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Diya'al-Qur'an: A Unique Qur'anic Commentary and the Commentator

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Abstract:

The Tafsir "Diya'al-Qur'an" was written by Pir Muhammad Karam Shah al-Azhari. It is a unique exegesis of the Holy Qur'an in Urdu language. Pir Karam Shah, was a famous saint of Chishtiyah order, a learned theologian, commentator of the Holy Qur'an, biographer of the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him), jurist, educationist and justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. His grandfather Pir Hafiz Muhammad Shah Ghazi was also a Sufi who took an active part in the Pakistan Movement and Kashmir freedom movement. The forefathers of Pir Sahib include famous Suhrawardi saints like Hazrat Sadr-ud-Din Arif and Hazrat Ghaus Bahauddin Zakariyya of Multan. This article presents a comprehensive study of modern day commentary of the holy Quran.

Keywords:

Tafsir, Diya'al-Qur'an, Pir Muhammad Karam Shah al-Azhari, Hazrat Sadr-ud-Din Arif

A) The Commentator

Muhammad Karam Shah was born on 1st July 1918 in Bhera (Distt. Sargodha). After studying the holy Qur'an, he was admitted in Mohammadia Ghausia Primary School in 1925. Later on, he got admission in Government High School Bhera and did his Matriculation in 1936. He learnt Persian and Arabic grammar from Maulana Muhammad Qasim Balakoti (1899-1939) and Maulana Abdul Hameed. In 1941, he got admission in Oriental College Lahore and passed examination of Fazil-e-Arabi.

On the advice of Khawaja Qamar-ud-Din Siyalwi, he reached Muradabad (now in India) in 1942 for the study of Hadith from Sayyed Mohammad Naeem-ud-Din Muradabadi. Though Maulana Muradabadi was busy in the struggle for Pakistan wholeheartedly but he spared time to teach Hadith to Pir Karam Shah who completed his course in 1943. On this occasion, Maulana Muradabadi said, "I am satisfied today that I have conveyed the trust of religious knowledge and Hadith to the most suitable person".

He graduated from the University of the Punjab in 1945 and then proceeded to Egypt for higher education in 1951 and got admission in al-Azhar University. He did his M.A. Honours in Islamic Law.

Pir Sahib was the disciple (murid) of Khawaja Qamar-ud-Din Siyalwi, under whose guidance he completed spiritual training. He was granted Khilafat in Chishtia order by Khawaja Siyalwi and his father. He became care taker of Pir Amir Shah's shrine after the demise of his father in 1957. Thousands of people took oath (Bay'at) at his hand.

He was not only Sufi and traditional pir but also a great scholar of Islam. He authored many books on Qur'an, Hadith and Seerah. He completed his first book "Sunnat Khayr al-An'am" while he was a student at Al-Azhar University. In this book, he refuted Ghulam Ahmad Pervaiz's views regarding Prophetic traditions. He completed his famous exegesis of the holy

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Qur'an entitled "Diya al-Qur'an" in Urdu language in five volumes. His Urdu translation "Jamal al-Qur'an" has also been separately published. He wrote a detailed biography of the holy Prophet (PBUH) entitled "Diya al-Nabi" in seven volumes. His lectures and articles have been published under the title "Maqalat Diya al-Ummat" in two volumes and speeches delivered by him to the prisoners of Sargodha Jail have also been published under the title "Abr-e-Karam" He also translated Waza'if of Silsilah Chishtia and Dala'il al-Khayrat into Urdu language. He issued a monthly journal "Diya-e-Haram" in 1970 and remained its editor for about 28 years. The editorials written by him under the title "Sirr-e-Dilbaran" were specially admired by literary and religious circles.

Pir Sahib was also an educationist and a very kind teacher. He re-organized "Dar al-'Ulum Muhammadiyyah Ghausiyyah" established by his father in Bhera. He brought drastic changes in the syllabi of religious education. He thought it necessary to impart modern education along with religious education. A beautiful building of main campus was erected near the Khanqah Amir us-Salikeen. Afterwards, al-Qamar Campus was built. This institution possesses a unique position among the religious institutions of the country.

