

## **ORIENTALISTIC RESEARCH METHODOLOGY TOWARDS THE QUR'ANIC TEXT (AN ALYtical STUDY)**

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**Abstract:** The issue of the authenticity of a text belongs to a branch of scholarship conventionally known as textual criticism. This discipline attempts to determine the origin or authorship of a text, its authenticity, and its original form in case there is a multiplicity of text forms. The fundamental texts of Islamic teachings are the Qur'an and the Sunnah, transmitted and preserved in both oral and written form with an immense care by Muslims. The Qur'an was committed to writing in its entirety during the life time of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) himself. Subsequently, it was collected in a codex (mushaf) during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr (11/632-13/634). Its written text was standardized during the Caliphate of 'Uthman b. 'Affan (24/644-36/656). The companions agreed that the text was identical to what the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) had received as revelation. The authenticity of the text was confirmed by memorization and the written records of such a large number of people that their agreement to perpetrate a lie was well nigh impossible. The same text was later transmitted continuously from generation to generation.

In the modern world, Orientalism is combating the Muslim world in well organized and scientific manner. Their basic purpose is to prove its superiority and priority over the Muslim World.

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*Note:* The English Translation of Ayat (Given in brackets) has been taken from: 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Ali, *Translation and Commentary on Qur'an* (UK: Islamic Foundation, 1975).

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do they have so many evils that they may have been moved towards the Fire.<sup>26</sup> J. M. Rodwell, in his translation of Qur'an follow the same line by saying that on the wall of *a'rāf* will stand "those whose good and evil works are equal, and are not, therefore, deserving of either Paradise or Gehenna."<sup>27</sup>

'Allāma Ibn-i- Kathīr says that different opinions of the different interpreters are converged to one stance that the men having equal repository of good and bad deeds, would be awarded the status of *a'rāf*. Maulāna Ashraf 'Ali Thānwi, Syed Qṭab Shaheed and Syed Abu al-A'lā Maudūdi, are of the same view, on the basis of *Aḥadith* which narrate that when asked about the persons having evenly balanced sheet of their virtues and vices, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) answered that they would be settled on *a'rāf*.<sup>28</sup>

It means clearly that the *a'rāf* form a limbo between Heaven and Hell, where those who have an equal quantity of good and evil works shall stand, waiting for the time when their Lord will have mercy upon them, and admit them to the Garden. It means that the answer to the third question is unanimously propounded that *aṣḥāb al a'rāf* are to be awarded paradise later. Because the Holy Qur'ān assures that though they have not entered paradise, but they will be longing for good-tidings:

لَمْ يَدْخُلُوْهَا وَهُمْ يَطْمَعُوْنَ

*(They will not yet have entered but they will have an assurance thereof).*

Moreover, their salutation to the paradise owners is a sign that they will join them in the long run. Before that, they would be provided with the facility to observe paradise and hell and to recognize clearly the people in Paradise and those who are in the Hell. They will be able to greet the paradise winners and question those who destined Hell. After the decision about all the mankind, they will be ordered to enter the Garden. The Omniscient Allah knows better.

*(Some faces, that day will beam (in the brightness and beauty). Looking towards their Lord; and some faces, that day, will be sad and dismal. In the thought that, some back-breaking calamity was about to be inflicted on them).*

Having studied *ayāt* like these, one's mind becomes clarified that every one in the life-hereafter will be assigned special marks, especially on faces, to indicate his identity and verify his destiny.

Now the question remains unsolved that what categories of people will enjoy the status of being *aṣḥāb al-a'rāf*?

According to Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzi, there are two versions about *a'rāf*; firstly that these are heights between paradise and hell, inhabited by some distinguished persons, secondly, there is an exalted stage from which the recognition of the paradise winners and hell choosers will be allowed to those, who will have equal storage of virtues and vices.<sup>23</sup>

Imām al-Shaukāni and Allāma Qurṭabi<sup>24</sup> has referred to as many as ten traditions regarding the different categories of men on *a'rāf*, derived from the holy words of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). They include, the people having equal quantity of good and bad deeds, the pious scholars, the martyrs, the martyrs who have fought without the consent of their parents, the messengers of God, the angels and the illegitimate off-springs of human being.

