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History of Pashto Translations of Bible: Its Impact on Pashto Language and Literature

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Abstract

The history of Pashto translation of Bible started by John Lyden in 1818 with parts of Bible translation followed by Pashto translations of New and Old Testament by William Carey in 1863 and the practice continued till the publication of full revised Bible by United Bible Societies in 2020. Bible was translated from Hebrew, Greek and English languages into Pashto prose and verse. Missionaries were assisted in these translations by Pashtun mullahs, qazis, scribes and local converts. Prominent Pashtun who assisted in these translations were Ahmad, Qazi Abdul Rahman, Ghulam Jilani, M.A. Taib, Hamidullah and Wazir-al-Din. Bible translations into Pashto left its impact on Pashto language and literature in terms of style and themes. The first printed in Pashto is the translation of Bible. Early Pashto translations helped in the emergence of standard Pashto dialect. This article explores the history of Bible translation into Pashto. Furthermore, it highlights the significant contributions of prominent individuals, missions and organizations. It also explores thematic, stylistic, literary and linguistic impacts of Bible translation on Pashto language and literature. The study is going to be dominantly descriptive in nature based on the primary and secondary sources.

Key Words: Bible, Pashto translation, Bible Society, New Testament, Old Testament, Pashto language, Pashto literature.

East India Company and Christianity in India

Although there was a clause in the Charter of 1698 which stated that “the chaplains in the factories are to study the vernacular language, the better to enable them to instruct the servants of the company in the Protestant religion (Moore, 1908: 129) but the Company did not allow missionaries and was not interested in spiritual welfare of the Hindus (Moore, 1908: 131). The history of modern missionaries in India starts from the landing of William Carey in Calcutta in 1793 (Moore, 1908: 131).

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Bible Translations into Languages of the Region

Despite having distinguished linguists and working in India for three hundred years, Romish missions did not produce a single translation of the Bible. Instead, it was evangelical missions that initiated Bible translation into the languages of the region. (Moore, 1908: 287). Protestant missionaries arrived in the region in the beginning of 18th century and focused on translating the Bible to help in their conversion efforts. Over time, the Bible was translated into most languages spoken in present-day India and Pakistan and other regions. Despite efforts to create a standard Protestant terminology for Indian languages, a comparison of translation histories shows that the translated Bible had to undergo continuous revision to keep up with linguistic changes in the region. However, due to the unique histories and cultures of each language, it was not possible to create a uniform terminology across all Indian languages. In the 20th century, the focus of translation efforts has shifted towards ecumenical translations and those that are reflective of the diverse multi-faith culture in India, rather than attempting to standardize terminology. Many Indian languages did not have their writing system, and missionaries were often required to compile basic auxiliaries, grammars, and dictionaries. Many of the earliest translations of the Bible became unsatisfactory and were replaced, partly or entirely, by revised versions due to this reason (Moore, 1908: 287).

The history of Bible translation is divided into two periods: individual translations up to 1850, and the period of revision committees since 1850. The first language of this region was Tamil in which Bible was translated in 1772 (Moore, 1908: 288). The Old Testament was translated into Bengali in 1801, and the New Testament was translated in 1809 (Moore, 1908: 288). Dr. Carey translated the Bible into Sanskrit between 1808 and 1818, and into Hindi between 1809 and 1818 (Moore, 1908: 289). The first Urdu translation of the Bible was made by Henry Martyn, printed in 1815 (Moore, 1908: 289). An imperfect and early obsolete translation of the Bible into Punjabi was also made by Carey, followed by Dr. Newton (Moore, 1908: 290).

Bible Translation into Pashto

John Leyden completed the earliest translations of some parts of the Bible into Pashto during the second decade of the 19th century. However, only the Gospels (*Injil*) of Mathew and Mark were translated into Pashto by the time of his death in 1811. The complete New Testament in Pashto was translated for the first time by John Leyden's Pashto-speaking colleagues which was published in 1818 in Serampore.

