

## INTRODUCING AN UNEXPLORED SOUTH ASIAN TREATISE ON I'JĀZ AL-QUR'AN

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper explores and introduces a manuscript on *i'jaz al-Qur'an* (inimitability of the Qur'an) named *Nūr al-Īqān bi i'jaz al-Qur'an* written by a profound South Asian Sindhi Scholar, Maulana Muhammad Ismā'īl al-Ūdvī. The field of *i'jaz al-Qur'an* has been and is the field of interest of many Muslim as well as non-Muslim theologians and scholars. Many Muslim scholars of the Middle East and the West have written books and research papers from third/ninth Century up to present times. The main and significant reason for this is that the doctrine of *i'jaz al-Qur'an* proves the prophecy of Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him. This paper argues that Shaikh al-Ūdvī is the first South Asian Sindhi Muslim Scholar, who wrote a separate treatise in Arabic on the doctrine of *i'jaz al-Qur'an*, which is not introduced properly in academic circles of the day. In this treatise, al-Ūdvī has advanced some new and original arguments to support the doctrine and the prophecy of Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him.

The author of this manuscript dealing with the *i'jāz al-Qur'an* (inimitability of the Qur'an) is a Sindhi, Southeast province of Modern day Pakistan, scholar Allāma Muhammad Ismā'īl b. Allāma Nabī Bakhsh b. Ghulām Hussayn al-Ūdvī al-Sindī (d. 1390/1970). He came from a family that had close contacts with the intellectual and spiritual circles of the day (1). He was a profound exegete, traditionist (*muhaddith*), jurist (*faqīh*) and grand muftī of Sind,

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Pakistan. After the death of his spiritual master Maulānā Tāj Mahmūd Amrotī (d. 1347/1929), a leader and an activist of the Khilāfat Movement (2) during 1919-24, al-Ūdvī enjoyed high esteem and respect in the hierarchy of Amrotī's reformist and *da'wa* activities in Sind and played significant role in Sunnī Muslim community of Sind.(3)

### **Significance of the Work**

The i'jāz al-Qur'an had been the subject of study by many Muslim theologians and scholars as attested by the fact that al-Rummānī, al-Khattābī and al-Bāqillānī, al-Rāzī and al-Suyūtī, had discussed certain aspects of the i'jāz in their treatises. (4) But, they all had focused mainly on linguistic style of the Qur'an, whereas al-Ūdvī has adopted entirely a different approach to this field. He advanced new aspects of the i'jāz al-Qur'an, which, according to him, is the result of his lifelong deep thinking and reflection on the Qur'an. Contrary to the classical and medieval authors, al-Ūdvī mainly focuses on the contents of the Qur'an as compared to its style. In this regard, he advances fourteen arguments to prove the i'jaz of the Qur'an as follows:

Qur'an's teachings are based on reason and logic

The reports of the Qur'an pertaining to the unseen

Qur'an's religious teachings are in complete agreement with human nature

Qur'an's depiction of stories of past nations in a way that contains wisdom and lessons

Qur'an's unveiling of the secrets pertaining to natural sciences discovered in modern times

Qur'an's inclusion of clear (muhkamāt) and allegorical (mutashābihāt) verses

Qur'an's classification of its commandment into different categories such as obligatory (fard), optional (nadb), prohibited (haram) and disliked (makrūh)

Qur'an's commandments are easy to practice

Qur'ān's inclusion of spiritual and material dimensions

Qur'ān's preservation from loss and corruption

Qur'ān's security from contradiction and inconsistency

Super-human eloquence and rhetoric

Its curious influence upon human hearts and minds

Qur'ān's evidence upon its truth is from within itself

This presentation of the argument is probably the first of its kind in the subject especially in South Asian Islam. No other Muslim scholar in South Asian region in particular and Middle East in general seems to have discussed the subject focussing on the contents of the Qur'an in so coherent and systematic manner, and the treatise appears to be the first novel attempt dealing with the i'jāz from contents point of view.

The importance of this treatise, introduced here for the first time, lies in the fact that it is the only Arabic treatise to be found in South Asian literature dealing exclusively with the subject of i'jāz, which forms significant and important doctrine in Islam. The central argument of al-Ūdvī in defence of the *i'jāz* is based on the concept of unletteredness or unschooledness (*ummiyya*) of the Prophet Muhammad. The second argument is that *i'jāz* of the Qur'ān has countless aspects; however, al-Ūdvī demonstrated it mainly through the contents of the Qur'ān, as mentioned above, although he did not overlook its style.

