

**FROM POLEMIC TO REFORM: COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS ON THE TRAJECTORY OF Q. 3:7
ENGLISH TRANSLATION FROM EARLY
EUROPEAN TO INDIAN MUSLIM PERIOD (17TH-
20TH CENTURY)**

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Master's Study Program of Islamic Studies at the
Faculty of Islamic Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of**

Master of Arts (M.A.)



by:

Ahmad Bayu Setiawan

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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNASIONAL INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

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Quran translations have been a complex enterprise that is still being produced worldwide. One of the intriguing issues is the translation of certain significant Quranic verses, such as Q.3:7, which reveals deep hermeneutical and grammatical divides within Islamic scholarship. This research aims to answer two main questions: 1) How has Q. 3:7 been translated in the early English European and Indian subcontinent Muslim translator context? To what extent do these translations illustrate variation, and what do such variations reveal about theological, linguistic, and interpretive priorities in different historical and cultural contexts? And 2) To what extent does the English translation of Q.3:7 reflect the existing Quran exegetical scholarship on the verse? This thesis is a library research using discourse analysis. It adopts a panoramic framework for analysing trends, continuity, and changes within specific topics by comparing a wide range of translations. This research compares six Quran translations from two main groups of translators, namely, early European and Indian subcontinent Muslims. As the post-colonial approach in translation studies proposes, the Indian Muslim translator shows a reformist-rationalist approach to Quranic translation by reclaiming the authority and shifting from a Western perspective toward Islamic exegetical tradition. As a result, European translators often viewed the Qur'an through legalistic or polemical lenses, whereas Indian Muslim translators emphasised rationalism, reformist spirit, and interpretive agency. Drawing on Tejaswini Niranjana's postcolonial translation theory, this thesis argues that Qur'an translation is a site of discursive contestation between Western Orientalism and post-colonial reformism.

Keywords: *Qur'an translation, Q.3:7, muḥkamāt, mutashābihāt, European translation, Indian Muslim translations.*

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INTRODUCTION

To this day, the translation of the Quran has evolved into a global tradition, both culturally and academically. Hundreds of Quran translations have been produced, reflecting diverse motives and intentions. However, translating the Quran is the most difficult task. Not only is it sacred, but it is also sensitive. Translating the Quran, just like translating other sacred texts, has the potential for both greater benefit and much greater disaster. However, due to the demand from the non-Arabic speaking community developed outside the Arabic world, the Quran has become the most frequently translated sacred text globally.

A major challenge lies in translating the Quran's *mutashābihāt* (ambiguous) verses, which are characterised by semantic ambiguity and interpretive complexity. In Quranic exegesis, the verses are divided into *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* verses. The latter is difficult to translate, as in the Arabic language, it contains no clear meaning. Nevertheless, recent studies on the Quran have introduced a third category of verses, commonly referred to as self-referential passages. These passages are neither *muḥkam* nor *mutashābih*, but they contain a self-definition of the Quran.¹

Self-referentiality in the Quran has been regarded as one of its central features. Quran Sura 3:7 is self-referential as it explains that the Quran consists of clear and ambiguous passages. Stefan Wild argued that the Quran 3:7 is a central passage in which the history of Quranic exegesis and its challenges began. Based on this verse, the Quran itself, at the same time, consisted of clear and understandable parts. Yet, certain parts of it are opaque, ambiguous, and clear only for God, and they are incomprehensible to human beings. Referring to John Wansbrough, he called this verse a starting point for any scriptural interpretation.² The understanding of these self-referential passages is important since they dictate theological, exegetical, and principles of the Quran. Consequently, the translation of such passages becomes a significant and urgent study.

The translation of the Quran is mostly intertwined with the ideology and contextual influence surrounding it. A study on the characteristics of each century of Quran translation has been carried out. It's thus unsurprising that contemporary translators of the Quran, such as Robert Spencer (2022), have captured this dilemma to insult Islam as a silly religion. In his

¹ Stefan Wild, "The Self-Referentiality of the Quran: Sura 3:7 as an Exegetical Challenge" in *With Reverence for The Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, p. 422

² John E. Wansbrough and Andrew Rippin, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford University Press Oxford, 1977), 194:149.

translation of Q.3:7, he argued that the existence of unclear verses is striking. It cancelled God's declaration in another part of the Quran that there is no single doubt in this Quran (Q.1:2). The absence of a clear answer on why God revealed unclear verses leads to the blind acceptance of Muslims. It discourages them from critically questioning their fundamental text.³ He questioned why God revealed the guidance which could only be understood by Him. This shows how Quran translation not only relied heavily on the exegesis tradition but also developed a sort of new interpretation of the Quran itself.

The early English, European, and Indian Muslim translations, which span from the 17th to the 20th century, are interesting. Polemical and prejudicial assumptions about Islam shaped many early English European translations. Many of them were written to combat Islam, often called the religion of Turks and the enemy of the Western world, and to diminish the Quran as a product of Muhammad. Greifenhagen argued that for George Sale (1734), translating the Quran was the easiest way to attack 'Mohammedans'. In his introduction, he convinced the reader that Muhammad pretended to receive divine words to support his political pursuit in governing Arab tribes and increase his power and prestige. Rodwell's translation (1861) is no different. In his introduction, he wrote that the Quran was the literary work of Muhammad. Thus, translating the Quran is equal to diving into Muhammad's mind.⁴ To do so, he was the first translator to provide a Quran translation in chronological order. In this era, the translation of the Quran was motivated by undermining Islam, gradually moving from the attack on the text itself to the personality of the Prophet Muhammad.⁵ Richard Bell, later in 1937-39, introduced a text-critical approach by re-ordering the *suras* based on alleged revisions, substitutions, and additions dictated by the prophet.⁶

During the early 20th century, the history witnesses the awakening of Indian Muslims who felt unsatisfied with the existing English translation of the Quran. Their effort can be perceived as part of a decolonisation project. Indian Muslim intellectuals tried to escape from the dominant Western-orientalist framework in portraying Islam and to reclaim agency through retrieving and reviving the Islamic intellectual heritage.⁷ Having gained intellectual and

³ Robert Spencer, *Critical Quran*, 91

⁴ J.M Rodwell, *The Koran* (J.M. Dent, 1909), vii.

⁵ Philip C. Almond, *Heretic and Hero: Muhammad and the Victorians* (Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1989), 18:77-78.

⁶ Richard Bell, *The Quran* (T.&T. CLARK, 1937).

⁷ Muhammad U. Faruque, 'Decolonizing the Muslim Mind: A Philosophical Critique', *The Philosophical Forum* 55, no. 4 (2024): 353-75, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phil.12378>.

political opportunities, many scholars from the subcontinent of India started to produce translations. Additionally, the rise of the Ahmadiyya missionary movement accelerated the spread of translation by the Muslims, given the fact that the Ahmadiyya movement was relatively more open to Quran translation compared to the Sunni world, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The high preservation of orthodoxy in the Sunni camps often discourages the act of translating the Quran as heresy and harmful.⁸

These Indian Muslim authors believed that the meaning of the Quran might not be understood by those who disbelieve it.⁹ Another characteristic of this era is the lengthy notes containing mostly from the Quran commentary traditions. More approaches were introduced. Yusuf Ali (1934-37) involved Islamic mystical interpretation and urged the adaptation of the English language into Arabic. Ahmed Ali (1984) sought to legitimise the Quran not from its poetic form but from its coherence with modern scientific enterprise.¹⁰ Muhammad Ali's translation stands as the most influential translation. Indian Muslim translations were attempted to refute any popular criticisms by the Western criticism of Islam. Tejaswini Niranjana (1988), in her post-colonial approach to the study of translations, argues that European translations often functioned as a medium of the colonial project. Orientalist translations served to construct Islam as the inferior other. On the contrary, Indian Muslim translations are produced in a post-colonial spirit, especially in their effort to reclaim discursive agency and revisit the rich tapestry of Islamic scholarship in translating the Quran into the English language.¹¹

This research aims to study how the English Quran translations capture the issue apparent on Q.3:7. It questions *how the translation of Q.3:7 undergoes change and continuity, and to what extent the translation tradition reflects the existing exegesis discourse on the verses or develops their trajectories*. This research limits its focus on the selected six English-rendering traditions of the Quran from the early English European era to the rise of the Indian subcontinent Muslim translators (16th-19th centuries). This period is selected since it marks a crucial shift from orientalist approaches to reformist Muslim perspectives.

⁸ El-Hussein A. Y. Aly, *Qur'ān Translation as a Modern Phenomenon*, 1st ed, Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān Series, v. 21 (BRILL, 2023), 158.

⁹ Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Quran* (Islamic Cultural Centre, 2001), vii.

¹⁰ Ahmed Ali, *Al-Qur'ān: A Contemporary Translation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 8, <http://archive.org/details/alquran00ahme>.

¹¹ Tejaswini Niranjana, *Bringing the Text to Legibility: Translation, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (University of California, Los Angeles, 1988).