This translation by John Lyden and William Carey was published by the Christian Mission (Serampore) in 1223 Hijra/1818 AD. Grierson in tenth volume of his book "Linguistic Survey of India" has mentioned this translation. Prof. B.A. Dorn has included an extract from this translation in his book "A Chrestomathy of the Pushtu or Afghan Language" published in 1847. Actually this translation is made by John Lyden but William Carry has assisted him. This is the first translation from a European language into Pashto made by a European person. Therefore, it has numerous mistakes. Another contemporary translation into Pashto of this translation of Bible into Pashto is the Pashto translation of Gulistan made by Amir Muhammad Ansari in 1812 (Khattak, 1979:10). Both of these translations were made in the same place, Calcutta. One is made by a non Pashtun while the other is made by a Pashtun. There is a six years difference between these translations. This translation is not fluent and sometimes sentences do not give sense.

The Pashto title of this translation of Bible is *Kalamullah Ayub*. Its English title is Job, in Pashto. It was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society London in 1895. It starts from page number 1 and continued to page number 64. On the first page it is written *Da Ayub Nabi Kitab* i.e Book of prophet Ayub (Job). It contains 42 chapters.

William Carey led a group that translated significant portions of the Hebrew scriptures between 1822 and 1832. In the following years, several other translations were initiated but remained incomplete until later in the century. In the same year i.e. 1818, William Carey and John Lyden translated the parts of the Old Testament into Pashto by the name of "*Da Khudai Khabare*" means Sayings of God (Khalil, 2011: 136).

Thomas Patrick Hughes with the help of Mulvi Ahmad translated Injil into Pashto and published from Hertford England. It contains 779 pages (Khalil, 2011, 148). Isidore Lowenthal, an American Presbyterian translated New Testament into Pashto with the assistance of H. James and Robert Clark (Khalil, 2011, 144). The complete New Testament was published by The British and Foreign Bible Society in Hertford in 1863. T.P. Hughes and T.J. Lee Mayer of the Church Missionary Society initiated a translation project in Peshawar in 1874, which was later joined by a Pashtun, Qazi Abd-al-Rahman. The translation of Psalms was completed and printed in London in 1882 under the Pashto title *Kitab da nawi Ehad Injil*. The team, which now included Worthington Jukes and another Pashtun named Ahmad, completed the translation of the Pentateuch (Panch Kitab) that was published in 1890. In 1889, New Testament, translated from Greek into Pashto by T.J. Lee Mayer and others, and scribed by Ghulam Jilani. It was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in London. Mayer made another translation

of the Bible, which was revised by Jukes and W. Thwaites, and printed in London in 1890. In 1891, Hamidullah, a Pashtun Mullah, made a new translation of Psalms under the guidance of Worthington Jukes and revised by T.J. Lee Mayer, which was published in London. Mayer and Abd-al-Rahman completed the translation of the remaining Old Testament. This version was revised by Thwaites and published in London in 1895. Similarly the Peshawar translation of the entire Bible into Pashto was completed.

Robert Clark was the first Christian missionary in Peshawar, who translated *Injil* into Pashto, which was published in England in 1900. The Danish Pathan Mission published a versified translation of the Gospel of John, titled *Injil Sahrif pa ma'rifat da muqaddas Yuhana Manzooom Pukhto ma' tafseer*, with commentary by J. Christmenson and verses by M.A. Taib in 1939. The translation had been revised by Christensen and Taib from earlier translations made in the 1930s. Taib had versified the translation to suit Pashtuns preferences. The British and Foreign Bible Society in London printed two other Pashto translations, Kalamullah Ezekiel and Kalamullah Ayub in 1895. Pentateuch in Pashto (Kalamullah Tawrat) translated by the REV. Worthington Jukes and was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society London in 1890.

In 1932, a committee was established to revise the Pashto translation of the New Testament. The committee comprised of Jens Christensen, F. Paulli, Maidie Shearburn, Vera Studd, K.B. Wazir-al-Din from Peshawar, and M.A. Taib from Swat. The revised version was printed in Lahore in 1945 by the Punjab Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Later, the West Pakistan Bible Society in Lahore published another revision of this translation in 1968, which was made by Christensen and W.J. Kane.

