

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's attitude towards Biblical Scriptures as reflected in his work *Tabyīn al-Kalām Fī Tafsīr al-Taurāt wa al-Injīl 'alā millat al-Islām*

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ABSTRACT

Tabyīn al-Kalam fī Tafsīr al-Taurāt wa al Injīl 'alā millat al-Islām is one of the most important works written by the Indian Muslim Scholar Sayyid Ahmad Khan. This book is his exploration of Judaeo – Christian scripture in responding to the challenge made by Christian missionaries and western orientalis in India for Muslims to study the Bible and the early Christian Churches. It has three volumes; covering several topics of discussion such as "On the necessity of the Coming of prophets to save mankind", what is Revelation and word of God?", and others. It also discusses several questions related to the Old and New Testaments.

ABSTRAK

Tabyīn al-Kalam fī Tafsīr al-Taurāt wa al Injīl 'alā millat al-Islām adalah satu daripada karya-karya yang sangat penting yang ditulis oleh ulama Islam India Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Buku ini adalah penjelajahannya terhadap skripturs Yahudi – Kristian sebagai respon terhadap cabaran yang dibuat oleh missionari-missionari Kristian dan Orientalis-Orientalis Barat di India terhadap orang-orang Islam untuk mengkaji Bible dan gereja-gereja Kristian yang awal. Buku ini mengandungi tiga jilid, merangkumi beberapa tajuk perbincangan seperti "keperluan kepada kedatangan Nabi-nabi untuk menyelamatkan umat manusia, apakah itu wahyu dan perkataan-perkataan Tuhan" dan lain-lain. Buku ini juga membincangkan beberapa persoalan yang berkaitan dengan Perjanjian Lama dan Perjanjian Baru

INTRODUCTION

*Tabyīn al-Kalam fī Tafsīr al-Taurāt wa al Injīl 'alā millat al-Islām or The Mōhamedan Commentary on the Holy Bible as they are translated in English, (Sayyid Ahmad Khan, 1887) are among the important works written by a Muslim as commentary on the Biblical scriptures. The importance of *Tabyīn al-Kalām*, especially in an Indian context, is not*

that they are the first works ever published in India related to the commentary of Judaeo-Christian scriptures. Before the religious debate of Easter 1854 took place in Agra between the Muslim 'ulama' represented by Rahmat Allah Kairanawī and Wazīr Khan and Christian missionaries led by Pfander and T V French, Rahmat Allah had published a number of works on Biblical subjects. Among them are *I'jaz-ī 'Isawī al-M'ulaqqab bih mīsqalah-ī tahrif, Izalat al-auham* meaning 'Removal of Doubts' and *Ibtāl-ī-tathlīth* meaning 'Invalidation of the Trinity'. All these works were published before 1854. (Christian W. Troll 1978, 68 – 69). But the importance of *Tabyīn al-Kalām* comes from their author; Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He was a controversial figure in India. His works on Islam and Biblical scriptures as well as his interpretation of Jesus attracted many people to study them. As a result, religious polemics arose between them. For example, some of his religious views on Islamic teachings were criticised by some Muslim scholars in India such as Mohshin al-Mulk and Maulwī Haji Ali Bakhsh Khan Sahab Bahadur. However, his religious exploration of Judaeo-Christian scriptures did not directly bring him into a theological conflict between him and Christian missionaries in India.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan wrote his three Volumes of *Tabyīn al-Kalām* in order to respond positively to the call made by two Christian evangelists, Pfander and William Muir "for a Muslim historical study of the Bible and the early Church" (Troll 1978, 70).

There is no doubt that Sayyid Ahmad Khan followed a religious debate that took place between Pfander and Rahmat Allah Kairanawī. He also was fully aware of the publication of William Muir's books that touched the controversy between Muslim 'ulamā' and Christians missionaries. Muir directly involved himself in that controversy by publishing several works that related to it.

Along with other Christian missionaries who were working in India at that time such as Pfander, William Muir also had a great interest in the study of Islam. He was not a missionary like Pfander, but his interest in religious writing enabled him to publish several works in this field.

On 1845, Muir's article entitled "The Mohammedan controversy" was published in the *Calcutta Review* (Muir 1897, 1-63). This was followed by his Urdu work on Church History called *Masihī Kalisa Ki Tarikh (The History of the Christian Church)*, published in 1848. (Troll 1978, 67). Another tract by him on Islam called "Sources for Biography of Mahomet" was also published in the *Calcutta Review* in 1853. In 1854, his Urdu work called *Dim Ki Tariq* meaning *The Path of Religion* appeared. He also published in 1855 another work entitled *The Testimony borne by the Coran to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures*. Rahmat Allah, Pfander and Muir published their works on this subject. Sayyid Ahmad

Khan also began to explore his writing on Biblical scriptures. Accordingly, three volumes of *Tabyīn al-Kalām* appeared. He had his own interpretation of the position of Christ, his birth, miracles and death.

In the first volume of *Tabyīn al-Kalām*, Sayyid Ahmad Khan discusses several topics including “on the necessity of the coming of prophets to save mankind”; (first discourse), “What is Revelation and Word of God?”; (second discourse), “What books are those which in the Koran [Qur’an] are alluded to under the name of Toureit [Torah], Soohoo Umbiya [Unbiya], Zuboor [Zabur], and Injeel?”; (third discourse), “What faith have Mohomedans [muslims] in the Toureit (Pentateuch), Zuboor (Psalms), Soohoo Umbiya (The Books of Prophets), and Injeel (The Gospels)?”; (fourth discourse), “What was the number of the books descended from God to prophets, and are they all included in the Bible?”; (fifth discourse), “What are the methods applied by the Mohomedan religion [Islam] to inquire into, and confirm the authenticity of a religious book?”; (sixth discoues), “What is the opinion entertained by the Mohomedans regarding to corruption of the sacred scriptures?”; (seventh discourse), “Are the books which compose the Bible identical with the original writings of the inspired writers?”; (eighth discourse), “What belief have Mohomedans in the versions of the sacred scriptures?”; (ninth discourse), and “What is meant according to the Mohomedan faith, by one commandment of God cancelling another or being cancelled by another?”; (tenth discourse).