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How has Q. 3:7 been translated in the context of the early European translator and the Indian subcontinent Muslim translator? To what extent do these translations illustrate variation, and what do such variations reveal about theological, linguistic, and interpretive priorities in different historical and cultural contexts?
2. To what extent does the English translation of Q.3:7 reflect the existing Quran exegetical scholarship on the verse?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stefan Wild argues that Q.3:7 reveals deep hermeneutical and grammatical divides. By examining the pre-canonical period before Uthmanic unification of the Quran, he argued that the epistemological problem of *mutashābih* or ambiguous verses was not apparent within oral tradition. The oral transmission includes the recitation preference for the listeners. Sometimes the reciter would stop after the phrase ‘*illallahu*’, asserting the interpretation of ambiguous passages can be known only by God, and on other times they continued reading *wa al-rāsikhūna*, meaning that humans might understand the ambiguous verses of the Quran. In the contemporary era, this differential reading reflects authority contestation. In 1925-26, al-Azhar University published an official Quran text with a sign of *waqflazm*, which obligates the reader to stop after the phrase ‘*illallahu*’.¹² While in Medina, in its official Quran, a sign of *waqfawla*, which means that stopping after the phrase ‘*illallahu*’ is preferable but not obligatory.¹³

There is no clear answer on how to read this verse. For some theologians, the canonised version of this verse, which prefers the notion that no one, including the prophet Muhammad, knows the meaning of the ambiguous verse, seemed unsatisfactory. For instance, Ibn Qutayba (d.276/889) explains that the Prophet, as those well-grounded in knowledge, knew the meaning of ambiguous excerpts.¹⁴ In a more ideological sense, some Imami-Shi’ite exegetes believed that their Imams knew the interpretation of ambiguous verses,¹⁵ and most of Mu’tazilite

¹² Stefan Wild, ‘Sura 3.7 as an Exegetical Challenge’, *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Oxford University Press, 2003, 426.

¹³ Tanqih wa-i’dad al-ri’asa al-’amma li-idarat al-buhuth al-’ilmiyya wa-l-ifta wa-da’wa wa-l-irshad, *Mushaf Al-Madina al-Munawwara* (Majma’ al-Malik Fahd li-tiba’at al-mushaf al-sharif, 1989), 90.

¹⁴ Ibnu Qutaibah, ‘Ta’wil Musykil al-Qur’ān, Ed’, *Ibrāhīm Syams Al-Dīn*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyah, Tt), n.d., 95.

¹⁵ Muḥammad ibn Ya’qūb Kulaynī, *al-Usul min al-Kafi. Ma’ al-sharh wa-al-tarjamah bi-qalam Muhammad Baqir al-Kamra’i. Sahhahahu Muhammad Baqir al-Bihbudi*, ‘Ali Akbar al-Ghaffari. *Al-tab’ah al-thaniyah* (al-Maktabah al-Islamiyah, 1962), 228–29.

scholars favoured a rationalist approach, insisting that the meaning of ambiguous verses could be known through firm scholarly methods. Some prominent Sunni scholars also included themselves as part of *al-rāsikhūna*.¹⁶

Academic studies on the translation of Quran 3:7 employed a wide range of comparative linguistic and hermeneutical analysis addressing the problem of cultural context and metaphorical meaning. Some studies focused more on the pedagogical approach in explaining the essence of Quran 3:7. However, these studies were limited to the phrase of *al-rāsikhūna fi-l-ilmi* and a limited source of interpretation.¹⁷ Another topic in the scholarly study of the verse revolves around comparative analysis. These authors compared several exegeses regarding their interpretation of the verse. Yet this approach lacks wider elaboration of the historical trajectories of the verse's interpretation.¹⁸ One notable study on the verse was the work of Leah Kinberg (1988). He analysed the interpretation of Quran 3:7 from the medieval exegesis tradition. For him, the lexical and syntactic ambivalence led to extensive debates in the medieval era.¹⁹

So far, the study focused on the translation of Quran 3:7 has not been carried. Such a focused study is essential, considering that the translation of the Quran is related much to the contextual and ideological intervention. Quran 3:7 might serve as a locus for examining the tendency of translation traditions, such as literal vis-à-vis commentaries approach, or between grammatical fidelity and theological pursuit. Aisha Geissinger argued that the English translation of the Quran provides a deep and intellectually colourful history of exegesis

¹⁶ Wild, 'Sura 3.7 as an Exegetical Challenge', 428; Abu Al-Qasim Al-Zamakhshari, *Tafsir Al-Kasysyaf* (Darul Ma'rifah, 2009), 1:338.

¹⁷ A H Wiyono, 'Profesi Guru Dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an', *Samawat: Journal of Hadith and Quranic ...* 02 (2018): 30–37; W Izati, 'Profil Pendidik Dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an', *Nida Al-Qur'an: Jurnal Pengkajian Islam* 4, no. 2 (2023): 87–103; Hadiyatan Wasilah, 'Upaya Mengatasi Tantangan Pendidikan Islam Pada Abad Xxi', *Tamaddun* 21, no. 1 (2020): 077 ; Abdul Fadhil, 'Karakteristik Pendidik Menurut Al-Qur'an (Analisis Kajian Tafsir Maudhu'i)', *Jurnal Online Studi Al-Qur'an* 11, no. 1 (2015): 38–54; Sarno Hanipudin, 'Konsepsi Guru Modern Dalam Pendidikan Islam Institut Agama Islam Imam Ghozali (IAIIG) Cilacap', *Al-Munqidz: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman* 3, no. 17 (2020): 338–57.

¹⁸ Sahiron Syamsuddin, 'Muhkam and Mutashabih: An Analytical Study of al-Tabari's and al-Zamakhshari's Interpretations of Q. 3: 7', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1, no. 1 (1999): 63–79; Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, in *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation* (2019); Andi. Abrar, 'Hakikat Al-Rasikhuna Fi al- 'Ilm Dalam Pemikiran al- 'Allamah al-Tabataba'i', *Aqidah-Ta: Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah* 6, no. 1 (2020): 17–36; Irwan Masduqi, *Menyoal Otentisitas Dan Epistemologi Tafsir Al-Jilani*, 19 (2012): 83–94; Halimah B, 'Tafwid Method in Understanding Mutashabihat Verse', *Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 21, no. 2 (2020).

¹⁹ Leah Kinberg, 'Mukamat and Mutashabihat (Koran3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis', *Arabica* 35, no. 2 (1988): 143–72.

tradition.²⁰ This research aims to fill this gap by carrying out a discourse analysis approach in examining the translation of Quran 3:7. This research will limit its focus to early English European to Indian subcontinent Muslims translators (16th-19th century), with a total of six translators, three translators for each group.

METHODOLOGY

The methods used in this research are library research and discourse analysis. The author adopts a comparative panoramic framework as proposed by Walid Saleh; this framework aims to portray the trend, continuity, and changes within the discourse of tafsir in certain topics by comparing and examining a wide range of exegetes.²¹ Adopting this framework, this study therefore compares six Quran translations from two main groups of translators, namely early English and Indian subcontinent Muslims. The translations under the study from the early English European period are Alexander Ross (1649), George Sale (1734), and J.M. Rodwell (1861). For the Indian Muslim translator, the translations under study are Muhammad Abdul Hakim Khan (1905), Maulana Muhammad Ali (1917), and Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1946).

Ross's translation is chosen as it represents key moment in early modern Christian polemics, framing Islam through a theologically lens shaped by Protestant anxieties and Orientalist assumptions. Ross's translation also contributed to the formation of popular and literary perceptions of Islam in Britain.²² George Sale's translation is chosen since it served as the standard English version for over a century. It also reflects the theological and political concerns of 18th-century Europe. Sale's work is deeply embedded in an apologetic Christian project aiming to compare Islam with Christianity, often to the detriment of the former.²³ Rodwell's translation is academically significant for its unique historical approach to the Quran. Rodwell sought to present Islam as a religion evolving in stages, which reflects 19th-

²⁰ Aisha Geissinger, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*. Edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Maria Massi Dakake, Joseph EB Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom (Oxford University Press, 2017).

²¹ Walid A. Saleh, 'Rereading Al-Tabari through al-Maturidi: New Light on the Third Century Hijri', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, ahead of print, 2016, 197, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2016.0242>.

²² Nabil Matar, 'Alexander Ross and the First English Translation of the Quran', *The Muslim World* 88, no. 1 (1998): 89.

²³ Ahmad Nadeem and Raja Nasim Akhtar, 'Translating to Refute: George Sale's Strategies in the Quran Translation', *Pakistan Journal of Language and Translation Studies*, 2017, 104.

century Orientalist frameworks on religious development. His work exemplifies how European biblical discourse influences early English translation of the Quran.²⁴

Muhammad Abdul Hakim Khan's translation was the first English translation by a Muslim author. It marks a pivotal moment in the intellectual response to colonial power and Christian missionary criticism. Khan's work is also notable for its integration of Quran exegetical discourse, offering commentary as part of the text to guide non-Arabic-speaking Muslims and Western readers.²⁵ Translation of Maulana Muhammad Ali is notable for its narrative framing of Islam as a rational, ethical, and modern faith. His interpretive approach reflects the early 20th-century reformist spirit, challenging the orientalist rendering of the Quran and asserting Muslim intellectual agency. Despite sectarian controversies surrounding the Ahmadiyyah Movement, Ali's translation transcended regional boundaries and became one of the most widely circulated and consumed Muslim translations in the West.²⁶ Lastly, Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation invokes both linguistic rendering and a cultural and theological approach aimed at asserting Islam's moral and civilisational value. His translation combined poetic English, extensive footnotes, and a modernist yet devotional reading of the Quran that appeals to both Muslim and non-Muslim readers.²⁷ Since this research focuses on the transition between early English to Indian Muslim translation, it excludes some notable English translations, such as Marmaduke Pickthall (1930), as it was produced after the rise of Indian Muslim translation.

