

IBN WARRAQ AND HIS APPROACH TO THE QUR'ĀNIC TEXT

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In this paper it is endeavored to expose Ibn Warraq's approach to the text and authenticity of the Qur'ān. Ibn Warraq is well-known among the literary circles of the West for his edited works on text and history of the Qur'ān. He has been frequently appearing on electronic as well as print media having subjective discussion on Islam and the Qur'ān. With a Muslim background, he has been affecting the minds of Muslims and non-Muslims as well for the last nine consecutive years. He has explicitly criticized text of the Qur'ān to disprove its authenticity through his books, websites and even television programs. His approach to the holy book of Muslims has been welcomed and encouraged in radical circles of the West. Unfortunately, being a former Muslim with literary makeup he has gathered attention of the Western media and there people are listening his harangues and buying his books.

Introduction

In the modern scenario Ibn Warraq has been one of the most referred and preferred *native orientalist*¹, for the contemporary Western scholars of comparative study of religions and the media as well for last few years. He is warmly welcomed in the field of criticism on the Qur'ān, as Toby Lester gleefully states:

The prospect of a Muslim black lash has not deterred the critical-historical study of the Koran, as the exercise of the essays in *The Origins of the Koran* (1998) demonstrate. Even in the aftermath of the Rushdie affair the work continues.²

With Muslim backdrop and Islamic knowledge he is fortified with cannons of criticism of the Qur'ān. Ibn Warraq is known as the author of several books on the Qur'ān, particularly. He has done a diligent job by editing voluminous books comprising of the writings of former and contemporary orientalist. Before going ahead it is quite pertinent to have a look upon his activities, works, schema and achievements.³

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Ibn Warraq, native to Pakistan, is an apostate, well-known for his criticism on Islam and secular views. He was born in a Muslim family in 1946 in Rajkot, India. His parents migrated to Pakistan in 1947 after the partition of India. He learned to recite the Qur'an by heart in Pakistan at a local *Madrassah* as he told in an interview⁴. For further study his father sent him to a boarding school in England.⁵ At the University of Edinburgh he studied Arabic with one of the 20th century's English Orientalists, Montgomery Watt.⁶ However, it is a different matter that in "Why I Am Not a Muslim⁷," Ibn Warraq harshly criticizes Watt for his influential apologetics on behalf of some of Islam's tendencies.

His full and original name has not been found anywhere.⁸ The nom de plume Ibn Warraq (ابن وراق), nearly literally means "son of a paper maker" is used due to his concerns for his personal safety and one that has been adopted by dissident authors having polemic and controversial agenda. The name refers to 9th century scholar *Muhammad al Warraq*⁹. In 1988 Salman Rushdie affair took place in which Ibn Warraq considers a turning point (leaving Islam) for him:

"1989 was the final turning point for me, when the Fatwa was issued against Salman Rushdie for his "Satanic Verses".¹⁰

While explaining the reason for turning point, he shows his idealism for Rushdie:

Rushdie wrote his book and trusted in freedom of expression. Whether one likes the book or not – he has the right to write it. Or as Rushdie put it, freedom of opinion also means having the freedom to upset people. Otherwise this freedom would be meaningless. I felt that freedom of opinion is a value that has to be defended. A value that we have to defend in the West. Like freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, true pluralism, the Western judicial system.¹¹

It is pertinent to note that he leaves his religion, Islam for freedom of speech and freedom of expression. But it is astonishing that he exercises these rights as the arms to attack on Islam leaving all other religions of the world aside. Attacking on any religions means to injure the sensibilities of its followers around the globe. Eventually he has to adopt the pseudonym in 1995 when he completed his first book, entitled "*Why I Am Not a Muslim*". In an interview, he explains the reason for adopting the pseudonym:

There were several reasons which are still valid. I had begun 1993 to write my book "*Why I Am Not a Muslim*" when it appeared in 1995, I was professor for British and American culture at the University of Toulouse. I had fear to become the second Salman Rushdie. I did not want to die and I had my family to protect. My brother and its family do not know until today that I wrote the book. I do not want that they must suffer on my account.¹²

In another interview with German magazine, he adds:

