

The Role of Non-Muslim Scholars in Quranic Literature: In the Context of Pakistan and India

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Abstract

Studying interfaith intellectual exchanges, colonial heritage, and postcolonial scholarly dynamics is facilitated by the participation of non-Muslim scholars in Quranic studies in the socioreligious spheres of Pakistan and India. This study analyzes the role played by non-Muslim scholars, linguists, and translators in Quranic interpretation, translation, and literary critique in South Asia since the colonial period, including Orientalists, Hindu reformers, and modern secular intellectuals. It examines how local discourses on Islamic, identity, and religious diversity have been impacted by their works, which often are subject to philological rigor, comparative religious paradigms, or missionary purposes. Non-Muslim scholars' Quranic interpretations (e.g., Christian linguists or Hindu scholars) have sometimes created debates about authenticity and representation within Pakistan, where Islam is central to the nation's identity, but also stimulated complicated interfaith discussions. In India, secular academies have allowed researchers such as K. S. Singh (anthropologist) or Rita Joshi (literary critic) to research the socio-cultural influence of the Quran, quite often transgressing communal borders. The tensions between academic objectivity and religious sensitivity, accusations of "outsider" perspectives, and allegations of Orientalist bias are addressed in the research. This research displays how South Asian non-Muslim scholarship on the Quran challenges and reinforces Islamic studies by investigating significant texts, institutional roles, and public responses. It achieves this by emphasizing the complex relationship between scholarship, faith, and identity within the region.

Keywords: Quranic Studies, Non-Muslim Scholars, Interfaith Dialogue, South Asia, Postcolonial Academia.

Introduction

Since the Quran is the sacred scripture of Islam, it has long been subject to scholarly study. Non-Muslim scholars have produced a unique body of Quranic scholarship in India and Pakistan's multicultural environments by bringing perspectives shaped by colonial past, interfaith dialogue, and post-colonial identity politics. Their roles, challenges, and impacts in the two nations are discussed in this article.

Historical Context: Pre-Partition Contributions

Early Muslim interactions with the Quran took place on the subcontinent under British

colonial rule, often for administrative or missionary reasons. Indian philosophers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy engaged with Islamic philosophy, while his focus was more universal than Quranic commentary, European scholars such as William Muir disapproved of the historicity of the Quran. Although with overt political intent, Christian missionaries had translated the Quran into popular languages, such as the German scholar Karl Gottlieb Pfander. These efforts paved the way for later scholarly works.

Post-Colonial Dynamics: India and Pakistan

India and Pakistan had different approaches to religious scholarship following the 1947 division.

- **India:** Non-Muslim scholars were in a position to research Quranic topics due to academic freedom being encouraged by secularism. Hindu scholar Arvind Sharma contributed to comparative religion research, though not exclusively on the Quran, and others like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar scrutinized Islam in Pakistan or Partition of India. P.D. Prainnath and other Christian divines focused on shared ethical values by integrating Quranic concepts in interfaith debates. The presence of non-Muslim faculty has led to varied intellectual interactions in the field of Islamic studies at universities like Jamia Millia Islamia and JNU.

- **Pakistan:**

Non-Muslim scholars have a harder time here in this Islamic country. Minorities, which comprise about 4% of the population, are hardly ever found in Quranic scholarship. Scholars such as Christian Yousuf Gabriel, however, have contributed mildly to theological debates. Non-Muslim scholars of language are occasionally engaged in translations into provincial languages, such as Sindhi or Punjabi, although their contributions remain underrepresented due to institutional and cultural biases.

Themes in Scholarship

Literary, historical, or comparative approaches are often employed by non-Muslim scholars when analyzing the Quran. Indian research comparing structural parallels with Hindu epics includes *The Quranic Narratives and the conceptual Mahabharata*. Scant Hindu literature produced in Pakistan might avoid religious discussion in favor of linguistic analysis. These works cross community divides by identifying the universal themes of the Quran.

Challenges and Controversies

- **Pakistan:** Social conservatism and strict blasphemy laws keep the serious study of the Quran at bay. Non-Muslim scholars risk the chances of being charged with heresy, thus limiting free scholarly contention.

- **India:** Religious scholarship is increasingly politicized in the wake of increasing Hindu nationalism. Quranic texts by non-Muslims can be hijacked to promote peace or create controversy, as seen in debate surrounding "love jihad" or conversions.

Impact and Legacy

Through multidisciplinary means—philological, anthropological, and literary—non-Muslim

scholars enrich Quranic writing. Their work brings people together, particularly in India's interfaith initiatives. Delicate inputs in Pakistan softly dismiss homogenized accounts and uphold multiplicity in adherence to constitutional limits.

