qualitatively enriched. As previously noted, the Qur'anic scholarship initiated by the sons of Shah Walī Allāh expanded beyond Arabic and Persian to include Urdu and other regional languages. This linguistic diversification reflected the evolving intellectual and social needs of the time. Moreover, the shifting historical and political conditions under colonial rule compelled the *ʿulamāʾ* to explore new methodologies and frameworks for engaging with the Qur'an, thereby reconfiguring its role and relevance within the changing socio-political landscape.

In response to British colonial dominance, prominent Muslim figures focused on religious and scientific studies to mobilize the Muslim community. Shaped by the social and political conditions of the time, these efforts aimed to counter colonial influence and revive Islamic intellectual and cultural identity. The initiatives to "returning to the Holy Qur'an" and "to reengage with its meanings," as reflected in these studies alongside broader Islamic disciplines, can be regarded as marking the beginning of a new era in the history of Qur'anic exegesis. These efforts not only revitalized the interpretative tradition but also signalled a significant shift in the intellectual approach to understanding the Qur'an considering contemporary challenges and contexts. The concept of "returning to the Qur'an" can be understood as a revivalist call first articulated by Shah Walī Allāh.[34] This call resonated across various intellectual and theological movements, influencing scholars who aligned with diverse approaches, whether rooted in tradition, modernism, or a synthesis of both. Prominent examples include Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898), who championed modernist interpretations; Ashraf Ali Thānawī (d. 1943), who upheld traditionalism within the Deobandi framework; and Ubaydullah Sindhi (d. 1944), who sought to harmonize modernist and traditionalist perspectives.

Although Shah Walī Allāh lived before modernism and rationalism gained prominence, his reform movement in education and social structures played a key role in bridging the divide between modernist Muslims and conservative groups in the Indian subcontinent, especially in the 19th century and beyond.[35] It is possible to see this influence of Shah Walī Allāh in almost all the Qur'an studies conducted in the Indian Subcontinent from the colonial period to the present day. Therefore, we consider it particularly significant that Johanna Pink regards Walī Allāh as an authority in South Asian Qur'anic exegesis and identifies him as the first model for modern exegetical thought.[36] Moreover, it is accurate to assert that his call for a "returning to the Quran" represented the foundational step in the development of modern Qur'anic thought

33 Tareen, 'South Asian Qur'an Commentaries and Translations', 233–256.

34 G. N. Jalbani, *Teachings of Shah Waliyullah of Delhi* (Lahore: Ashraf Press, 1973), 3.

35 J. A. Kalhoro, "Historical Evolution of Educational System in the Pre-Partition Indian Subcontinent," *Pakistan Journal of History & Culture* 39/1 (2018), 159–183.

36 Johanna Pink, "Striving for a New Exegesis of the Qurʾān," *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Schmidtke, S. (Oxford University Press, 2014), 765–792.

in the Indian subcontinent.

Following increased interaction with the West, Qur'anic translation efforts rose significantly. This surge was partly driven by the *ʿulamāʾ*'s renewed focus on the Qur'an in response to contemporary developments, and by the widespread translation and distribution of the Bible by Christian missionaries and Orientalists. Annemarie Schimmel suggests that Shah Walī Allāh's sons, Shah Rafiuddin (d. 1818) and Shah Abdul Qadir (d. 1815), were inspired not only by their father's Persian Qur'anic translations but also by the Urdu Bible translations of Protestant missionaries like Benjamin Schultze and Henry Martyn.[37] In South Asia, Qur'an translation efforts were also carried out with the support of Christian missionaries and British-run institutions. Notably, in 1844, the American Presbyterian missionaries facilitated a Qur'an translation project aimed at supporting interfaith dialogues.[38] Another notable example is the Hindi translation produced in 1803 by Kazim Ali, Amanat Ullah, Mir Bahadur Ali and Maulovi Fazl under the supervision of John Gilchrist at Fort William College.[39] This project was carried out with the support of Mughal Sultan Shah Alam II (d. 1806), reflecting the collaborative engagement between Mughal elites and colonial institutions in the intellectual and linguistic endeavours of the period. Apart from this, there were also attempts by missionaries to translate the Qur'an into other local languages such as Bengali. For example, Sri Philip Biswas's translation was published as "Koran" by the Calcutta Christian Vernacular Society in 1891 and in part form by Reverend William Goldsack between 1908 and 1920.[40]

The widespread translation of the Bible into local languages and missionaries' Qur'an translations, supported by the British administration, prompted Muslim scholars to translate the Qur'an. These efforts intensified in the late 19th century and continued to grow into the 20th century, with Qur'an translation activities experiencing a significant increase in the second half of the 19th century. According to a government report published in 1871, approximately 23000 copies of the Qur'an, or portions thereof, were printed in that year alone.[41] This figure is particularly significant, given the limited demand for general literature during this period. One of the key factors contributing to the significant rise in Qur'anic translation activities during this period was the advent of printing technology in the region. Technological advancements enabled the production and spread of translations, prompting scholars from various intellectual and theological schools to compete in Qur'anic translation efforts. Notable examples include translations by Shaikh Mahmud Hasan Deobandi (d. 1920), Ashraf Ali Thānawī (d. 1943),

37 A. Schimmel, *Classical Urdu Literature from the Beginning to Iqbāl* (Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1975), 205.

38 Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton-New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 202.

39 Ṣāliḥa, *Qurʾān-i Ḥakīm Kē Urdū Tarājum*, 95.