Maulāna Amin Aḥsan Iṣlāḥi<sup>25</sup> has raised some objections about these categories. He opines that only the Muslim scholars, who are struggling for the projection of virtue and goodness, deserve the elevated and exalted status of *a'rāf*. This opinion is singular and personal having no authentication from the classic *Ḥadīth* literature. One can not help believing the traditions referred above in this regard, by some established scholars.

The categories listed by commentators, derived from *Aḥādīth* are almost a dozen in number but the consensus opinion is that *aṣḥāb al-a'rāf* are those people who will have evenly balanced account of good and bad deeds. Keeping in view, the traditions mentioned by 'Allāma Ibn-i- Jarīr Ṭabari, one thinks that, they have neither so many good deeds to be awarded paradise, nor

will be men who would know every one by his marks.) which clearly explains that the *aṣḥāb al-a'rāf* will have the ability to identify those who are in Paradise and those in Hell.

It means that on the Day of Judgment both the dwellers of Hell and dwellers of Paradise will be identified and recognized through their special marks, by the *aṣḥāb al-a'rāf* and the *a'rāf* will be stage and status from where the whole process of identification will be carried out.

As regards the special marks of the people in Paradise and of those who are in the Hell, Qur'ān clearly mentions in different verses, everyone will have vivid signs on the face as to be recognized with his destination. For the convenience of understanding the following examples are quoted:

i) Āl-i-'Imran3: 106

يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ أَكْفَرْتُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ

*(On the Day when some faces will be (lit up with) white and some faces will become (in the gloom of) black; to those whose faces will be black (will be said) "Did you reject Faith after accepting it? Then taste the Penalty for rejecting Faith.")*

ii) Al-Raḥmān55: 41

يُعْرَفُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ بِسِيمَاهُمْ فَيُؤْخَذُ بِالنَّوَاصِي وَالْأُقْدَامِ

*(For) The sinners will be known their Marks, and they will be seized by their forelocks and their feet).*

iii) Al-Qiāmah75: 22-24

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاطِرَةٌ ۖ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ ۖ وَوُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ بَاسِرَةٌ ۖ تَنْظُرُ أَن يُغْمَلَ بِهَا فَاقِرَةٌ

*a'rāf* for a certain period and will ultimately be allowed to enter into Paradise. Thus the verse above mentioned reads:

وَتَادُوا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ أَنْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ لَمْ يَدْخُلُوهَا وَهُمْ يَطْمَئِنُّونَ

*(They will call out to the Companions of the Garden, "Peace on you". They will not yet have entered but they will have an assurance (thereof)).*

Therefore, it becomes clear that *al-A'rāf* is a stage and status which gives certain persons an opportunity not only to prepare themselves for the entrance to Paradise but also it provides them with a unique stature having ability to recognize every one and converse according to his status.

As regards the question who are the people to be titled as *Ashāb al- A'rāf*? The Holy Qur'ān declares them as: رِجَالٌ يَعْرِفُونَ كُلًّا بِسِيمَاهُمْ, that they are *rijāl* (men) having the ability to recognize dwellers of the hell and those of the heaven by their marks. The interpretations about these *rijāl* are replete with differences. One school thinks that the men on the heights are the angels, or such men of exalted spiritual dignity (e.g. the great apostles) who will be able to know the souls at sight, as regards their spiritual worth: The heights will be exalted stations from which they will welcome the righteous with a salutation of peace, even before the righteous have entered heaven; the salvation to those whom they solute.