Jens Enevoldson translated the Gospels (*Injil*) of Matthew and Luke into standard dialect of Pashto in 1981, which was published by the Pakistan Bible Society in Lahore. Jens Enevoldson also translated summary of *Torat* along with *sahaif* of *zabur* into Pashto language. In 1991 Pakistan Bible society produced New Testament in standard Pashto dialect spoken in Pakistan. It was revised in 1996. In 2020 full Bible was printed in Pashto by the United Bible Societies.

Source Languages of Bible

Bible has been translated from various languages into Pashto. Among them Greek, Hebrew and English are prominent ones.

Greek: New Testament volume IV has been translated from Greek language originally by T.J. Lee Mayer and revised by Pashto revision committee. It was printed in 1890 by British and Foreign Bible Society London. It contains 565 pages.

Hebrew: Pentateuch was translated from Hebrew into Pashto by Worthington

Jukes. It is scribed into Pashto by Ghulam Jilani, a famous Pashto scribe. It was printed by the British and Foreign Bible Society London in 1890. It contains 456 pages. Ezekiel was also translated from Hebrew into Pashto by T.J. Lee Mayer and scribed by Ghulam Jilani. It was published by British and Foreign Bible Society London in 1895. There are 48 chapters in this version. It starts from page number 259. Main text covers pages from 259 to 389.

English: Translation of Bible from English into Pashto language has also been made in the history of Pashto translations of Bible.

Introduction of Missionary Translators

As already mentioned that missionaries, Pashtun mullahs and local converts contributed to these translations into Pashto. Some of the prominent missionaries are being introduced in the following lines.

William Carey (1792-1833)

He born in Paulerspury village in Northampton on August 17, 1761. He father, in his youth, was a cobbler and then a school master. William Carey was also a cobbler from his earliest days (Moore, 1908: 134). He joined the Baptists in 1783. He founded B.M.S (Baptist Missionary Society) in October 1792 at Kettering. He was engaged in numerous missionaries' activities in England and Scotland before he left for India (Moore, 1908: 131). He came to India in 1793, for preaching of Christianity, seven years after the death of Kiernander (Moore, 1908: 130). Once he arrived in India he never went back (Moore, 1908: 143). He started his mission from Calcutta during East India Company. He established society of the preaching of Christainity in the city of Serampore in 1800. At that time Serampore when belonging to Denmark and was called Frederiksnagar (Moore, 1908: 131). Dr. Carey and his two fellows Marshman and Ward are called Serampore Trio (Moore, 1908: 134). First he translated New Testament into Bengali. He was made Master and later on Professor of Bengali, Sanskrit and Marathi (Moore, 1908: 136). With collaboration of other fellows he established a college in Serampore for Hindus. He also installed printing press there. His dearest project was translations of Bible into Asian languages for these people. For the first time he along with his colleague John Lyden translated the Bible into Pashto which was published in 1818. It is also the first printed book in Pashto. It has been named as *Da Khudai Tamame Khabare* [Perfect Sayings of God] (Khalil, 2011:136). He died in 1834 (Moore, 1908: 138).

John Lyden

He born in London in 1785. He was a medical doctor by profession. He learnt Arabic and Persian languages at the age of eighteen. He got job in East India company at the age of eighteen and came to India. He learnt Gujrati language in

the Madras city of India and wrote a grammar of Gujrati language. Later on he learnt Urdu and became teacher of Urdu language in Fort William College Culcutta. He also learnt Sanskrit and translated a few books into English. He went to Indonesia and on his back to Culcutta he started learning Pashto language. He translated a part of the complex Pashto text of Akhund Darweza's book *Makhza-al-Islam*. Later on he translated *Injil* and *Torat* into Pashto. As already mentioned his *Injil* translation by the name of *Da Khudai Tamame Khabare* was published in 1818. He studied Pashtun's history and translated an essay about Roshanites from the *Dabestan-i-Mazahib*. This translation titled "Roshania sect and its founder Bayazid Ansari" has been published in Asiatic Researches in 1812. He died in 1821 at the age of thirty six years (Khalil, 2011: 138-39).