40 Goldsack's translation received a harsh response from the Muslim community at the time. Eventually, this translation was banned. For details about his translation, see D. O. Coffey, *Admitted Truths in Muslim-Christian Dialogue: A Study of William Muir, Sayyid Ahmad Khān and William Goldsack in 19th Century India* (Great Britain: University of Edinburgh, 2003), 106–111; Nur Uddin, *Hint Alt Kıtası'nın Batı Ile Etkileşim Sonrası Toplum ve Siyasetinde Kur'ân ve Hz. Peygamber* (Istanbul: Marmara University, PhD Thesis, 2024), 228–235.

41 Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 204.

and Ahmed Riza Khan (d. 1921), founder of the Barelvi school. The translation of the Qur'an into Persian and Urdu encouraged translations into other local languages in the region. In a short time, translations of the Qur'an were made into languages such as Bengali (1868), Sindhi (1870), Punjabi (1871) and Tamil (1873).[42]

Muslim scholars emphasized Qur'anic translation as a strategic response to Christian missionaries, often supported by colonial authorities, translating and spreading the Bible in local languages. The translations aimed to make Islam more accessible to the general public. Shah Walī Allāh was the first to explicitly state that his translation was intended to benefit the wider Muslim community, promoting religious awareness among lay audiences.[43] The same intent is evident in the works of Shah Walī Allāh's sons, including Shah Abdul Aziz's *Fath al-Aziz*,[44] Shah Muhammad Rafiuddin's *Tafsīr-i Rafi'i*, and Shah Abdul Qadir's *Mūḍiḥ-i Qur'an*. Additionally, the translation undertaken by Sayyid Ahmed Khan (d. 1898) and his assistant Nazir Ahmad al-Dihlawī (d. 1912) holds particular significance. To make the translations of this period understandable, less importance was given to preserving the Arabic word order and style, with the desire to present them in natural and idiomatic language.[45] For instance, Nazir Ahmad's 1895 translation was prepared in a fluent and accessible style, intentionally avoiding strict adherence to the Arabic text. However, this approach attracted criticism from certain scholars for its perceived lack of textual fidelity. Ashraf Ali Thānawī, for example, authored an article titled *Iṣlaḥ-ı Tarjuma-i al-Dihlawīyye* specifically to critique Nazir Ahmad's translation.[46] The focus on accessibility continued in Mawdūdī's (d. 1979) *Tafhimu'l-Qur'ān*, echoing Dihlawī's (d. 1762) approach. Mawdūdī's preface highlights that the work was written for readers with average education and no prior knowledge of Arabic, continuing the tradition of making the Qur'an accessible to a wider audience.[47]

Shah Walī Allāh's Qur'an translation efforts, continued throughout the 19th century, influenced both translation and tafsīr activities, aiming to make the Qur'anic message more accessible. As Sher Ali Tareen notes, this movement not only emphasized the importance of translating the Qur'an into various languages but also shaped the style and approach of later translations during the colonial period.[48] In the 20th century, the Qur'anic translation and exegetical efforts gained even greater momentum, and this progress continued unabated into the post-colonial period. These endeavours have remained a vital part of Islamic scholarship, reflecting the sustained engagement with the Qur'anic sciences across changing socio-political

42 Venjara, "Qurʾān Translation in South Asia», 573–576.

43 Shah Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, *Fath Al-Raḥmān Bi-Tarjamat al-Qurʾān* (Karachi: Nur Muhammad Aasih al-Matâba ve Karkanah Ticaret-i Kutub, 1980), 2.

44 For details about this tafsir and its methodology, you can see.Enayatullah Azimi - Fatih Tok, 'The Tafsir Methodology of the Indian Scholar Shah Abdulaziz Dehlawi', Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi 12/1 (15 March 2025), 163–185.

45 Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 203.

46 Ṣāliḥa, *Qurʾān-i Ḥakīm Kē Urdū Tarājum*, 243–244.

47 Abū al-Aʿlā Mawdūdī Mawdūdī, *Tafhim Al-Qur'ān* (Lahore: Idaratu Tarjumanu al-Qur'an, 1999), I/5–6.

48 Tareen, "South Asian Qur'an Commentaries and Translations" 233–256.

contexts. Thus, due to the socio-political context of the period, Qur'anic translation studies transcended mere academic inquiry and became a catalyst for religious reform and the broader dissemination of Islam.[49] It can be argued that before this period, Qur'anic studies were not undertaken with the goal of religious reform and widespread dissemination.

To better understand the intellectual evolution of Qur'anic studies during this era, we will examine works from the mid-19th century, when colonialism began, to the mid-20th century, its most active period. Key contributions from influential figures in both socio-political and intellectual spheres will be highlighted. From the early 19th century to the end of colonial rule in 1947, hundreds of Qur'anic studies were produced, including complete and partial translations, full commentaries, and surah-specific works.[50] However, given the scope and focus of this study, only a selection of the most prominent works will be discussed to highlight their significance and impact. The discussion will proceed chronologically, based on the dates of death of the *ʿulamāʾ*, to systematically analyse their works and contributions to Qur'anic studies.