This research will examine their translation of Quran 3:7. The choice of two groups of translators is based on some rationale. First, the early European group reflected the original interest in the translation of the Quran into the English language. Their translation was also affected by the Western Orientalist perspective. The Indian subcontinent Muslim translator, as the second group, was chosen as the focus since they reflected the rupture from their predecessor European to defend Islam and offer a modern-rationalist reading of the Quran, as well as the spirit of religious reformism. Thereby, comparing two groups of translators is sufficient to capture the dynamics, change, and continuity within the tradition of Quran translation. This study will analyse the issue regarding the translation of the key terminologies such as *al-muḥkamāt*, *umm al-kitab*, *al-mutashābihāt*, and *al-rasikhuna fī al-ilm*.

²⁴ Muḥammad Sultān Shāh, 'A Critical Study of Rodwell's Translation of the Qur'ān', *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Research* 12 (2013): 53–66.

²⁵ Khaleel Mohammed, 'Assessing English Translations of the Qur'an', *Middle East Quarterly*, 2005, 59–72.

²⁶ Shāh, 'A Critical Study of Rodwell's Translation of the Qur'ān', 14.

²⁷ Abdallah El-Khatib, 'Abdullah Yusuf Ali: A Study of His Life and Translation', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2009): 198–169.

Subsequently, the author will use the critical discourse analysis framework to explain what the variations reveal about theological, linguistic, and interpretive priorities in different historical and cultural contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

DISCOURSE SURROUNDING Q. 3:7

This section will explain the discourse surrounding the exegetical debate and the significance of Q 3:7. It will discuss the passage's existence as a self-referential verse and how philosophical and linguistic discourse surrounding the verse has been developed through the Islamic scholarly tradition.

فَوَالَّذِي نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ ۚ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ ۚ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ ۚ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ ۚ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا ۚ وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

“It is He who has sent down to you, [O Muhammad], the Book; in it are verses [that are] precise - they are the foundation of the Book - and others unspecific. As for those whose hearts are deviating [from truth], they will follow that of it, which is unspecific, seeking discord and an interpretation [suitable to them]. And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah. But those firm in knowledge say, "We believe in it. All [of it] is from our Lord." And no one will be reminded except those of understanding.”
(Ṣaḥīḥ International)

Almost all scholars agreed that Quranic verses are divided into *muḥkamāt* – obvious, clear in meaning, determined – and *mutashābihāt* – ambiguous, indeterminate, polysemous. However, recent discourse on Quranic studies has introduced the new term of self-referential passages of the Quran. This category is neither *muḥkam* nor *mutashābih*. The self-referentiality of the Quranic passages explains itself.²⁸ Q.3:7 can be categorised into this new category alongside other verses such as Q.2:2. *This Book, with no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty.*

Q. 3:7 only indicates the classification of Quranic passages, yet it does not explain how these two categories are to be defined. The following problem is in distinguishing between *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* verses so that no Muslim would fall into those who desire *fitnah*

²⁸ Wild, ‘Sura 3.7 as an Exegetical Challenge’.

by manipulating *mutashābihāt* verses. Muslim scholars have debated this problem. Some define *muḥkamāt* as *nasikhat*²⁹ and *mutashābihāt* as *mansukhat*.³⁰ This means that *muḥkamāt* contains imperative nuance while *mutashābihāt* can be abandoned. The common understanding of *muḥkam-mutashābihāt* is based on epistemological considerations in which *muḥkamāt* verse contains a single clear interpretation, such as *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* verses, whereas *mutashābihāt* contain multiple interpretations and meanings.³¹

Another classification defines *muḥkamāt* as verses containing the stories of the Prophet and the previous community, whereas *mutashābihāt* refers to the opaqueness of the story detail. On philosophical understanding, *muḥkamāt* are the passages whose meaning, interpretation and understanding can be known through scholarly effort. At the same time, *mutashābihāt* are the passages in which no one has a chance to interpret and understand them, since only God knows their interpretation. This category includes matters such as the exact time of the Day of Judgment, the coming of the Messia, and *al-aḥruf al-muqatta'ah*³². In linguistic matters, *mutashābihāt* means ambiguous as opposed to *muḥkamāt*, which means clear. *Muḥkamāt* is analogous to a solid building protecting its dweller, or a tight knot which is hard to parse, or the horse's bridle preventing any distraction.³³

Throughout the Islamic tradition, the textual discourse of *muḥkam-mutashābih* also played a central role in the political affairs. Al-Maturidi (1333) illustrated how *muḥkam-mutashābih* discourse was dragged into the politicisation of theological schools in Islam.³⁴ It was the common practice of medieval Islamic denominations to classify certain Quranic passages which support their ideologies and doctrines as *muḥkamāt* and devalue other verses used by their competitors as *mutashābihāt*. For instance, the theological school of Mu'tazilite considered the Q.18:29 (*so whoever wills - let him believe; and whoever wills - let him disbelieve*) as *muḥkamāt* while considering Q.81:29 (*you do not will except that Allah wills*) as *mutashābihāt*. In the Mu'tazilite school, free will is the most prominent doctrine, and they

²⁹ *Nasikhat*, often translated into abrogating verse, refers to the newer legal nuance verse which load certain law cancelling or revising the previous law.

³⁰ *Mansukhat*, often translated into abrogated verse, refers to the previous verse whose legal ruling content was cancelled or revised by the new *nasikhat* verse.

³¹ Sahiron Syamsuddin, 'Muhkam and Mutashabih : An Analytical Study of al-Tabarī's and al-Zamakhsharī's Interpretations of Q. 3: 7', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1, no. 1 (1999): 63.

³² It refers to the separated Arabic letters which open several chapters of Quran such as (alif lam mim, Ya Sin, etc). While some exegesis tried to explain the meaning of this passage, most Muslim scholars agreed that its true meaning is out of human being's understanding.

³³ Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr Al-Fakhr al-Rāzī al-Mashhūr Bi'l-Tafsīr al-Kabīr Wa-Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Dār al-Fikr, 1981).

³⁴ Abū Mansūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Samarqandī Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl-Sunnah*, ed. Muhammet Masum Vanlioğlu Mizan (Istanbul: Yayınevi, 2005), vols 2, 313.

believe in the capability of human beings to determine their faith.³⁵ In contrast, the Ash'arite theologians would treat these two verses in a reserved way. In many cases, some Islamic schools would treat certain verses which they regard as *muḥkamāt*, in favour of their doctrines, to cancel *mutashābihāt* verses adduced by their opponents to justify their inappropriate doctrines.³⁶

Another significant discussion is the meaning of the phrase *al-rāsikhūna fī-ilmi*, often translated as 'those who are firmly rooted in the knowledge.' Some exegetes define *al-rāsikhūna* as the group of special people who know the interpretation of the *mutashābihāt* verses. Al-Tabari refers to *al-rāsikhūna* as *ahl al-ta'wīl*, or the people of interpretation. Further, he defined *al-rāsikhūna* as the fellow of the esoteric understanding which acknowledges the limit of human epistemology, in the science of Quranic recitation or 'ilm al-qirā'at. The phrase *al-rāsikhūna fī-ilmi* can be read in two ways: first, the *isti'nāf* reading. This reading obligates stopping after the phrase 'illa-allahu', thus treating *al-rāsikhūna* as the new subject and detaching it from God. Second, *atf* reading. This reading posits *al-rāsikhūna* as the second subject after God, implying that they acknowledge an esoteric understanding of the ambiguous verse.³⁷

Deeply elaborated, there are three approaches in discussing the way to explain *al-rāsikhūna* in the epistemological problem of *muḥkam-mutashābih* interpretation. The first and most dominant view rejects the ability of *al-rāsikhūna* to know the interpretation of *mutashābihāt*. For the proponent of this view, God is the only knower of the whole meanings of the Quran since it was none but His words. Their reason was primarily based on the report of the Prophet's companion, and they preferred the *isti'nāf* reading as popularised by Ubayy ibn Ka'b and 'Abd Allah. Consequently, the translation says 'no one knows its hidden meanings except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: " We believe in the Book. "' *Al-rāsikhūna* are those who acknowledge their epistemic limitation before God. Several reasons why *al-rāsikhūna* might not possess an interpretation of the *mutashābihāt* verse have been discussed. Al-Baghawi in his exegesis emphasises the prerogative right of God to make

³⁵ Sophia Vasalou, *Moral Agents and Their Deserts: The Character of Mu'tazilite Ethics*, Princeton University Press, 2008.

³⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr Al-Fakhr al-Rāzī al-Mashhūr Bi'l-Tafsīr al-Kabīr Wa-Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vols 7, 147.