I have to be careful; I'm on several death lists. And I don't want to upset the Muslims in my family. They don't know I've written all these books. But as I'm speaking in public more and more often now, someone is bound to recognize me at some point.¹³

His book "*Why I Am Not a Muslim*" is so full of hard bark on fundamental principles of Islam that he has to conceal his identity due fear of death and being the second Salman Rushdie. The above said book was so anti Islam that country like France banned its publication before the event of 9th September, 2001. Ibn Warraq himself makes a clean breast for the fact:

"two years ago when my book came out, in the French edition it was practically boycotted. Now certainly the French press is running after me left, right and centre".¹⁴

In 2007 he participated in St. Petersburg Secular Islam Summit along with other native orientalist and critiques of Islam such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Wafa Sultan and Irshad Manji.¹⁵ The group released the St. Petersburg Declaration which urges world governments to reject *Sharia* law, fatwa courts, clerical rule and state-sanctioned religion in all their forms, oppose all penalties for blasphemy and apostasy, which they believe to be in accordance with article 18 of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights.¹⁶

His Collection on Textual Criticism of the Qur'ān

Ibn Warraq's most of the literary work is as an editor. His work on the Qur'ān is comprised of articles written by different Western scholars in different time spans. He proceeds his own hypotheses in introduction of an article or a chapter. His major works on the Qur'ān with a brief introduction and their specifications are as under:

The Origins of the Koran; Classic Essays on Islam's Holy Book

*The Origins of the Koran; Classic Essays on Islam's Holy Book*¹⁷ was published in 1998. In this book, Ibn Warraq has reproduced thirteen articles of the prominent orientalist on the history and nature of the Qur'ānic text. Twelve of these essays are dated back to eighteenth and nineteenth century and only one from the 20th century. The book is comprised of four parts. Part I includes an introduction by the author himself and an article, 'The Koran' by Theodor Noldeke. The second part "The collection and the variants of the Koran" consists of the article by Leone Caetani, Alphonse Mingana, Arthur Jeffery and David Margoliouth. Third part 'The Sources of the Koran' comprises of essays by Abraham Geiger, W. St. Clair Tisdall and Charles Cutler. Part four "Modern Textual Criticism of the Koran" consists only one essay 'Literary Analysis of Koran, *Tafsir*, and *Sira*: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough' written by Andrew Rippin.

Professor Yasin Dutton critically reviews *The Origins of the Koran* by Ibn Warraq as:

Ibn Warraq himself rejects most, if not all, Muslim scholarship on the issue, while at the same time seeming to accept without question anything produced by the “revisionist” wing of modern Western scholarship, neither of which positions would seem tenable for one seeking to produce by “rational enquiry”.¹⁸

Yasin Dutton scholarly reveals Ibn Warraq’s polemic and biased hypothesis in the guise of academic scholarship:

But not only is Ibn Warraq’s own position “based on polemic” and an uncritical acceptance of certain sources (in this case, modern revisionist scholarship), but so too are the highly “Christianised” critiques - or attempts at critique - of, for example, Mingana and St Clair-Tisdall, for whom nothing is ultimately acceptable unless it accords with Christian scripture¹⁹...the contents of the present book seem little more than a polemical attempt to debunk the Qur’ān and, by extension, Islam.²⁰

What the Koran Really Says: Language, Text, and Commentary

*What the Koran Really Says: Language, Text, and Commentary*²¹ is another edited work of Ibn Warraq on the language, text and commentary of the Koran. Contrasting to title, the book is not a commentary of the Qur’ān by Ibn Warraq but is a collection of over forty critical essays on the Qur’ān by philological scholars and orientalist.

The Book is about 782 pages long, but has no new hypothesis.