Isidore Lowenthal

Isidore Loewenthal, an orthodox jew of Poland, born in Germany and graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey. He became an Evangelist missionary in Peshawar under the auspices of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. He came to Peshawar in the beginning of 1857. Here he translated the New Testament into Pashto and embarked upon compiling a Pashto Dictionary before he died at the age of thirty seven. He has also compiled a grammar of Pashto. He wrote a book *Nawi Wasiatona* which was published in 1863 in London. One of his essays titled "Is Pashto a semitic language? Was published in 1860 (Khalil, 2011: 143-44). He was a missionary but was also taking part in military services. He was shot dead in Peshawar in March 1863 and buried in the Old English Cemetery of Tehkal Peshawar. His tombstone bears the following inscription.

"Rev. Isidore Loewenthal, of the American Presbyterian Mission who translated the New Testament into Pashto— was shot by his chokeydar, April 27, 1864."

Henry George Raverty

Henry George Raverty was a military lieutenant of the Bombay army. While serving in Peshawar in 1849-50 he was taught Pashto by a learned linguist, Maulvi (afterwards Qazi) Abdur Rahman Khan Muhammadzai, translator of Old Testament from Hebrew and John Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress' into Pashto among other notable literary works.

Robert Clark

He came to Peshawar in 1854 for missionary purpose. He also remained Principal of Edwards school Peshawar. He learnt Pashto and translated *Injil* into Pashto which was published from London in 1900. His another book is mentioned as "*Ibniyat da Hazrat Esa*". He bought land in Gor Gathrri Peshawar in December 16, 1852 and built a mission house there. He is called the first preacher of

Christianity in Peshawar. Later on he went to Kashmir (Khalil, 2011: 145-146).

Thomas Patrick Hughes

He completed Christianity studies in London and came to Peshawar in 1865. He spent twenty years among Pashtuns. He could speak Pashto, Arabic and Urdu languages. He collected many Pashto manuscripts from Pashtun region and took all with himself. After his arrival into the region of Pashtun, numerous literary works of Pashto were published. He was assisted by Mulvi Ahmad of Tangi. He compiled a text book of Pashto "*Kalid-i-Afghani*" for Britishers which was published in 1882 in Lahore. Its second edition was published in 1893 from Lahore. He translated Injil into Pashto and published in 1863 in Hertford England. It contains 779 pages. He has also written a grammar of Pashto. He also published Dewan of Rahman Baba in 1877 in Lahore which was prepared by Mulvi Ahmad (Khalil, 2011: 147-149). He has also written a novel "*Ruhaina*" set along the Afghan frontier of British India.

Jens Enevoldson

He born in 1922 in Denmark. He was known Ghulam Esa among the Pashtuns. He graduated in Theology in 1954. He came to Peshawar in 1958. He started teaching of European history in the department of History of the University of Peshawar. At the same time he was also doing his research in Pashto Academy of the University of Peshawar. He speak Pashto fluently. He was associated with Danish Pathan Mission. He has completely integrated himself in Pashtun culture. He started Pashto literature service in Pashto in a van having a mobile book shop. On this van the slogan was written in Pashto language as "*Kitabona Daryabona*" [Books are rivers]. On one side of the van it was written "*Ghuncha da golo me pa las da/ ka sok golona boyavi no ra deshina*" [I have a bouquet of flowers in my hand/ if someone smells it, he is welcome to come closer]. Later on he also opened a book shop at Peshawar Saddar. Pashto literature service published Pashto translation of Injil and "*Da Torat Khulasa sara da zabur sahifo*". He died in 1991 (Khalil, 2011: 150-156).

