BOOK REVIEW

Toward Islamic English **by Ismāʿīl Rājī al Fārūqī, International Islamic Publishing House Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, Virginia U.S.A, 1416 A.H/1995 A.C.**

Dr. Ismāʿīl Rājī al Fārūqī (1339-1406 A.H/1921-1986 A.C) is widely recognized as an authority on Islam and comparative religion. Dr. al Fārūqī was a dedicated and active academician. His educational training in Philosophy took place at Indiana and Harvard University. He also engaged in the post-graduate study of Islam at al-Azhar University and Christianity and Judaism at McGill University. He co-founded the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS). Among his significant intellectual and academic contributions is his consistent emphasis on the Islamization of knowledge and result-oriented inter-faith dialogues. The present book, *Toward Islamic English,* extends the same discourse on the Islamization of knowledge. However, the paradigm in which the book's theme is described is more academic and relates to the methodological dimensions of studying Islamic Studies as an academic discipline.

The association of the English language with British colonialism made many Muslims develop strong reservations against the language. Because of its affiliation with British colonialism, many Muslims in the past felt reluctant to use English as a language for communication and intellectual practices. Muslims, other religious communities, and diverse ethnic and indigenous groups no longer hold the ideological and political presumptions that there is a binary relationship between English and their respective cultural and religious identities in the post-colonial world. As a result, millions of Muslims now use English as their first or second language, and more books on Islam are published in it than in any other language. However, Ismāʿīl Rājī al Fārūqī sees a severe anomaly in how Muslim names and Islamic theological terms are transliterated and translated, as the dominant practice shows no loyalty to meaning but to the norms of the target language. Such an approach causes these names and terms to lose their semantic associations and religious connotations.

To rectify this, al-Faruqi proposes the introduction of "Islamic English." Based on his linguistic diagnosis and remedy.[1]

Dr. Ismāʿīl Rājī al Fārūqī holds that the correct methodological approach towards Islamic Studies in academic domains is very crucial, as it relates to the historical, Civilizational, literary, and cultural aspects of Islam and is central to the correct interpretation and understanding of Islam. The book *Toward Islamic English* deals with the same subject and is divided into four components. According to Dr. al Fārūqī, Islamic English is the English language modified to enable it to carry Islamic Proper nouns and meaning without distortion and thus serve the linguistic needs of the Muslim users of the English language. In this context, the author raises three crucial questions about Islamic English. Who are the Muslim users of the English language? What is the nature of the distortion claimed to exist? What is the needed rectification? The author attempts to discuss these questions and their significance throughout the book.

Muslim users of the English language, as per Dr. al Fārūqī, are Muslim citizens and permanent residents of English-speaking countries and non-citizen Muslim students who are part of these countries for academic purposes. The term also includes the Muslims of those countries where English is the official language, such as India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and others in Africa and around the Globe. The category equally includes all those Muslims, regardless of their country of residence, who have mastered or acquainted themselves with the English language and use it as a language of reading, research, writing, and communication. Some of the considerations of this book involve the Muslim users of all other languages that are not based on the Arabic alphabet, thus making the number of persons involved more significant than those non-Muslims for whom English is a mother tongue. Suppose these Muslims understand and employ correctly the rules related to Islamic English. In that case, it will naturally influence non-Muslim writers, thinkers, academicians, and commentators on Islam, Particularly the Orientalists whose writings distort the meaning and ethos of Islamic theological terms.

Dr. al Fārūqī boldly asserts that the present situation of the English language, when it expresses matters concerning Islam, Its culture, history, and civilization, is chaotic. It constitutes an intellectual and spiritual disaster and carries a universal Injustice against the human spirit. Loyalty to Islam is inseparable from allegiance to the *Holy Qurʾān*, and commitment to it is inseparable from devotion to Arabic, its language, and its form. Any distortion in the Arabic terms that connote an Islamic value or any divine *ṣifāt* (attribute) or the name of Muhammad *(Ḥaḍrat Muhammad*

Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabiyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam) or of his epithets or name of any other Prophet of Islam *(Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabiyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam)* or any quality of that Prophet is not only a violation of the term but all that it represents in the context of Islam. Dr. al Fārūqī exhorts that Islamic terms have cultural, civilizational, spiritual, and historical implications. Inappropriate and inadequate English equivalents of Islamic terms during their transliteration leads to distortion of meaning. The author explains this by providing the following examples: suppose a name is a conjunction of 'Abd (servant) and one of the divine names; it would be blasphemous to misspell or mispronounce it, e.g. 'Abd al Haqq (servant of Allāh, The Truth) as Abd al Hakk (servant of scratching). Similarly, misspellings of the names of God combined with other words to make personal names, such as Mumtaz al Rehman instead of al Rahmān, Abd al Ghafur (servant of wide and empty) instead of 'Abd al Ghafūr (servant of the forgiving). Using names like Mohamet, Mahomet, Mohamed, Mohamad, and Maumet for Prophet Muhammad *(Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabiyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam)* is also strongly objectionable from an Islamic perspective. The word *Muhammad* signifies someone who is praiseworthy, and *Ahmad* means someone who praises God the most. Conversely, some of the misnomers bear highly offensive connotations. [2] Similarly, the terms Mohammedanism or Mohammedans are also misleading and signify some meaning not in line with the spirit of Islam. Muslims worship Allāh only and not Muhammad *(Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabiyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam)* who was the last and final messenger of Allāh.