The treatise, however, is not a complete work on the subject of *i'jāz* dealing with the nature and principles of the *i'jāz*, although the reader may well form an idea about al-Ūdvī's conception of the nature of the *i'jāz* since he referred to the Ash'arites School's doctrine in some places. The treatise is in the main a work on the use of Qur'ānic contents to prove its *i'jāz*. It was written originally as an apologia for the supremacy of the Qur'an over all other religious scriptures, however, it also represents to prove its divine origin.

The significance of the treatise, therefore, lies not so much in the detailed matters it discusses, although they could reasonably

have had their influence on Muslim scholars if it had been published, as in the comprehensive view of the whole subject of the *i'jāz*. The originality of the treatise lies in its new departure in the study of *i'jāz*. Therefore, following pages are devoted to introduce this unexplored work on *i'jāz* written in South Asia.

### **Description of the MS**

The present manuscript of *Nūr al-Īqān Fī I'jāz al-Qur'an* (light of faith in inimitability of the Qur'an), is the only extant manuscript, and was first preserved in the library of Shāh Walī Allāh Oriental College, Mansura, Sind, entry number C. N. 9903. Then, this manuscript was transferred by the administration of the college to the Museum of Idāra Ta'mīr-e-Millat, Mansūra, Sind, having no entry, as a result of nationalization done by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the then Prime Minister in 1973. This could be seen on folio 1, where two readable stamps of both institutions appear. It contains 301 folios of 15 lines each with approximately 15 words in each line in two small books. The first book contains 186 folios and the other contains 114 folios. This manuscript was sold and remained under the study of number of scholars as shown by the prices and signatures, which appear on f. 1 of the second volume, and for the last time, by Professor Sayyid Muhammad Salīm during 1960s. <sup>(5)</sup> Several explanations and meanings of words, in different languages including, Persian, Urdu and Sindhi, have been added in margins. There are in the text occasional repetitions, sometimes one or two words and some times more than that up to five words. Some mistakes have been corrected, by a number, in the margins and some places by omitting and writing beside them. The manuscript is written on thick white paper in good *naskh* script in black in one hand with headings and sub-headings written in the same format and marked by a line above, and at some places written in a large format without mark. Three words on f. 3 and one word on f. 6 are over inked, which, with little attention, could be read. The several edges are also affected. This MS is partially vocalized particularly those words that could be read either way. The title of the work appears on f. 2, where the scribe mentions that it is his property in *nasta'liq* script as follows:

مملوكه مسكين الدهقاني طالب العلم أحقر العباد بقلم خود  
 نور الإيقان في إعجاز القرآن  
 مصنف هذا الكتاب مولانا محمد إسماعيل صاحب العودوي ثم الشكارفوري  
 وكتب هذا الكتاب الدهقاني طالب العلم  
 يلوح الخط في القرطاس دهرا وكاتبه رميم في التراب  
 العبد نورمحمد

There are many scribal errors. The text begins:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، الحمد لله العزيز العليم، منزل الذكر الحكيم

The text ends on f. 299 as follows:

فمن كان مبلغهم من العلم حياة الدنيا وزخارفها وهم عن الآخرة غافلين (كذا) فلا شك أنهم أخص وأدون من الذين لهم علم بما سوى الحياة الدنيوية من الروحانيات والأمر الأخرية المستعدين لها

Underneath that the scribe, al-Dahqānī gives the date of its finishing as follows:

قد تم هذا الكتاب المستطاب لعلامة العصر والزمان أعني أستاذي ومولاي باسم ذبيح الله - مد ظله علينا- العودوي ثم الشكارفوري من (كذا) يد دهقاني طالب العلم في تاريخ عشرين من الشهر الذي نزل فيه الكتاب المبين بالدلائل المتينة من سنة ثلاث عشر مائة وخمسة وسبعون (١٣٧٠ هـ) عن هجرة النبي الأمي خاتم النبيين - صلى الله تعالى عليه وعلى عترته أجمعين - ويطابق هذا التاريخ ١٩٥٥  
 ٢٠٥.

أنا العاجز الدهقاني طالب العلم

At the end on f. 300 the author gives the certificate of reading out of this work to him by al-Dahqānī as follows:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، الحمد لله وحده والصلاة والسلام على من لا نبي بعده، أما بعد!  
 فقد قرأ علي كتاب "إعجاز القرآن" الذي من تأليفتي المولوي الفاضل المختار بين الأقران نور محمد الدهقاني . رقاہ الله تعالى إلى غاية ما يتمناه . حوالي سنة خمس وسبعين وثلاث مائة بعد الألف وأجزته أن يرويه عني وغيره من تأليفتي، والله سبحانه هو المولى .