The analysis begins with Siddiq Hasan Khan (d. 1890), a key scholar and founder of the Ahl-i Hadith school, whose contributions to tafsīr emerged after 1857. Serving in an administrative role in the Bhopal government, he played a crucial role in making Bhopal a center of Islamic scholarship focused on the Qur'an and Sunnah.[51] Among Siddiq Hasan's most significant contributions to Qur'anic studies are his Arabic exegeses, *Fatḥ al-Bayan fi Maqāṣid al-Qurʾân* and *Nayl al-marām min tafsīr ayat al-Ahkām*, along with his Urdu work, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān bi-Latā'if al-Bayān*. These works were composed during the colonial period, a time when bidʿah (innovations) and superstitions were widespread in Muslim society. Consequently, Siddiq Hasan's exegetical approach emphasized narration (*riwāyāt*) and relied heavily on authenticated traditions. Notably, his works eschewed Isra'iliyyat (narratives of Judeo-Christian origin).[52] Siddiq Hasan held the view that interpretations of the Qur'an should not be based on rational sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqlīyah*) but should instead rely exclusively on narrations (*riwāyāt*) transmitted from the early generations of Islamic scholarship (*salaf*). He considered this approach the only valid methodology for authentic exegesis.[53] It can be argued that Siddiq Hasan's intellectual stance was shaped, in part, by his contemporaneity with proponents of rationalism, such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) and his affiliation with the Ahl-i Hadith school, which stood in opposition to the ideas of the Ahl-i Qur'an movement.

Another important point should be mentioned that, Hasan Khan worked to show that his Ahl-i

49 K.A. Khan and J.P. Pink, "Daʿwa and Qur'an Translation in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 26/2 (October 1, 2024), 1–15.

50 Key sources that provide valuable insights into South Asian Qur'anic works include the Turkish book *Hind Alt Kıtası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri* (Birışık) and the Urdu works *Tazkira-i Mufassirin-i Hind* (Umari), *Hindustani Mufassirin aur Un ki Arabi Tafsīrāt* (Kidwai), *Qur'ân-ı Majid Key Urdu Tarajim*, and *Ṣāliḥa's Qurʾān-i Ḥakīm kē Urdū Tarājum*.

51 Birışık, *Hind Altkıtası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri*, 119.

52 Rahmatullah, *Contribution of Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan to Quranic and Hadith Studies* (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, PhD Thesis, 2015), 131.

53 Seyyid Hamid Sattari, *Qur'ân-ı Majid Key Urdu Tarajim u Tafasir Ka Tankidi Mutala'a* (Haydarabad: Nizami Urdu Trust, no date), 438–439.

Hadith school was not opposed to the colonial government. His book *Tarjumān-i-Wahhābīyyah* aimed to gain British favor, asserting that under British rule, the Indian subcontinent was *Darul-Islam* and that jihad against the British was illegitimate. He also criticized those involved in the 1857 War of Independence.[54] Although he did not provide direct evidence from the Qur'an to support these views, the perspectives he expressed in his Qur'anic studies indirectly benefited the British colonial government. Siddiq Hasan did not directly express his own views in his commentary, but the narrations he quoted clearly aligned with his Ahl-i Hadith school. For example, in the commentary on verse 190 of Surah al-Baqarah, he emphasizes that war in Islam is only allowed for defence. He references the Prophet's hadith during the conquest of Mecca: "Kill those who draw their weapons against you, but grant safety to those who do not resist." Siddiq Hasan Khan also disagrees with the view that this verse is abrogated by Surah at-Tawbah "Kill the polytheists wherever you find them"[55], instead interpreting it as "Fight those who fight you," promoting retaliation against enemies of Islam.[56] In support of this view, he cited the relevant part of Ibn Kathir's commentary by directly quoting it.

This interpretation reflects the Ahl-i Hadith school's approach, which sought to maintain a good relationship with the British. The narrations Siddiq Hasan uses reinforce this passive stance towards the British. This view, which allows only defensive wars, was criticized by scholars like Ubaydullah Sindhi, who took a more active stance against the British. This contrast shows that the Ahl-i Hadith school avoided a politically awakening society.

Hasan Khan's key contributions to Qur'anic scholarship, including works in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, gained widespread recognition. His Arabic commentary, *Fatḥ al-Bayan fî Maqāṣid al-Qurʾân*, was praised by Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II, who awarded him the Majīdī Order.[57] Additionally, He made significant contributions to Muslim cosmopolitanism both as *Amir* of Bhopal and through his intellectual works.[58]

It is indispensable for our subject to discuss the Qur'anic works of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, a key figure advocating modernism and rationalism during the colonial period, made significant contributions to Qur'anic studies. As an intellectual leader of the Ahl-i Qur'an school, his *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* was pivotal in shaping contemporary Qur'anic discourse. Before his commentary, Khan wrote on Qur'anic topics in his journal *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, which he started in 1870. The first volume of his commentary, covering the Qur'an up to Surah Isra, was published in 1879, and the second volume was released posthumously in 1898.[59] According to some scholars, the pressures and challenges posed by the modern colonial context are most evident in Khan's

54 Siddiq Hasan Khan, *Tarjumān-i- Wahhābīyyah* (Lahore: Dar-i Matba Muhammadi, 1312h), 13–16.
55 Surah at-Tawbah 9/5.
56 Siddiq Hasan Khan, *Tarjumān el-Qur'ān Bi-Latā'if al-Bayān* (Lahore: Maktaba Ashabul-Hadith, 2003), II/80–85.
57 Rahmatullah, *Contribution of Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan*, 132–133.
58 See details, Seema Alavi, 'Siddiq Hasan Khan (1832-90) and the Creation of a Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the 19th Century', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 54/1 (2011), 1–38.
59 Kamran Bashir, *The Qur'an in South Asia: Hermeneutics, Qur'an Projects, and Imaginings of Islamic Tradition in British India* (London-New York: Routledge, 2022), 90.