³⁷ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Ḥafīz Abū Al-Khayr and b. Faḍl Allāh, 'Abd Allāh (Dār Ibn al-Jawzi, 2009), vols 6, 204.

some part of His words ambiguous for humans. In the same nuance, al-Tibbi argued that there is no disavowal for God to make some of the Quranic passages be understood only by Him.³⁸

Other exegetes mitigate the capability of *al-rāsikhūna*. Al-Razi argued that *al-rāsikhūna* merely refers to the people who know how to differentiate *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* verses. Their capability is limited to its classification and does not go beyond understanding it. Al-Qunawi further proposed that, despite having a high level of wisdom, knowledge, and faith, it does not make *al-rāsikhūna* capable of understanding *mutashābihāt* verse.³⁹ There are four types of Quranic passages based on their understandability. The first category includes verses that can be understood easily by any reader. The second category consists of verses that might be understood only by Arabs or those who have Arabic linguistic proficiency. The third category includes verses that might be understood only by scholars, including *al-rāsikhūna*. The last is a *mutashābihāt* verse, which only God would understand its meaning. Al-Maraghi, in his exegesis, argued that the limitation of *al-rāsikhūna* related to the fact that their knowledge and understanding are subject to the law of physics and empirically restricted reason.⁴⁰

The second is a moderate approach. For the proponents of this approach, the condemnation found earlier in the verse⁴¹ did not diminish the possibility of interpreting the *mutashābihāt* verse. Instead, interpreting *mutashābihāt* verse is necessary and should be based on the *muḥkamāt* ones. They do not totally negate the possibility of the interpretation of the *mutashābihāt* verse. Ibn Kathir was among the proponents of this view. He argued that despite its meaning might only be known by God, its interpretation can be grasped by the scholars.⁴² Through the valid epistemological method, *al-rāsikhūna* can interpret the ambiguous verse. However, the perfect knowledge remains the domain of God. Ibn Atiyyah further argued that even *ulama* were able to interpret the ambiguous verse, including the matter of the soul and the day of judgement.⁴³

³⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān*, 201; Abu Muhammad al-Husain Al-Baghawi, *Maʾalim al-Tanzil* (Majmaʾ Malik Fadh, 1997), 2:10.

³⁹ ʿIṣām al-Dīn Ismāʿīl al-Ḥanafī Al-Qūnawī, *Hāshiyat Al-Qūnawī ʿalā Tafsīr al-Imām al-Bayḍawī: Wa-Maʾahu Hā Shiyat Ibn al-Tamjīd*, ed. Muḥammad Maḥmūd, ʿAbd Allāh ʿUmar (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2001), vols 3, 100.

⁴⁰ Aḥmad Muṣṭafā Marāghī, *Tafsīr Al-Marāghī*, vol. 5 (Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1946).

⁴¹ *those who have got a perverseness in their hearts, follow that part of it which is ambiguous to seek a disturbance*

⁴² Syamsuddin, 'Muḥkam and Mutashābih: An Analytical Study of al-Ṭabarī's and al-Zamakhshari's Interpretations of Q. 3: 7', vol. 73.

⁴³ Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Ibn ʿAṭiyya, *Al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz Fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-ʿazīz*, ed. ʿAbd al-Shāfi Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Salam (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2001), vols 1, 402.

Another reason includes the typology of *ta'wīl* or interpretation. Ibn Kathir proposes two meanings of interpretation. First, *ta'wīl* means *ḥaqīqah*, or the truth. In this sense, *al-rāsikhūna* are excluded from knowing the interpretation of the ambiguous verse. Second, *ta'wīl* means *tafsir*, or explanation. In this sense, *al-rāsikhūna* can gain an explanation of the ambiguous verse.⁴⁴ Ibn al-uthaymin differentiates *al-rāsikhūna* and the first group mentioned previously – *those who follow that part of it which is ambiguous, to seek a disturbance*. For him, *al-rāsikhūna* can understand the meaning of *mutashābihāt* compared to the first group, who failed to understand it, leading to the seeking of disturbance.⁴⁵

Another reason for the moderate approach is pragmatic. Since God sent his word for human beings to be understood by them, it is impractical that some parts of His word are not understandable. Al-Khazin, in his exegesis, recalled the sound reports stating that some Companions of the Prophet declared themselves as *al-rāsikhūna* and that they understood the interpretation of *mutashābihāt*.⁴⁶

The last and less dominant approach claims that *al-rāsikhūna* can know the meaning of *mutashābihāt* verse. For them, the existence of *mutashābihāt* verses encourages the people who are firm in knowledge to do *ijtihad* to gain their hidden meaning.⁴⁷ al-Zamakhsharī begin his view on this verse by emphasising the importance of *mutashābihāt* verse to maintain the *ijtihad* endeavour so that Islam will always be a dynamic religion. He proposed that *al-rāsikhūna* must interpret *mutashābihāt* verse with their special reasoning and comprehension through the guidance of *muḥkamāt* verse.⁴⁸

To conclude, discourse on Q.3:7 revolves around the meaning of *Muḥkam-mutashābih*, the meaning of *al-rāsikhūna fī ilmi* and its epistemological debate concerning the nature of human knowledge. This contextual discussion is essential to the next section, which discusses how some keywords in Q.3:7 were translated into the English language. This contextual analysis is also important to know the extent to which the English rendering of Q.3:7 consulted the existing exegesis discourse of the Quran.

⁴⁴ Ismā'īl b. 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm* (Dār Ibn Jawzī, 2013), vols 2, 8.

⁴⁵ Muḥammad b. Šāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: Ali 'Imran* (Dār al-Thurayyā, 2004), 34–35.

⁴⁶ It is reported from Ibn 'Abbās (may Allah be pleased with him) that he used to say: 'I am among those firmly grounded in knowledge.' And from Mujāhid, from him (i.e., Ibn 'Abbās): 'I am among those who know its interpretation.' see. A al-H Al-Khazin, 'Lubab Al-Ta'wil Fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil', *Tahqiq: Abdus Salam Muhammad Ali Syahin. Beirut: Dar Kutub Ilmiah* 3 (2004).

⁴⁷ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl-Sunnah*, vols 2, 313.

⁴⁸ Abu Al-Qasim Al-Zamakhshari, 'Tafsir Al Kasysyaf' An Haqaiq Ghiwamid Al Tanzil Wa' Uyun Al Aqawil Fi Wujuh Al Ta' Wil', *II. Beirut: Dar al Kutub al Ilmiyah*, 1995.

EARLY EUROPEAN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF Q.3:7

This section first elaborates on the context of early European Orientalism and interfaith hostility in the 16th century. Afterwards, it investigates how the pre-modern English translation rendered the Q 3:7. Highlighting the several characteristics of pre-modern translation, such as hostile assumptions toward Islam and the Quran as the forgery of the Prophet Muhammad and how some pre-modern translators consulted Islamic scholarly traditions, such as al-Baydhawi and al-Zamakhshari. It elaborates how the translation becomes highly varied in some words while also repetitive in other words.

The 16th-17th century witnessed an unprecedented interest in the Quran in Christian Europe. During this era, sectarian divisions within Christianity intensified with the rise of Protestant churches, which not only posed theological challenges but also represented significant socio-political turbulence. Furthermore, this period also witnessed dramatic shifts in the political and military fortunes of Muslim and Christian powers. The Ottoman Empire, after capturing the Byzantine Empire in 1453, was marching into the Balkans and further into Europe. The Ottomans' victory in the Battle of Mohács (1526) made this Islamic empire the ruler of much of the European continent, followed by the conquest of Buda in 1541. Despite the following victory in the next century over the Turkish Ottoman, the fear of the Turkish and *Mohammedans* remained strong. The Europeans rendered the Quran as the Turkish Bible and equated Turkish with Muslim. Through this cultural-military encounter, interest in the Quran during this period was mainly motivated by a desire to understand the religion of the enemy (Turk) and to convert them to Christianity further.⁴⁹

It is also noteworthy that the knowledge of Islam and the Quran in Europe in the 16th-18th centuries was heavily reliant on the Arabic script. This term refers to European scholars who work in different languages, with different political affiliations and traditions of Christian belief, to study Islam. This movement transformed European knowledge of Islam and its tradition. Their motives were to refute the Quran and subjugate Islam to Christian superiority by disseminating their thoughts through publishing literary works. However, this aspiration was met with significant resistance from Church authorities, who perceived the publication of

⁴⁹ Naima Afif et al., *The European Qur'ān: Encounters with the Holy Text of Islam from the Ninth to the Twentieth Century* (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2024), 67.

literature work on the rival religious might endanger and disturb the faith of the Christian community.⁵⁰

Marthin Luther (1483-1546), Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) and Theodor Bibliander (1509-64) were among the most influential figures advocating the translation of the Quran into Latin, openly criticising the Catholic conservatives' opposition to such an effort. As a result, in 1543, the Latin translation of Robert of Ketton was first printed in Basel. After the Basel Quran, the translation of the Quran into Latin and vernacular languages was intensified, many of which included prefaces that strongly condemned the Quran. In some cases, this condemnatory preface served as a defence against accusations for publishing a heretical book, given that the Quran was widely perceived by 16th-century European as containing blasphemous teachings and polemical propaganda.⁵¹ The first English translation of the Qur'an, undertaken by Alexander Ross (1590–1654), inherited this broader European tradition of hostility and condemnation towards Islam and its sacred text.

