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***Critical Study of John Burton's Objections on the Qur'ān Regarding Its Revelation in Seven Letters (Saba' Ahruf)***

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**Abstract**

*Almighty Allāh is the Creator of the mankind. When He Created Hazrat Ādam and sent him in this world, He said that He would send guidance from Himself and whoever would follow that guidance he would have neither fear nor grief on the Day of Judgment. So to fulfill this promise, Almighty Allāh sent almost one lac and twenty four thousand prophets and revealed to many of them His scriptures as He revealed Torah to Hazrat Mūsa (Moses), Zabūr to Hazrat Dawūd (David) and Injīl to Hazrat Īsa (Jesus), likewise, the Qur'ān is the last and final link in this series under which the first books have been revealed. Almighty Allāh revealed the Holy Qur'ān to His last and final Messenger Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H) almost fifteen hundred years ago. The Qur'ān itself says that it is not a new thing; rather it is a continuation of the pre-existing direction. Orientalists have denied this fact and wrote many books to create doubts in the minds of the people regarding the Qur'ān and Islām. A famous orientalist John Burton has also written his book "The Collection of the Qur'ān" and objected on the Holy Qur'ān. He tried to prove that the Qur'ān is not the book of Allāh rather it has been written by Prophet Muhammad himself. John Burton has raised objections on the Holy Qur'ān on the base of difference of recitations of the Holy Qur'ān. He argues that differentiation in the recitation of the Qur'ān causes differentiation in the Islāmic rules. In this article, the reality and status of seven letters (Saba' Ahruf) has been discussed and the justification of the revelation of the Qur'ān in seven letters has been proved with rational and textual arguments. Furthermore, the misconceptions of John Burton regarding Saba' Ahruf have also been clarified with proofs in this article.*

**Keywords:** John Burton, Orientalism, Islam, Quran, Critical Study.

## Introduction

The Holy Qur'ān is the word of Almighty Allāh which He has revealed for the guidance of the mankind. As it is the sunna (way) of Almighty Allāh to make the rules easy for the mankind so they can act on them without any difficulty, as Allah says in the Holy Qur'ān:

“Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship.”<sup>1</sup>

So to make the Holy Qur'ān easy and understandable for the people who were ignorant, illiterate and were new to accept Islam, Almighty Allāh granted facility to recite the Holy Qur'ān in seven dialects which were different in wording but same in meanings. They were synonyms. They were revealed by Almighty Allāh to create easiness for the people newly coming to Islam. John Burton has objected on the Qur'ān due to its revelation in seven dialects and has quoted some different recitations of the Holy Qur'ān. In this article the revelation of the Holy Qur'ān has been justified and Burton's misconceptions have been clarified with solid arguments.

## Review of the Literature

Though many books, articles and thesis have been written regarding orientalist's research about the Qur'ān and Islām like *“Islām-Aur-Mustashreqīn”* by Doctor Hsfiz Muuhammad Zubair, *“Ikhtilaf-e-Qira'at aur Nazria-e-Tahrif-e-Qur'ān”* by Muhammad Fairuz-ud-Dīn Shah Khagga, *“Tartīb-e-Qur'ān aur Mustashreqīn”* by Doctor Hafiz Mahmūd Akhter, *“Qur'ān-e-Hakīm Mustashreqīn ki Nazar men”* by Abd us-Sattar Ghouri, *“Hifāzat-e-Qur'ān-e-Majīd awr Mustashreqīn”* by Doctor Hafiz Mahmūd Akhter, “Orientalists and English Translations of the Qur'ān” by Prof. Abd-ur-Rahim Qudwai and “Orientalists on the Early History of the Compilation of the Qur'ān” by Doctor Muhammad Nasir Mahmūd Waraich etc. yet no work has been done specially regarding the Critical Study of “The Collection of the Qur'ān” by John Burton.

## Justification and Likely Benefits:

John Burton has created misconceptions about the Qur'ān regarding:

1. Islāmīc Rulings, that the difference in fiqh of Mad'āhib-e-Arba' is due to the conflict in the Qur'ān.
2. That there is conflict between the Qur'ān and the Hadīth.
3. The revelation of the Qur'ān in seven letters (Saba' Ahruf).
4. The theory of abrogation.
5. The process of the compilation of the Qur'ān.