كتبه بيده العاجز الفقير إلى الله الغني الجليل محمد إسماعيل العودوي الشكارفوري - عفي عنه ما كان

منه -

The f. 1 and 301 contain matter irrelevant to the text. On f. 187, there are some signatures, in different hands by the people, who

borrowed it to study, or owned it including al-Dahqānī, the scribe and original owner, Abdullah Khushk al-Sindī, Qurbān Alī Bugtī. A note, in margin, by the scribe on f. 172 reveals that the MS under discussion was copied from the MS of the author, which is not extant. On the whole, the manuscript is in good condition, with only a few places, where ink smudges make reading difficult.

### **Identity of the author of the MS**

The authorship of this treatise can be established by two ways. First, internal evidence which can be shown through f. 2, as mentioned above. In addition, its authorship can also be seen from the forward of the author f.5. Second, the authorship of this treatise has never been disputed in biographical references on al-Ūdvī, which provides a sufficient proof that it is an authentic work of al-Ūdvī. Its authorship is first mentioned by Professor Amīnullāh al-‘Alavī (b. 1362/1943) in his biographical article on al-Ūdvī. Al-‘Alavī has retired as a professor of Arabic language and literature and as a principal of Government C and S Degree College, Shikārpur, Sind in 2003. It is reported that he has close contacts with al-Ūdvī and is one of the participants in his lectures and religious sermons in Shikārpur. This implies that al-‘Alavī was well acquainted with the works of al-Ūdvī. Moreover, al-‘Alavī belongs to the circle of Sindī ‘Ulama’ and a knowledgeable person about Sindī scholars and their lives and works. His testimony is therefore quite weighty. Other references to this treatise are also found in other biographical material on al-Ūdvī.<sup>(6)</sup>

### **Title of the treatise**

The title *Nūr al-Īqān Fī I'jāz al-Qur'an* of the MS can also be shown in two ways. First, it is clearly mentioned on f. 2, as mentioned above. Second, all the biographers of al-Ūdvī have mentioned same title.

### **The scribe: Identity and Dating**

The MS bears on ff. 2, 299, 300 the name of its scribe, Nūr Muhammad al-Dahqānī, a famous student of the author, who is well

known to the biographers of al-Ūdvī.<sup>(7)</sup> The MS also bears on ff. 199 and 300 the date of its finishing, 20/ 9/ 1375- 2/5 1955. However, no one has mentioned the date of starting scribing present MS from the original MS of the author, which is not extant. The certificate by the author, al-Ūdvī, on f. 300 bears witness that the scribe, al-Dahqānī read it out to the author during 1957 AH, although the place is not mentioned.

### Orthography

The scribe’s orthography is generally good and clear, but he seems to have paid little attention to diacritical points, grammatical rules, recognized orthographic forms and peculiarities, orthographical idiosyncrasies diagonal stroke at some letters, hence, he has made several mistakes which are listed below:

S. No.	Page	Error	Correct
1	5	اصطلاحات	إصلاحات
2	5	الجليلة	الجليلة
3	6	انعمت	أمعنت
4	7	افمن على	أفمن كان على
5	15	وعند	وعد
6	17	بالمدينة	بالمدينة
7	20	بمذ	بمذه
8	21	لتفسدون	لتفسدن
9	22	من منهم	منهم
10	25	فضاهو	فضاهي
11	26	اخترع هـ	اخترعه
12	27	القطرات	القطارات
13	27	العالم	العالم
14	28	المسي	المسمى
15	28	لم ار من	لمن
16	29	تعديل	تعديل
17	30	تسحكم	تستحكم

18	30	يود	يولد
19	30	هذ	هذه
20	31	عن	أن
21	31	مهم	منهم
22	32	بالنكاح	بإنكاح
23	33	ذكرين أنثى	ذكر وأنثى
24	34	لنك	لتلك
25	34	والآخرين	والآخرين
26	38	الباء	البلاء
27	40	فاسخ	فانسوخ
28	41	العقائد	العقائد
29	42	رئيت	رأيت
30	43	التشريعة	التشريعية
31	44	بماشي	بماشي
32	44	احيان	الأحيان
33	45	قراءه	قراءة
34	49	كلواحد	كل واحد
35	51	المحقق	التحقيق
36	52	يسر	يسير
37	59	الاكبير	الكبير
38	60	بتعددة	متعددة
39	62	بالمرأة	بالمرأة
40	66	جزا	جزاء
41	67	سقع	سقيع
42	67	الموجود	الموجود
43	73	وحدت	وجدت
44	73	العجبية	العجبية
45	81	الموة	المودة
46	83	كنا	كتاب