In the same volume, Sayyid Ahmad Khan also mentions “the dates of the principal events recorded in the Bible” and “the correspondence between the Hijree [Hijrah] and Christian eras” (Sayyid Ahmed 1887, 1. n.p.).

In the second volume of *Tabyīn al-Kalām* he discusses several questions that relate to the Old Testament. Certain events which have been narrated in the Old Testament such as the position of Adam and the Satan and the Deluge of Noah are discussed by him.

What is interesting in this volume is that when he discusses certain passages in Genesis, he also quotes some similar passages in the Qur’an that discuss the same subject. All verses in Genesis have been written in Hebrew with Urdu and English translations. Similarly, verses from the Qur’an have been translated into Urdu and English. Sayyid Ahmad Khan was assisted by a Jewish scholar called Salim in his study of Hebrew verses in Genesis. But he managed to write his Biblical commentary on The Old Testament only on Genesis I – XI. It is not known why he was unable to finish his commentary on the Old Testament, or at least on Genesis. It is unlikely that it was loss of interest in the study of Biblical scriptures that made him stop his project of Biblical commentary. This may be proved later from what he published in the third volume of *Tabyīn al-Kalām*. Apart from his writing on “A Brief History of the

Christian Religion up to the coming of Muslim Religion”, in this volume, the main focus is concentrated on the commentary of the Gospel of Matthew. It would be good if Sayyid Ahmad Khan had been able to write his Biblical commentary on four Gospels rather than only on the Gospel of Matthew. It is not known also why he did not continue his Biblical exploration of the Gospels. What is clear is that after finishing the third volume of this *Tabyīn al-Kalām*, he was fully occupied with other activities.

In his first discourse “on the necessity of the coming of Prophets to save mankind (انسان کی نجات کونبیون کاآنا ضرور) Sayyid Ahmad Khan emphasises the necessity of revelation from God to mankind.

According to him, the necessity of the coming of the Prophets is for two reasons .

to tell us by revelation (ilham) [wahyu] who and what our Master is. And that we must walk according to His will, so that in this way we may reach our fundamental, imperishable truth, i.e. eternal life. (Sayyid Ahmad Khan 1887, 1 3)

At this stage we see him acknowledging the limited role played by reason in knowing God. He says that by reason only man is unable to know his Master. Therefore, God sent prophets to mankind in order to make known His existence. He argues that if God did not send prophets to mankind, how can He bring upon man the sin of unbelief? In other words, God sent prophets to human beings in order to convey the message and commandments of God to them. They told them to believe and worship Him. If they still do not believe and obey His commandments through the message brought by His prophets, then, it is their own fault. Sayyid Ahmad Khan thus concludes that there is no doubt prophets were sent by God to all children of the human race. Through them, God’s unity and His will were made known. Then, gradually men depraved the message of God. Basing himself on *Sūrā Shūra* in the Qur’an, verse 13, Sayyid Ahmad Khan is of the opinion that all the prophets came with the same message preaching to the people to believe in the unity of God. He alone is to be worshipped. The Qur’an says:

شرع لكم من الدين ما وصى به نوحا والذى اوحينا اليك وما
وصينا به ابراهيم وموسى وعيسى ان اقيموا الدين ولا
تتفرقوا.

Meaning:

The same religion has He established for you as that which he enjoined on Noah – The which We have sent by inspiration [by Revelation] to thee – and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus: namely, that ye should remain steadfast in Religion [Al-Din], and make no divisions therein... (Surah al-Shura, 13)

According to Sayyid Ahmad Khan again, God revealed different *Shariat* “that is the prescriptions regarding the service of the One God and the way He should be worshipped” to different prophets (Sayyid Ahmad Khan, I 4), who lived in different ages. In a wider context, this statement can be analysed to mean that every prophet and messenger of God brought the same *aqidah* that is calling people to believe in the Oneness of God. But since they live in different ages, cultures and traditions, therefore they had different Shari’ah. The Qur’an says: (لكل جعلنا منكم شرعة ومنهاجا)

Meaning:

to each among you have We prescribed a Law [Shari’at] and an Open Way.

Relating to this, Sayyid Ahmad Khan mentions that the teaching brought by all the prophets is the same: acknowledging the One God, worshipping and serving Him. Thousands of prophets were sent at different times. When people corrupted the teaching of a prophet, another prophet was sent. “For this reason”, he says, “thousands of prophets came, brought their books with them and propagated the unity of God and His precepts among the people”. In his discourse “On the necessity of the coming of Prophets to save mankind”, Sayyid Ahmad Khan also points out that the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the seal of the prophets (*Khātim al-Nabiyyīn* and the Lord Messiah (Christ) is the “Spirit of Allah” (*Rūh Allah*), the “Word of Allah” (*Kalimat Allah*), and the “Aided by the Holy Spirit” (*mu’ayyid bi-rūh al-qudus*) (Sayyid Ahmad Khan, I 5). He also says that all the sacred books revealed by God to His messengers are true such as *Taurāt*, *Zabūr*, *Suhuf al-anbiyā*, (the books of the prophets), *Injil* (Gospels) and the Qur’an. As other Muslims, he also believes that all prophets and angels of God are free from light and serious sin and they are dependent on God.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan is right when he mentions that God revealed His words not only to His prophets and messengers but also to those who were not prophets. For example, there are many places in the Qur’an, as quoted by him, where God revealed His words to non prophets. The Qur’an says:

واوحينا الى أم موسى ان ارضعيه فاذا خفت فألقيه في
اليم ولا تخافي ولا تحزني انا رآدوه اليك وجاعلوه من
المرسلين.