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Baqara 2:185.

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So it was felt great need of the time to clarify these misconceptions and to prove that the Holy Qur’ān is the True Word of Almighty Allāh. We have tried to clarify all misconceptions created by John Burton topic wise in almost five articles which will be published one by one. This article is a link of this series. We hope that this article will prove helpful in rooting out doubts and misconceptions created by John Burton *.In Shā Allāh*

### **Main Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this article is to prove justification of the revelation of the Holy Qur’ān in seven dialects and to reply to the objections made by John Burton in his book “The Collection of the Qur’ān” regarding Saba’ Ahruf, So that people may become aware of the truthfulness of the Qur’ān and Islām.

In this article, we have made our best efforts to prove that the revelation of the Holy Qur’ān in seven dialects is justified, and it is from Almighty Allāh and critically studied the objections raised by an orientalist John Burton in his book “The Collection of the Qur’ān.” John Burton repeats same objections again and again and there is lack of sequence and relevance in his book, yet we have clarified only those objections which are relevant to our topic.

### **Introduction of John Burton**

John Burton was born in 1929. He served as professor of Arabic at The University of Edmburgh, Scotland.<sup>2</sup> We could find his three books named “The Collection of the Qur’ān” published by Cambridge University Press in 1977 AD, “The Sources of Islāmic Law” and “An Introduction to Hadīth” published by The University of Edmburgh, Scotland in 1990 and 1995 AD accordingly.

### **John Burton’s Views about the Topic**

John Burton believes that it was the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be upon Him) who himself fabricated the Qur’ān. He explains the concept of the Saba’ Ahruf by saying that Muhammad could not recall the exact words which he had delivered to his companions. That is how various companions received different versions, though all of them were imparted through the Prophet Muhammad. Burton writes:

“Amid his manifold state responsibilities Muhammed could not always himself remember the precise wording in which he had given out certain revelations. This is how different companions

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Zubair, **Islam awr Mustashrequeen**, (Lahore, Maktaba Rahmat ul Lilālamīn, 2014), 60.

received their slightly differing versions, although all were received direct from the Prophet himself. Certain verses Muhammad forgot outright, others he summarily altered. With his own hand he had cancelled yet other verses”.<sup>3</sup>

While objecting on “Saba’ Ahruf” John Burton Writes:

“Anas recited: *hiya ashaddu wat’an wa aswabu qilan*. Someone pointed out that the correct reading was *aqwam; aqwamu*, he retorted, *aswabu, ahya’u-* they are all the same.

Muhammad b. Sirin said, “We read, “*in kanat illa saiha wahida.*” Abdullah reads, “*illa zaqya wahida.*”<sup>4</sup>

John Burton has raised objections on the Holy Qur’ān on the base of difference of recitations of the Holy Qur’ān. He argues that differentiation in the recitation of the Qur’ān causes differentiation in the Islāmic rules. He has also quoted some examples as the difference in the way of fasting of the person who breaks oath. According to Hanafis, he will fast three consecutive days while according to Shafī he can fast three separate days. The reason for their difference is that Hazrat Abdullah bin Mas’ud recited: “Three (consecutive) days”.

“Q 5.89 regulates the penalties for breach of oaths. Among these is a three days fast and the Hanafies argue that the fast should be consecutive. Abdullah is said to read, “a fast of three [consecutive] days.”<sup>5</sup>

Burton also writes that Ubayy was credited to read the verse of Sūrah An-Nisa, 4:24 as *famastamta’tum bihi minhunna (ila ajalin Mūsamman)*. Burton’s words are as following:

“The same variant reading was attributed to Ubayy who, in addition was credited with reading Q 4.24, a verse charged with significance for the Muslim law on marriage, in a variant version: *famastamta’tum bihi minhunna [ila ajalin mūsamman]*.”<sup>6</sup>

Burton also writes that the method of performing *wudu* (ablution) has been mentioned in the Holy Qur’ān but some of the followers recite the word as “*arjulakum*” and they wash their feet while performing ablution, but there is another recitation of this word as “*arjulikum*” which permits the wiping of the feet

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<sup>3</sup> John Burton, **The Collection of the Qur’an**, (UK, Cambridge University Press, 1977), 234.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, P: 34.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, P: 34.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, P: 35.