It’s just the same stuff written by different bums rather than Ibn Warraq. The books comprises of nine parts. Part first ‘*Introduction*’ consists of two articles one by Ibn Warraq: Introduction and second by Toby Lester: What Is the Koran? The second part ‘*Background*’ is comprised of only one essay by Yehuda D. Nevo while the third part ‘*A Question of Language*’ comprises of essays by Alphonse Mingana, D.S. Margoliouth, Paul E. Kahle, C. Rabin, Josua Blau and A. Ben-Shemesh. The fourth part ‘*Sources of the*

Koran: Essenian, Christian, Coptic' consists of the articles by Ibn Warraq, Eric R. Bishop, Marc Philonenko, Wilson B. Bishai, Raimund Kobert. The fifth part '*Suras, Suras, Suras*' is comprised of the articles written by Franz Rosenthal, Claude Cahen, Meir M. Bravmann, M. J. Kister, Uri Rubin, C. Geger and Michael Schub. The articles of J. Barth, A. Fischer, C.C. Torrey and James A. Bellamy are included in the sixth part '*Emendations, Interpolations*'. The seventh part consists of Richard Bell's introduction and commentary of the Qur'ān. The eighth part '*Poetry and the Koran*' includes articles by Rudolf Geyer, Julius Wellhausen and Ibn al-Rawandi while the final part is about *Manuscripts* including the essays by Adolf Grohmann and Gred-R. Puin.

Obviously Ibn Warraq's selection of the material is comprised of only non-Muslim writings on the sacred book of Muslims and void of any coincided arguments. This tendency does not reveal any kind of academic research or endeavor for truth but only discloses his dishonesty for running a one way traffic of charges and allegations against the text of the Qur'ān and his antagonism to Islam with masquerade of freedom of expression. For instance the allegations on manuscripts of the Qur'ān forwarded by Toby Lester and G.R. Puin have obviously been deflated in literary circles before publication of the book.²²

Application of Higher Criticism to the Qur'anic Text.

Although there is a long list of orientalists who spent their lives in investigating and criticizing the Qur'ān yet he regards it insufficient. He quotes Arthur Jeffery:

Critical investigation of the text of the Qur'ān is a study which is still its infancy.²³

Western intellectuals have been unable to extinguish his thirst for criticism of the Qur'ān, he speaks out:

Western intellectuals and Islamologists have totally failed in their duties as intellectuals. They have betrayed their calling by abandoning their critical faculties when it comes to Islam.

Some Islamologists have themselves noticed this appalling trend in their colleagues.²⁴

He says that 'conservative orientalists', such as Watt or Welch have done nothing to quench his thirst for criticism of the Qur'an and still there are crucial question that have never been asked:

- If they (Watt and Welch) believe that the Koran is "authentic", how do they; think Muhammad received his revelations?
- Do they believe that Muhammad literally went into a trance and somehow saw visions of angles who recited various versed to him whom the then revealed to his companions, who wrote them down verbatim?
- Some of the passages and stories in the Koran are very long indeed. Are we to understand that Muhammad remembered several hundred lines of rhymed prose that were revealed to him in his trance?
- Do we assume that all his companions were literate and able to write down his every word, all the time believing that their prophet was in direct communion with an angel?
- ...what exactly does authentic means to non-Muslim scholars? Is there a coherent definition for "authentic"?
- Is there then a valid, i.e., non-circular, argument to show that the Koran is authentic?
- How can we know that the Koran is authentic if we cannot trust any of our sources for the rise Islam and the life of Muhammad?²⁵

His above said "latest questions" on the authenticity of the Qur'an are not new rather, have been repeatedly propagated since the early days of orientalism and already exploded by the orientalists. In fact, Ibn Warraq lays the foundations of his criticism of the Qur'an on theories and ideas of Orientalists instead any of his own creative achievement. On the basis of

his inflating approach, he asserts for having a scholarly test of the Koran in 21st century:

It is also an extraordinary situation that in the twenty first century we still do not have a definitive, scholarly test of the Koran. The situation is truly chaotic; with scholars' content work without specifying which manuscript of edition they are relying on... Neither Western scholars nor ordinary Muslims have it seems, something called the Koran; they all make do with a Koran.²⁶

In an interview with a German online magazine "Qantara" he charges the Muslims to be scared of Qur'anic criticism:

If one tries to criticize the Qur'ān today, many Muslims react with hysteria. Because they don't want to accept any criticism of their religion. But we should encourage people to criticize the Qur'ān. We have to protect and support the scholars who are looking at the Qur'ān as scientists. That is the only way to prompt a reformation in Islam or secularization in Muslim minds.²⁷