(al-Qisas, 28 . 7)

Meaning:

So We sent this inspiration [revelation] to the mother of Moses ‘Suckle (thy child), but when thou hast fears about him, cast him into river, but fear not nor grieve: for We shall restore him to thee, and We shall make him one of Our apostles [messengers].

In the above passage, God conveyed His message to the mother of Moses and she was not a prophetess. Similarly, according to the Qur’an, God also revealed His words to the mother of Jesus, Maryam (Mary). Gabriel (Jibril), the angel of Revelation conveyed God’s message to her relating to the birth of Jesus.

In Surah al-Kahf (The cave) verse 86, God said to Zul Qarnain

قلنا ياذا القرنين اما ان تعذب واما ان تتخذ فيهم حسنا

Meaning:

We said “O Zul-qarnain! (Thou hast authority), either to punish them, or to treat them with kindness.

All these Qur’anic verses prove that non prophets also received revelation from God. But only messengers of God were given books by Him which contain His orders.

In his discussion on “what books are those which in the Koran are alluded to under the names of Toureit, Sohoofumbiya, Zuboor, and Injeel”, Sayyid Ahmad Khan says that the revelations received by the prophets were no doubt the very words of God, Therefore, he adds,

the origin of the Toureit, the Sohoofumbiya, the Zuboor, and the Injeel, is the revelations which were conveyed from God to Moses, to the Israelitish prophets, to David, and to Jesus respectively.

Those revelations are known as cited above when they were written down. Sayyid Ahmad Khan is of the opinion that when the Qur’an mentions about the Torah, the Suhuf Anbiya’ and the Zabur and the Injil, it directly refers to the revelations that God revealed to the above mentioned prophets. Those books, he says, “had obtained authority at any time whatever”.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's

Like other Muslim scholars, Sayyid Ahmad Khan understands revelation as words of God revealed by Him to His prophets. Therefore, he differentiates between the revelation of God to Jesus which is known in Islamic theology as *Injil* and the acts of the apostles. He acknowledges the apostles of Christ as

inspired men, and their writings, so true, holy and worthy of respect that they may be used as religious guides.

But since he holds the view that revelation consists of words which directly came from God to a prophet, therefore, he considers the writings of Christ's apostles as similar to that of the writings of the Prophet Muhammad's companions.

It is clear that the concept of revelation understood by Muslim is different from that of Christians theology. In Christian Theology there are two types of revelation: General and Special Revelation. According to Alan Richardson, general revelation

is given to men everywhere and makes them truly human. Man, even Hindu man or communist man or pagan man, could not exist as man apart from the divine grace of general revelation. This general revelation, so far as it goes, is saving revelation, for there is no such thing as a non-saving knowledge of God. But, of course, it is not the complete knowledge of God, for this comes only by his *special* revelation through the prophetic history of Israel and its culmination in Christ. (Alan Richardson 1977, 295)

In other words, special revelation reaches its highest point in Christ. In Islam, what the Prophet Muhammad spoke to and taught peoples about God's commands is considered as the revelation form God. The Qur'an says

وما ينطق عن الهوى ان هو الا وحى يوحى علمه شديد القوى
ذو مرة فاستوى وهو بالا فاق الاعلى ثم دنا فتدلى فكان
قاب قوسين او ادنى فاوحى الي عبده ما اوحى ما كذب
الفوءاد ما رأى ...

Meaning:

Nor does he say (ought) of (his own) desire. It is no less than inspiration [revelation] sent down to him: He was taught by one mighty in power, endued with wisdom for he appeared (in stately form) while he was in the highest part of

the horizon. Then he approached and came closer, and was at a distance of but two bow-length or (even) nearer. So did (Allah) convey the inspiration [the revelation] to his servant – (conveyed) what He (meant) to convey. The (prophet's) (mind and) heart in no way falsified that which he saw.. (surah al-Najm, 53 3 – 11)

Relating to the different concepts and understandings of revelation in Christian and Islamic theology, Kenneth Cragg says .

As the Christian faith understands and receives Him, Christ is “the Word of God” He in Himself constitutes what God wants to say, God, that is, engages in speech. He is not content that there should be a barrier of silence and, therefore, of unknowing between Himself and man. Whereas the ultimate speech of God for Islam is prophecy, “sealed”, as the phrase goes, or accomplished, in Muhammad, the speech of God for the Christian is personality – a human life in all the revealing human situations, the Person of Jesus Christ in the flesh, Whose antecedents, character, history, and meaning for men are sufficiently recorded in the Bible. The Bible thus becomes a secondary ‘word’ – the written word preserving and expressing the incarnate. There is the Life that reveals; there is the history that describes. The latter is the means to the continuing accessibility of the former. (Kenneth Cragg 1956, 272)

Sayyid Ahmad Khan says that the Qur’an teaches Muslim to believe in other holy scriptures revealed by God to His prophets. Those holy scriptures such as the *Torah*, *Zabur*, *Suhuf Anbiya*’, *Injil* and the Qur’an are the very words of God and no doubt they came from Him. Many passages in the Qur’an. as he adds again, ask Muslim to believe in those books. The Qur’an says

نزلّ عليك الكتاب بالحق مصدقا لما بين يديه وانزل
التوراة والانجيل من قبل هدى للناس وأنزل الفرقان.