47	83	د-ن	دين
48	85	محرقة	محرقة
49	86	قابا	كابا
50	86	مجزة	معجزة
51	87	عصته	عصمته
52	87	بالاعتناق	بالاعتناق
53	92	طنوع	تنوع
54	93	ابدءوا	أبدعوا
55	99	أنانين	أفانين
56	109	اليه	إليه
57	114	الاحسنى	الحسنى
58	115	أكثر	أكثرهم
59	121	الرحمته	لرحمته
60	122	مر	مريم
61	122	الحذر	الحذر من العدو
62	126	بالغة الفصيحة	باللغة الفصيحة
63	136	عليّ	على
64	138	اكلمل	أكمل
65	139	تعظيمه	تعظيمه
66	139	تبرؤها	تبرؤها
67	140	السبيل	السبل
68	140	بايصدوف	بالصدوف
69	143	يقلبون	يلقبون
70	143	هذين	هاتين
71	144	تؤذ	تؤذن
72	144	تكو	تكون
73	145	غر	غير
74	147	تغير	تغيير
75	148	صحهما	صحيحهما

76	148	تسوّءه	تسوّئه
77	148	تؤلمه	تألمه
78	151	حسبت	حسب
79	155	كالخا	كالحياءة
80	156	قامة	قامت
81	158	تؤل	تؤول
82	164	نتائجها	نتائجها
83	166	اوحده	أوعده
84	169	حرم الأطفمة	حرم من الأطفمة
85	169	شعبة	شعبة
86	172	بوعظ	بوعظ
87	172	فطريئ	فطري
88	172	بيهما	بينهما
89	173	التمزجون	التمزجون
90	174	وتصلحوا	وأن تصلحوا
91	174	الفحشا	الفحشاء
92	177	وغير	وغيرها
93	177	تخلف	تختلف
94	177	المتكفل	المتكفل
95	178	تحلموا	تحكموا
			للتقوى واتقوا الله ان
96	178	للتقوى ان الله	الله
97	179	خلا	خلوا
98	181	بترك	بترك
99	181	فياكل	فليأكل
100	182	رجم	رجس
			يايها الذين آمنوا
101	185	يايها الذين اطيعوا الله	أطيعوا الله
102	190	خضوا	خضعوا

103	190	الظمير	الضمير
104	202	الصفات	الأوصاف
105	204	والانزل	والإنزال
106	206	رحم فسوها	رحم بذنبهم فسوها
107	214	رشد	شديد
108	216	الحادي عشرة	الحادية عشرة
109	219	فقتقها	فعتقها
110	222	تبرءه	تبرئه
111	222	بكاوا	بكاء
112	224	اولا	أولاد
113	226	تعبان	تعبانا
114	229	غري	غيري
115	235	وسكن	سكن
116	235	يبغي	ينبغي
117	238	لفظي	لفظية
118	240	جلعهما	جعلهما
119	246	المنزاهة	المنازهة
120	260	تل	تدل
121	261	فيبغي	فينبغي
122	262	للمتقين	للمقوين
123	263	ونشان	ونشاهد
124	264	الطبية	الطبية
125	266	تسحوذ	تستحوذ
126	267	كلواحد	كل واحد
127	279	بين هما	بينهما
128	281	التعافف	التعاطف
129	282	رازنة	رزانة
130	283	بدا	بدى
131	285	فيمهاوي	في مهاوي

The preceding list of errors clearly shows that the scribe seems not to have been careful in his scribing. Besides this, the scribe wrongly repeats sentences, even up to half page.<sup>(8)</sup> He also makes mistakes in citing verses and references from the Qur'an in a few places.<sup>(9)</sup> Furthermore, he is also guilty of wrong pagination as he disordered the pages from one place to another<sup>(10)</sup> as well as in numbering of sub-headings.<sup>(11)</sup> It seems necessary to note that several corrections have been made in the text. It is likely that the corrections were made by the scribe himself, as the style of the writing is similar to the text. He uses few methods of correction. When a word or words are definitely additional, he simply strikes them out.<sup>(12)</sup> Sometimes he crosses out the incorrect words and makes corrections beside them,<sup>(13)</sup> while at others in the margins.<sup>(14)</sup> In such cases, the scribe uses numbers in the margins. On f. 165, half of page is blank. There are significant grammatical errors in the MS, as mentioned in the list above, and since only one copy of the work is extant it seems impossible to say whether the incorrect grammar is to be attributed to al-Ūdvī, or to the scribe.