commentary. This work was composed during a period of heightened missionary activity and critical engagement with the Qur'an and the Prophet by Orientalist scholars. Consequently, Khan's exegesis reflects an apologetic dimension, as he sought to address contentious issues by drawing parallels and attempting to validate certain Qur'anic concepts through references to the Bible. Simultaneously, Khan sought to respond to the critiques of missionaries and Orientalists by addressing the concept of prophetic miracles and the Qur'an's status as a miracle through a rationalist lens. Consequently, this commentary, heavily influenced by rationalism and modern scientific thought, diverged from traditional exegetical frameworks on certain issues. In his Qur'anic works, Khan addressed both Muslim and Western audiences, aligning the Qur'an with modern scientific approaches like rationalism and positivism. He argued that the Qur'an is fully consistent with the laws of nature, asserting that any lack of compatibility would imply a weakness in Allah's perfection, which he considered impossible.[60]

Ahmad Khan interpreted the destruction of Abraha and his elephant army in Surah al-Fil metaphorically, claiming their death was caused by a plague spread by the birds, rather than by the birds and stones themselves. His comment on this matter is as follows:

> The Qur'an informs us that a disaster struck Abraha's army, leading to its destruction. While the Qur'an does not specify the nature of this disaster, the context of the Qur'anic text and historical events suggest that it was likely a plague or smallpox. This disease spread rapidly within Abraha's army during the siege of Mecca, causing widespread death among both people and animals, ultimately leading to the army's defeat. Allah has described this event in this Surah.[61]

Ahmad Khan also claimed that the drowning of the Pharaoh in the sea was not due to the miracle of Prophet Moses but due to the tides in the sea and that Prophet Moses' staff had no role in opening the way to cross the sea.[62] It can be said that Khan approached the Qur'an as a whole through this principle, aiming to interpret its teachings in a way that aligns with human reasoning, experience, and observation, while adhering to the cause-and-effect relationships promoted by naturalism, rationalism, and positivism. Consequently, in his exegesis, he did not address all the verses of the surahs but focused particularly on those that mentioned miracles and unseen truth, such as the Prophet's *mi'raj* and the birth, crucifixion, or death of Jesus, his ascension to heaven, the incident of the Elephant, Pharaoh's drowning in the sea, and matters related to angels, demons, and devils. In short, he interpreted the verses that appeared to contradict the method he termed the law of fitrah. For example, he explained the event of the Prophet's mi'raj in Surah Isrā according to the principle he adopted and interpreted the Prophet's mi'raj as an event that did not happen physically. According to Khan, this event should only be understood as the spiritual journey of the Prophet. He claims that this event took place in the Prophet's dream, and that even if an event is not described as a dream in the Qur'an, it can be understood from

60 Nadvi, *Bar-i Saghir Mayn Mutala'a-i Qur'An*, 22–36.

61 Sayyid Ahmad Khan, "Ashab-i Fil ka Vaqi'a," *Maqālāt-i Sir Sayyid*, ed. Ismā'īl Pānīpatī (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqī-yi Adab, 1984), II/116–127.

62 Nadvi, *Bar-i Saghir Mayn Mutala'a-i Qur'an*, 20.

the context and the way it is told that it was a dream.[63]

Ahmad Khan's interpretation of Islam and the Qur'an, using Western academic methods, challenged core Islamic beliefs and posed a threat to traditional religious sciences, drawing strong opposition from most *ʿulamāʾ*. Even in a 1911 lecture (Lucknow), Missionary Canon W.A. Wilson also argued that the liberal ideas promoted by Khan and others would eventually undermine religious beliefs, even if unintentionally. This missionary stated that the religious community in the region was justified in their concerns, as they feared losing their faith. He also claimed with joy that their critical approach to the Qur'an, based on reasoning and rational methods, would make it impossible to prove its truth, questioning the belief in the Qur'an as the word of Allah.[64]

The above-mentioned Siddiq Hasan Khan and Sayyid Ahmad Khan did not oppose the British government politically. The following text will discuss the Qur'anic works of those who actively resisted colonialism. Among them, the concise commentary and translation of the Qur'an by Shaikh al-Hind Mahmud Hasan Deobandi (d. 1920), titled *Muḍiḥ-i Furqān*, holds significant importance. Shaikh al-Hind, a prominent scholar and anti-colonial figure, contributed significantly to Islamic scholarship and educated key figures like Ashraf Ali Thānawī and Ubaydullah Sindhi. While imprisoned by the British on Malta, he wrote treatises such as *Muḍiḥ-i Furqān*. Mahmud Hasan argued for a new Qur'anic translation, despite existing Urdu versions, citing the inadequacy of previous translations in conveying the true meaning of the Qur'anic text.[65] During his solitary confinement on Malta, he reflected on India's societal issues, identifying internal conflicts and the Muslim community's disconnect from the Qur'an as key factors. Rather than creating a new translation, he revised Shah Abdul Qadir al-Dihlawī's (d. 1790) translation, updating it with contemporary language. According to Mahmud Hasan, while Shah Abdul Qadir's original translation is notable, some of the words have become outdated over time. Additionally, in an effort to remain faithful to the Qur'an and the principles of translation, Abdul Qadir occasionally rendered the text in a condensed form, which can be challenging for contemporary readers seeking clarity. To address these issues, Mahmud Hasan introduced substantial revisions and supplemented the translation with new content.[66]

Akhlaq Husain Qasimi, in his review *of the Mahasin Muzihi Qur'an* on Shah Abdul Qadir al-Dihlawī's translation, notes that Mahmud Hasan completed this work using simple language, making it easily understandable for readers, while also infusing it with a sense of jihad.[67]

63 Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an* (Lahore: Dost Associates, 1995), VI/91–118. (Ahmad Khan addressed the event of the *Mi'raj* in all its aspects in a volume that can be regarded as a treatise. His views on this topic can be found on pages 1-123 of the relevant volume.

64 Canon W.A. Wilson, 'The Situation in India', *Islam and Missions*, ed. E. M. Wherry - S. M Zwemer (Second Missionary Conference on behalf of the Mohammedan World Held at Lucknow, London-New York-Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1911), 141–158.