(Surah al-Imran, 3 · 3)

Meaning

It is He who sent down to thee [Muhammad (step by step) in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down Law [The Torah] (of Moses) and the Gospel [Injil] (of Jesus) before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the Criterion (of judgment between right and wrong) [the Qur’an].

It should be noted here that as a Muslim scholar, Sayyid Ahmad Khan's view on Biblical scriptures and other revealed books is within an Islamic framework. Therefore, he believes that the Qur’an is the final message revealed by God to the prophet Muhammad. (Sayyid Ahmad

Khan 1887, I . 32). According to him, while there are the five outstanding holy scriptures revealed by God to His prophets already mentioned, Islam does not limit the number of revealed scriptures only to them. He considered that all books that came from God are authentic and genuine gifts from heaven. He is of the opinion that the present Old Testament does not included its total contents revealed. He therefore divides three parts of the Old Testament:

1. Those books which are contained in the Bible.
2. Those books whose existence once [sic] should not be doubted, but that they are not forthcoming now.
3. The apocryphal writings, some of which also are not forthcoming. (Sayyid Ahmad Khan 1887, I . 40)

In the first division, Sayyid Ahmad Khan includes all books in the present Old Testament. The books which are listed in the second division are:

1. The covenant of Moses.
2. The book of the wars of Moses.
3. The book of Jasher.
4. The book of Jehu, the son of Hanani.
5. The book of Shemiah, the prophet.
6. The Prophecy of Ahijab, the Shilonite.
7. The book of Nathan, the prophet.
8. The visions of Iddo, the Seer.
9. The book of the Acts of Solomon.
10. The book of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz.
11. The vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz.
12. The book of Samuel, the Seer.
13. The Solomon's 1,005 Songs.
14. The book of vegetables and animals by Solomon.
15. The book of 3,000 Proverbs by Solomon.
16. The Lamentations of Jeremiah for Joshua.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan believes that the above books were prophetic writings which no longer exist. He then lists the following books which he considers in the third division:

- 1-7 The seven books of Seth
8. The book of Hanock or Idris
9. The Revelation of Abraham
- 10 The Revelation of Moses
- 11 The book of the little Genesis. This book was rejected by the Christian Council held at Trent.

- 12 The assumption of Moses
- 13 The testament of Moses
- 14 The book of the Mysteries of Moses
- 15 The Ascension of Moses
- 16 The book of Esdras ['Ezra] no. 1
- 17 The book of Esdras ['Ezra] no. 2
- 18 The book of Tobit
- 19 The book of Judith
- 20 The rest of the chapters of the book of Esther
- 21 The Wisdom of Solomon
- 22 The Wisdom of Jesus the son of Serach, or Ecclesiasticus.
- 23 The book of Baruch
- 24 The song of the three Holy children
- 25 The History of Susanna
- 26 The History of the Destruction of Bel and the Dragon
- 27 The prayer of Manesses King of Juda
- 28 First book of the Maccabees
- 29 The Second book of the Maccabees
- 30 The book of the Ascension of Isaiah
- 31 The Preaching of Habakkuk.

According to him again, the books in the third division are excluded from the present canonical books. Some Christian sects, adds Sayyid Ahmad Khan, considered some of those books as "books of religious authority" Some of those books also were at the beginning accepted among the canonical books. Then they were excluded from them because their genuineness was doubtful. The Christians also universally rejected some of them. As regards the New Testament, Sayyid Ahmad Khan clarifies that what he means by the New Testament is those revelations which came down to Jesus and were recorded by his apostles. Muslim call them *Injil*.

The four Gospels are canonical books and therefore they are classed in the first division. There are many other books which have been excluded from the canonical books of the scriptures and therefore they are rejected by the Christians. The rejected books are classed in the second division and listed below:

1. The Gospel of the Infancy of Christ by St. Matthew
2. The Gospel of the birth of Mary
3. The Prot-evangelian of James. [The Gospel of Jacob]
4. The Gospel of Nicodemus
5. The Gospel of Peter
6. The Second Gospel of John
7. The Gospel of the disciple Andrew
8. The Gospel of Philip

- 9 The Gospel of Bartholomew
10. The Gospel of Thomas
- 11 1 The Gospel of the Infancy of Christ by Thomas
- 12 2 The Gospel of the Infancy of Christ by Thomas
- 13 The Gospel of Matthias
- 14 The Gospel of Marcus entitled "The Egyptian Gospel"
- 15 The Gospel of Barnabas
- 16 The Gospel of Thaddaeus
- 17 The Gospel of Paul
- 18 The Gospel of Appelles
- 19 The Gospel of Basilides
- 20 The Gospel of Cerinthus
- 21 The Gospel of the Ebionites
- 22 The Gospel of the Encartites
- 23 The Gospel of Eve
- 24 The Gospel according to the Hebrews
- 25 The Gospel under the name of Jude
- 26 The Gospel under the name of Judas Iscariot
- 27 The Gospel of Marcion
- 28 The Gospel of Merinthus
- 29 The Gospel according to the Nazarenes
- 30 The Gospel of Perfection
- 31 The Gospel of Scythianus
- 32 The Gospel of Titan
- 33 The Gospel of Truth used by the Valentinians
- 34 The Gospel of Valentinus.

Besides the four Gospels, the rest of the books in the present New Testament such as "the Acts of the Apostles", "The Epistle to the Romans" and many others are also classed in the First Division along with the four Gospels. There are ninety rejected books of the New Testament as listed by Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Among them are The Epistle of Mary to Ignatius, the Epistle of Mary to the Sicilyans, the Book of Genesis by Mary, the Book of Mary, the tradition of Mary, the Book of the miracles of Christ by Mary, the Book of the Doctrines of the Apostles, the death of Mary by John, the particulars of Christ's descending from the Cross by John and many other books. Apart from those books, it is also reported that Jesus himself produced several books as follows:

1. The Epistle to Abgarus
2. Ditto to Paul and Peter
3. The Book of Proverbs and Preaching
4. A Hymn which Christ taught to his disciples.

