

BOOK REVIEW by **Zeeshan Ahmad Sheikh***

Toward Islamic English by Ismā'īl 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. Ismā'īl 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 was, therefore, one of the few contemporary Muslim scholars qualified to deal with Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. He was a co-founder of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS). He was also the founder of the Islamic Studies program in the Department of Religion at Temple University. He has also authored various books such as *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, *Tawhīd: Its Implication for Thought and Life*, *Historical Atlas of the Religions of the World* and *Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of Its Dominant Ideas*. Among his significant intellectual and academic contributions is his consistent and constant emphasis on Islamization of Knowledge and result-oriented inter-faith dialogue. The present book *Toward Islamic English* is an extension of the same discourse on Islamization of Knowledge, albeit the paradigm in which the theme of the book is described is more academic and relates to the methodological dimensions of studying Islamic Studies as an academic discipline. Dr. Ismā'īl Rājī al Fārūqī's rationale for the correct methodological approach towards Islamic Studies in academic domains is very crucial, for it relates to the historical, Civilizational, literary, and cultural aspects of Islam. Accurate academic representation of such methodology in terms of precise utilization of Islamic terminologies is central to the correct interpretation and understanding of Islam. The book is divided into four components, each complementing the previous one. According to Dr. al-Fārūqī, Islamic English is the English language modified,

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enabling it to carry the Islamic Proper nouns and their 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?

Furthermore, what is the needed rectification?

These questions and their significance lie in their proper understanding, which the author attempts to discuss throughout the book.

The first Component of the book discusses Muslim users of the English language:

Muslim users of the English language, as per Dr. al Fārūqī, are Muslim citizens and permanent residents of the English-speaking countries and non-citizen Muslim students that are part of these countries for academic purposes. The term also includes the Muslims of those countries where English is one of the official languages, such as India, Pakistan, 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 in or acquainted themselves with the English language and use it as a language of reading, research, writing and communication. Thus the author says the number of Muslim users of the English language to whom the book addresses amounts to several hundred million. Dr. al Fārūqī says 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. If these Muslims understand and employ correctly the rules related to Islamic English, 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 terms.

The second Component of the book deliberates upon the nature of distortion claimed to exist:

- **Distortion through Transliteration**

Dr. al Fārūqī boldly asserts that the present situation of the English language when it expresses matters concerning Islam, its culture, history and civilization to the Muslim World or non-Muslims is chaotic. It constitutes an intellectual and spiritual disaster and carries a universal injustice against the human spirit. The

author does not merely present this argument but substantiates it with practical examples. Loyalty to Islam is inseparable from loyalty to the Qur'an and loyalty to the Qur'an is inseparable from loyalty to Arabic, its language and its form. This inseparable connection is at the root of *ʾijāz*, the absolute inimitability of al Qur'an and its transcendent and miraculous nature. Any distortion in the Arabic terms which connote an Islamic value or any divine *ṣifāt* (attribute of Allah) or the name of Muhammad ﷺ or of his epithets or name of any other Prophet of Islam 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 every Islamic name has cultural, civilizational, spiritual and historical implications. Even the names of Muslims themselves are so significant that they serve to form their identities for the outside world and their relationship with Allah, for instance 'Abd Allah (servant of Allah), 'Abd al Raḥmān (servant of most merciful). Alteration or mutilation of the same tends to mislead its entire meaning. Inappropriate and inadequate English equivalents of Islamic terms are the grave manifestation of this distortion. Dr. al Fārūqī 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 Raḥmān, Abd al Ghafur (servant of wide and empty) instead of 'Abd al Ghafūr (servant of the Forgiving). Misspelling the names of Prophet ﷺ without proper transliteration such as Munzir or Monzer (hurrier, belittler, despiser) instead of Mundhir (warner) or Muddassir (he in whom something has been plunged by force, as in assassination with a dagger) instead of Muddaththir (wrapped in his mantle). Using names like Mohamet, Mahomet, Mohamed, Mohamad, and Maumet for Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is also strongly objectionable from an Islamic perspective.

Similarly, the terms Mohammedanism or Mohammedans are also misleading and signify some meaning which is not in line with the spirit of Islam. Muslims worship Allāh only and not Muhammad ﷺ who was the last and final messenger of Allāh. By providing these examples, Dr. al Fārūqī draws our attention to the need and importance of the subject under discussion. Dr. al Fārūqī suggests that these misappropriations and distortions, if not rectified and any academic study/research

devoid of such rectification can compromise the true meaning embedded in Islamic terms and concepts. Dr. al Fārūqī further argues that names that have a Western equivalent (Yūsuf, Ya'qūb, Ishāq, Yūnus, Mūsā, Ibrāhīm) are hastily changed into their Biblical equivalents (Joseph, Jacob, Issac, Jonah, Moses, Abraham) without the awareness that these Biblical personalities represent entirely different meaning to the Christians and Jews than the Qur'anic names do to the Muslims. General ignorance of Arabic and the difficulties of Transliteration are responsible for it, claims the author. The author admits that many ways of transliterating Arabic words into Latin alphabets exist. However, within the English-speaking world, there has been little success in coordinating and unifying the various ways. Those of one country have followed different ways from those of another. Some universities, libraries, educational institutions and publishing firms have devised their ways. Some have more influence than others. The Library of Congress, The American Oriental Society, The Middle East study association and some other universities each tried to establish their way as a universal norm for Transliteration. None succeeded, and none proved its viability without question since each had set its own rules, some of which are pretty arbitrary, incomplete and inadequate for English-speaking Muslims. The vast majority of transliterated words carry no diacritical marks and thus give occasion for mispronunciation.