Table 1 Early European Translation of Q.3:7

Translator	Year	Translation
Alexander Ross	1649	He it is that sent to thee the Booke, whose precepts are necessary, they are the originall, and foundation of the Law, like in puritie one to the other, and without contradiction. Such as in their heart incline to depart from the truth, do often they follow their inclination, desirous of sedition, and to understand the explanation of the Alcoran; but none understand its explication, but God, and such as are profound in learning; they say, we believe in God, all things proceed from his divine wisdom, nevertheless none remember, but the wise. ⁵²
George Sale	1734	It is he who hath sent down unto thee the book, wherein are some verses clear to be understood, they are the foundation of the book; and others are parabolical. But they whose hearts are perverse will follow that which is parabolical therein, out of love of

⁵⁰ Alexander Bevilacqua, 'The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment', in *The Republic of Arabic Letters* (Harvard University Press, 2018).

⁵¹ Afif et al., *The European Qur'ān: Encounters with the Holy Text of Islam from the Ninth to the Twentieth Century*, 70–71.

⁵² Andr Du Ryer and Alexander Ross, *The Alcoran of Mahomet : Translated out of Arabique into French*, with University of New Hampshire Library (London, 1649), 30.

schism, and a desire of the interpretation thereof; yet none knoweth the interpretation thereof, except God. But they who are well grounded in knowledge say. We believe therein, the whole is from our Lord; and none will consider except the prudent.⁵³

J.M Rodwell 1861 He it is who hath sent down to thee “the Book” Some of its signs are of themselves perspicuous, — these are the basis of the Book — and others are figurative But they whose hearts are given to err, follow its figures, craving discord, craving an interpretation, yet none knoweth its interpretation but God And the stable in knowledge say, “We believe in it. it is all from our Lord” But none will bear this mind, save men endued with understanding.⁵⁴

Alexander Ross’s translation offers a unique perspective, particularly on how he renders *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*. Notably, Ross chooses to translate only *muḥkamāt*, rendering it as ‘necessary, original,’ while leaving *mutashābihāt* untranslated. He translates *umm al-kitāb* as the ‘foundation of Law.’ This wording choice reflects his broader view of the Qur’an primarily as a legal text. According to Ross, all Qur’anic passages are *muḥkamāt* in the sense that they contain no contradiction and therefore are authoritative and complete.

In his introduction, Ross explored Prophet Muhammad’s legal consciousness, asserting that Muhammad drew upon Abrahamic legal traditions, such as in the case of circumcision, whose legal ruling is not explicitly stated in the Quran. This observation reinforced Ross’s perception of the Qur’an as rooted in earlier religious laws. Throughout his translation and commentary, Ross emphasised the dual nature of the Quran as both sacred scripture and divine law. He even proposed that one of the Mohammedan faiths is that Jesus Christ will return at the end of time to confirm the Law of Muhammad, further underscoring the Quran’s role as an enduring and comprehensive book of law.⁵⁵

The phrase *umm al-kitāb* appears in multiple places in the Qur’an, and its interpretation varies depending on context. It is particularly interesting to examine how Alexander Ross rendered this phrase in different verses. In Qur’an 43:4, Ross translated *umm al-kitāb* as ‘the

⁵³ George Sale, *The Koran, Commonly Called the Alcoran of Mohammed: Translated Into English Immediately from the Original Arabic, with Explanatory Notes Taken from the Most Approved Commentators, to Which Is Prefixed a Preliminary Discourse* (William Tegg, 1850), 195.

⁵⁴ Rodwell, *The Koran*, 386.

⁵⁵ Du Ryer and Ross, *The Alcoran of Mahomet*, 14.

original Book, majestic and mysterious.’ This resembles his earlier translation of *umm al-kitāb* in Qur’an 3:7, where he interpreted it as “the original, and foundation of Law.” Although both verses use the same phrase, traditional Qur’anic exegesis (tafsīr) makes a clear distinction between their meanings: In Q.S 3:7, *umm al-kitāb* commonly refers to *muḥkamāt* verse, especially to the opening chapter of the Quran or *al-fatihah*. Meanwhile, in Q.43:4, *umm al-kitāb* means *lauḥ al-maḥfudz* – The divine record of all events, actions, destinies, and revelations.⁵⁶

Given these differing contexts, it is difficult to determine precisely how Ross understood the phrase *umm al-kitāb*. However, his consistent rendering of the term in both verses suggests that he might not have been aware of — or did not engage with — the Islamic exegetical and theological discussion surrounding it. This indicates a limited familiarity with the interpretive tradition of the Qur’an, leading him to offer a uniform and contextually inadequate translation.

Ross’s translation reflects a broader Western interpretive framework of his time (16th–17th centuries), in which the Qur’an was viewed primarily through a legalistic lens. From this perspective, the Qur’an is seen not as a multifaceted religious text but as a written source of Islamic law, which is used by the Prophet Muhammad to govern his Muslim community. This legalistic framing is evident in Ross’s translation of Qur’an 3:4, where he renders *āyāt Allāh* (‘signs of God’) as ‘the Law of God’—a rendering that emphasises legal authority over spiritual or symbolic meaning.

Furthermore, in Qur’an 3:7, Ross rendered *muḥkamāt* as ‘*necessary, original*’ and avoided translating the phrase *mutashābihāt*, thereby diminishing the theological distinction between clear and ambiguous verses that is central in traditional Islamic exegesis. His rendering of the phrase *umm al-kitāb* as the ‘*foundation of Law*’ reinforces this legalistic interpretation, suggesting that every Qur’anic passage is both essential and foundational as jurisprudence text. Ross’s treatment of the issue of interpretation (*ta’wīl*) appears to reflect this restrictive perspective. His translation of Q.3:7 put *al-rāsikhūna* as the second subject following God. It implies that the interpretation of the Quran can be gained by the *profound in learning or al-rāsikhūna*, working in conjunction with the divine authority, and that others – *those who incline to depart from the truth – cannot* understand it. This perspective resonates

⁵⁶ Syukran Abu Bakar and Husna Khairudita, ‘Variasi Makna Lafaz Al-Umm Dalam Al-Qur’an’, *Tafser: Journal of al Quranic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2021): 209–28.

with Protestant concerns about authoritative interpretation, yet it devalues the pluralism of hermeneutical approaches within Islamic tradition.

In sum, Ross's translation of the verse illustrates how early European engagements with the Quran were shaped by legalist readings that reduced and overlooked its spiritual, literary, and theological dimensions.⁵⁷ This not only shows a certain level of unfamiliarity with Islamic exegetical tradition but also reveals how the Quran was approached through a Christian and orientalist view, privileging law over revelation and authority over ambiguity.

The next early English European translation is George Sale (1734). Sale felt that Ross's translation lacked quality. For him, the translation of the Quran should be rendered directly from the original Arabic language rather than another second language, as Ross did in translating the Quran from French. Nevertheless, Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar argued in his translation that Sale did not refer much to Arabic Quran commentaries, which he claimed to rely on.⁵⁸ Sale indeed shows a high level of Islamic scholarship in which he referred to some Islamic Quran commentary, such as al-Zamakhshari and al-Baidawi's commentary.

There is a notable discontinuity between Sale and his predecessor, Alexander Ross (1649), in their respective rendering of Q.3:7. One of the key distinctions lies in their translation of the term *muḥkamāt*. Ross translated it as 'original,' a choice that seems to be awkward and imprecise, as it does not reflect the semantic range of the Arabic term. In contrast, Sale paraphrases *muḥkamāt* as *verses clear to be understood*, a translation more faithful to the Quranic context and exegetical tradition, in which *muḥkamāt* refers to the verses which are explicit, unambiguous, and clear in meaning, and contrasted with *mutashābihāt*.⁵⁹

Sale's translation of the phrase *umm al-kitab* into '*the foundation of the book*' also demonstrate a more accurate linguistic correspondence with the Arabic original. Unlike Ross, who rendered it through a legalistic lens as the '*foundation of Law*,' Sale's translation treats *kitab* as '*book*' in a more general sense. This translation rupture is significant, as it implies that the Quran is not merely a legal text, but a multidimensional text containing not only law but also doctrines, stories, parables, and ethical teachings. Despite improvements in philological

⁵⁷ Early Western orientalism often portrayed Islam as a rigid legal system focused on law and ritual, rather than a spiritual or intellectual tradition. Orientalists often referred to Islamic scriptures as 'Mohammedan Law,' and reducing Prophet Muhammad to a lawgiver politician rather than spiritual leader. see Nicolás Roser Nebot and Rachida Boubrit, 'Imprints of Islam on Edward Said's Orientalism', *Anthropology of the Middle East* 19, no. 2 (2024): 42.

⁵⁸ Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar, 'Translation of the Holy Qur-Ān: From the Original Arabic Text with Critical Essays, Life of Muhammad, Complete Summary of Contents', (*No Title*), 1920, xvi.