Jens Christensen

He born in Chicago on August 24, 1899, to Danish parents, he dedicated himself to the study of the Pashto language and the Pathan culture from an early age. In fact, his first Danish book delved into the Pashtuns and Islam. He was tasked with creating Christian literature in Pashto and, in 1927, established the 'Pushto Literature Committee' with six missionary societies, where he served as the chairman. In the Mardan reading room. Jens established a printing and distribution center. In 1931, he initiated the translation of Matthew's Gospel into Pashto, which was followed by the translation of John's Gospel in 1936. The latter

was later edited by Taib and supplemented with commentary by Jens. This publication adhered to the best traditions of Muslim religious writings and was well-received by those produced at reading room. The British and Foreign Bible Society covered the expenses of this translation, as it did with the complete New Testament translation at a later date. During World War II, the Danish Mission lost its connection to their home base and support. Jens died at the age of 67 in 1966.

Introduction of Pashtun Co-Workers and Translators

Mulvi Ahmad

He born in 1845 in Tangi village of Hashtnagar. He belonged to Muhammadzai tribe. He studied Sarf, Nahwa, Fiqah, Hadith and Tafseer. He moved to Turu and then to Bar Tehkal Peshawar. In Peshawar he assisted T.P. Hughes in his compilation of *Kalid-i-Afghani*. He wrote numerous books such as “*Adam Khan Durkhanai*” published in 1872 in government printing press Lahore. He published his another book “*Ganj-i-Pashto*” in 1873 from Lahore. Similarly he published “*Bacha aw Jamjama*” in 1875 and “*Ghal aw Qazi*” in 1877. In Pakhtunkhwa he was the first person who wrote short folk tales in simple prose. Plouden translated his book *Ganj-i-Pashto* in English and published in 1875 and 1896. It has also been translated into Russian and Uzbeki languages. He also edited and compiled Rahman Baba Dewan which was scribed by Ghulam Jilani in 1872 and published in 1877. He died in 1883 in Prang area of Charsada. (Khalil, 2011:469-474)

Qazi Abdul Rahman

Basically he belonged to Afghanistan where he lived in Hazrat Qala village of Ghazni. He along with his younger brother went to India for education. He got education in Arabic and Persian languages. On their arrival back when they reached to Bannu. Qazi Abdur Rahman became a teacher of Arabic and Persian in Bannu and his brother went to Ghazni. He died in 1899 and buried in Bannu. He knew numerous languages such as Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, English and Pashto. For the first time he translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Pashto. He helped Christian mission of Bannu in translation. With his co-workers he translated John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim Progress* into Pashto language by the name of *Sair-us-Salikin*. It was published from Amratsar under the supervision of T.J. Lee Mayer in 1877. It contains 294 pages (Khalil, 2011: 476-77). It is the first translated novel into Pashto. Abdur Rahman had also taught the legendary Sir Richard Francis Burton when he was serving as a lieutenant in East India Company. Burton was a multi-lingual explorer, writer and under cover military spy for British who later translated the famous classic ‘*Arabian Nights*’ from Arabic into English in his much publicized adventurous life and also became one of the few non-Muslims ever to perform Hajj in Makkah under the guise of a Pathan in 1853.

Scribes**Ghulam Jilani**

He was a Pashtun scribe. Besides Bible Pashto translations, he also scribed Rahman Baba Dewan and many other Pashto literary works.

M.A. Taib

Taib and Christensen were lifelong colleagues. Taib was born in a village in Swat in a family of Muslim clerics. He was baptized by Mr Robertson and became a writer, poet, and hymn composer. He transformed Jens's prose writings into verse, making them more appealing to the Pashtun community. Taib served as a librarian, keeping records of the distribution of religious materials. He also studied theology with Jens and was ordained as a pastor in 1938 by Bishop J. Sandegren of the Lutheran Swedish Church in South India. Taib worked as a traveling pastor, encountering many new situations and answering questions as a Christian Pashtun who served poor Christian communities.

Introduction of Missions who translated Bible into Pashto

Besides individuals, some missions also assisted in the Pashto translations of the Bible in one or another way. Some of these missions are introduced in the following lines.

Danish Pathan Mission Mardan NWFP

Danish Pathan Mission played an important role in the Pashto translations of the Bible. It published Bible in verse by M.A. Taib with commentary of J.