Ibn Warraq, in his books, articles and speeches, asserts that reformation of the Islam and the progress and broad vision of Muslim mindset lay upon the textual criticism of the Qur'ān by applying the Biblical Criticism to it. He introduces himself as a critic of the Qur'ān and an inflator of the orientalist's critical study of the Qur'ān. Ibn Warraq rejects the approved facts regarding authenticity of the text of the Qur'ān while negating the Muslims consciousness to their religion "Blind dogmatism has shut Muslims off from the intellectually challenging and exhilarating research, debate, and discussion of the last century and a half."²⁸ It is a wrong notion; Islam is the only religion on the earth that is not based on blind faith but on continuous chain of traditions and authentic sources. Hence, the Muslims are ever willing to discuss research and debate about their sacred literature.

He has the opinion that Islamic world is still a theologically conceived and ordered society and needs enlightenment and reformation in its mindset or worldview like Western society. He further argues that reformation in Islamic world is based on execution of the science of textual and contextual criticism of the Qur'an. He quotes admirably Western society who got secularization and rationalization through Biblical criticism:

The secularization of Europe took place thanks to various historical movements; one of them was bible criticism, where Germans in particular played an important role: Albert Schweizer, for example, saw the Old and New Testament as texts written by men that can be analyzed on a scholarly basis.²⁹

While preferring the secularization over religious theology, he quotes Spinoza

*"...the Bible was purely a human and secular text: theology is not an independent source of truth"*³⁰

He considers that Spinoza's attack on scriptural concepts (religion) and ideas, based on the doctrine that there is no reality beyond the unalterable laws of Nature, and consequently no revelation, miracles or prophecy, made philosophical intuition everywhere in England, Italy, Germany and France.³¹

He expresses his deep dejection that this type of Biblical criticism has not so far been applied to the Qur'an:

Qur'anic criticism, on the other hand, has lagged far behind. But surely, Muslims and non-Muslims have the right to critically examine the sources, the history, and dogma of Islam. The right to criticize is a right of which Muslims avail themselves in their frequent denunciations of Western culture, in terms that would have been deemed racist, neocolonialist, or imperialist had they been directed against Islam by a European. Without criticism, Islam will

remain unassailed in its dogmatic, fanatical, medieval fortress: ossified, totalitarian, and intolerant. It will continue to stifle thought, human rights, individuality, originality, and truth.³²

Ibn Warraq has included Andrew Rippin's article: *Literary Analysis of Koran, Tafsir and Sira: The Methodology of John Wansbrough* in his book *The Origins of the Koran* in which Rippin inflates and applauds Wansbrough's methodology of revisionism³³. On the basis of his methodology, Wansbrough applies "instruments and techniques" of Biblical criticism with all its types such as:

- Form Criticism
- Source Criticism
- Redaction Criticism

for the textual criticism of the Quran. It is the Biblical Criticism or Principles of Higher Criticism for which Ibn Warraq propagates much hue and cry for its implementation to the Qur'ān. Well, we see the consequences of Wansbrough's application of the Biblical criticism to the Qur'ān. He assumes the following conclusions:

- i. The different parts of the Qur'ān originated in different communities located not in Arabia but in Iraq or Syria and that these evolved only gradually from originally independent prophetic traditions ("prophetic logia") during a long period of oral transmission, assuming their final and "canonical" form in the late second/eighth century.³⁴
- ii. That the texts that were given scriptural status were only a small part of the vast body of traditions as the rest of these became instead the staff of *Hadith*.³⁵
- iii. That this "canonization" of the Qur'ānic text was linked with the rise of Classical Arabic and its grammar and the appearance of the Qur'ānic commentaries.³⁶

- iv. That the “polemical character” of much of the Qur’ān suggests that an important Jewish opposition served as one of the motivations behind its “canonization”.³⁷
- v. That the Islamic tradition is an example of what is known to biblical scholars as “salvation history”: *a theologically and evangelically motivated story of a religion’s origins invented late in the day and projected back in time*, the whole process being similar to that of the canonization of the Hebrew Scripture.³⁸
- vi. That “the reason that no Islamic source material from the first century or so of Islam has survived...is that it never existed”; nor can most Muslims traditions be confirmed by contemporary non-Muslim sources. Taking Schacht as basis for Muslim law before the ninth century.³⁹