5. The Book on Magic
6. The Book on the birth of Christ, Mary and her nurse.
7. The Christ Epistle which fell down from Heaven directed to a priest named Leopas in the city of Eras.
8. An Epistle of Christ produced by Manichees.

At this stage we see Sayyid Ahmad Khan did not give his view on whether it is correct or not to exclude all those books which are classed in the second and third divisions of the canonical books of the Biblical scriptures. In many places in his *Tabyīn al-Kalām*, he referred to the works of Thomas Hartwell Horne and Nathaniel Lardner in order to develop his writings on Biblical subjects.

In his discourse on “to find out which of these books are authentic and what rule there is according to the Muslims to confirm the authenticity of the book”, Sayyid Ahmad Khan is of the opinion that the authenticity of a book chiefly depends on whether the author of the book is *mu'tabar* (worthy of credence) or not.

If he [i.e. the author] is worthy of credence, then the book too. If not, the book, likewise, cannot be relied upon. Further, if the book has been ascribed (*mansub*) to a trustworthy person, then the *sanad* (i.e. ascription, the chain of authorities on which a tradition is based) is needed, to establish the fact that the book in question truly has been written by the person [it is ascribed to]. As long as we have not an uninterrupted chain (*sanad-i muttasil*) from our time up to the author of the book, this fact [of his authorship] has not been established. By *sanad-i muttasil* we meant that a trustworthy person has “learnt” this book from the original writer, then a second person from this person and so on in a way that his [the original author's] testimony has arrived up to the present in the very manner. (Sayyid Ahmad Khan 1887, 1 43)

Apart from this condition in judging whether the book is *mu'tabar* or not, he also mentions other *qa'idah* or rules in order to establish whether the book is reliable or unreliable. According to him, there are four divisions of books considered to be genuine and reliable :

1. To this category belong those books whose authenticity has never been called in question, whose renown had spread from city to city; – books which were used by the pious and learned men of every age; and which were unanimously allowed & accepted as true and orthodox. To the truth of books so vouched we at once give in our adhesion.
2. In this class are placed books, that authors of which enjoyed high reputation and acceptance in their days. These books were generally known and esteemed but they did not gain universal acceptance and although they were largely used for references by other writers and

for quotation purposes, they in the causes of time lose their influences in the mind of men and gradually sunk into oblivion after attaining temporary acceptance. These books were at one time very popular and eventually lose their position in reference works. These books we also admit to be authentic and worthy of trust but of comparatively less value than those of class one.

3. In this division are reckoned those books which, although written by eminent men, never attained to any general circulation, and were not adopted as text books by the scholar of the age, nor were they quoted by contemporary or subsequent writers. Such books we do not hold to be of unquestionable authority.
4. The fourth and last class is composed of books which were wholly unknown to antiquity, and made their appearance at a comparatively later period, without attracting the notice of the able and learned men of the time. Such books we do not regard as trustworthy or authentic.

Studying throughout his three volumes of Bible commentaries, one can see that Sayyid Ahmad Khan's views on Biblical scriptures, particularly the New Testament were more sympathetic than other Muslim scholars in India.

In his discussion on the Muslim religious view towards the corruption of the sacred scriptures, Sayyid Ahmad Khan followed *Imān* Fakhruddin al-Razi and Shah Waliyullah. Therefore, based on *Iman* al-Razi's interpretation of the word *Tahrif*, he discusses this crucial topic.

According to *Imām* al-Razi the word *Tahrif* means "to change, to alter, to turn aside anything from its truth.

التحريف التغير (التغيير) والتبديل والتحريف هو مالة الشيء عن حقه

This is in fact a general meaning of the word *Tahrif*. But when this word is applied to the sacred scriptures, it means "a wilful corruption of the word of God from its true and original purport and intent" (Sayyid Ahmad Khan 1887, 1 64).

Sayyid Ahmad Khan is of the opinion that the *tahrif* occurs in eight different ways:

1. By adding words or phrases which were not there originally
2. By striking out existing words or phrases.
3. By the substitution of other words, differing in meaning from those struck out.
4. By making verbal changes while reading, so as to convey to the ear words different from what were written.

5. By reading only some passages, and omitting others.
6. By instructing the people in a manner contrary to God's teaching in his holy word, and yet making them believe that this instruction is the true word.
7. By adopting an improper meaning of certain words of ambiguous or equivocal interpretation, which does not suit the sense intended.
8. By misinterpreting those passages which are mysterious and allegorical (Sayyid Ahmad Khan 1887. I · 66).

The first four types of *Tahrīf* is called *Tahrīf Lafzī* or verbal corruption and the last four *Tahrīf ma'nawī* or corruption of the sense or meaning of sacred scripture. According to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the first three kinds of *Tahrīf* are not practised although some other Muslim scholars believe these have been practised. This is because these scholars includes under the name of *Tahrīf* "all books or writings which being the productions of individuals, have been falsely published under the name of prophets or apostles", and because they proved that some of the Jews practised those three types of *Tahrīf*. They accordingly claim some of Christian orthodox made these deliberate corruptions. Sayyid Ahmad Khan rejects the arguments used by those scholars in interpreting these three types of *Tahrīf* as practised corruptions. He says that,

these arguments are not sound; nor do such alterations or interpolations pertain to those corruptions which are spoken of in the Holy Koran {Qur'an}. (Sayyid Ahmad Khan 1887, I 68)

He emphasises that the publication of a book by an individual under the name of a prophet or an apostle cannot be considered acts of the corruption of the truth. Apart from that, if anybody interpolates sacred scriptures of his private copy, then "it is a mere isolated fact, quite unconnected with the general question under discussion". What we have to consider, he adds, is that whether Biblical scriptures which had spread throughout Christendom and Judaism really being corrupted with those three types of *Tahrīf*. On the other hand, the interpolations practised by the Orthodox Christians, as some Muslim scholars argue, are not parallel to what the Qur'an means by the word *Tahrīf*. This is due to the fact that people who made alterations did not intend to corrupt the scriptures. They thought that those alterations were the real truth.

