



**Multiple Versions of Islamic
Source Texts:
A Suggestion for Achieving
Cultural Security**

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Received: : 01July 2017

Accepted: 21 November 2017

Turnitin - passed research



Abstract:

Security, and particularly cultural security, are of utmost significance for sustaining the cultural capital of any nation. Although various nations may take pride in their dissimilar cultural capitals, all depending on their cultural values and heritage, the same principle of safeguarding our cultural capitals proves of conspicuous significance for our posterity and the future any nation may desire to construct. The present paper pays attention to ways of achieving cultural security vis-a-vis multiple versions of Husayni texts for our posterity and the threats and opportunities that may appear. Here Husayni literature, in its various manifestations, is regarded as a precious capital worthy of careful safeguarding for our future generations. It is here that various types of translation and annotation, when applied to Husayni literature, prove of utmost significance.

Keywords: *Security, cultural security, Husayni texts and literature, cultural translation.*

“Security” proves a necessity when a “threat” or “danger” can be discerned. “Cultural security” proves of utmost significance because cultural assault or invasion takes place steadily, without injuring anybody, hence any sensible authority (or even a person) is expected to guard oneself and the community against such a threat or danger so as its posterity shall be able to understand its own position and status and not to be (or feel) lost in the face of an assault launched by a cultural enemy.

Since any community that has (and is aware of its own) splendid history and has a sense of historicity may be subject to invasion (whether cultural, economic, or otherwise), the intellectuals of such a community are expected to take the appropriate initiative for maintaining their cultural security and stability for the contemporary generation as well as for the posterity. In such a condition that typical Muslim communities have long been subject to various types of cultural invasions, it is our duty to present our cultural heritage to the younger generation of Muslim communities as well as to the wider global audience. However, due to the highly culture-bound nature of our Islamic cultural heritage, it proves necessary to present it in a variety of versions (whether in textual editions or in multi-media formats) so as to suit the comprehension level(s) of various age groups of audience. In this way, translation can receive an identity-preserving function. Never an end in itself, such an identity-oriented function of translation necessitates reproducing a given value-laden source text in multiple versions in translation for various age groups. In this way, it is hoped that an appropriate way of maintaining cultural security can be achieved.

For a people, however advanced they might seem, unawareness of their cultural glories makes a ground for their slavery. On the other hand, nations that have realized their glories seldom tolerate the yoke and burden of obeying invading forces. This is a potential threat that is currently observed in certain younger generations of some Muslim nations. Granted that no nation can remain an isolated island in the present-day world, modern communication technologies can prove both an asset and a threat. A currently desper-

ate plight of certain Muslim nations is that the younger generations seem seldom well-informed of their cultural glories.

The cultural glories of a Muslim nation can be divided in several ways. Some personalities and their heritage are locally important. For example, a wealthy benefactor constructs a public library, public bathroom, a bridge, and the like for the convenience of the people of his city. There is yet another type of people whose efforts can benefit both the present state and the future of a nation. Examples of such people are those who build colleges, universities, hospitals, factories, printing-houses, publishing firms, and so on. There is a third group of people whose efforts benefit almost all people in the world. Examples of these dignitaries include those thinkers and inventors whose mental efforts still bear fruit for all people.

“Culture” is a term that sounds of crucial significance for the present discussion. Apart from dividing “culture” into two broad categories of “material culture” and “non-material culture”, for a few definitions of culture, just the following ones are cited here. Williams in his book *The Long Revolution* (1961) defines culture in three “general categories”, namely, the “ideal”, the “documentary”, and the “social” categories. According to his definitions, the “ideal” definition is that “culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values” (Williams, 1961, p. 41). His second, “documentary” definition is that “culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed work, human thought and experience are variously recorded” (Ibid.). The third, “‘social’ definition of culture [...] is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behavior. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture.” (Ibid.)