In addition to Wansbrough, Ibn Warraq has included the work of Patricia Crone with Michael Cook, she wrote, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (1977) in the case of application of Biblical Criticism to the Qur’ān. Among Hagarism’s controversial claims were suggestions that the text of the Koran came into being later than is now believed: that Mecca was not the initial Islamic sanctuary points unambiguously to a sanctuary in north-west Arabia....Mecca was secondary: that the Arabs conquests preceded the institutionalization of Islam: that the idea of the *hijra* or the migration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622, may have evolved long after Muhammad died: and that the term “Muslim” was not commonly used in early Islam.⁴⁰

Hagarism came under immediate attack, from Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike, for its heavy reliance on hostile sources. As its authors wrote, “This is a book, based on what from any Muslim perspective must appear an inordinate regard for the testimony of infidel sources”.⁴¹ Crone and Cook

have since backed away from some of its most radical propositions—such as, for example that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) lived two years longer than the Muslim tradition claims he did, and that the history. In her other book *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (1987) she made detailed argument challenging the prevailing view among Western scholars that Islam arose in response to the Arabian spice trade.⁴²

Patricia Crone defends the goals of this sort of thinking as Toby Lester quotes her remarks:

“The Koran is scripture with a history like any other except that we do not know this history and tend to provoke howls of protest when we study it. Nobody would mind the howls if they came from Westerners, but Westerners feel deferential when the howls come from other people: who are you to tamper with their legacy? But we Islamicists are not trying to destroy anyone’s faith.”⁴³

Toby Lester quotes her further: she says “everyone took it for granted that everything the Muslims claim to remember about the origin and meaning of the Koran is correct. If you drop that assumption, you have to start afresh.”⁴⁴ Crone puts in *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity*,⁴⁵

The Biblical redactors offer us sections of the Israelite tradition at different stages of crystallization, and their testimonies can accordingly be profitably compared and weighed against each other. But the Muslim tradition was the outcome, not of slow crystallization, but of an explosion; the first compilers were not redactors, but collectors of debris whose works are strikingly devoid of overall unity: and no particular illumination ensue from their comparison.⁴⁶

In *Hagarism* they have presented no novelty or progress other than Wansbrough’s methodology. Patricia and Cook

themselves make a clean breast that they “did not say much the Koran in Hagarism that was not based on Wansbrough”.

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Ibn Warraq is campaigning for such criticism of the text of the Qur'ān but seems to forget that the Bible and the Qur'ān are different books and hence each has to deal with in its own right. Ibn Warraq insists for reapplying the Biblical textual criticism to the Qur'ān denying the fact that application of principle of higher criticism to divine literature has already been rejected and declared an outdated fallacy. Because the purpose of the textual criticism is to find errors in the text and remove them and its application to divine literature means to prove it a man effort as A.E. Housman defines:

Textual criticism is a science, and, since it comprises recension and emendation, it is also an art. It is the science of discovering error in texts and the art of removing it. That is its definition, which is what the name denotes.....textual criticism is not a branch of mathematics, nor indeed an exact science at all. It deals with a matter not rigid constant, like lines and numbers, but fluid and variable; namely, the frailties and aberrations of the human mind, and of its insubordinate servants, the human fingers.⁴⁸

Accordingly, by applying this kind of textual criticism to the Bible, the critics like Spinoza, have rejected its authority and divinely status. “Spinoza did not regard the Bible as divinely inspired - instead it was to be evaluated like any other book”.⁴⁹ Therefore, the application of textual criticism to divine literature has been rejected by the Church on the ground that it is impracticable for a critic to fulfill the basic requirements for this project:

No study perhaps requires so devout spirit and so exalted a faith in the supernatural as the pursuit of the Higher Criticism. It demands at once the ability of the scholar,

and the simplicity of the believing child of God. For without faith no one can explain the Holy Scriptures, and without scholarship no one can investigate historic origins.⁵⁰

The Qur'ān is the unaltered word of Allah and does not contain any kind of errors to remove, which is the purpose of textual criticism. So far as the law of textual criticism in case of its compilation, recording and transmission is concerned, there are authentic evidences to prove its authenticity and transparency. The Muslims established a very strict criterion for the textual criticism of the Qur'ān. While compiling the Qur'ān during the reign of Abu Bakr the laws of textual criticism were strictly implemented by Zayd and the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Such are the underpinning of textual criticism and editing established by Orientalists in the twentieth century:

- i. Older copies are generally more reliable than newer ones.
- ii. Copies that were revised and corrected by the scribe, through comparison with the mother manuscript, are superior to those which lack this.
- iii. If the original is extant, any copy scribed from this loses all significance⁵¹.