65 Mahmud Hasan - Shabbīr Aḥmad ʿUthmānī, *Tafsīr-i Uthmanī* (Karachi: Dar al-Isha'at, 2007), 11–12.

66 Hasan - ʿUthmānī, *Tafsīr-i Uthmanī*, 12–13.

67 Akhlaq Husain Qasimi, *Mahasin Muzihi Qur'an* (Lahore: Zinnureyn Academy, 1983), 95–97.

Mahmud Hasan believed his Qur'anic translation would benefit both scholars and the general public, and it became widely used during the later years of colonial rule. Muhammad Qasim Zaman notes that Shah Abdul Qadir's translation remains a key guide for Indian Muslims, largely due to Mahmud Hasan's revival of the anti-colonial movement. He also highlights that the publication of this translation, with with commentary footnotes *(Tafsīr-i Uthmanī)* by Shabbir Ahmad Uthmanī, Mahmud Hasan's student, further strengthened its role in the anti-colonial struggle.[68] This Urdu commentary is highly regarded in the Indian subcontinent and has been translated into several other languages, including Bengali, Persian, and English.

The works of Hamiduddin Farahi (d. 1930) were instrumental in introducing significant innovations to Qur'anic studies during the British period. His most notable contribution is his commentary, *Tafsīr Niẓām al-Qurʾān wa Taʾwīl al-Furqān bi'l-Furqān*. In his work, Farahi used the methodology of interpreting the Qur'an through itself, aiming to uncover the coherence between verses and surahs. A key aspect of his studies is his emphasis on Nazm al-Qurʾān (the coherence of the Qur'an). Motivated by critiques from Western Orientalists, who claimed the Qur'an lacked consistency, Farahi introduced a new understanding of Nazm/Nizam and developed a program to restructure Islamic sciences with the Qur'an at its core.[69] As a result, he became the focal point of Qur'an studies in his time and in subsequent generations.[70]

Among the most impactful Qur'anic studies produced during the colonial period, the works of Ashraf Ali Thānawī (d. 1943) hold a prominent place. Thānawī, a highly influential scholar of the Deobandi school, is recognized as one of its foremost contributors to the Qur'anic sciences. Compared to other Deobandi scholars, he demonstrated a particularly extensive engagement with Qur'anic studies, solidifying his reputation as a key figure in the exegetical tradition of the colonial era. Ashraf Ali Thānawī's most renowned Qur'anic contribution is his twelve-volume commentary, *Bayan al-Qur'an*. He felt that the Qur'anic works of Shah Walī Allāh and his family had not penetrated the society sufficiently. Consequently, he felt compelled to produce a commentary and translation tailored to the language, style, and sensibilities of contemporary audiences. In the introduction to his translation and commentary, he emphasizes his deliberate efforts to craft a work that is linguistically rich and dialectically inclusive, ensuring its accessibility and appeal to Muslims across South Asia, transcending regional particularities.[71] In the twentieth century, Qur'anic translations increased significantly in the Indian subcontinent, with various schools of thought publishing works to promote their ideologies. Some aligned with Western thought, while others deviated from traditional interpretations, at times even veering into heresy. Thānawī criticized most translations for

68 Muhammad Qasim Zaman, 'Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi, His Successors, and the Qurʾān', *Ways of Knowing Muslim Cultures and Societies* (Brill, 2018), 280–297.

69 Bashir, *The Qur'an in South Asia*, 2022, 164.

70 Farahi authored numerous Qur'anic studies. For a detailed exploration of his contributions, see...Orhan Güvel, *Hamîduddîn El-Ferâhî (ö. 1930) ve Niẓāmu'l-Kur'ân ve Te'vîlu'l-Furkān Bi'l-Furkān Adlı Tefsiri* (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi, Doktora Tezi, 2019); Bashir, *The Qur'an in South Asia*, 2022, 170–193.

71 Ashraf Ali Thānawī, *Tafsīr Bayān Al-Qurʾān* (Lahore: Maktaba Rahmaniyya, no date), I/6.

not following established principles and for contradicting core Islamic tenets, calling for a new translation to address these inaccuracies.[72] It is evident that he crafted his translation and commentary in a language and style that resonated with the understanding and sensibilities of contemporary society.

The main characteristics of Ashraf Ali Thānawī's *Bayan al-Qur'an* commentary include a focus on the relationship between verses and surahs, as well as the naẓm (coherence) qualities of the Qur'an. It also preserves and continues traditional Qur'anic commentary ideas while being written in a style that is accessible to the general audience.[73] As observed in Farahi's work, this feature is connected to the assertion that the Qur'anic texts exhibited inconsistencies during the colonial period. Likewise, Thānawī's focus on the relationships between verses in his exegesis can be interpreted as a direct rebuttal to these claims. Additionally, his adherence to traditionalist views, while addressing contemporary needs, serves as a counter-response to modernists like Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who, influenced by Western thought, abandoned traditional interpretations and approached the Qur'an through modern rationalism. The fact that his commentary was written in a language accessible to the general public reflects the social conditions of the time, as there was a concerted effort to make the Qur'an more accessible to the people in order to reform Islamic society under colonial rule.