⁵⁹ Kinberg, 'Mukamat and Mutashabihat (Koran3/7)':

aspects, Sale's overall approach to translation is not without orientalist bias. In his preface, he acknowledges that his objectives were to expose what he called irrational beliefs and narratives within the Quran, framing it as written by Prophet Muhammad rather than divinely revealed.⁶⁰ This polemic was noticed by later scholars, Arthur Arberry (1955), who criticised Sale for presenting the Quran as a mythological text and conflating it with unreliable commentaries and reports.⁶¹

In his translation of Q.3:7, Sale translates the term *mutashābihāt* as 'parabolical' verse, indicating that such passages should be understood figuratively rather than literally. Notably, Sale cites in his footnote the classical exegetical source, namely the commentaries by al-Zamakhshari and al-Baydawi, which he claimed were among the most reliable sources. Sale's explanation draws a clear distinction between two categories of Quranic passages. The first category is *muhkamāt*, which he described as plain and obvious to be understood. These verses, said Sale, form the foundational part of the Quran and are referred to as the '*mother of the book*.' Belonging to this category are the Quranic principal doctrines and moral ethics, and should be interpreted literally.

In contrast, *mutashābihāt*, or '*parabolical*' verses, are metaphorical in nature and delivered in an enigmatic and allegorical style. Sale insisted that these verses always require interpretation, as their meaning is not readily apparent on the first reading. His extensive notes reflect his serious engagement with Islamic scholarship, even though his broader agenda was often described as polemical.⁶²

Another distinctive part of Sale's translation of Q.3:7 lies in his rendering of the Arabic conjunction *wa* (و), which precedes the phrase *al-rāsikhūna fī al-ilm*. While the common translation of '*wa*' is '*and*', Sale translated it as '*but*', thereby separating those who are well-grounded in knowledge from having the ability to understand the interpretation of parabolical (*mutashābihāt*) verse. Sale's reading of *al-rāsikhūna* can be understood considering his broader view of Islamic literalism, which he articulated in his introduction to his Quran translation.⁶³

⁶⁰ Sale, *The Koran, Commonly Called the Alcoran of Mohammed: Translated into English Immediately from the Original Arabic, with Explanatory Notes Taken from the Most Approved Commentators, to Which Is Prefixed a Preliminary Discourse*, 89.

⁶¹ Arthur J Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*. London/New York: George Unwin & Unwin, Ltd, The MacMillan Company, 1955, 14.

⁶² Ahmad Nadeem and Raja Nasim Akhtar, 'Translating to Refute: George Sale's Strategies in the Quran Translation', *Pakistan Journal of Language and Translation Studies*, 2017, 104.

⁶³ Sale, *The Koran, Commonly Called the Alcoran of Mohammed: Translated into English Immediately from the Original Arabic, with Explanatory Notes Taken from the Most Approved Commentators, to Which Is Prefixed a Preliminary Discourse*, 19.

He argues that the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad encourage a strictly literal understanding of religious doctrines among Muslims. While he acknowledges that some Muslims interpret certain allegorical verses, such as the paradise and the throne of God, he insists that Islam's orthodoxy generally adheres to a literalist theology, requiring belief in the obvious and literal understanding of the text.

This Islamic literalism of Sale likely influenced his translation. By rendering *wa* as 'but' instead of *and*, he excludes *al-rāsikhūna* (who are well-grounded in knowledge) from understanding the interpretation of ambiguous verses. In doing so, Sale reinforces his view of Islam as a religion that discourages interpretive reasoning in favour of doctrinal submission; his grammatical choice thus serves not only a linguistic function but also advances his broader polemical narratives, portraying Islamic theology as inherently resistant to metaphorical or philosophical inquiries. At this point, his reliance on Zamakhshari's commentary is superficial since, in his exegesis, al-Zamakhshari emphasise the existence of ambiguous verse as encouragement for those who are well-grounded in knowledge to seek interpretation.⁶⁴

The next analysis is Rodwell's translation, which was written during the scientific orientalist criticism of Islam. Rodwell's translation was the first English rendering to organise the Quranic verses in chronological order. Rodwell is famous for having two different approaches to translating the Quranic passages. For the shorter and poetic passages, he used a communicative style to achieve similarity in the style and effect of the Arabic language.⁶⁵ For the longer and prosaic ones, Rodwell tried to stay close to the original text of the Arabic Quran. He avoided as much as he could to paraphrase the Quran, in which he accused George Sale of overdoing.

Rodwell's effort to avoid paraphrase is apparent in his translation of Q.3:7. Compared to his predecessor Sale, he translated *muḥkamāt* not in the paraphrase of *verse clear to be understood* as Sale did, but translated it into '*perspicuous*'. Whether or not Rodwell consulted the English-Arabic dictionary existing in his era, it's notable to mention that the term *muḥkamāt* was translated into *perspicuous* in 18th 18th-century English-Arabic dictionary by John Richardson (1800).⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the term *mutashābihāt* was rendered into *similies, allegories*,

⁶⁴ Al-Zamakhshari, 'Tafsir Al Kasysyaf' An Haqaiq Ghiwamid Al Tanzil Wa' Uyun Al Aqawil Fi Wujuh Al Ta' Wil'. (in which volume and page number?)

⁶⁵ El-Hussein A. Y. Aly, *Qur'ān Translation as a Modern Phenomenon*, 1st ed, Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān Series, v. 21 (Boston: BRILL, 2023), 10.

⁶⁶ John Richardson, *A dictionary, Persian, Arabic, and English*, with Internet Archive (1800), 1:912.

metaphors, doubts, and ambiguities.⁶⁷ Thus, Rodwell's word choice is close to that of the Arabic language. Rather than paraphrasing it, Rodwell uses an equivalent word for the expression of *muḥkamāt*. He translated *umm* as *basis* while putting footnotes explaining that its literal meaning is *mother*.

Nevertheless, Rodwell translates *mutashābihāt* as *figurative*. In the literature context of 19th-century English, the word figurative was significant in literary criticism, theology and poetics. Figurative means symbolic, metaphorical and non-literal. During the rise of modern hermeneutics in the 19th century, textual criticism of the Bible resurfaced the issue that some parts of the Bible should undergo figurative interpretation to reconcile faith and modern rational inquiry.⁶⁸ From this, Rodwell succeeds in avoiding paraphrase and provides an accurate translation of the Quran using equivalent English words. However, his translation is also inclined to be academic rather than literal in the case that he rendered *mutashābihāt* as a figurative term used widely in 18th-century biblical hermeneutics discourse.

MODERN INDIAN MUSLIM TRANSLATION OF Q.3:7

This section first discusses the context of religious reform in the 19th-century Indian subcontinent Muslims. Afterwards, it analyses the translation of Q.3:7 by these Indian Muslim translators through a contextual analysis of religious reformism, which was inherent in the modern period of subcontinent Indians.

Religious reform in the 19th-century Indian subcontinent traced back to the Great Mutiny (1857), the war between Indian sepoys and the East Indian Company. Their revolt was not only to overthrow unjust rule but also as a reaction to the pervasive activities of Christian missionaries and British policies, which undermined deeply religious customs of both Hindus and Muslims.⁶⁹ This Great Mutiny resulted in the 1858 proclamation, in which the administrative ruling of India was handed over to the British Crown from the East Indian Company, marking the adoption of Queen Victoria's general administration. There are two main points of this proclamation which influence the following milieu of Indian reform: First,

⁶⁷ Richardson, *A dictionary, Persian, Arabic, and English*. By John Richardson, Esq. F.S.A. ... To which is prefixed a dissertation on the languages, literature and manners of eastern nations. 1800, 1:885.

⁶⁸ Cole William Hartin, 'Three Trajectories in Nineteenth-Century Anglican Biblical Interpretation: From Narrow to Broad', *Journal of Anglican Studies* 23, no. 1 (2025): 204–18.

⁶⁹ Karen Chancey, 'The Star in the East: The Controversy over Christian Missions to India, 1805–1813', *The Historian* 60, no. 3 (1998): 507–22.

the British Crown would not intervene in religious matters. Second, the strategic government position is open to being held by qualified Indian people.⁷⁰

The non-interference attitude of the British Crown initiated the Religious Tolerance Act, which allowed Muslims and Hindus to propagate their religion. This Act had fostered an increased gap between Indian Muslims and Hindus as they were competing to defend their identity and community from converting to another religion. The harsh tension between the two communities inspired some influential elites and intellectuals to adopt modernity and rationalist reform toward their religion. For them, the backwardness of their religion and their opponents lies in the prioritisation of irrational faith. To outpace their opponents and escape from colonial pressure, the rationalist reform of religion is indeed necessary.⁷¹

Another key watershed moment was the English Education Act in 1835, which was aimed at producing British yet Indian elites and intellectuals to bridge the British and Indian populations. This policy had resulted in the emergence of dozens of Muslim and Hindu intellectuals who were familiar with Western scholarship and way of thinking. Consequently, many reformist agencies from both Muslims and Hindus started to produce and proliferate their understanding with the help of modern tools such as printing media.⁷² This contextual setting provides a catalyst circumstance for the emergence of Indian Muslim scholars who produced an English translation of the Quran as a tool for reforming Islam.