Dr. al Fārūqī further argues that many Arabic words are not translatable to English. Muslims eager to present their meaning in English must be cautious enough to retain the original meaning of the Arabic word and avoid using words that do not do justice to the word's intended meaning. One of the critical arguments raised by Dr. al Fārūqī is that the meaning embedded in the Arabic language of the *Holy Qur'ān* is a precious legacy that no one is at liberty to tamper with or change. Many Arabic words and phrases are of divine provenance and are not separable from their Arabic forms. Arabic words should not suffer semantic loss and obliteration regarding their meaning. When their meaning is altered, transformed, and transvalued through translation, it is an irreparable loss to Islam, Muslims, and the human spirit.

Hence, for Dr. al Fārūqī, the word *Ṣalāh* cannot be translated as prayer. Being the supreme act of worship in Islam, *Ṣalāh* must be

held five times a day for the purposes defined by *Sharī'ah* (Islamic law). It should be entered only after ablutions and a solemn declaration of *niyyah* (Intention). All this cannot be compressed into a word like prayer. Therefore, the reason demands that *Ṣalāh* should always be called *Ṣalāh.* Similarly, *Zakāh* often translates as charity, alms-giving, or poor-due. These terms may refer to any voluntary act of giving anything to help those in need, termed *ṣadaqah* in Islam. However, *Zakāh* represents something entirely different. Words like *taqwā, ḥuda, qisṭ, waḥī, ṣiyām, ḥajj, fiqh, uṣul al-fiqh, ḥadīth, etc.* have much more meaning in their Arabic form than their English approximations are ever capable of carrying. Giving them English translations reduces and ruins their sense of purpose.

While discussing Islamic English, Dr. al Fārūqī does not project the whole discourse as a violation of the English language but as its enrichment. Neither does he discourage Muslims from engaging in translation works. According to him, today, the English-speaking world needs Islam's religious and spiritual values more than at any other period. Infusion of the English language with a new Islamic vocabulary immune from any mistranslations is very beneficial not only for the English-speaking people themselves but for the world of which they are economic, political, and military leaders, contends Dr. al Fārūqī. Since Islam is the second largest and arguably fastest-growing religion in many regions in the West, and since its resurgence is palpable worldwide and affects global affairs, its universal appeal makes the connection between it and English even more pertinent.[3]

Towards the end of the book, Dr. al Fārūqī discusses the rules and regulations concerning the transliteration of Arabic letters into their respective English equivalents. Analysis of rules governing the transliteration of consonants, vowels, vowels following a consonant, initial vowels, and medial or final vowels are thoroughly examined. Dr. al Fārūqī has meticulously outlined the rules for translating Arabic letters. Further, the author suggests that phonetic transliteration should be avoided as much as possible. The linkage between words should be appropriately identified, and knowing where one word begins and ends and recognizing constituent words is equally necessary. General rules which will ensure rectification during translation are discussed in detail.

These rules preserve Arabic words' meaning and purpose during their English translation. The author does not claim this list of rules to be exhaustive and suggests that further research is required in this field. Since Islam is taught at the college and university levels in non-Arabic languages worldwide, the time has come to institute a common curriculum to guarantee the continuity of Islamic knowledge despite its pursuit in languages other than Arabic. These rectifications

shall maintain and preserve the Islamic character and style of words, concepts, and terms put to use through translation and safeguard this discipline from falsification or alteration by improper translation.

Conclusion

Dr. al Fārūqī propounds that every branch of knowledge should be Islamized to reflect a consciousness determined by the principles and values of Islam. According to him, there is a crying need for Islamic scholarship to establish those key concepts, categories, and technical vocabularies expressing Islam. Hence, the author suggests creating a new language called Islamic English for English-speaking people or those who study or write about Islam in English. The proposition of Islamic English has the potential to spark a great deal of intellectual curiosity. Al- Fārūqī's hypothesis that Muslim names and Islamic theological terms can enter English without semantic alteration and continue to enrich this global language is supported by post-colonial tendency. There are challenges and complexities in creating a new form of English given the purported contradiction between Islam and English, which may appear to make the name Islamic English oxymoronic. Moreover, the crucial, complex, and hidden epistemological principles involved in the academic applicability of this Islamic English have been inadequately explored, thus leaving enough scope for future deliberations on this conceptual framework. Nonetheless, the book creates a consciousness toward a post-colonial approach to studying Islam as an academic discipline from its methodological standpoint. It presents a very relevant discourse for students and researchers in Islamic studies.

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[1] Hasan Mahmudul Md. (2014). Islam's Encounter with English and Ismail al-Faruqi's Concept of Islamic English: A Postcolonial Reading, *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences,* Vol 32, Page 1.

[2] Hasan Mahmudul Md. (2014). Islam's Encounter with English and Ismail al-Faruqi's Concept of Islamic English: A Postcolonial Reading, *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences,* Vol 32, Page 10.

[3] *ibid*. Page no. 5