He participated in the Pakistan Movement and canvassed for the Pakistan Muslim League in the 1946 election. Pir Sahib also took an active part in the politics of the country. When the Federal Shariat Court was established, Pir Karam Shah sworn in as justice of the court in June 1981. He was elevated to Shariat Bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. He remained Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan till his last breath.

He was a member of the Advisory Board of Dar-al Mal al-Islami meant for working on Islamic Banking. He also rendered services as a member and chairman of Royat-e-Hilal Committee.

After suffering from illness for a year, he passed away on March 7, 1998. (1)

B) The Tafsir "Diya al-Qura'an"

The "Diya al-Qur'an" is famous exegesis of the holy Qur'an written by Pir Karam Shah. He himself wrote when he completed its first volume: "with full trust in the Almighty, this frail and feeble wayfarer who set out for his goal on the first of Ramadan 1379 A.H. (Monday 29, 1960) has come a long way towards the realization of his mission. The hour is past midnight. The year 1964 has come to an end. The year 1965 has just dawned upon the horizon of life". (2)

The commentator completed the exegesis in such a long period. Actually this is the result of the deep study and contemplation of the scholar. One of his contemporary commentator Sayyed Abu'l-A'la Maududi completed his exegesis "Tafhim al-Qur'an" in thirty years and four months. (3)

Division in Volumes

Pir Karam Shah planned to publish Diya al-Qur'an in three volumes but the matter was too extensive to be published in 3 volumes. So it was decided that the tafsir would be published in five volumes (4) The exegesis was printed accordingly. The tafsir comprises 3575 pages. Following is the detail of each volume:

Volume	Surahs from/ to	No. of Surah included	Pages	Date of Completion
I	Fatihah — An'am	6	672	Sha'ban 27, 1384/ January 1965

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II	A'raf — Bani Isra'il	11	736	1970
III	Al-Kahf — al-Sajdah	15	674	Jamadi al-Thani 1391/ 1971
IV	Al-Ahzab — al-Tur	20	706	1391/ 1972
V	Al-Najm — al-Nas	62	787	Ramadan 29, 1399/ August 23, 1979

Dr. Muhammad Sa'd Saddiqi wrote in his doctoral thesis about Diya'al-Qur'an thus: "This is an excellent exegesis among the Qura'nic commentaries of modern age wherein the knowledge of the predecessors has been presented in beautiful, easy and intelligible way". (5)

Prof. Dr. Khalid Alvi says:

"As a student of Hadith I knew him through his wonderful work "Sunnat Khairul Anam". This intellectual acquaintance developed into mutual respect and, always found him kind and helpful. His academic pursuits brought fruit in the form of "Zia' al-Qur'an" and "Zia' al-Nabi" which remains a source of inspiration for the students of Qur'an and Seerah of the Prophet (PBUH)". (6)

Dr. Mudassar Guallini, an Italian Muslim, thinks that Pir Sahib's tafsir and seerah should be translated into European languages. In this context, he writes:

"We feel that in the west, there is the need of a serious and robust literature from "Muslim to Muslim" and not from "Muslim to Christian" as available at present. This literature can only be found in the masterpieces of the translation and commentary of the Glorious Qur'an (Diya' al-Qur'an) and the Seerat, Zia-ul-Nabi by Zia-ul-Ummah (R.A), which should be properly translated into several European languages". (7)

Preface of Tafsir Diya'al-Qur'an

In the beginning of the first volume of the tafsir, the author has written a preface in 13 pages. According to Dr. Sajid ur-Rahman, the worthy mufissir has described his method of commentary in these pages. (8) Pir Sahib has expressed his gratitude to Almighty Allah and confessed the difficulty to write Qur'anic exegesis. He observes: "a field wherein such past masters in the art and scholarship of history and Tradition as Ibn-e-Jarir and Ibn-e-Kathir, such discerning men-of-letters and learned scholars as Zamakhshari and Ibn-e-Hayan of Andlusia, such scholars and philosophers as Razi and Baidawi, and jurists such as Abu Bakr Jassas and Abu Abdullah of Cordova stand bewildered and breathless with adoration, the intruding of a know-nothing like me is indeed an occasion for wonder and surprise". (9)