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while doing *wudu*.<sup>7</sup> He also adds that the recitation in Ayesha's mus'haf was as *al salat al wusta (salat al Asr)*.<sup>8</sup>

### Analysis of John Burton's Views

These and other misconceptions like these are because of that John Burton and other orientalists have not studied the teachings of Islām completely. They do not consult the Qur'ān and the Hadīth directly rather they have read the books written by western scholars or some Muslims. John Burton has misunderstood the concept of the revelation of the Qur'ān in seven letters. There are two reasons behind these objections:

The first reason is that the Qur'ān was revealed in seven letters, and Hazrat Uthmān compiled one official mus'haf consisting of all seven letters. All these different recitations which Burton has quoted were before this complement because he ordered to burn all other personal mus'hafs except the official mus'haf.

Secondly, all the additional words which have been quoted by Burton like three (consecutive) days. And *wa as salāt al wusta (salāt al asr)* etc. were not the original words of the Qur'ān, rather, these words were written by the companions and the students of the companions as explanatory notes for their own understanding. So these words were not the part of the Qur'ān.

### Revelation of the Qur'ān in Seven Letters (Saba' Ahruf)

Let us understand that what is the definition of Saba' Ahruf, why it was permitted to recite the Qur'ān in seven letters and why these letters were compiled in one official mus'haf. The narrations about the revelation of the Qur'ān in seven letters are in large number but some of them are being mentioned below:

1. Hazrat Ubayy bin Ka'ab narrates that the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) met Hazrat Gabriel. The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said to him: "I have been sent to an ummah which is ummi (not well versed). There are baby boys, baby girls, old aged women and very old men in this Ummah." Hazrat Gabriel said: "Order them that they should recite the Qur'ān on seven letters (whichever is easy to them)"<sup>9</sup>
2. Hazrat Abu Bakr narrates that Hazrat Gabriel said: "O Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H)! Recite the Qur'ān on one letter." Hazrat Michael said: "(O Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H) ask him (for) more (recitations). "Hazrat Gabriel said:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, P: 37.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, P: 37.

<sup>9</sup>Ibn-e-Hibban, **As-Sahih**, (Beirut, Mussasat-ur-Risala, 1993), Chapter: The Recitation of the Qur'an, Hadith: 7397, 3 : 4.

“Then recite it on two letters.” Hazrat Michael said: “Ask him for more” till he reached the seven letters. Hazrat Gabriel said: “All the letters are sufficient and healers, but any verse of mercy should not be wronged with the verse of punishment and any verse of torment should not be wronged with the verse of mercy. For example: *Ta’āl* and *‘aqbil, halumma*, and *idh’hab, asri’* and *a’ajil* (are different in wordings but same in meanings)”<sup>10</sup>

3. Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbas narrates that the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said: “Hazrat Gabriel recited the Holy Qur’ān in front of me in one letter. Then I asked him (to recite it in another way) and I kept on requesting him to increase ways of reciting and he continued reciting it in different ways till he recited it ultimately in seven various ways.”<sup>11</sup>

Imām Ibn-e-Shihab Zuhari, says after reporting this Hadīth: “I have listened that these seven ways of reciting are essentially in same matter, it does not make any difference in what is lawful and what is unlawful. (i.e. the difference is just of words, not the meanings.)”<sup>12</sup>

4. Hazrat Abdullah bin Mas’ud narrates: “I listened to a person reading a verse of the Qur’ān in a style which was different from that way in which I had listened to the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) reciting. So I caught hold him by his hand and brought him to the Messenger of Almighty Allāh, but he said: “Both of you are correct.” Shu’ba (the sub narrator of this Hadīth) says: I think that the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said to them: “Do not differ because the people before you differed so they perished (because of their disagreements).”<sup>13</sup>

5. Hazrat Umer bin Al-Khattab narrates: “I listened to Hisham bin Hakīm reading Sūrah Al-Furqan when Allāh’s Messenger was alive, and I had heard the Holy Prophet’s recitation. So I noticed that Hisham was reciting in several various ways which the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) had not taught me. I was near to jump on him while he was praying, but I controlled myself. When he completed the prayer, I kept his upper cloth around his neck and asked seizing him by it: “who has taught you the Sūrah which I listened to you reciting?” He said: “The Messenger

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<sup>10</sup>Imām Ahmad bin Muhammad Hanbal, **Al-Musnad**, (Beirut Ar-Resalah Publishers, 1999) Hadith: 20425, 34 : 70.