Having a Sufi personality, Thānawī also dealt with Sufi issues in his commentary work. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, who wrote an intellectual biography about him, says that Thānawī clearly presented Sufism as a part of the Qur'anic sciences in his work *Bayan al-Qur'an*.[74] The Sufi thoughts of the region, which had started to deteriorate during the reign of Akbar Shah, became even more corrupt during the colonial period. To address this, Thānawī authored significant works aimed at reforming Sufi thought. In these writings, he consistently emphasized the primacy of *Shariʿah* over *Tariqah*, advocating for a reorientation of Sufism that remained firmly grounded in Islamic legal and theological principles.[75]

Another key example for understanding the developments and transformations of Qur'anic studies of South Asia is Ubaydullah Sindhi (d. 1944), who gained prominence as a socialist *mufassir*.[76] Throughout his life, Sindhi actively engaged in political resistance to British colonial rule. In his work *Qur'ānī Shu'ūr-i Inqilāb* (The Qur'an's Conscience of Revolution), he presented the Qur'an as a manifesto for revolution. Sindhi argued that revelation and revolution are inherently interconnected, asserting that the Qur'an is a revolutionary text advocating for

72 Thānawī, *Tafsīr Bayān Al-Qurʾān*, I/6.

73 Uddin, *Hint Alt Kıtası'nın Batı Ile Etkileşim Sonrası Toplum ve Siyasetinde Kur'ân ve Hz. Peygamber*, 276.

74 Muhammad Qasim Zaman and *Ashraf Ali Thanawi: Islam in Modern South Asia* (Oxford: Oneworld Academic, 2008), 84.

75 Şâh Muînuddîn el-Hâşimî - Cüneyd Ahmed el-Hâşimî, 'Eşref Ali (Tehanevî) Tânevî'nin Reformist Düşüncesinde Tasavvuf', trans. Yakup Yüksel - Muhammet Ali Tekin, *Namık Kemal Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi (NKUIFD)* 3/2 (15 December 2017), 333–364.

76 In his work on Sindhi, Birışık explores how Sindhi's socialist views shaped his interpretation of the Qur'an. see.. Abdulhamit Birışık, *Sosyalist Müfessir Ubeydullah Sindi'nin Dini-Siyasi Düşüncesi ve Tefsiri* (Bursa: Emin Yayınları, 2012).

a global transformation aimed at dismantling injustice and uplifting the marginalized.[77] He, deeply influenced by the ideas of Shah Walī Allāh, authored a work titled *Shah Waliullah aur Unki Siyāsi Taḥrīk* (Shah Walī Allāh and His Political Movement), exploring al-Dihlawī's political thought. Sindhi remarked:

> Imam Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī has removed the obstacles to understanding all the letters and meanings of the Qur'an for the people of our time and has made it very easy to comprehend this great book. To claim, even in such circumstances, that the Holy Qur'an cannot be understood represents the highest degree of deviation.[78]

Sindhi, who later embraced Islam, reflects on the colonial period and asserts that the root cause of the numerous challenges faced by Indian Muslims—such as ignorance, moral corruption, and social division—was their failure to adhere to the original teachings of the Qur'an.[79] Sindhi, who embraced Islam by his own choice and regarded the liberation of Indian Islamic society as his life's foremost duty, viewed the Qur'an as the sole source of solutions to social issues and political crises. Unlike other scholars, he tried to portray the Qur'an as a revolutionary manifesto.

He focused on an intellectual and scientific struggle to free the colonized society from the grip of colonial power. Aiming to revitalize Indian Muslims, Sindhi sought to convey the revolutionary message of the Qur'an to society through his works. For example, in his commentary *Qur'ānī Shu'ūr-i Inqilāb*, he named the surahs in a manner never seen before. He referred to Surah al-Fātiḥa as the "Qur'anic Foundation of Revolution," Surah al-'Aṣar as the "Qur'anic Rules/Principles of Revolution," Surah al-Mujādala as the "Qur'anic Revolutionary Party," Surah al-Hashr as the "Qur'anic Steps towards Revolution," Surah al-Mumtaḥana as the "Qur'anic Law of Revolution," Surahs al-Muzammil and al-Mudaththir as the "Qur'anic Program for Revolution," Surah Muḥammad as "The Qur'anic War of Revolution," Surah al-Fath as the "Qur'anic Title of Revolution," and Surahs al-Ikhlas, al-Falaq, and al-Nas collectively as the "Qur'anic Idea of Revolution."[80] He tried to translate and interpret the Surahs in accordance with the names he gave them.

To understand the Qur'anic thought of the colonial period, it is essential to consider the works of Thanā'ullah (Sanaullah) Amritsarī (d. 1948). A prominent member of the Ahl-i Hadith school, Amritsarī played a key role in the intellectual debates of his time. He was particularly engaged in significant discussions with Christian missionaries and Hindu Arya Samaj scholars. Additionally, he actively participated in polemics and authored refutations against the Qadiyani, Barelvi, and Ahl-i Qur'an schools, reflecting the dynamic and contested religious environment of the colonial era. Amritsarī's contributions to Qur'anic studies include the Arabic commentary *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi-Kalām al-Raḥmān* and the Urdu work *Tafsīr-i Thanāʾī*. He authored his

77 Ubaydullah Sindhi, *Qur'ānī Shu'ūr-i Inqilāb* (Lahore: Makka Dar al-Kutub, 1999), 103, 348, 420–421.
78 Sindhi, *Qur'ānī Shu'ūr-i Inqilāb*, 103.
79 Ubeydullah Sindhi, *Kur'ân-ı Pâk Ka Mutâli'a Keysey Kiyâ Câey* (Lahore: Darul-Kitap, 2003), 70.
80 Sindhi, *Qur'ānī Shu'ūr-i Inqilāb*, Qur'ānī Shu'ūr-i Inqilāb, p. 51;105;161;181;227;259;289;405;511.