What is interesting in the three definitions rendered by Williams is that he mentions and emphasizes the role of “values”. And since “the study of culture can never be free of assumptions of value or an

involvement in meaningful, value-making activity” (Brooker, 2003, p. 60), “value” makes part and parcel of the culture and/or cultural traits of a people or community. Another value-oriented definition of culture maintains that it “consists of the abstract values, beliefs, perceptions of the world that lie behind people’s behavior, and which are reflected in their behavior” (Haviland, 1994, p. 303). It is certain that culture is acquired by new generations of people from their parents, peers, and predecessors not only “through the medium of language” (Haviland, 1994, p. 303) but also by viewing the gestures and modes of behavior of other people around.

On the other hand, in the cultural-cum-civilizational contacts among nations, civilizations, and peoples, some cultures may prove more attractive stand higher. The upper, hence triumphant, people may prove ruthless, as it was so in the case of the Mongol peoples who invaded the Middle Eastern lands and ruined almost everything. In other cases, the upper people try to contribute to the cultural enrichment of the conquered people, as it was the case in the arrival of Islam in Iran. It is here that the contributory role of the Islamic religions to the ancient Iranian culture and civilization becomes apparent such that soon after the advent of Islam the Persians (later on identified Iranians) have long established a bilateral relation with the Islamic religion, hence a considerable number of Muslim scholars have been originally from the Persian-cum-Iranian cultural context. [1] Moreover, as a “missionary religion” (Huntington, 1996/1997, p. 42), the spread of Islam has relied very much on dissemination of its values and principles by means of promulgating its pillars and belief systems by scholars and merchants (who had religious knowledge, too). [2, 3]

Modern broadcasting innovations may cause a cultural danger for the younger generations. Nowadays, with the spread of modern technologies, e.g., the mass and social media, on the one hand, and the widespread of learning foreign languages, particularly English, [4] on the other hand, makes it a rather strange case for safeguarding our younger generations. Since almost all sorts of materials can

be accessible via these channels, not only sensible families are expected to care for the future of their children but also it is rightly expected of conscientious policy-makers to take the right and appropriate measures and initiatives for maintaining the future of their nations. Therefore, it sounds a must to be concerned with the cultural security of our peoples and the upcoming generations.

It is exactly here that the safeguarding role of Islamic religious literature becomes salient. Throughout Islamic history, great figures and socio-cultural reformers who were well-versed in Islamic education and literature were able to rise over important cultural barriers and helped safeguarding the upcoming generations of their people. [5] Given that one of the causes of falling into the trap of alienation in the younger generations is to a great extent their unawareness of their past cultural glories, it is the duty of educators, preachers, historians, biographers, authors of school books, essayists, journalists, film-makers, and cultural managers to collaborate with one another for preserving their future generations and to immune them from the unfavorable effects of cultural hegemony of mainly Western countries. [6]. It is really a pity that in certain Muslim nations, e.g., Iran, many, many university students, let alone poorly, or even uneducated, people are ignorant of their past glories.

Faced with the critical problem of cultural survival, the cultural practices of nations can serve as a good lesson and model. In typical Anglophone cultures, and mainly in the UK and the USA, multiple versions of their literary masterpieces are constantly produced. Granted that in the field of translation studies, it was indicated that “[e]very great book demands to be re-translated once in a century, to suit the change in standards and taste of new generations, which will differ radically from those of the past” (Cohen, 1962, p. 9), the same can safely and wisely be held with regard to producing various editions of culture-bearing and value-laden masterpieces, as it has long been a practice in Euro-American nations. Although there have appeared several religio-national simpler editions of certain works, it is yet to be a fully established practice in third world nations.

Since the cultural threat felt mainly targets underlying Islamic religious values and value systems, it is essential to produce various editions and reader-friendly translations of Islamic religious texts from the Arabic other host or target languages. In this regard, it is necessary for the translator to have appropriate religious education. Since a translation is expected to be “an intellectual construct” (Chaudhuri, 1999, p. 43), it must be done with utmost care, particularly when the original text belongs to a past period of another language. A qualified translator is expected to be able to properly discern the “authorial intention” (Chaudhuri, 1999, p. 2) of the text being translated. Cohen (1962) rightfully maintains thus: “The more important the book in the cultural history of mankind, the more self-important the language in which it must be translated.” (p. 29) In line with this remark, it deserves mention that Roman Jakobson (2012 [1959], p. 127) made a tripartite division of translation in terms of being interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic. Such division must have implications and insight for finding appropriate means of communicating the cultural values of peoples with their audience.