Table 2 Indian Muslims Translation of Q.3:7

Translator	Year	Translation
Muhammad Abdul Hakim Khan	1905	Allah is He who sent down unto thee the book, some verses of which are definite, ^b which are the mother of the book , and others ambiguous ; wherefore those who have got a perverseness in their hearts, follow that part of it which is ambiguous to seek a disturbance and to seek an interpretation, and none knoweth the interpretation thereof but God ; and those who are well-grounded in knowledge ; they say we believe in it ; the whole is from our Lord : but none get warned except the men of brains. ⁷³

⁷⁰ Jörg Fisch, 'A Pamphlet War on Christian Missions in India 1807-1809', *Journal of Asian History* 19, no. 1 (1985): 22–70.

⁷¹ Barbara D Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 198.

⁷² Ajit Mondal, 'The Lord Macaulay's Minute, 1835: Re-Examining the British Educational Policy', *Academia Letters*, 2022.

⁷³ Muhammad Abdul Hakim Khan, *The Holy Quran with a Commentary*, 1905, 103.

Maulana Muhammad Ali	1917	He it is who has revealed the Book to <i>you</i> : some of its verses are decisive, they are the basis of the Book, and others are allegorical* ³⁸⁷ , then as for those in whose hearts there is perversity, they follow the part of it which is allegorical, seeking to give it (<i>their own</i>), and seeking to give it (their own) interpretation;* ³⁸⁷ but none knows its interpretation except Allah, and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge say: We believe in it, it is all from our Lord* ³⁸⁷ and none mind except those having. ⁷⁴
Abdullah Yusuf Ali	1946	He it is Who has sent down To thee the Book : In it are verses Basic or fundamental (Of established meaning) ; They are the foundation ³⁴⁷ Of the Book: others Are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow The part thereof that is allegorical, Seeking discord, and searching For its hidden meanings, But no one knows Its hidden meanings except God. And those who are firmly grounded In knowledge say: " We believe In the Book ; the whole of it Is from our Lord : " and none Will grasp the Message Except men of understanding. ⁷⁵

Muhammad Abdul Hakim Khan (1905) was the first Muslim to translate the Quran into English.⁷⁶ Nuancing his background as a surgeon, Khan brought a scientific and rationalist outlook to his engagement with the Holy book. Before writing an English translation, he wrote a Quranic commentary in Urdu using the *tafsir al-Quran bi al-Quran method*.⁷⁷ This approach emphasised the internal coherence and self-explanatory nature of the Quran. Additionally, his translation is pedagogical, and he aimed to make the Quran more accessible to modern readers by prioritising reason, clarity, and educational messages.

Initially, he was a supporter of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad before turning against him in harsh criticism after publishing his translation. Indian Muslim intellectuals of the nineteenth

⁷⁴ Maulana Muhammad Ali, *English Translation and Commentary of The Holy Quran*, first, 1917, 141.

⁷⁵ Abdullah Yūsuf 'Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Arabic Text with an English Translation and Commentary* (Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1946), 123.

⁷⁶ Abdur Raheem Kidwai, 'Mohammad Abdul Hakim Khan's The Holy Quran (1905): The First Muslim or The First Qadyani English Translation?', *Insights* 2, no. 1 (2009).

⁷⁷ *al-Quran bi-al-Quran* approach is an approach in exegetical studies of Quran which focus on the interconnectedness within the Quranic verses. Verse of Quran is assumed as explanatory one to another. See N Gafoordeen, 'The Method of Qura'nic Interpretation-Historical Perspective', *Journal of Education and Practice* 8, no. 35 (2017): 43–45.

and twentieth centuries were known to tend rationalism and reformist spirit, stressing the primacy of Islam's foundational texts, namely the Quran and Hadith, while encouraging direct engagement with them and relying less on the accumulated medieval scholarship. In the context of early twentieth-century India, rational explanation and consistency with natural law were considered essential for any religion.⁷⁸ The colonial context of the Indian subcontinent also influences Khan's translation. In nineteenth-century India, many Muslims accessed Western-based education, including instruction in the English language and exposure to Christian theological works, often through missionary schools. This background is evident in Khan's use and familiarity with biblical vocabulary and frequent references to Christian texts.⁷⁹

In his translation of Quran 3:7, Muhammad Abdul Hakim Khan introduced several novel interpretive choices that set his work apart from earlier English renderings. Notably, he begins his translation with the term '*Allah*,' which does not appear in previous translations, thereby foregrounding the divine origin of the Quran. He also translated the term '*muḥkamāt*' as '*definite*' – a wording choice not found in earlier translations. Through his word choice, he tended to use simple and common expressions while avoiding elegant English.⁸⁰ Even though he was familiar with the Biblical dictionary, the choice of modest words to translate *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* reflects a broader dilemma common to the Muslim Quran translators in that era. The dilemma lies in the question of whether to produce a translation that is familiar and attractive to the Western reader or a translation that is familiar to Muslims worldwide. Khan adopts the second option to provide a wide-read translation which non-native English speakers might easily understand.

Khan put notes on the issue of *muḥkamāt-mutashābihāt*. In this footnote, he reflects the rationalist approach of early twentieth-century Indian Muslim intellectuals and his commitment to a pedagogical reading of the Quran, as well as highlighting its interconnectedness. Khan further introduced a novel explanation by distinguishing three interpretive levels that depend on the reader's capacity. Drawing upon the verse of Q.39:23, which refers to the Quran as an '*ambiguous book*,' he argues that for beginner Muslims, all verses might appear as *mutashābihāt* or ambiguous due to their lack of theological knowledge. In contrast, for advanced Muslim readers, or those well-grounded in religious principles, all verses are

⁷⁸ Riaz Ahmad Saeed et al., 'Muslim Approaches to Respond Western Civilization (an Analysis in the Context of Indian Subcontinent)', *Multicultural Education* 7, no. 12 (2021).

⁷⁹ Robert W Hefner, 'Introduction: The Culture, Politics, and Future of Muslim Education', *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, Princeton University Press Princeton, NJ, 2007, 1–39.

⁸⁰ Muhammad Abdul Hakim Khan, *The Holy Quran with a Commentary*, 103.

muḥkamāt or definite, as affirmed in Q.11:1: ‘a book whose verses have been composed and explained by a wise and knowing God,’ The third category is the middle group, for whom some part of Quran might be definite while others are ambiguous. This tiered explanation exemplifies Khan’s rationalist and educational approach, positioning the Quran as a dynamic text whose clarity depends on the reader’s intellectual and spiritual level.⁸¹

Khan also reinforces interconnectedness and the self-explanatory nature of the Quranic verse. Citing the report from al-Bukhari, he explained that *mutashābih* or ambiguous verses might be explained by the *muḥkamāt* ones, a principle central to his method of *tafsir al-Quran bi-al-Quran*. His reading on the phrase *al-rāsikhūna fīl-ilmi* (those firmly grounded in knowledge) also exemplifies his rationalist-reformist spirit. Unlike a translator who ends the preceding clause with an ellipsis after *illa-allah* (‘none knows [its interpretation] except Allah’),⁸² Khan translates the verse continually. This implies that those deeply rooted in knowledge may, in fact, acquire the meaning of ambiguous verse – a view consistent with his broader claim that those who are advanced in theological and religious principle can comprehend the Quranic messages.

Maulana Muhammad Ali (1917) was the first Muslim translator to include extensive scholarly notes in his translation. Rooted in the rationalist and reformist ideals of the Ahmadiyya movement, his approach exemplifies the intellectual and religious concerns of the colonial period in India.⁸³ Just like his predecessor Abdul Hakim Khan, He emphasises the Quran as the supreme authority in religious matters and advocates the everlasting relevance of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). Like Abdul Hakim Khan, he adopted the method of interconnectedness of the Quran (*tafsir al-Quran bil-Quran*), interpreting verses through internal cross-explaining to highlight the coherence and universality of the Quranic message.

One of the key novelties of Ali’s translation of Q.3:7 is his unique lexical choices, which reflect his reformist theological orientation. He rendered *anzala* as ‘revealed,’ *muḥkamāt* as ‘decisive’ and *mutashābihāt* as ‘allegorical’. Notably, the term ‘allegorical’ instead of the more common ‘ambiguous’ rendering indicates a deliberate interpretive stance. Since Ali emphasises that the Quran is the primary and authoritative source of all religious matters, the Quran can’t inherently contain unclear verses. Thus, ‘allegorical’ in his translation implies that such verses invite further explanation rather than confusion. Like Abdul Khan, he employs

⁸¹ Muhammad Abdul Hakim Khan, *The Holy Quran With A Commentary*, 103.

⁸² Muhammad Abdul Hakim Khan, *The Holy Quran With A Commentary*, 103.