He has himself described his mode of translation and interpretation of the holy Qur'an. Afterwards, he has also written a note on collection of the holy Qur'an wherein he discusses the collection and preservation of the holy Qur'an during the caliphate of Abu Bakr Siddiq and Uthman Ghani. Then he has briefly discussed "The arrangement of the Qur'an":

"Most of the Christian orientalisists have raised much hue and cry over this issue and left no stone unturned to prove that the current arrangement was not executed during the period of the holy Prophet (PBUH) but was so affected by the companions later on".(10)

Introduction to each Surah

Allamah al-Azhari has written an introduction to each surah describing the contents of the surah. He has given statistics about the text of each surah and other information pertaining to

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each chapter. For example, he writes about the third surah of the holy Qur'an: "The name of this surah is Ale Imran. There is a consensus of scholars that this is a Madenite surah. It is divided into 20 sections (Rukus) and 200 verses. It comprises 3542 words and 15336 letters". (11)

The author of Diya'al-Qur'an has written the summary of each surah, dividing it in various topics. For example, he has summarized Surah al-Ma'idah (12) in 6 and Surah al-An'am(13) in 7 points. In introduction of some surahs he has also described the period of revelation. For instance, he wrote in introduction to Surah al-Nisa. "According to the opinions of research scholars its revelation began after the battle of Uhud in Shawwal 3 A.H. when the problem of orphans and distribution of inheritance arose after the martyrdom of seventy Muslims. Salat al-Khauf was first offered during the battle of Dhat al-Raqah in 4 A.H. The permission of Tayammam was given in the battle of Banu Mustaliq in 5 A.H. The period of these events indicates that if the revelation of this surah started after the battle of Uhud then its revelation continued till the beginning of 5 A.H".(14)

He has indicated some important events or personalities in the introduction if referred to in that surah. By quoting the number of verses such events are told so that the reader can easily consult the translation and commentary of such verses. For example, according to him, verses 11 to 26 of Surah al-Muddathir allude to Walid bin Maguire. (15) Similarly, in the introduction to surah al-Ahzab, the author has described that an old custom which was specially invalidated by this surah was that of equating adopting sons with real sons. The holy Prophet (PBUH) put an end to this practice by marrying the divorced wife of his adopted son Zayd bin Haritha.(16)

Elucidation by Maps

He has elucidated historical events mentioned in the Qur'an with the help of maps. In this tafsir, he has given 22 maps to elaborate some Qur'anic stories. The battle fields of Uhad, Khandaq and Banu Mustaliq are shown on maps. The areas of Arab tribes and the abodes of famous Arab tribes in the period of the holy Prophet (PBUH) have also been indicated on maps. The trade routes of Quraysh and the migration route have been drawn. Palestine during Maccabees dynasty, the kingdom of Herod, Palestine during Christ's time, Israelite state and Judah, the kingdom of David and Solomon, the area of Noah's nation, the region pertaining to Joseph, Abraham's migration from Ur to Kinnan, the tribal division in Palestine, Beni Isra'il's migration from Egypt, the areas of Ad, Thamud and the nations of Lut and Shoaib are clarified by drawing maps.