<sup>11</sup>Muhammad bin Ismail Bukhari, **Sahih al-Bukhari**, (Ar-Riad’, Darussalam, 1999), The Book of virtues of the Qur’an, chapter: the Holy Qur’an has been revealed to be recited in seven various ways, hadith: 4991, 895.

<sup>12</sup>Muslim bin al-Hajjaj, **Sahih al-Muslim**, (Ar-Riad’, Darussalam, 2000), The Book of Virtues of the Qur’an, Chapter: The clarification that the Holy Qur’an has been revealed in saba’a Ahruf (seven modes of recitation) and clarification of its meanings, Hadith: 1902, 329.

<sup>13</sup>Muhammad bin Ismail Bukhari, **Sahih al-Bukhari**, (Ar-Riad’, Darussalam, 1999), The Book of Khusoomat, chapter: About the people and quarrels, hadith :2410, 387.

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of Allāh has taught me this Sūrah.” I said: “You are telling a lie, because the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) has taught me this Sūrah in a different style from yours.” Then I dragged Hisham to the Messenger of Allāh and said (to the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H): “I listened to this person reading Sūrah al-Furqan in a style which is different from the way that you have taught me.” Allāh’s Messenger said to me: “Release him,” (and said to Hisham) “O Hisham, recite.” He recited (the Qur’ān) in the same style in which I had listened to him reciting. The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said: “It was sent down in this way.” Then he said: “O Umer, recite,” I recited it in the way he had taught it to me, then Allāh’s Messenger said: “It was sent down in this way. This Holy Qur’ān has been sent down in seven letters, whichever is easier for you, recite it in that way.”<sup>14</sup>

6. Hazrat Ubayy bin Ka’b narrates: “I was sitting in the mosque and a person entered and offered prayer. He recited (the Holy Qur’ān) in a way which I did not know. Then one other person entered, and recited (the Holy Qur’ān) in a way which was different from the way of former person. When we had offered the prayer, we all went to the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) and I told him: “(O Allāh’s Messenger!) This person recited in a way which I did not know, and the other person entered (the mosque) and recited in a way which was different from the first person.” Allāh’s Messenger asked them to read, so they (both) recited. The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) gave approval of their ways of recitation. At that time, a sort of denial occurred in my mind which never occurred even in the days of ignorance. When Allāh’s Messenger observed my condition that (a wrong opinion) overcame me, he slapped on my chest, so I broke into the sweating and I felt as I were watching Almighty Allāh with fear, he (Allāh’s Messenger) said to me: “O Ubayy! A message was revealed to me to read the Holy Qur’ān in one way, and I asked: “Make it easy (to recite) for my Ummah.” Then a second message was conveyed to me to recite it in two dialects. I again asked Him: “Make (its recitation) easy for my Ummah.” Then a third message was sent down to me that the Holy Qur’ān should be recited in seven (different) dialects. Then it was said to me: “You are being given a chance of seeking for every time I have sent a reply to you. You can avail these three chances of seeking from Me. So I availed two chances of seeking by saying: “O Almighty Allāh! Forgive my Ummah, Forgive my Ummah.” And I have delayed the third chance of seeking

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<sup>14</sup>Bukhari, **Sahih al-Bukhari**, The Book of virtues of the Holy Qur’an chapter: The Qur’an was sent down to be recited in seven various ways, Hadith: 4992, 895.



for that day on which the whole creation (of Almighty Allāh) will turn to me, including Hazrat Ibrahim (for intercession).”<sup>15</sup>

Hazrat Ubayy bin Ka’b narrates that Allāh’s Messenger (P.B.U.H) was at the tank of Banu Ghifar and Hazrat Gabriel arrived to him and said: “Almighty Allāh has ordered you to read the Qur’ān to your people in one dialect. On this the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said:” I seek Allāh’s pardon and forgiveness. My Ummah is not capable of doing so.” (Hazrat Gabriel returned back and) he arrived for the second time and said: “Almighty Allāh has ordered you to read the Holy Qur’ān to your Ummah in two ways.” Upon this the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) again said: “I ask Allāh’s pardon and forgiveness, my Ummah would not be capable of doing so.” (Hazrat Gabriel returned back and) he arrived for the third time and conveyed the message: “Almighty Allāh has ordered you to read the Holy Qur’ān to your Ummah in three styles.” Upon this the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said: “I (again) seek Allāh’s forgiveness and pardon, my Ummah would not be capable of doing so.” (Hazrat Gabriel returned back and) then he arrived for the fourth time and conveyed Allāh’s message: “Almighty Allāh has ordered you to recite to your Ummah, the Holy Qur’ān in seven ways and in whichever way from these seven ways they would read the Holy Qur’ān they would be correct.”<sup>16</sup>