Another school of thought thinks that the men on the heights are such souls as are not decidedly on the side of merit or decidedly on the side of sin, but evenly balanced on a partition between Heaven and Hell. Their case is yet to be decided, but their salutation to the righteous is a wistful salutation because they hope for God's Mercy. The third line of interpretation is close to the first one, with this exception that the partition and heights are figurative. The higher souls will rejoice at the approaching salvation of the righteous.<sup>21</sup>

Richard Bell has something different to say. He pronounces *a'rāf* as *i'rāf* which means (the people able) to recognize and identify (as supervisors or guards).<sup>22</sup> This interpretation is very important because the Holy Qur'ān qualifies and highlights *ashāb al-u'rāf* as: وَعَلَى الْأَعْرَافِ رِجَالٌ يَعْرِفُونَ كُلًّا بِسِيمَاهُمْ (And on the Heights

having minor sins and waiting for Divine Mercy. He has given *a'rāf* a Catholic meaning of being a Purgatory (A place where one can clean oneself).<sup>17</sup>

This is a unique idea but one can not perceive it to be alien to the Qur'ānic concept of the stage of *a'rāf*. The Arabic- English dictionaries consider *a'rāf* and purgatory to be equal in their meaning. For example, an important linguist and Orientalist of German Jewish descent, Francis Joseph Steingass, who was professor of Arabic Language, at the Oriental Institute, in his Arabic- English Dictionary confirms that *a'rāf* literally means a purgatory, as does the Oxford English-Arabic Dictionary.<sup>18</sup>

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary<sup>19</sup> Purgatory (derived from Old French word: *purgatoire*; place of cleansing) is a state or place in which the souls of those who have died in a state of grace are believed to undergo a limited amount of suffering to expiate their venial sins. In Roman Catholic teaching a place or state in which the souls of dead people suffer for the bad things they did when they were living, so that they can become pure enough to go to heaven.

Furthermore, It is not only the matter of lexical interpretation of the word *a'rāf*, but the fact is that the concept of a purgatory is Biblical decree, as to be an intermediate stage of life-hereafter where one will be given a chance to purge off ones sins, and ultimately will be allowed to enter the Garden of heavens. That is why the Biblical scholars equate the concept of *a'rāf* with the belief of purgatorial stage of life, after death.

The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism explains that the purgatory is an intermediate state of purification between death and heaven that provides for the removal of remaining personal obstacles to the full enjoyment of eternal union with God...At its core, the doctrine affirms simply a transitional spiritual state (possibly instantaneous and coincident with death) of transformation in view of the assured prospect of the Beatific Vision (The direct knowing and loving of God after death).<sup>20</sup>

This interpretation has also a due weight, because we learn from Qur'ān, through the study of verses under discussion that *Aṣḥāb al-A'rāf* will stay on

“And the dwellers on the Battlements shall call to certain men they know by their sign: ‘Your amassing has not availed you, neither your waxing proud.’”<sup>14</sup>

Giving *a'rāf* the meaning of Battlements seems to be suitable because Qur'ān itself uses word *sūr* in place of *hijāb* in Sūrah Al-Ḥadeed, in the same meaning, as discussed earlier. The word *Sūr* is used for the wide city-wall, which has entrenchments to defend the city, remaining aware of the invaders. Same is the meaning of the Battlements; the word used by Arthur J Arberry for *a'rāf*.

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary Battlement means a low wall around the top of a castle with spaces in it that people inside could shoot through. John Farrar, in his Biblical and Theological Dictionary explains Battlement as a wall or parapet round the flat roof of eastern houses designed as partition from an adjoining building, or to prevent person from falling off.<sup>15</sup>

The detailed study of The Old Testament discloses that to build battlements along the roofs, is a biblical instruction to its followers, the commandment goes as:

“When you build a new house, put a parapet along the roof, or you will bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if any one should fall from it.”<sup>16</sup>

It means that when Arberry thinks *a'rāf* to be the battlements, he has this biblical concept in his mind. This interpretation gives *a'rāf* a meaning of being defense apparatus of paradise to prevent unwanted individuals fall upon it or enter the Garden without legal permission. In fact Arberry has confirmed the point that *hijāb* and *a'rāf* are lower and higher parts of the same boundary, respectively. In other words, *hijāb* and *a'rāf* are two aspects of the same reality; *hijāb* is the wall and *a'rāf* are the tops of the wall between the paradise and the hell, which clearly determine the division between them.

Richard Bell, the expert of Arabic language and critic/ translator of Qur'ān, in his book *Introduction to Qur'ān* (Revised by Montgomery Watt) analyzes the word *a'rāf* with a new angle. He thinks it a temporary boarding for the people