Characteristics of Translation

One distinguishing features of his translation is that it is literal and idiomatic at the same time. All translations of the holy Qur'an published earlier were either literal or idiomatic. Shah Abdul Qadir completed his idiomatic translation of the holy Qur'an in 1205 A.H and his brother Shah Rafi'al-Din completed word for word Urdu translation of the Qur'an in 1818 A.H. Introducing a new concept of translation, he wrote:

"The Urdu translations of the holy Qur'an which I have come across are of two types. One is literal i.e. verbatim translation which is disjointed and lacks vehemence of force which is the distinctive quality, nay very soul and substance of the holy Qur'an. The other type is that of idiomatic translation. But the problem in this case is that the word in the text and the translated meaning are so widely spaced that the meaning follows or precedes the word by one or two lines with the result that the reader is in a fix about the proper placement and mental adjustment of the

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word and meaning in a sentence. I have, therefore, thought it fit to blend the two types to ensure the flow of the translated meaning by the translation of every sentence below the text". (17)

The second outstanding feature of the translation is that the writer has very carefully avoided exaggeration, immoderation and other intellectual dishonesty.

Each language has different sentence structure and some words of each language have no equivalent in other language. Arabic is an ancient and rich language and in fact Urdu lags behind Arabic in vocabulary and eloquence. While translating the holy Qur'an, sometimes the translator had to add some words to complete Urdu sentence so that the reader may make sense of the translation or he has to add some explanatory words. That is why, he thought over the issue and solved the problem of additional Urdu words in translation by putting them in brackets

Sources of Diya'al-Qur'an

The sources of Diya'al-Qur'an have been mentioned by the author himself at various places in the tafsir. Prof. Karam Haideri writes about the sources of this tafsir as following:

"While reading the Diya'al-Qur'an a reader is astonished by the extensive study of the Pir Sahib. In his exegesis, he has given the reference of all ancient great commentators, traditionists and historians. Among the ancient scholars Imam Malik, Imam Hasan Askari, Zamakhshari, Baydawi, Qurtabi, Ibn Hayyan Andalusi, Ibn Khaldum, Fadail bin Ayyad, Maulana Rum, Imam Razi, Imam Tirmadhi and other scholars, among companions Abbas, Umar and Ali, and among modern scholars Mujaddid Alf Thani, Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi and among the scholars of our age Mufti Muhammad Abduh, Allamah Iqbal and various contemporary scholars have been referred to in the tafsir. (18)

The books referred to in the tafsir have been classified after collection from all of the volumes, which include exegesis of the holy Qur'an, collection and commentaries of Hadith, seerah, history and geography, lexicography, encyclopaedia, the Bible and other books.

Pir Sahib had immense love and veneration for the the holy Prophet (PBUH). He always kept in his mind the Hadith: "You cannot become believer until I become more endearing to you than your parents, off-springs and all other people". (19) While writing the commentary of Surah al-Akhlis, al-Kauthar, al-Tin, al-Inshirah, al-Duha and at many other places in the Diya'al-Qur'an readers can observe how beautifully the author has eulogized the holy Prophet. He has used beautiful titles for the beloved Prophet. In fact Pir Sahib has prayed to Almighty Allah in the very beginning as follows:

"May my heart be illuminated forever with the love of your beloved Prophet (PBUH) and the collar of his servility may forever adorn my neck" (20)

A Mystic Exegesis

Diya'al-Qur'an is a mystic commentary of the holy Qur'an. As Pir Sahib was a Sufi-scholar, therefore, he benefited from earlier saints who have written Qur'anic exegeses. He has quoted from tafsir "Ruh al-Maani" again and again. He referred to the writings of sufis like Ya'qub Charkhi, Mulla Fateh Allah Kashani, Shah Wali Allah, Imam Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi, Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, Mujaddid Alf Thani, Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehlawi and Maulana Na'im al-Din Muradabadi.

Pir Sahib has avoided unnecessary discussion, however, he wrote in a very lucid manner. Wherever he had to stress upon some important issue, he quoted the references of other Muslim sects to prove his point of view.