Urdu commentary with the specific aim of refuting views considered heretical, particularly those of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the proponents of the Ahmadiyya movement.[81]

Amritsarī wrote his Urdu commentary primarily to protect society from misguided ideas by making the meanings of the Qur'an accessible to the general public. In his translations and commentaries, he did not rigidly adhere to the Arabic wording but instead adopted a simple and natural language style.[82] Amritsarī wrote his commentary to defend the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) against the discourses of missionaries, orientalists, and the Arya Samaj during the colonial period. Unlike other commentators, he dedicated much of the introduction to providing evidence for Muhammad's prophethood, addressing efforts by missionaries and orientalists to undermine both the Qur'an and the Prophet. His statement, "it is important to consider the reputation of the person who brought[83] the book before reading it," and his use of Biblical references to support the Prophet's prophethood,[84] were likely motivated by this context. Furthermore, his particular emphasis on the relationship between verses in his commentary[85] was likely a response to Western attempts to portray the Qur'an as a disjointed and incompatible text.

In addition, one of the key issues Amritsarī addressed in this commentary, in response to Christian missionaries, was the birth, death, and ascension of Jesus, as well as the Christian belief in him as the son of God. While interpreting nearly all the Qur'anic verses related to Jesus, Amritsarī aimed to present the correct understanding of Islam by addressing the claims of Christians and Jews on this matter.[86] He strongly criticized Christians, referring to them as the "ignorant friends" (نادان دوستوں) of Jesus.[87]

A primary goal of this commentary was to counter the efforts of the Hindu Arya Samaj, in collaboration with Christian missionaries, to weaken the Muslim community by exploiting colonial divisive policies. The Arya Samaj had occasionally sought elements in the Qur'an to support their own beliefs. For instance, they used the 56th verse of Surah al-Nisa, "Lo! Those who disbelieve Our revelations, we shall expose them to the Fire. As often as their skins are consumed, we shall exchange them for fresh skins that they may taste the torment," as evidence to justify their core belief in reincarnation. Amritsarī addressed this issue extensively, aiming to refute these claims.[88]

While scholars discussed so far are associated with specific regional schools of thought, individuals not tied to any particular school also made significant contributions to colonial-

81 Birışık, *Hind Altkıtası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri*, 157–162; Bashir, *The Qur'an in South Asia*, 2022, 80.
82 Thanā'ullah Amritsarī, *Tafsīr-i Thanā'ī* (Lahore: Maktaba-i Quddusiyya, 2002), I/18.
83 Here, Amritsari used the phrase صاحب کتاب for the Prophet.
84 For detailed information, see.. Amritsarī, *Tafsīr-i Thanā'ī*, I/6–18.
85 Amritsarī, *Tafsīr-i Thanā'ī*, I/18.
86 For examples of his explanations in this regard, see his commentary on Al-i-Imran 3:42-45 and an-Nisa 4:56-58. Amritsarī, *Tafsīr-i Thanā'ī*, I/18. pp. I/197-199, 339-340.
87 The subject that the *mufassir* has elaborated on in detail is summarized briefly here. See... Amritsarī, *Tafsīr-i Thanā'ī*, I/197–198.
88 For Amritsarī's answers on this issue, see... Amritsarī, *Tafsīr-i Thanā'ī*, I/302–305.

era Qur'anic studies. Notably, Abul Kalam Azad's (d. 1958) *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* stands out. Azad's education, anti-colonial activism, and scholarly work were independent of established schools, showcasing his unique intellectual approach within the broader landscape of colonial-era Qur'anic studies. In the introduction to his commentary, Azad discusses various obstacles to understanding the Qur'an and proposes potential solutions. He argues that the quality of the science of interpretation has gradually declined over time from the early days of Islam to the present. To address this issue, Azad advocates an objective approach to the Qur'an, emphasizing methodologies such as interpreting the Qur'an through the Qur'an itself (tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi'l-Qurʾān), which he considers essential for revitalizing the discipline of Qur'anic interpretation.[89]

Azad, similar to Farahi, emphasized the importance of understanding the relationships between verses and surahs in interpreting the Qur'an. He often criticized pre-modern commentaries for portraying the Qur'an as a fragmented and disjointed text.[90] His advocacy for nationalism and interfaith unity is reflected in his Qur'anic commentary. For example, in support of his theory of religious unity or pluralism, he cited the verses from Surah Yunus (10:19*),* "Mankind was [once] a single community (united in faith)" and from Surah Baqarah (2:213), "Once mankind were one community," as evidence.[91]

Faruqi, in his evaluation of *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, observes that Azad's work, influenced by the thought of the Egyptian reformist Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), bears similarities to Abduh's *Tafsīr al-Manār*, despite differences in content.[92]

As noted, ideological divisions among the *ʿulamāʾ* significantly influenced Qur'anic studies during this period. Works such as *Bayan al-Qurʾān* by Ashraf Ali Thānawī and *Kanz al-Īmān fi Tarjumat al-Qurʾān* by Ahmed Riza Khan illustrate how these divisions shaped Qur'anic interpretation. These works, along with others from the Deoband, Ahl-i Qur'an, Ahl-i Hadith, and Barelvi schools, provide valuable insights into the era's Qur'anic scholarship. Birışık adopts this approach in analyzing interpretation studies based on these theological divisions.[93]

The colonial period witnessed a substantial increase in the number of Qur'anic studies compared to earlier periods. Beyond the works discussed here, there exists a vast array of studies that reflect the rich intellectual activity of this era. However, to maintain the scope of this study within manageable limits, it has been necessary to focus exclusively on a selection of prominent works, leaving many other significant contributions unaddressed.

During the colonial period, as Muslims faced the erosion of their religious identity under colonial influence, scholars and intellectuals turned to the Qur'an as a means of reclaiming

89 See the details of his opinion on this issue in Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjuman Al-Qur'an* (Lahor: Islami Academy, 1976), I/9–11.

