Twitter Thread by Shaheedah



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Every time i see a reference to The Glorious Qur'an, i remember Abdullahi Yusuf Ali whose life didn't end the way i believe it was supposed to (this is my opinion) but Allah knows best. A Thread:

> \u201cSurely, Allah does not change the condition of a people unless they change what is in themselves.\u201d
> - Glorious Quran; Surah 13 (Ar R\u2019ad):11.
>
> — Dr. Joe Abah (@DrJoeAbah) January 6, 2021

Abdullahi Yusuf Ali wrote probably the most wildly used translation of the Qur'an titled, The Glorious Qur'an: Translations and commentary. The morning of 10th December 1953, a policeman found a half-conscious old man slumped on a street bench in the Westminster area of London.

The man died a day later and you guessed right, the delirious old man was Abdullahi Yusuf Ali. Although he wrote the most famous translation of the Qur'an, was one of the most senior muslim civil servants in India, inaugurated the first mosque in Canada...

...represented India at the Paris Peace Talks in 1919, was a trustee of London’s oldest mosque, was a known educationist and a prolific writer on Islam; He died alone, homeless, and with no one by his side.

Yusuf Ali lived at a time when the British were pillaging, ransacking and colonizing the world. During world war I, the british had nearly half a million muslim soldiers (indian/pakistani/bangladeshi) and Some refused to fight the Turkish Ottoman soldiers who had joined the war..

...against the allied army. A mutiny was attempted but the British were quick to quench it which led to the execution of 76 muslim men (now this particular bit is a lot more interesting and Zadie Smith in WHITE TEETH played around with this history and it was beautiful)...

...anyway, the muslims were hot with anger over the execution of muslims by the british. Many of them considered the Ottoman Sultan as their Caliph. Their personal affinity and strong connection led to the Khilafat Movement in India that called for boycotting the British...

...Our protagonist was against this. He called for muslim soldiers to fight for the British. In a speech in 1914 he is quoted to have said “You have comrades in the British army whose fellowship and lead are a priceless possession to you.”

“The Ottoman Caliph announces Jihad against the British and what does Yusuf Ali do? He goes around European countries asking Muslims to fight for the British,” Humayun Ansari, a professor of Islam at the University of London, told TRT World.

He was against political Islam and insisted that Muslims could do better under British rule and that they should focus on educating themselves as opposed to agitating for independence.

2 failed marriages later and a bunch of estranged children later, Yusuf Ali began his lonely journey to translate the Qur'an. Although other scholars had worked on translating the Qur'an to english, Yusuf Ali's was so humble and open-minded that it stood out.

Although he identified as Shia, he was respected so much so that he lead congregations at Sunni mosques. “In his translation of the Quran, published between 1934 and 1937, Yusuf Ali expounded the spiritual side of Islam more than its worldly view,” writes one researcher.

Besides dealing with his matrimonial failures, he had a hard time coming to terms with what happened to Arab Muslims after World War I. The disbandment of the Ottoman empire shook him but the proposal to partition Palestine crushed him

“One way alone can bring thee peace:

That ancient rights be not suppressed,

That aliens from encroachments cease,

And Quds be given its rightful rest,” he wrote in the poem Palestine published in January 1938.

Okay i don tire. This is turning out longer than i expected. His story is simply one that has fascinated me and reading Zadie Smith's White Teeth last year (an excellent book) where the group KEVIN called him "a little flamboyant" had me laughing in tears.

Continuation and Conclusion: It is said that despite his feelings towards the partitioning of Palestine, his loyalty to the British did not waver as he traveled to India at the urging of England’s Ministry of Information...

...to rally Muslim support after it declared war on Germany in 1939. He met with politicians, muslim scholars, students all in the hopes of convincing them to still fight for the british and support their war against Hitler (the muslims were like "brah, not my fight. bissalam").

At the same time, Muslim and Hindu Indians were fighting their own fight for independence. Upon his return, he wrote articles and gave speeches, asking Indians to unite in defence of the empire and drop their demand for political reforms.

But his appearance as an important player in international events quickly faded after the war ended in 1944. The British basically used and dumped him. As the British began to move away from south-east asia following the calls for independence from it's colonies...

...Yusuf Ali began to disappear from newspapers. His powerful friends had no use for him anymore to push their pro-empire agenda. He spent his last years living in the National Liberal Club on a monthly pension that he received against his government job.

After a while, even his powerful friends in the Muslim community lost track of him. Being estranged from his ex-wives and children, Yusuf Ali died alone.

Of his children he wrote in his will, "These children by their continued ill-will towards me have alienated my affection for them, so much that I confer no benefit on them by this will." I can't speak for his children but this, coming from a father who fought to get custody...

...of his 4 children is just sad and heartbreaking. He was also not entirely oblivious to the systematic discrimination that Muslims faced under British rule. He wrote about how Britain was using Indian revenue in the Great War. He also wrote about discrimination based on color

"We have to look at him in the context of his times. That was a generation when the British claimed superiority over the natives. And then you have somebody who can emerge and beat them at their own game," says Jamil Sherif, who wrote Ali's biography titled Searching for Solace.

Aaaaand that's the end. I am quite glad to see a lot of people interested in the story of Abdullahi Yusuf Ali. He was an honorable man who introduced most of the western world to the Qur'an and his end of life saddens me. May his soul continue to rest in peace.