Refutation of Rejecters of the Hadith

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Pir Sahib's first publication "Sunnat Khayr al-Anam" was about the authenticity of Sunnah. In this book, he refuted the rejecters of the Prophetic traditions. Actually he wrote it to repudiate Ghulam Ahmad Parwez's thoughts regarding the Hadith literature. In Diya'al-Qur'an, Pir Sahib has also rejected these thoughts. In this regard he observes:

"When it is evident that he is the Apostle for all and the purpose of his Prophet-hood has been told that he should be obeyed. How can a person professing him as the Prophet deviate from his obedience and give irrelevant interpretation of these clear verses? This was the habit of the Jews that they used to accept some verses of the Torah which were according to their desires and misinterpreted others according to their will. Anyhow, it is clear that the Qur'an has reiterated the Prophet's Sunnah unquestionably that all doors have been closed to deviate from the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) after believing the Qur'an as Allah's Book". (21)

Refutation of Orientalists

The author of Diya'al-Qur'an has also refuted the misunderstandings created by the western scholars. He endeavoured to erase such baseless objections raised by dishonest orientalist. For example, after narrating the instructions imparted by Caliph Abu Bakr to his commander Yazid bin Abu Sufyan, he addresses the orientalist who object to the Islamic concept of Jihad and remind them of Islamic ethics of war.(22) At another place Pir Sahib writes that some orientalist have presented strange picture of Islamic Jihad.(23) He rejects all the objections raised by orientalist like William Muir about the personality of the holy Prophet (PBUH).(24) Later on, Pir Sahib wrote his famous book "Diya al-Nabi". He did not forget those orientalist who calumnized the holy Prophet (PBUH) and raised objections about the holy Qur'an.

The Author's Point of View about Science

Pir Sahib had visited a number of countries including western and saw scientific progress there. He had also studied Islamic history wherein he had learnt about the achievements of Muslim scientists. Though he never opposed science but he raised voice against such theories which have not been proved scientifically. For instance, he was not unaware of evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin and refuted it tooth and nail. He had discussed in detail the struggle for existence and survival of the fittest. According to him, the holy Qur'an should be accepted as a touchstone to know the reality about the scientific theories. Commenting on verse 10:2 he writes:

"Some people want to search the details of the creation of universe from the Qur'an. They want to interpret the Qur'an according to the ideas of the thinkers and philosophers of their age but their way of thinking about the Qur'an is not absolutely intellectual, because the thinkers of all periods present their theories as a result of their intellectual activities and people acknowledge them due to their heavy arguments and consider them to be ultimate in that field but the followers and pupils of these thinkers falsify the ideas of their predecessor teachers and lay foundation of grand building of new ideas with heavier arguments... therefore, it is against the spirit of the Qur'an to restrain the Qur'anic verses to any ancient or modern theory".(25)

Finality of Prophethood

According to the holy Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the last prophet of Allah. A number of the Prophetic traditions also support this Qur'anic viewpoint but some false prophets appeared during last fifteen centuries among the Muslims. Pir Sahib has not accepted any possibility of revelation after Prophet of Islam (PBUH). A person claimed to be an apostolic

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prophet in the Punjab during colonial rule. (26) Pir Sahib thought it necessary to emphasise the belief in the finality of prophet-hood and rejected any claim for the office of prophet-hood after the last Apostle of Allah, Muhammad (PBUH). He has discussed Musaylmah, the Liar and his defeat during the caliphate of the first Caliph Abu Bakr who was ultimately assassinated by Abu Bakr's army.(27) Pir Sahib has refuted the false prophet of the Punjab vehemently. Commenting on the verse 5:5 he observes: "This verse is a clear argument for the holy Prophet (PBUH) as the last Prophet because the religion has been finalised and there is no room for change in its injunction, which prevented the need of any new prophet". (28)

Rationalism and Miracles

The author of the Diya'al-Qur'an has tried to tell his readers about the logic and rationale of the Qur'anic injunctions. For example, while commenting on the verse 4:2 he has enumerated 9 points in favour of polygamy and endeavoured to justify this permission granted by the revelation. (29) Similarly, his discussion about Islamic system of inheritance has beautifully described the rationale underlined in the verses of the holy Qur'an. He has deduced three principles i.e., close relation with deceased (Qarabat), necessity (Darurat) and division of wealth.(30) Besides this, Pir Sahib has discussed the miracle of Prophet Isa (Jesus) and his mother Maryam The commentator has enumerated the following five miracles of Christ:

1. forming of bird out of clay by breathing into it;
2. healing the born blind;
3. curing the leper;
4. bringing the dead to life and
5. giving the news of unseen.(31)

Time and again, Pir Sahib has proved the miracles of the holy Prophet (PBUH). He has underlined about the miracles of ascension (Mi'raj) as follows:

"The peculiar style how the holy Qur'an has described the greatest miracle of ascension of the holy Prophet (PBUH) compels our intellect to believe that this event described in the verses of the Qur'an and authentic Prophetic traditions is a truth. There is no room to have any doubt about it".(32) Pir Sahib has refuted the fabricated definition of a miracle and views of Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan but in a decent way. According to him Sir Sayyed has over emphasised upon rationalism and tried to explain every event in terms of laws of nature. It is the result of his defensive attitude towards the objections raised by orientalist.(33)

Index of Exegesis

Pir Sahib has prepared the index of each volume of the tafsir and included it in the respective part. It includes both translation and commentary. The list contains topics under heading and sub-heading and reference of the surah and verse is given in front of it. The Index is detailed and nothing is omitted from it. It is spread over 43 pages in the first volume. The topic of index are: Almighty Allah, Muhammad the Apostle of Allah (PBUH), Islam, Prophet's dignity, commandments, Bani Isra'il, predestination and determinism, Jihad, supplements, politics, refutation of polytheism (Shirk), Shari'at, Mu'amalat, the Companions and Ummah of the holy Prophet, woman, Fasiq, Qibla, the Qur'an, Torah, the Day of Judgment, infidels and polytheists, sins, Injil, pious and believers, economics, miracles, hypocrites, forbidden acts. With the help of the index a reader can easily reach the translation of verses pertaining to the topic and exegetical notes.

Comparison with other Qur'anic Exegeses in Urdu

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The predecessor and contemporary Muslim scholars of Pir Sahib have written a number of translations and exegeses of the holy Qur'an in Urdu language. Each exegesis has certain characteristics which are lacking in other commentaries of the last Divine Book. For instance, Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi (d.1363/1943) wrote "Bayan al-Qur'an" replete with complex Arabic and Persian terms, making nearly impossible for common reader to comprehend and benefit from this exegetical work.(34)No doubt, he deduced mystical points from certain verses of the holy Qur'an. Likewise, Mufti Muhammad Shafi'(1897-1976) wrote "Ma'arif al-Qur'an".(35)that only caters the needs of the students of Islamic jurisprudence and judges of Shari'at courts. The work of Abu'al-A'la Maududi (1903-1979) entitled "Tafhim al-Qur'an" answers the questions of a modern man.(36) Another Urdu commentator Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi (1904-1997) has attempted to search the coherence (nazm) of the Book in his "Tadabbur-e-Qur'an".(37)He failed to focus on the Prophetic traditions (Ahadith) and instead benefited from earlier scriptures as a source of exegesis. He based the commentary on Arabic language and diction of the holy Qur'an. The modernists like Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan and Parvez relied on intellect and altogether neglected Hadith literature while interpreting the holy Qur'an.

Pir Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari was bestowed with all the important qualities required for a successful and effective commentator of the holy Qur'an. Keeping in view the context and period of revelation, he wrote the exegesis with utter mastery. He embellished it by deducing mystical points from certain verses. He interpreted the verses pertaining to fiqh like jurists and refuted un-Islamic ideas like Socialism, Rationalism and Darwinism. He elucidated vocabulary items with reference to the famous Arabic lexicons. Moreover, he gave scientific interpretation to the verses pertaining to contemplation, cosmology, human creation and embryology. He did not fail to provide sufficient information about earlier religions and scriptures. Without any doubt, Pir Sahib retained his love and veneration of the holy Prophet (PBUH) which ultimately empowered him to produce a work which would remain unparallel for years to come.

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