However, Ibn Warraq is somewhat satisfied with more sarcastic and pungent theories of the orientalist towards the criticism of the Qur'ān e.g. Wansbrough's methodology: 'revisionism'. He inflates John Wansbrough's methodology that pretends to examine the Qur'ān using methods like those of non-Islamic sources, comparing it with comparable contemporary devotional works, seeking clues about its origin. He says:

Wansbrough emphasizes two points whose full implications are perhaps too disturbing for most scholars to draw: first, there is no Muslim literature which can be dated, in the form in

which it is available to us, earlier than 800 C.E (end of the second century of Islam); the other is that Islam is a complex phenomenon the development of which must have taken many generations and occupied an extended geographical area before it attained a form resembling that which we know today.⁵²

Employing the Wansbrough's methodology he alleges that the authenticity of the Qur'ān must be confirmed by comparing with non-Islamic historical sources:

If by 'authentic' we mean that the Koran was the word of God, as passed on, either directly from God or thorough the intermediary of an angel, to a historical figure called Muhammad, supposedly living in Arabia , then clearly we need some independent confirmation of this extraordinary claim.⁵³

In fact Ibn Warraq reproduces Wansbrough's theory of 'revisionism' to strengthen his polemical agenda as Fred M Donner remarks:

.... the pseudonymous religious polemicist Ibn Warraq who seems to champion Wansborough's ideas in pursuit of his own personal religious agenda.⁵⁴

Donner is absolutely right; Ibn Warraq's hue and cry reveals his individual interests rather than any literary advancement as he himself is fully aware of the massive work of orientalists on the Qur'ānic criticism.

Major Cannons towards the Qur'ān

Ibn Warraq, with a very loathsome tongue, is carrying on criticism of the Qur'ān at international forums, facilitated by the West, to pursue his polemical agenda.

Textual Authenticity of the Qur'ān

There are numerous gateways for an assault on the Qur'ānic text, one of which is to question its recording and compilation as Arthur Jeffery remarks: "The Western scholars do not consent that the arrangement of the text of the Qur'ān which

is in our hands now is the work of the Prophet".⁵⁵ It is in this spirit that Orientalists allege that Quran was not indeed recorded during the Prophet's (peace be upon him) lifetime. Collection and compilation of the Qur'ān has been a basic subject for almost all the renowned orientalists as far as the study of the Qur'ān is concerned. Well-known to the fact that integrity and authenticity of the text of the Qur'ān rests upon its recording and collection, orientalists endeavored at their best to critically investigate the early history of the compilation and collection of the Qur'ān.

In his book, "*The Origins of the Koran*" Ibn Warraq has included his introduction as a prelude, therein; he discusses the collection of the Qur'ān quite objectively. He has the opinion that through a critical investigation of the Qur'ān it is hoped to find out the answers of the following questions:

1. How did the Koran come to us?—That is the compilation and the transmission of the Koran.
2. When was it written, and who wrote it?
3. What are the sources of the Koran? Where were the stories, legends, and principles that abound in the Koran acquired?
4. What is the Koran? Since there never was a *textus receptus ne varietur* of the Koran, we need to decide its authenticity.⁵⁶

He rejects the divine origin of the Qur'ān in his statement :

..... it is surely totally irrational to continue to believe that the Qur'ān is the word of God when the slightest amount of rational thought will reveal that the Qur'ān contains words and passages addressed to God (e.g. VI.104; VI.114; XVII.1; XXVII.91; LXXXI.15-29; lxxxiv.16-19; etc.); or that it is full of historical errors and inconsistencies.⁵⁷

After describing the project of collection of the Qur'ān under the custody of Abu Bakr and Uthman (may Allah be pleased with them) he finds no relief to his agony against the integrity of the text of the Holy Book:

There are no compelling reasons for accepting the 'Uthmanic story and not the Abu Bakr one; after all they *are all gleaned from the same sources*, which are all exceedingly late, tendentious in the extreme, and all later fabrications, as we shall see later".⁵⁸

According to his pre-assumed objectives, he rejects every tradition or evidence of the recording or written preservation of the Qur'ān:

Similarly the Companions of the Prophet are said to have memorized many of his utterances. Could their memories never have failed? Oral traditions have a tendency to change over time, and they cannot be relied upon to construct a reliable, scientific history. Second, we seem to assume that the Companions of the *Prophet heard and understood him perfectly*.⁵⁹

The major theme runs through Ibn Warraq's voluminous works on the Qur'ān, "*The Origins of the Koran*" and "*What the Koran Really Says*" is to put a question mark on the authenticity of the Qur'ān. not only Ibn Warraq but many others, since a long time, have never been intended to believe the Qur'ān as word of Allah, as Muslims believe. They find Bible with a history of corruption, tempering and alteration in consequence of implying the principles of textual criticism. Being religiously biased and prejudiced or with objectives of political empowerment and for acquisitive interests not for academic research, they apply the principles of higher criticism to Islam's sacred book but originated nothing sensible to realize their contentment. So they have endeavored at their level best and even spent their lives to rummage around microscopically for each and every, weak and slight clue to negate the fair collection and transmission of the Qur'ān in the early history of Islam. But after a long run of centuries they could not make heads or tails of it.

Variant Readings and Manuscripts

Ibn Warraq has exaggerated the allegations instigated by the orientalists regarding variant readings and variant manuscripts of the Qur'ān in his work "*The Origins of the Koran*" and "*What The Koran Really Says*" that suit his hard bark on the sacred book of Islam. Keeping in view the importance of Arthur Jeffery's hypothesis of variant readings of the Qur'ān Ibn Warraq has selected his well-known work "*Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān*"⁶⁰ and other articles under the topic "The Collection and the Variants of the Qur'ān" in his edited work "*The Origins of the Koran*". To establish that "the Qur'ān is Muhammad's book, the impression of his personality is on it from the first word to the last,"⁶¹ Jeffery collected about six thousand variant readings from books dealing with commentary (*tafsir*) linguistics (*lughah*) literature (*adab*) and reading style (*qira'ats*).⁶² His main source was the *Kitab al-Masahif* of Ibn Abi Dawud (d. 316 A.H). However a large number of variant reading entries listed in his *Materials* lack proper and authentic chains of transmission, a fact which he himself realizes.⁶³ Moreover, while listing variant readings in his *Materials* Jeffery never mentions his source.⁶⁴ He himself acknowledges that in Ibn Abi Dawud's *Kitab al-Masahif*, his very first and basic source, the *isnad* is weak and that the Orthodoxy may not accept it.⁶⁵

It seems quite relevant here to depict the status of seven ahurf and the need of multiple (variant) readings for reciting the Qur'ān along with conditions of authentic readings. According to an authentic *Hadith*, the Holy Prophet (*peace be upon him*) has said:

ان هذا القرآن أنزل على سبعة احرف فاقروا ما تيسر منه.⁶⁶

The Qur'ān has been revealed covering seven versions. So recite it in a way that is easy for you from out of these.

Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud reports:

The Messenger of God said: "The Qur'ān was sent down in seven ahurf. Each of these ahurf has an outward aspect (*zahir*: ظاهر) and an

inward aspect (batin : باطن); each of the ahurf has a border, and each border has a lookout."⁶⁷

In view of above quoted authentic *Hadiths* it is, thus, clear that the Qur'ān was revealed in seven letters but to explain and describe these seven letters is not an easy task. The discussion of the seven ahurf is a very significant, extensive and one of the most complicated discussions on the sciences of the Qur'ān. This is an established fact that the term *Sab'a Ahruf* (سبعة احرف) does not mean Seven Qira'at (Seven Readings) rather it refers to seven types.⁶⁸ However, the best explanation and interpretation of the Seven Dialects of the Qur'ān is that it means "Variant Recital".