In order to support his view on this subject, Sayyid Ahmad Khan refers to the ideas of several great Muslim scholars who are in favour of his view. Among them are *Imām* Mohamad Ismail Bukhari, one of the most outstanding *Hadith* collectors, Shah Waliyullah and *Imām*

Fakhruddin Al-Razi. *Imām* Bukhari says that the meaning of the word *Tahrif* is “(ازالة)” meaning losing (of the sacred Scriptures). But, he adds, nobody could be lose a single word from the books of Allah, so that the Jews and the Christians could only misrepresent the words of God and not lose them. *Imām* Ibn Taimiyah also was asked about the same subject. He said that there are two different views relating to this matter: some say that the word *Tahrif* is to mean interpolation of words and others believe that it means the misrepresentation of the meaning of a subject and Ibn Taimiyah was in favour of the latter opinion. Sayyid Ahmad Khan quotes Shah Waliyullah for the opinion that although people had habits of corrupting certain passages in paraphrases and commentaries on book of the Old Testament, yet they did not make unauthorised changes in the original texts of the scriptures. Ibn ‘Abbas also thought the same as Shah Waliyullah. It is also mentioned by *Imam* al-Razi, on the authority of Ibn Abbas, that the Jews and the early Christians were suspected of changing the text of the Old and New Testaments. On the other hand, the corruption of the original text of the scriptures is believed to be impossible by Muslim theologians (*almutakallimūn*). This is due to the fact that both the Old and New Testaments were well known and widely circulated among the people that made this *Tahrif* impossible.

Imām Fakhruddin al-Razi also asks how it was possible to alter the Old Testament while it was so well known among the people. The answer given by him in this respect is parallel to what the Qur’an mentions in Sura Al’Imran, verse 78, thus

وان منهم لفريقا يلوون السنتهم بالكتاب
لتحسبوه من الكتاب وما هو من الكتاب ويقولون هو من
عندالله وما هو من عندالله ويقولون على الله الكذب هم
يعلمون.

(Surah Al-Imran, 3 78)

Meaning:

There is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues: (as they read) you would think it is a part of the Book, but it is not part of the Book: and they say, “That is from Allah”; It is they who tell a lie against Allah, and (well) they know it.

Accordingly, *Imām* Fakhruddin al-Razi points out that only a few

persons were involved in such a work of corrupting the ‘book of the Old Testament. This is what is meant by the word *Tahrif*. He also gives his comment on other Qur’anic passages in Sura al-Nisa’, verse 46 in which the Qur’an says .

من الذين هادوا يحرفون الكلم عن مواضعه ويقولون سمعنا
وعصينا واسمع غير مسمع وراعنا لئلا بالسنتهم وطعنا في
الدين. ولو انهم قالوا سمعنا واطعنا واسمع وانظرنا
لكان خيرا لهم واقوم ولكن لعنهم الله يكفرهم فلا
يوءمنون الا قليلا.

Meaning

Of the Jews there are those who displace words from their (right) places, and say “We hear and we disobey”, and “Hear what is not heard” and “Ra’ina”, with a twist of their tongues and a slander to faith. If only they had said “We hear and we obey”; and “Do hear”; and “Do look at us” it would have been better for them, and more proper; but Allah hath cursed them for their unbelief; and but few of them will believe”

Relating to these verses, *Imām* al-Razi asks how is it possible that an alteration took place into the book of God when it was so well known in the East and the West. The answer he gives is that the number of people who made the change was small and the number of those who had any knowledge about the scripture were stil fewer. As a result it was possible to misrepresent the text without discovery. The second answer given by him to that question is that what is meant by *Tahrif* is to create false doubts, to make the corrupted interpretation and commentary and to pull the word and pronunciation from its right meaning to falsehood by verbal artifices.

ان المراد بالتحريف القاء الشبهته / الشبهة / الباطلة
والتأويلات / والتأويلات / الفاسدة وجر اللفظ من معناه
الحق الى الباطل بوجه الحيل اللفظية.

Imām al-Razi is in favour of the second answer.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan also refers to the ideas of Ibn al-Munzir and Ibn Abi Hatim in the *Tafsir* of Darmanthur who believe that the Torah and the Injil have not received any change of words. In other words, they are pure as they were when revealed by God, But the Jews made *Tahrif* or corruption and wrong interpretation.

All these arguments have been used by Sayyid Ahmad Khan to prove the first three kinds of *Tahrif* as mentioned earlier have not been practised. The sacred scriptures have not been altered in accordance with any of those three types of *Tahrif*. But he believes that the other five kinds of *Tahrif* had taken place. For example, the Jews made a verbal change in Sura al-Baqarah verses 58-59 in which the Qur'an says:

واذ قلنا ادخلوا هذه القرية فكلوا منها حيث شئتم رغدا
وادخلوا الباب سجدا وقولوا حطة نغفر لكم خطاياكم وسنزيد
المحسين. فبدّل الذين ظلموا قولاً غير الذى قيل لهم فانزلنا
على الذين ظلموا رحزا من السماء بما كانوا يفسقون.