Christensen in 1358 Hijra 1939 AD. Its Pashto title is *Injil Sharif Pa Ma'rifat da Muqaddas Yuhana Manzum Pashto ma' Tafseer* [Bible versified Pashto Translation and interpretation]. It contains 216 pages.

Danish Bible Society

The above mentioned translation of Bible in Pashto verse was published with the aid of Danish Bible Society.

Introduction to Publishers

As mentioned already some of the missions contributed to the Pashto translations of the Bible. In the same way some publishers also contributed to these translations in terms of their publication and printing. A few prominent publishers are introduced in the following lines.

Publishers have their own significant contribution in publishing the Pashto translations of the Bible. Therefore it is necessary that they may also be introduced.

British and Foreign Bible Society London

British and Foreign Bible Society has rendered inestimable services in translations. It had satisfactory financial position which enabled it to print itself or render support in its printing. It borrowed experts, in some cases for years

and also paid the cost for translations (Moore, 1908: 293). British and Foreign Bible Society London has published a number of Pashto translations of Bible.

Other Publishers

Other publishers include British and Foreign Bible Society in Hertford, England in 1863, Danish Bible Society, Church Missionary Society Peshawar (T.P. Hughes).

Impact on Pashto language and literature

The first Bible translation in Pashto was completed in the early 1800s by British missionaries, and since then, many more translations have been made, including modern versions that are widely available. These translations helped to standardize the Pashto language, and they also left a significant impact on Pashto Literature. Language standardization to some extent is still an issue in Pashto language because Pashto has many dialects and varieties mainly based on ethnic and geographical divisions. Besides, Pashto is mainly spoken in two different states that are Pakistan and Afghanistan. Both of these countries have different linguistic policies. Subsequently, these different linguistic and language planning policies have influenced Pashto language and particularly the matter of standard dialect and standard and unified orthography. Bible, the first printed book, to some extent resolved this issue. Later on numerous versions of the Pashto translation of Bible were produced in the standard dialect of Pashto which helped in the emergence and development of standard literary dialect for Pashto language. The Bible has been translated into Pashto in both verse and prose forms, and the translations have included both the Old and New Testaments. These translations also contributed to the vocabulary of Pashto and introduced new terms into Pashto language. Pashto has a rich literary tradition of religious contents in verses. Poetry and versified contents are liked by Pashtuns. Keeping in view this literary and poetic taste of Pashtuns, the Bible was also translated into Pashto verse. This has given Pashto speakers access to stories and information from Bible, which were previously unavailable to them, and has also provided Pashto literature with a new source of inspiration.

Pashtun poets and writers such as M.A. Taib, Ghulam Jilani, Mulvi Ahmad, Abdul Rahman and others either translated Bible in prose or moulded into verse. These translators were writers of Pashto and thus their Pashto literary writings were influenced by translation of Bible such as using new vocabulary and terms into Pashto language and literature. Different missions working for Bible translation also promoted Pashto literature through printing and publishing. Bible translation also helped in the standardization of Pashto literary and standard dialect which subsequently helped in the development of Pashto literature and unified orthographic system for Pashto.

Conclusion

The history of Bible translation in Pashto is divided into two periods: individual translations up to 1850 AD, and the period of revision committees since 1850 AD. The Bible has been translated into Pashto by various individuals and groups over the centuries. Many of the earliest translations of the Bible became unsatisfactory and were replaced, partly or entirely, by revised versions. Pashtun mullahs, qazis, scribes, and local converts assisted missionaries in the Pashto translations of Bible. Bible has been translated into Pashto verse and prose. Prominent individuals, missions, organizations and publishers contributed in the Pashto translations of Bible. The translations had a significant impact on the Pashto language and literature in terms of vocabulary, terms, style and themes. The early Pashto translations of Bible also helped in the emergence of a standard Pashto dialect and unified orthography. Translators also face many challenges such as making standard, relevant and contextual terminology in Pashto language because of the difference of culture and religion. All of the Pashto translations were made from the original Greek, Hebrew and English languages.

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