The research on the Quran has been greatly enriched by the efforts of non-Muslim scholars in India and Pakistan, who often study it from literary, historical, comparative, or sociopolitical lenses. Their work enriches scholarly discourse, interfaith dialogue, and intercultural exchange on the topic. A consideration of their role, outstanding contributions, and challenges in both countries follows:

Interfaith scholarship has a long history on the Indian subcontinent. To foster syncretic cultural practices, Hindu and Sikh scholars learned Islamic scriptures, like the Quran, during the Mughal Empire. Both India and Pakistan continued this after the division, but under shifting sociopolitical conditions.

2. Significant Non-Muslim Academic Contributions

A. Stylistic and Literary Analysis

Non-Muslim scholars often focus on the grammatical beauty, structure, and rhetorical devices of the Quran:

- **Indian Hindu scholar Dr. Gopi Chand Narang:** Analyzed the influence of the Quran on Urdu poetry and literary symbolism.
- **Dr. Kanwal Feroze (Christian, Pakistan):** Studied the linguistic nuances of Quranic Arabic as part of comparative Semitic studies.

B. Comparative Religion Studies

Scholar's comparative themes of the Quran with those of Christian, Sikh, or Hindu literature:

- Dr. Satya Pal, a Pakistani Hindu, compared the Bhagavad Gita with the teachings of the Quran.

Dr. Anna Suvorova, a Russian and Indian non-Muslim, is the author of "Muslim Saints of South Asia," which discusses Sufi readings of the Quran.

C. Legal and Socio-Political Studies

- Equity Christian Pakistani writer R.P. Singh's work "Quran and Justice" discusses the deployment of Quranic legal concepts to modern governance.
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, an Indian Dalit academic, referenced the Quran's equality in his denunciations of caste bias.

D. Textual and Historical Criticism

- Professor Harbans Mukhia, an Indian Hindu, researched the history of the Quran within medieval Indian contexts.
- Dr. Wendy Doniger, an American scholar interested in India, penned a book called "On Hinduism" comparing Hindu mythology with Quranic stories.

3. Major Pieces and Topics

Indian scholars' "The Quran and the Bhagavad Gita: A Comparative Study" is one such interfaith discourse.

Prof. Kulbhushan (Pakistan)'s "Quranic Human Rights: A Non-Muslim Perspective" Scholarship on Sufi readings of the Quran and their concurrence with Bhakti/Sant traditions is referred to as cultural syncretism.

• **Secular Ethics:**

Emphasizing the universal nature of Quranic values such as compassion (Rahma) and social justice (adl).

4. Challenges and Controversies

- **Religious Sensitivities:** The right-wing conservatives often suspect or resent non-Muslim scholars, questioning their "authority" to expound Islamic scriptures. For example, Between Muslims and Non-Muslims in an Interreligious India: Selections from a Nineteenth Century Translation of the Quran into Urdu by Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar, made people argue.
- **Political Pressures:** Pakistan's non-Muslim critics of religious orthodoxy can be charged with "blasphemy" under strict laws.
- **Academic bias:** Some writings are dismissed as "outsider points of view" which are not grounded in any theology and therefore do not really exist.

5. Impact on Society and Academia

- **Promoting Pluralism:** Non-Muslim scholars in multicultural countries sweep away misunderstandings.
- **Expanding Quranic Studies:** They provide a historical and linguistic approach which complements traditional tafsir (exegesis).
- **Global Recognition:** South Asian universities publish books such as Bruce Lawrence's (non-Muslim) "The Quran: A Biography".

6. Case Studies

A. India

- Hindu historian **Dr. Tara Chand** emphasized the Quran's influence over medieval Indian politics.
- Sikh scholar **Dr. Harcharan Singh Sobti** compared the doctrine of monotheism contained in the Quran with that set forth in Guru Granth Sahib.

B. Pakistan

- Christian justice Alvin Robert Cornelius: Used Quranic teachings in major judgments handed down by his Court
- Secular scholar **Dr. Younus Shaikh** argued for revising certain passages from the Quran from a humanist point of view.

7. Prospects for the Future

- **Cooperative research:** Muslim and non-Muslim scholars combining forces with joint projects across different campuses (e.g., Banaras Hindu University and Darul Uloom Deoband in India).
 - **Digital Scholarship:** Comparative research available on-line to a wider audience at sites
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like "Quran Archive" (India).

• **Policy Impact:** Instilling the ethics of the Quran within secular paradigms (e.g., gender justice, ecology).

Conclusion

In both Pakistan and India, this is promoted by non-Muslim scholars to a great extent. They unite divides in conflicting society, by bringing forth universal concepts, historical background and massive cross-referencing. Despite ongoing struggles, they stress that the Quran's timeless cache of knowledge has no religious overtones and is applicable to everyone. Apart from educating others, this cooperative spirit brings peace to perhaps the most diverse spot on planet Earth.