Given that a translation-oriented solution is being sought, two other ways or modus operandi may also prove helpful. Of them is transcreation (Lal, 1996) which is essentially “the creative adaptation of source language material in the target language” and “[s]uccessful transcreation is based on thorough knowledge of local environment, practices and details of specific to a given culture and country.” (Harishankar, Krishnan, and Shivakumar, 2013, p. 36). Reynolds also talks of “Prismatic Translation” that tries to “release the multiple possible meanings of the source text rather than offering just one equivalent” (2016, p. 87). It seems that we must make use of all such possibilities for re-understanding and reintroducing the glories of our past to both our nations and to the world.

The Third world countries, if such a notion can be really correct and factual, are constantly being culturally attacked by the hegemonic ideologies of the governments that are better known as superpowers, or instances of what Williams terms as “culture-vulture” (1976, p. 82). The dominant nations that are sometimes described as “major” (Bagby, cited in Huntington [1996/ 1997], p. 43), or properly they can also be described as invading governments [7] attack the “peripheral” (Bagby, cited in Huntington [1996/ 1997], p. 43) or less powerful civilizations. It remains the duties of the intellectuals and teachers of such “peripheral” communities to value and appreciate the merits of their own cultures and civilizations. Such self-recognition must not be led for a nation to regarding itself as the best gift of God to mankind. The reality is that a nation, however advanced, can and must learn from the historical experience of other nations. This cultural humbleness is a major step toward being constantly enriched.

References

[1] Here it is necessary to make a division between “Persia” and “Iran”, on the one hand, and “Persian” and “Iranian”, on the other hand. “Persia” refers to the vaster and greater cultural and civilizational space that had existed even before the advent of Islam. “Iran” is the name that is applied to the present-day country in the Middle East. It follows that the word “Persian” has a greater cultural-geographical point of reference. Perhaps similar differentiation must be considered in relation to “Islam” and “Islamic”, on the one hand, and “Arab(ic)”, on the other hand, although in older English texts “Arab” meant “Muslim” or “Islamic”.

[2] Various classifications of religions, whether “missionary” or otherwise, can be found in other sources, e.g., Park (1994), Jensen (2014), Ward (1909), Smith (2000), and Smart (1971 [1969], 1989).

[3] For the spread of Islam in the world, T. W. Arnold (1913) is still a good and reliable read in English.

[4] Phillipson (1992) discusses certain thought-provoking aspects of the spread of English over the globe. Apart from the educational value and the necessity of learning English for more efficient international communication in the world, it cannot be devoid of its potential cultural threats for other nations and peoples.

[5] A few notable cases in point are as follows: Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in the Indian Subcontinent. He was a personality who, among other great jobs and praiseworthy endeavors, founded a higher education institution, now well-known as Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India. (For further insight into the character and career of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, see Kidwai [2017]). Another notable dignitary was the late Sheikh al-Tusi, the founder of the Najaf seminary in Iraq. A good source for the life and times of Sheikh al-Tusi is available in Tehrani (1997); it must be indicated that the original version of Tehrani’s book is in Arabic.

[6] By saying so, the present writer never intends to deny the good and beneficial achievements made for mankind in typical Western countries. Nor is it fair to regard all Western peoples as “dominant, colonizing” (Chaudhuri, 1999, p. 18) powers, hence enemies of the

other, culturally “colonized” (Chaudhuri, 1999, p. 18) communities. Figures such as the Swiss priest and physician, Albert Schweitzer, who devoted himself to rendering humane services to Africans can hardly be regarded as a malignant person, hence it is utterly unfair and unjust to regard all Western people as “culture vultures” (Williams, 1976, p. 82).

[7] The present writer quite purposefully refrains from using the word “civilizations” for such governments on the ground that the heart of “civilization”, as an opposite of barbarism, is bound to be closely tied to showing really sympathetic feelings and beneficial deeds for mankind. Hence the American pilot who bombarded the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or the ISI agents and forces who massacred ordinary people for nothing can hardly be regarded as “civilized” people, although they were provided with the most advanced warfare technologies.

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