Meaning:

And remember We said: "Enter this town, and eat of the plenty therein as ye wish but enter the gate with humility, in posture and in words, and We shall forgive you your faults and increase (the portion of) those who do good. But the transgressors changed the word from that which had been given them, so We which sent on the transgressors a plague from heaven, for that they infringed (Our command) repeatedly.

According to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the word "(حنطة) *Hittatun*" in the above passage which means forgiveness had been changed to the word "(حنطة) (*Hintatun*)" in pronouncing it. The meaning of the word "(حنطة)" is wheat. Therefore, the Jews interpreted the word (*Hittatun*) in the above passage as totally different from its original meaning. The *Tahrif* in the above passage, as he understands, is only verbal alteration. In other words, "the alterations were of words only as conveyed to the ear, and not of the written text" Therefore, he excludes this verbal change in pronunciation from those three types of the *Tahrif* as mentioned earlier.

In Sura Al-'Imran, verse 78, the Qur'an says

وا من منهم لفريقا يلوّن السنتهم بالكتاب لتحسبوه من الكتاب
وما هو من الكتاب ويقولون هو من عند الله وما هو من عند الله
ويقولون على الله الكذب وهم يعلمون.

Meaning:

There is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues: (As they read) you would think it is a part of the Book, but it is no part of the Book; and they say, "That is from Allah", but it is not from Allah: it is they who tell a lie against Allah, and (well) they know it.

Regarding the above passage, Sayyid Ahmad Khan is of the opinion that readers of the Holy Scriptures had habits of changing the words in the scriptures to their own words. But there is no evidence to prove that there was any meddling or interference with the original texts of the scriptures. All these passages and some other Quranic verses as referred by Sayyid Ahmad Khan in Sura Al-Nisa' verse 46, Al-Ma'idah verse 14, dan Al-Baqarah verse 75, are clear proofs that the *Tahrif* in the fourth type took place as mentioned in the Qur'an. On the other hand, those Qur'anic passages also prove that the *Tahrif* as the Qur'an mentions is not parallel to any of the first three kinds of *Tahrif*.

With respect to the fifth type of *Tahrif*, Sayyid Ahmad Khan also present several arguments which show that it happened. In this *Tahrif*, a reader of the holy scriptures reads some passages and then omits others. It happened when a Jew read the holy scripture of the Torah on the subject of stoning to death for the crime of adultery. It is narrated by *Imām* Bukhari from Abdullah Ibn 'Umar that the Jew who read that scripture hid the passage that related to the penalty of adultery with the palm of his hand. Realising the cheat, 'Abdullah Ibn Salam took off the reader's hand from hidden passage of the scripture.

The Qur'an says in Sura al-Baqarah or 'The Heifer', thus

ان الذين يكتُمون ما انزل من البينات والهدى من بعدما بيناه
للناس فى الكتاب اولئك يلعنهم الله ويلعنهم اللاعنون الا الذين
تابوا واصلحوا وبيّنوا فاولئك اتوب عليهم وانا التواب

(al-Baqarah, 2 159 – 160)

meaning: Those who conceal the clear (signs) We have sent down, and the Guidance, after We have made it clear for the people in the Book, – on them shall be Allah's curse, and the curse of those entitled to curse, except those who repent and make amends and openly declare (the truth): to them I turn; for I am oft – Returning, Most Merciful. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2 159 – 160)

According to *Imām* Al-Razi's commentary, Ibn 'Abbas narrated a story that relates to the revelation of these passages. His group of Al-Ansar asked a Jew about the attribute of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as mentioned in the Torah and the laws in their Holy Scripture. But the Jews hid them. Then, those verses were revealed. This incident proves that "the Jew hid certain passages of scriptures, not that they struck them out of the book.

There are many other examples from the Qur'an which show that the fifth class of *Tahrif* was practised. Passages from the Sura Al-Baqarah verse 174, Al-Imran verse 187 and Al-Ma'idah verse 16 have been quoted by Sayyid Ahmad Khan in support of his view

Relating to the sixth type of *Tahrif*, where people have been given the teaching of God in a way which is against His words, Sayyid Ahmad Khan then, quotes Quranic passages as follows

يايها الذين امنوا ان كثيرا من الاحبار والرهبان ليأكلون
اموال الناس بالباطل ويصدون عن سبيل الله.

(Surah al-Taubat, 9 34)

Meaning:

“O ye who believe! There are indeed many among the priests and anchorites, who in falsehood devour the substance of men and hinder (them) from the way of Allah.

According to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the word *al-Batil* in the above passage, which means ‘in falsehood’ or ‘in vanity’, is to be interpreted that it was a habit of some people to proclaim teachings which are against the commands of God. They also practised taking bribes from their followers. *Imām al-Razī*, in his *Tafsir al-Kabir* which becomes a main source of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, mentions that Muslim commentators have different views on the interpretation of the word *al-batil*. Some interpreters believe that those priests and anchorites (the scripture readers) used to take money from their followers in order to reduce the sentences (*al-ahkam*) and obtain forgiveness (*al-musamahat*) of the *Shari'at* or the laws. They also claimed openly that there was no other way to get salvation (*al-fawz*) except serving and obeying them and donating the money for the priests' pleasures. The people were easily misled with those lies.

With respect to the seventh and eighth types of *Tahrif*, namely “adopting an improper meaning of certain words of ambiguous or equivocal interpretation, which does not suit the sense intended” and “misinterpreting those passages which are mysterious and allegorical”, there was little difference between them. Therefore, the same Quranic passages have been used by Sayyid Ahmad Khan in order to prove that these two kinds of *Tahrif* took place. The Qur'an says:

ولا تلبسوا الحق بالباطل وتكتموا الحق وانتم تعلمون

(al-Baqarah, 2 . 42)

Meaning:

And cover not truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth when ye know (What it is) (Surah al-Baqarah, 2 42).