- **Distortion through translation**

Dr. al Fārūqī asserts that many Arabic words are not translatable to English. Muslims who are eager to present their meaning in English must be cautious enough to retain the original meaning of the Arabic word and avoid using those words which do not do justice to the intended meaning of the word during its English translation. The orientalist may have used such inappropriate translations because, for them, all Islamic meanings must fit themselves under western categories. However, for the Muslims to imitate the orientalist in their errors and misinterpretations is unacceptable. Some of the examples which Dr. al Fārūqī provides to substantiate his arguments are:

Consider the word *Ṣalāh* which is often translated as "Prayer." The translated word does not reflect the proper connotation of the Arabic word *Ṣalāh*. Being the supreme act of worship in Islam, *Ṣalāh* must be established five times a day for the purposes defined by Shari'ah (Islamic law). It comprises precise recitations, Prostrations, standing and sitting with an orientation towards the Ka'bah and should be

performed only after ablutions and a solemn declaration of *niyyah* (intension). All this cannot be compressed into a word like “prayer.” Therefore, the reason demands that *Ṣalāh* should always be called *Ṣalāh*.

Similarly, consider the term *Zakāh* often translated 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. It is a public welfare tax with a specific amount (2^{1/2} percent) to be paid by Muslims as per *Shari’ah* (Islamic law). Its payment is religiously and publicly obligatory for all Muslims who have the minimum required wealth. So the English equivalents mentioned above do not communicate the proper meaning of the word *Zakāh*. Therefore it must be understood as it stands in its Arabic form. Dr. al-Fārūqī concludes that the same considerations apply to most of Islam's vocabulary, religion, and culture. Words like *taqwā*, *ḥuda*, *qist*, *wahy*, *ṣiyām*, *ḥajj*, *fiqh*, *uṣul al-fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, etc. have more meaning in their Arabic form than their English approximations are ever capable of carrying. Translating them is to reduce and ruin their meaning. Dr. al-Fārūqī suggests that the intellectual faithfulness to English form has no right to assume priority over faithfulness to meaning. While talking about Islamic English, Dr. al-Fārūqī does not project the whole discourse as a violation of the English language but rather as its enrichment. According to him, today, the English-speaking world needs Islam's religious and spiritual values more than it did at any other period of its history. 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.

In the third Component of the book, the author talks about the needed rectification in Transliteration:

Here Dr. al-Fārūqī discusses the rules and regulations concerning the manner of transliterating Arabic letters into their respective English equivalents. Dr. al-Fārūqī, in a sequential way, talks about the Transliteration of letters, consonants, and vowels. These English equivalents of Arabic letters are significant while transliterating Arabic words into English. Analysis of rules governing Transliteration of consonants, vowels, vowels following consonant, initial vowels and medial or final vowels are thoroughly examined. To the readers of the book, it is

recommended to correctly figure out all necessary points that Dr. al Fārūqī has meticulously enumerated pertaining to the Transliteration of letters.

Regarding rectification in the Transliteration of words, Dr. al Fārūqī suggests that phonetic transliteration should be avoided as much as possible. The linkage between words should be appropriately identified and knowledge of where one word begins and ends and the recognition of constituent words is equally necessary. Dr. al Fārūqī also talks about 21 specific rules, which are crucial during the Transliteration. These rules preserve Arabic words' structure and shape during their English Transliteration.

In the fourth Component of the book, the author talks about the needed rectification in translation:

General rules which will ensure rectification during translation are discussed in detail here. These rules are essential from the readers' point of view and need an attentive reading; however, the author does not claim that this list of rules is exhaustive and suggests that further research is needed in this field. Since Islam is taught at the college and university levels in non-Arabic languages worldwide, the time has come to institute common curricula and terminology which would 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 any falsification or alteration by improper translation. In the last part of the book, Dr. al Fārūqī provides a list of Islamic words and concepts along with their Arabic form, Transliteration and translation. The author claims that the list is meant to initiate and institutionalize such developments for the Muslim users of the English language and its consequences for academic purposes are positively envisioned.

Conclusion

The book's theme forms a part of the program of Islamization of Knowledge, of which Dr. al Fārūqī was a strong proponent. Dr. al Fārūqī propounds that every branch of knowledge should be Islamized to reflect a consciousness determined by the epistemological and methodological principles and values of Islam. According to him, there is a need for Islamic scholarship to establish those key concepts, categories, and technical vocabularies expressing Islam as it relates to the correct interpretation and understanding of Islam. Dr. al Fārūqī thinks that faulty Transliteration and improper translation constitute a severe problem to the

continuity of Islamic Knowledge and its understanding. Hence, for the English-speaking people or those who study or write about Islam in English, Dr. al Fārūqī suggests the need for creating a new language called Islamic English. Adding to modern English the terms of Islam, its culture, civilization, spirituality and ethics, together with pertinent rules of Arabic grammar, represents a worthy and beneficial effort. The book also evokes a consciousness toward a post-colonial approach of studying Islam as an academic discipline and presents a very relevant discourse for the students and researchers in the field of Islamic studies.