So far as the case of variant manuscripts of the Qur'ān is concerned Ibn Warraq has dedicated the first and the last parts of his book "*What The Koran Really Says*" for allegations on the manuscripts of the Qur'ān. Both these articles are inter-related as Toby Lester inflates and reiterates Puin's views more sensationally. "*What is the Koran?*"⁶⁹ by Toby Lester in the part first, under the heading Introduction, and another article "*Observations on Early Qur'ān Manuscripts in Sana'a*" written by Gerd-R. Puin⁷⁰ in the last part under heading: Manuscripts.

If Puin's found discrepancies in Sana'a fragments are analyzed, keeping in mind above discussion of variant readings, it becomes clear that these statements carry no weight of evidence, clearly far-fetched and totally untenable. It seems that the main theme runs behind his allegations is to resume the work of his ancestors to prepare a revised version of the Qur'ān. Puin determines to complete the mission by his findings:

The plan of Bergstrasser, Jeffery, and later Pretzl to prepare a critical edition of the Qur'ān was not realized, and the collection of variant derived from real old codices failed to survive the bombs of World War II. Many more old manuscripts are accessible now, which would

justify a new approach, nit no such undertaking
is in sight.⁷¹

It is the matter of amusement that Puin wants to resume the work of Jeffery to prepare a variant version whereas Jeffery himself acknowledges this fact dejectedly, lamenting that "practically all the early codices and fragments that have so far been carefully examined, show the same type of text, such variants as occur being almost always explainable as scribal errors"⁷² Bergstrasser also reached a similar conclusion.⁷³ Now one can ask: where does Puin stand?

William Muir acknowledges the truth:

"There is probably no other book in the world
which has remained twelve centuries (now
fourteen) with so pure a text".⁷⁴

Conclusion

Ibn Warraq, denying all the living evidences, is creeping on the criticism of the Qur'ān by inflating various theories whereas in this era of enlightenment and conscience text and history of the Qur'ān are proved flawless. His entire work is a non serious scholarship that does not incite any glimpse of impartial, balanced and realistic meditation. He rejects the every light of Islam in a pure unethical approach based on pre-planned and presumed conclusions. It seems that he has been deployed to misrepresent Islam, regenerate old prejudice and fear against Islam and mould the public opinion in favour of long run of 'war against terrorism'.

He asserts that he was a Muslim by birth, educated in Islam and learnt the Qur'ān by heart. But his books reveal his ignorance of the basic sources of Islam and patchiness in Arabic language. He leaves aside all of his Islamic knowledge and accepts the Orientalists view point of Islam and its sources. He has edited two voluminous books on the criticism of the Qur'ān which are totally based on non-Muslim writings instead of Muslim scholars and thinkers. He comprehends Islam through the non-Muslim sources, presents Islam as Orientalists desire and consequently endeavors to impose his perception of Islam on entire *Ummah*. His scholarship is

partial and biased, to criticize everything in Islam by rejecting Muslim sources.

A contemporary scholar remarks:

...Warraq is an intolerant pseudo-scholar. It (his work) is good propaganda, but not good scholarship."⁷⁵

The West should be cautious of these kinds of false friends who are adding fuel to hatred against the West among the Muslim communities. The West should also review the war on criticism against Islam as the Muslims have never criticized them to give up their beliefs.

NOTES & REFERENCES

¹ In shade of the spar between Islam and the West many individuals having Muslim family and background carry on criticizing Islam for their personal agenda of recognition, reputation, affluence and even the European nationality. Considering their literary activities as Native Orientalism, the term may be defined as “*any former Muslim living in West who inflates, advocates and precedes orientalist’s theories and works, is a Native Orientalist, and what he or she does is Native Orientalism*”. The definition may be considered as an initial attempt and not the final and ultimate. The academics and scholars are welcomed and requested to realize new realms and improvements in the definition ‘native orientalism’.

² Ibn Warraq, *What the Koran Really Says*, Prometheus Books, New York, 2002, p.111.

³ There are no sufficient details of his personal life mentioned in his books. His bio-data and personal details are mostly found in his interviews in magazines and world wide websites on Internet. It is endeavored at the level best to collect the related information from the print media, however, in some certain extents, the references of the internet websites are quoted due to non availability of printed sources.

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