⁸³ Aly, *Qur’ān Translation as a Modern Phenomenon*, 2023, 59.

interconnected approach, citing Q.11:1— “a book whose verses have been made decisive”— and Q.39:23—where the Qur’an is described as *mutashābih*—to demonstrate the interrelation of these terms rather than their contradiction.⁸⁴

Ali provides an etymological elaboration to support his view. He traces the linguistic root of *muḥkamāt* into *ahkama*, meaning ‘to make firm or stable,’ suggesting that such verses are protected from any distortion. In contrast, *mutashābihāt* derives from *sibh*, meaning resemblance, and thus refers to the verses that may admit multiple interpretations due to their figurative trait, unlike Khan, who categorises *muḥkamāt-mutashābihāt* based on the level of the readers. Ali offers a more essentialist argument. He maintains that some Quranic verses are essentially decisive, and others are essentially allegorical. The Quran establishes core doctrinal principles in clear and unequivocal language, while other verses, by their nature, submit to various meanings. The interpretation of the latter should be consistent with the former and aligned with the overarching message and spirit of the Quran. For Ali, this dualism of *muḥkamāt-mutashābihāt* is not a flaw but natural to any profound writings.

Interestingly, Ali leverages this duality to address the critique of Christian theology. He argues that central Christian doctrines – including the divinity of Jesus Christ and the concept of blood atonement – are based on allegorical and ambiguous passages of the Bible and deviated from the foundational prophetic doctrine of monotheism. According to him, the failure to interpret allegorical verses on behalf of the decisive ones leads to doctrinal error. Additionally, Ali extends his criticism to Muslims who extensively attribute miraculous traits to Jesus, condemning it as a result of misreading an allegorical passage of the Quran.⁸⁵

Ali’s translation choices further reinforce this perspective. He renders *wa-ibtighā’ ta’wīlihi* (commonly translated as ‘seeking its interpretation’) as ‘seeking to give it (their own) interpretation.’ This small change indicates that those described in the verse – people with ‘perversity in their hearts’ – are not merely seeking interpretation but imposing personal interpretation on ambiguous verses. For Ali, the deviant beliefs, whether in Christianity or some Islamic denominations, were caused by the interpretation of the *mutashābihāt* verse, which contradicts the *muḥkamāt* verse. On the issue of *al-rāsikhūna* fi-ilmī, Ali includes it as a subject alongside Allah. It indicates that the interpretation of allegorical verses can be understood by *those who are firmly rooted in knowledge*, surely through the method of revisiting fundamental and decisive verses.

⁸⁴ Ali, *English Translation and Commentary of The Holy Quran*, 141.

⁸⁵ Ali, *English Translation And Commentary Of The Holy Quran*, 141.

The last translator is Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1946). His translation is notable for its ethical emphasis and its synthesis of Eastern and Western scholarship. He consulted classical commentators of the Quran such as al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, and Tafsīr al-Jalālayn, as well as modern reformists like Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā. For lexical references, he drew on Lisān al-‘Arab, Lane’s Lexicon, and Penrice’s Glossary of the Koran. Yusuf Ali generally favoured interpretations from early exegetes, believing they were closest to the Qur’an’s original linguistic and historical context.⁸⁶

In translating *muḥkamāt*, Yusuf Ali did not take its literal rendering. Instead, considering his Quranic spirituality meaning, he renders it as ‘*basic or fundamental*’. He adds a bracketed phrase of (Of established meaning) and that these verses are ‘the *foundation of the book*.’ In his accompanying note, Yusuf Ali presents *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* not as separate categories but as intertwined components of the Quran. The former constitutes the core teachings – clear, foundational principles – while the latter are figurative, metaphorical, or allegorical expressions that signify a profound spiritual realm beyond human intellect. Even though the people of wisdom might have partial knowledge of it, no one can justify their knowledge as final since the final understanding of its meaning belongs only to God.⁸⁷

Yusuf Ali’s explanation of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* reflects his broader reformist agenda, which emphasises that the interpretation of the Quran will always be subject to relativity and context-oriented. Consequently, there is no final interpretation, no matter how magnificent the interpreter was. He asserts that no final interpretation, since humans’ understanding will always be constructed by historical and intellectual context. Drawing a distinction between *manqūlāt* (reported knowledge, such as historical facts) and *ma‘qūlāt* (rational knowledge, concerning meaning and ethical application),⁸⁸ Yusuf Ali maintains that while past events remain fixed, their significance must be continually reinterpreted. In his view, God’s message is perfect and eternal, but human comprehension is limited and must be reformed across generations.

What is unique in Yusuf Ali’s translation compared to his predecessor is his emphasis on the legal dimension of *muḥkamāt* verses. Referring to the common commentary, he explains *muḥkamāt* verses as referring to the categorical orders of the *sharia* or Islamic Law. All Quranic verses, which include legal norms and laws, are always decisive, plain, and clear to understand.

⁸⁶ Abdallah El-Khatib, ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali: A Study of His Life and Translation’, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2009): 198–169.

⁸⁷ ‘Ali, *The Holy Qur’ān: Arabic Text with an English Translation and Commentary*, 123.

⁸⁸ Aly, *Qur’ān Translation as a Modern Phenomenon*, 1st ed (BRILL, 2023), 76.

However, he did not limit *muḥkamāt* to legal verses as he also reminds the reader that the meaning of *muḥkamāt*, since it was described subsequently as the mother of the Book, may include a wider dimension of God's message.⁸⁹

Just like his predecessor, Yusuf Ali cited Q.11:1 and Q. 39:23. On this interconnectedness, Yusuf Ali proposes that the division of verses into *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* is determined by the meanings to be attached to them. For him, every single verse of the Quran is a Sign or a symbol. The interesting and distinct part of Ali's explanation is his reference to Plato's philosophy in explaining *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*. He equates *muḥkamāt* as the 'forms of Ideas' which are eternal and independent of time and space.⁹⁰ The wise man or *al-rāsikhūna* will acknowledge that in every Quranic passage, there is an 'essence' and an 'illustrative clothing' given to this essence. They must try as hard as possible to understand the essence, yet not to waste their energies debating the finality of their interpretation, since its finality is beyond human intellect.

Yusuf Ali was also the first to resurface the issue of *waqf* – the debate on where to put a break in reading the Q.3:7. He preferred a less accepted way of reading this sentence and renders 'no one knows its hidden meanings except God and those who are firm in knowledge. It's not explained why he preferred this less accepted reading in the commentary tradition.⁹¹ However, it might reflect his reformist approach, that the *ijtihad*, or the independent reasoning, should always be encouraged and that there will be no final interpretation on the essence of Quranic meanings. Thus, *al-rāsikhūna* can access a certain level of Quranic essence, though the final understanding is only the prerogative of God. This way of reading also encourages modern scholarship not to follow the medieval exegesis mindlessly as the final understanding, but to always reinterpret the Quranic essence based on contemporary needs and situations.

CONCLUSION

This research examines the Quran. 3:7, a deeply self-referential and exegetically disputed verse, has been rendered in the period of early English European and Indian Muslim translators. Two central questions guide this research: 1) How do these translations of Q.3:7 reveal theological, linguistic, and interpretive preferences shaped by their historical and

⁸⁹ 'Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Arabic Text with an English Translation and Commentary*, 123.

⁹⁰ 'Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Arabic Text with an English Translation and Commentary*, 123.

⁹¹ 'Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Arabic Text with an English Translation and Commentary*, 123.

cultural weltanschauung? And 2) To what extent do these translations align with or depart from classical exegetical discourse of the verse?

Through detailed discourse analysis, this research has indicated that Orientalist ideologies heavily influenced early English European translations under study. They often adopted a polemical approach that essentialised the image of Islam as legalistic and literalist. These translations are not only being distanced from Islamic exegetical discourse but also fostering the colonial enterprise of defining the Other Islam through scriptural discourse. Notably, Sale consulted al-Zamakhshari and al-Baidhawi. Yet his reference is superficial.

By contrast, Indian Muslim translations under study represent a significant epistemological rupture. These translations are the result of the post-1857 colonial encounter and Western-education influence. Indian Muslim translators sought to reclaim interpretive authority over the translation of the Quran. Their approach reflects a reformist-rationalist effort in configuring the dualism of *mutashābihāt* and *muḥkamāt* not as fixed binaries but rather as intermingled modes of Islamic epistemology. Indian Muslim translators highly asserted the necessity and legitimacy of *ijtihād*, arguing that those who are firmly rooted in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūna fī al-‘ilm*) can interpret whole Quranic verses within ethical, rational, and contextual frameworks. They consulted deeply the exegetical scholarship surrounding the verse.

The interpretive approach of the Indian Muslim translator exemplifies post-colonial reading, especially on the issue of Islamic reformism. Instead of opposing Orientalist translations with a simple reversal, the Indian Muslim translators adopted a deeper approach, from a static rendering of sacred language, into a performative act of revisiting Islamic epistemologies within the framework of the worldwide modernity impulse. Their use of modest, widely accessible English vocabulary, alongside deep theological commentaries and rationalist reading, foregrounds translation as a medium of a post-colonial reformist agenda. The translation of Q.3:7 is not merely a linguistic act, but a theological and cultural intervention. It reflects how translators, especially in the Indian Muslim era, creatively responded and critically deconstruct colonial discourses, reshaping Qur’anic interpretation into a site of both resistance and reform. Indian Muslim interpretations of Q.3:7 reflect a cultivated intellectual impulse shaped by the post-colonial struggle within the Islamic world to engage with modernity and move beyond traditionalist readings of Islam.

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