90 Kamran Bashir, *The Qur'an in South Asia: Hermeneutics, Qur'an Projects, and Imaginings of Islamic Tradition in British India* (London: Routledge, 2022), 204.

91 Azad, *Tarjuman Al-Qur'an*, I/176–186.

92 Imadulhasan Azad Faruqi, *The Tarjuman Al-Quran: A Critical Analysis of Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad's Approach to the Understanding of the Quran* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982), 47.

93 See for details… Birışık, *Hind Altkıtası Düşünce ve Tefsir Ekolleri*, 113–246.

their sense of self. As a result, some advocated for understanding the Qur'an strictly through the traditionalist approach, while others argued that it should be interpreted solely through narrations. At the same time, some rejected both approaches and sought to understand the Qur'an through rationalist ideas, creating a complex and diverse intellectual environment regarding the Qur'anic interpretation. However, in this circumstance, efforts to enhance access to the Qur'an and encourage its reading and understanding among the general public have gained significant momentum. By the early 20th century, Qur'anic study assemblies in mosques and homes became widespread in colonial South Asia. These gatherings led to the emergence of scholars who, though not educated in traditional religious madrasahs, rose to prominence as *ʿulamāʾ* due to their involvement in the movement to understand the Qur'an. These scholars, like those from religious madrasahs, earned the respect of the public but did not adhere to existing interpretations of the Qur'an. Instead, they developed their own methods of understanding. In the Indian subcontinent, prominent figures such as Abul Kalam Azad, Abū al-Aʿlā Mawdūdī (d. 1979), and Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī (d. 1977) are notable examples. In addition, figures such as Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī translated the Holy Qur'an into languages such as English to facilitate *Da'wa*[94] and extend its reach beyond their own communities.

Conclusion

South Asia, a key region in the Islamic world, remained under British colonial rule for an extended period. During this time, it is well-documented that the colonial power sought to impose its own civilizational ideas alongside establishing political dominance. Following a period of political decline, the Indian Muslim society experienced stagnation in various areas such as education, culture, and the economy. In response, Muslims undertook both scholarly/intellectual and political efforts to preserve their existence and identity. Consequently, the intellectual activities previously undertaken by Muslims gained new momentum, driven by the leadership of prominent scholars and thinkers in society. One notable example of this resurgence is the rise of Qur'anic translation efforts, initiated by Shah Walī Allāh's sons, as a response to the growing influence of British power.

Before the colonial period, most of the Qur'anic works were written in Arabic, because they were primarily intended for scholars rather than the general audiences. However, with the rise of British influence, Qur'anic works began to be written in local languages. As colonialism intensified, the number of such works increased, particularly in languages spoken by Muslims, such as Urdu. This study concluded that the primary motivation behind this shift was to make the Qur'an more accessible to the general public. Although the first significant step in facilitating access to the Qur'an for the general public began with Shah Walī Allāh, it can be argued that Qur'anic studies underwent a transitional phase from his time through to the first half of the

94 Matthew J. Kuiper, "ʿAbd Al-Mājid Daryābādī's Tafsīr-Ul-Quran and the Daʿwalogy of Abū'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī Nadwī," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 26/2 (October 1, 2024), 128–159.

19th century. Before Shah Walī Allāh, the Qur'an was primarily approached from a mystical perspective, with a tradition of writing annotations (*Hashiya*) to classical tafsīr works. It was also studied from a philological standpoint and in relation to fiqh, particularly regarding the *Ahkamu al-Qur'an* (legal rulings derived from the Qur'an).

During the colonial period in the Indian subcontinent, the nature and focus of Qur'anic studies underwent significant changes. The intended audience of the Qur'anic works expanded beyond Muslims to include Western missionaries, Orientalists, and local non-Muslims. Consequently, Qur'anic works were often composed with the objectives of reforming Muslim society, bolstering its political strength, and addressing criticisms or misconceptions propagated by Christians and Hindus regarding Islam. Furthermore, the intellectual divisions that emerged within the Muslim community, particularly in the post-1857 period, also left their mark on Qur'anic scholarship. Some *'ulamā'* incorporated polemical debates and critiques of other *'ulamā'* into their exegetical and Qur'anic writings. Thanā'ullah Amritsari and Ashraf Ali Thānawī are two important examples in this regard. Another significant characteristic of Qur'anic studies during the colonial period was the shift from traditional methods of interpretation to approaches influenced by modern Western thought, particularly rationalism. Sayyid Ahmad Khan stands out as the most influential figure in this regard. At the same time, the works of prominent scholars such as Siddiq Hasan reflect adherence to the traditional modes of Qur'anic interpretation. However, it is noteworthy that the colonial powers indirectly benefited from his interpretive approach, despite its traditional foundations. The works of scholars such as Ubaydullah Sindhi and Abul Kalam Azad, who sought to bridge the gap between traditional and modern Qur'anic thought and viewed the Quran as a manifesto for revolution, also exhibit notable characteristics of this period.

With the expansion of colonial influence in the region, several key factors contributed to the developments and innovations in Qur'anic studies in South Asia. These factors include the spread of *bid'ah* (innovations in religious practices) and superstitions, the dissemination of Biblical translations, the decline of Muslim political power, the influence of Western thought, the rise of reformist movements, the interpretation of the Qur'an as a tool for resistance, and the emergence of diverse intellectual schools within the Muslim community. Based on these factors, a new category of Qur'anic works from the colonial period can be established. We believe that this category will make a significant contribution to understanding the development and transformation of Qur'anic interpretation in the post-colonial context.

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