

# QUR'AN STUDIES IN BENGALI

By Dr Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg

***Banglabhasay Qur'an Charchar Patabhumi-O-Amuslimder Dhara Tar Pracher-o-Prashar***(Background to the Study of the Qur'an in Bengali Language and its Propagation by non-Muslim Scholars) by Dr Muhammad Mujibur Rahman, Calcutta: Shaikh Prakashani, 2011, pp.76+xxviii.

Retired Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies as well as a prolific writer in Bengali and Urdu, Dr Muhammad Mujibur Rahman (born in Maldah district in West Bengal c.1936) is a versatile Islamic scholar. I have known him since 1967, when he helped me to obtain a copy of Allamah Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti's (d.1505) history book entitled *Ta'rikh al-Khulafa'* (lit. *History of the Caliphs*) from the house of one Qari Muhammad Husain at Nachowl in Rajshahi, Bangladesh. This act of kindness by Dr Mujib is very important to me. With this book in my possession I left Rajshahi University and travelled to England to study for a PhD at Cambridge University.

After nearly four years of study (from September 1967 to July in 1971) I gained my PhD degree and was hoping to return to Rajshahi University in 1971, when civil war broke out in East Pakistan. Some of my relatives, including my uncle S.M. Mahtab Beg were killed at the beginning of the civil war. My friends advised me to abandon my idea of returning to my homeland, so I lived and worked in UK and Malaysia for the next decade. I also worked at the British Museum (1972) under the patronage of Dr Martin Lings, the Keeper of the Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts at the British Library, and later in the National University of Malaysia (1974-1985).

In the intervening years, Dr Mujib was promoted to Professorship of Arabic at the University of Rajshahi and wrote many books on Islamic subjects, including his PhD thesis entitled *Banglabhasay Qur'an Charcha* (Lit. Qur'an Studies in Bengali Language) which was published by the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh in 1984. It was reviewed by Professor Rahul Peter Das in the German journal, *Der Islam* circa 1990. Based on his magnum opus, Dr Mujib's booklet, *Banglabhayay Qur'an Charchar Patabhumi* was published in 1980 and it was enlarged and reprinted by Shaikh Amanullah of Shaikh Prakashani, the 24 Parganas in West Bengal in 2011.

The last named book provides a summary of Dr Mujib's findings regarding the translations of the Qur'an by Muslim and Hindu scholars (including the first full translation of the Qur'an in Bengali language in 1881 by Girish Chandra Sen (1835-1910) of Narayanganj in Bangladesh and partial translations by others such as Rajendra Kumar Mitra (1879); Basantakumar Mukhopadhyay (1937), Kiran Gopal Singha (1908), Taracharan Bandopadhyay (1882) and Sri Philip Biswas (1891).

Thus many Hindu writers had translated parts of the Qur'an (especially Amm Para) in Bengali. Among the early translators of the Qur'an in Bengali (1800-1880 CE) were many Muslim scholars such as Amiruddin Basunia (c. 1808), Mir Wahid Ali (1868), Mawlana Muhammad Naimuddin (c. 1880), Taslimuddin Ahmad (c. 1907) and Mawlana Abbas Ali (c. 1906), etc. Dr Mujib served the interest of the academic community by exploring the history of Bengali translation of Qur'an. The most outstanding aspect of his research was the publication of the life and works of Girish Chandra Sen (pp.36-56). This is by far the most elaborate discussion of a pioneering translator of the Qur'an into Bengali. According to Dr Mujib, the language of Girish Sen is, on the whole, eloquent but rather pedantic. Sanskritised, and hence, to some extent, incomprehensible. Two scholars, in a letter of commendation to Sen were mildly critical: "We think that the book (Bengali translation) may be useful particularly to the Mohammadans, if the style could be rendered a little easier so as to be understood by the less erudite." Among its shortcomings, the translation contains no original Arabic text, nor is there an index to the sign of pause in Qur'anic verses. However, Sen does mention the *Shan-i-Nuzul* (Asbab al-Nuzul), which refers to causes and the background of revelations according to Shah Abdul Qadir and *Tafsir-i-Husaini*, but not in great detail. Without it the deeper meaning of the Qur'an cannot be understood. Many readers therefore can be easily misguided by the outward meaning of the verses.

Dr Mujib has written no less than eight books on Qur'an Studies, including his PhD thesis:

1. *Bangla Bhasay Qur'an Charcha*, which was approved by the Rajshahi University Syndicate in 1981 and cited above.
2. *Qur'an Kanika* (Selections from the Qur'an, 2 volumes).
3. *Fada'il al-Qur'an* (Merits of the Qur'an).
4. *Qur'aner Chirantan Mu'jizah* (lit. Eternal Miracles of the Qur'an). This book on the I'jaz al-Qur'an was published in Urdu as well as Bengali. The Bengali version had a foreword written by Professor Kazi Din Muhammad.
5. The author became famous for his translation of *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir* into Bengali (in 10 volumes).
6. He also has to his credit a *Pocket Size Qur'an translation* (without Arabic text) in Bengali language.
7. An international edition of his Bengali translation of the Qur'an (with Arabic text) was published by Darussalam Publishers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
8. He compiled a book titled *Duas from the Qur'an*. This collection of supplication was published in the United States.

Dr Mujibur will be remembered by posterity for his many mediocre books, which lack originality. The author is preparing a new and enlarged edition of this book in which printing errors of the 2011 edition under review should be corrected. Apart from his translation of books from Urdu and Arabic, Dr Mujib has also translated some books from English into Bengali. For instance, he translated Prof Emeritus Serajul Haque's doctoral thesis, *Ibn Taymiyah and his Projects of Reform* into Bengali under the title of *Imam ibn Taymiyah Abong Tahar Sanskar Parikalpana* (Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1987). He also translated Dr Muhammad Hamidullah's famous book, *The Battlefields of the Prophet Muhammad* into Bengali titled *Ranangane Mahanabi*; it included a foreword by Ashraf Siddiqi. Among other works of Dr Mujib are *Madinar Ansar-O-Hazrat Abu Ayyub Ansari* (biography). He also translated Professor Ghulam Maqsd Hilali's book, *Islamic attitude towards non-Muslims* into Bengali as *Islame Dharmanirpekhkhta* (1973).

Although the breadth of Professor Muhammad Mujibur Rahman's literary output is vast, but the quality of his work is neither original nor outstanding. Even so, he deserves much credit for his valuable contribution to Islamic thought and literature.

**Dr M A J Beg obtained his MA in Islamic History and Culture from the University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh and was awarded a scholarship to study for PhD in Islamic History at Cambridge University. He taught Islamic History at several universities including the National University of Malaysia for more than a decade. He is author of more than a dozen books and has contributed scores of articles to *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). This article was edited by Muhammad Mojlum Khan.**