Imān al-Razī points out that it is said “Do not cover the truth” because of the confusions the Jews made to the listeners. The Jews were disputing those texts and they were whispering to the people about the proof of the coming of the prophet Muhammad. They were called whisperers due to the confusions they made relating to those texts. This is what the Quranic passages mean by the words : “(ولا تلبسوا الحق)” i.e. “and do not cover the truth”

With regard to this commentary, Sayyid Ahmad Khan points out that the Qur’an reminds the Jews not to put a false meaning to words. This also means that the Jews were not guilty “of mutilating the written text”

In sura Al-‘Imran, the Qur’an also says:

يا اهل الكتاب لم تلبسون الحق بالباطل وتكتمون الحق وانتم تعلمون.

Meaning:

Ye people of the Book! Why do ye clothe truth with falsehood, and conceal the Truth while ye have knowledge. (Surah Al-Imran, 3 71)

According to the commentary of *Imām* al-Razī, often quoted by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the Jews attempted to hide those passages which indicate to the prophethood of Muhammad.

According to *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* again, the purpose of some one who attempts to hide the truth is either to raise doubts (*al-shubhāt*) and display what is true as being false or to hide the proof that indicates the truth. The first purpose is indicated by the passage “(لم تلبسوا الحق)” and the passage “(تكتمون الحق)” indicates of the second purpose. Furthermore, Al-Hasan and Ibn Zaid explain that the passage “(ليس الحق بالباطل)” meaning “the Truth is covered by falsehood” has many meanings and one of them is an alteration of the Old Testament. According to Al-Hasan and Ibn Zaid, the Jews adulterated the revealed passages.

A second opinion on this matter was given by Ibn ‘Abbas and Qatadah. They say that the Jews of Medina were prepared to acknowledge Islam at first but at the end of the day, they created doubts among the people.

According to al-Qadhī, there is in the Torah an indication of good news about the prophethood of Muhammad and his attributes. There are

also some passages in the Torah which have a different view about the prophethood of Muhammad like *al-Muhkam* and *al-mutashābih* in the Qur'an. *Al-muhkam* is a passage that has a clear meaning while *al-mutashābih* has an obscure meaning. Therefore, a reader of the scriptures does not know the meaning of an *al-mutashābih* passage. Therefore, the Jews created confusion relating to this matter among the weak people.

The fourth and last point on this subject is that the Jews claimed that the Prophet Muhammad acknowledged that Moses was right and the Torah shows that the *Sharī'at* or laws of Moses are not abrogated.

All these arguments, as *Imām* al-Razī says in his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, create *al-shubhat* or confusion to the people.

Therefore, we see they are included by al-Razī and often quoted by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, under the name *Tahrīf* of Holy Scriptures.

CONCLUSION

Based on all these passages from the Qur'an Sayyid Ahmad Khan comes to the conclusion that what is meant by the alteration and the corruption of the sacred scriptures do not imply "an actual mutilation of the text; but simply the modifying of words when read to another, or the concealing of passages; or the transgressing of the commandments of god; or misinterpreting or misconstruing the words of God". He also concludes that what the Qur'an speaks against is the practice of some people who published books that are not genuine under the names of distinguished people. This also includes what the Qur'an says:

فويل للذين يكتبون الكتاب بأيديهم ثم يقولون هذا من عند الله
ليشتروا به ثمنا قليلا فويل لهم مما كتبت ايديهم وويل
لهم مما يكسبون.

(al-Baqarah, 2 79)

Meaning:

Then woe to those who write the Book with their own hands and they say · "This is from Allah", to traffic with it for a miserable price¹ – woe to them for what their hands do write, and the gain they make thereby. (Surah al-Baqarah 2:79)

It is clear that Sayyid Ahmad Khan bases most of his arguments about the corruption or *Tahrīf* of the Holy scriptures on *Imām* al-Razī's *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. The main point which he tries to prove is that most

Tahrīf occurred in the form of *tahrīf ma'anawī* (corruption of meaning). He strongly believes that the first three types of *tahrīf lafzī* (verbal corruption) did not take place. He does not deny, however, that *tahrīf lafzī* occurred in the fourth category but it is not so strong as those first three kinds of *tahrīf lafzī*.

In his eight discourse in the *Tabyīn al-Kalām* on the subject of "Are these books {The Old and New Testaments} exactly the same as the original books written at the time of Revelation", Sayyid Ahmad Khan says that the present Bible is the Holy scriptures to which the Qur'an refers and they existed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad and even before Islam advented (Dar 1971, 92).

Observing Sayyid Ahmad Khan's early works on the Biblical studies such as *Tabyīn al-Kalam fī Tafṣīr al-Taurāt wa al Injīl 'alā millat al-Islām* as a whole, one can see the views and attitudes existing in his works differ from the works of other Muslim scholars in India regarding the subject of Biblical scriptures. Rahmat Allah, for example, took an uncompromising attitude by completely rejecting the present Bible as unreliable. On the contrary, Sayyid Ahmad Khan accepts the present Bible as the Holy Scriptures which are mentioned by the Qur'an. As a Muslim, his religious idea and attitudes are totally bound by the Qur'an.

Although his ideas on certain aspects of Islamic principles are different from other Muslim scholars, yet they are not against Islamic principles. On the contrary, those ideas are his *ijtihād* on certain subjects in which the Qur'an gives general clues in understanding them. These include his religious ideas as he presented them in the *Tabyīn al-Kalām* and his other works.

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