### Conclusion

Careful study of history of the doctrine of i'jāz al-Qur'ān shows that from third/ninth century up to thirteenth/nineteenth century the interest of Muslim theologians and scholars has been to mainly focus on the linguistic beauty and stylistic miracle of the Qur'an. al-Rummānī, al-Khattābī and al-Bāqillānī, al-Rāzī, al-Suyūtī and al-Rafī'ī are clear examples of showing miraculous nature of the Qur'an through rhetoric and style of the Qur'an. Al-Udvi adopted a different line of argumentation in his treatise. Al-Udvi mainly focused on the contents of the Qur'an rather than words of the Qur'an to prove rationally the prophecy of Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him. This is a new and original line of argumentation in the field of i'jāz al-Qur'ān.

## REFERENCES

1. Soomro, Muhammad Qāsim, *Shikārpur Jo Tārīkhī Pasmanzar* (Historical Background of Shikārpur), unpublished PhD Thesis, Jamshoro: University of Sind, 1998, p. 145; Alavī, Amīnullāh, “Hazrat Maulānā Muhammad Ismā‘īl al-Ūdvī Thumma al-Shikārpurī”, *al-Rahīm*, ed. Qāsmī, Ghulām Mustafā, 1980, (Nov. Dec), p. 3. For detailed study of his life and works, Kāndhro, Mukhtiar Ahmed, “Maulānā Muhammad Ismā‘īl al-Ūdvī al-Shikārpurī”, *Allāma Ghulām Mustafā Qāsmī Ain Sandas Ham‘asar Ālima Ain Adība*, (Allama Ghulam Mustafā Qāsmī and His contemporary Scholars and Literary Figures) ed. Khādim, Qāzī, Jamshoro: University of Sind, 2007, p. 81-95.
2. For detailed study on the Khilāfat Movement, with regard to the role of Sind and its *pīrs* (spiritual guides), See. Milnault, Gail, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*, New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 1999, 65-110, where he narrates: “the best example of the personal influence of religious leaders in popular political mobilization at this time occurred in Sind, where *pīrs* enjoy a particularly important position among rural Muslims.... At, he continues, the Provincial Khilafat Conference in Sind in February 1920, Shaukat Ali, Abdul Bari, and Haji Abdullah Haroon shared the platform with a couple of the more influential *pīrs*, Maulana Taj Muhammad, [Mahmūd] Pir Muhammad, and Pir Turab Ali Shah”. See p. 105. For the role of Shikārpur in the Khilāfat Movement, see. Sābir, Shams, “Shikārpur Jo Tahrik-e-Khilāfat Men Hiso” (Contribution of Shikārpur in the Khilāfat Movement), in *Shikārpur: Tārīkha Ain Tahqīqa*, (Shikārpur: History and Research) ed. Moryānī, Khalīl, Kandyāro: Roshnī Publication, 2004, p. 262.
3. Chāchar, Abdul Wahhāb, “Maulānā Nabī Bakhsh al-Ūdvī”, *Sharī‘at*, ed. Chāchar, Abdul Wahhāb, 1981 (October), p. 185; Kāndhro, p. 81.
4. For an overview of these works, see Issa J. Boullata, “The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur’ān: *i‘jāz* and Related Topics”, in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān*, ed. Rippin, Andrew, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, pp. 143-54; al-Himsī, Na‘īm, *Tārīkh Fikra i‘jāz al-Qur’ān mundhu al-Bi‘tha*

*al-Nabawiyya Hattā al-‘Ar al-Hādir, ma‘a naqd wa ta‘līq*, Beirut: Mu‘assasa al-Risāla, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1980.

5. Kandhro, 90
6. See, for instance, Adīb, Sibghatullāh, “Maulānā Muhammad Ismā‘īl al-Ūdvī”, *Wīnjhār*, ed. Mujāhid Chanā, 2004, (January), p. 15; Moryānī, Abdul Wahīd, “Maulānā Muhammad Ismā‘īl al-Ūdvī”, *al-Sind*, ed. Abro, Abd al-Hayye, Islamabad, 2000 (May-June), p. 27.
7. See. ‘Alavī, p. 12; Kāndhro, p. 91
8. See. Folio. 220
9. See, for example, ff. 115, 127, 178, 185, 196, 214, 277.
10. See. ff. 284, 285.
11. See. f. 126.
12. See. f. 4.
13. See, for example, ff. 5, 8, 9, 10, 11.
14. See, for example, ff. 44, 45, 56,