There is a narration in Musnad Abu Ya’la that Hazrat Uthmān said while addressing the people: “I ask you by reminding you Almighty Allāh that whoever of you has listened to the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) saying the following words, should stand: “Indeed the Holy Qur’ān has been revealed in seven dialects, each dialect is healer and sufficient.” Upon that, many people stood up till they could not be counted, all of them witnessed on the truthfulness of this Hadīth. Hazrat Uthmān then said: “I also witness with them (that this sayings of the Messenger of Allāh is true.)”

This Hadīth has been narrated by twenty one companions of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H). Their names are being mentioned below:

Ubayy bin Ka’b, Anas bin Malik, Huzaifa bin Yamān, Zaid bin Arqam, Samura bin Jundub, Suleman bin Sarad, Abdullah bin Abbas, Abdullah bin Mas’ud, Abd-ur-Rahman bin Awf, Uthmān bin Affan, Umer bin Khattab, Amr bin Abi Salma, Amr bin Al-Ās,

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<sup>15</sup>Muslim bin al-Hajjaj, **Sahīh al-Muslim**, The Book of Virtues of the Qur’an, Chapter: The clarification that the Holy Qur’an has been revealed in saba’a Ahruf (seven modes of recitation) and clarification of its meanings, Hadith: 1904, 330.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid

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Muāz bin Jabal, Hisham bin Hakīm, Abi Bakra, Abu Jahm, Abu Saeed KHūdri, Abu Talha Ansāri, Abu Huraira and Umme Ayub (R.A).<sup>17</sup>

### The Reality and Status of *Saba' Ahruf*

When we read all the narrations about Saba' Ahruf (seven dialects) we come to know the following points:

Firstly, the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān in seven dialects was not invented by the Holy Prophet himself or the companions of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) rather this facility was awarded by Almighty Allāh. The following verse of the Qur'ān also explains this opinion as Almighty Allāh has said:

“And whenever, our clear verses are recited to them in a manifest way, the people who do not expect the meeting with Us (on the Day of Judgment) demand: “Produce for us a Qur'ān besides this one, or at least make (some) changes in this (Qur'ān).” Say (O Prophet Muhammad) to them: “I have no authority to make any change in this (Qur'ān) by my own wish. I only obey what is sent down to me (by Almighty Allāh. I fear, if I disobey my Lord, the punishment of an awesome day.”<sup>18</sup>

In the above mentioned verse, Almighty Allāh commands His Prophet to announce to the people who have asked him to fabricate another Qur'ān or alter the present mus'haf according to their own wish, that he (the Holy Prophet P.B.U.H) cannot make any change in the Qur'ān. He just follows the revelation from his Lord. Furthermore, the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) expressed his fear of the punishment of the Day of Judgment in case of any disobedience of Almighty Allāh. It confirms that the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) did not make any change in the Holy Qur'ān. So the orientalist are wrong in their sayings that the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) himself had invented seven dialects for the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān.

Secondly, the reason for providing the permission to recite the Holy Qur'ān in seven dialects was to facilitate the people and to make the recitation and understanding of the Qur'ān easy for them. When the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) was sent to the Arab people their condition was very strange. They were in full ignorance. So Almighty Allāh adopted easy and gradual steps to reform them. It

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<sup>17</sup>Muhammad bin Muhammad Ibn al-Jazari, *An-Nashru fil-Qira'at al-Ashr*, (Beirut, Dar ul Kutub al-Ilmia), 1 : 21.

<sup>18</sup>Younus 10:15.

has always been the Sunna of Almighty Allāh in inviting the people to his right path especially those people who are fully ignorant and far away from the guidance as Almighty Allāh commanded Hazrat Mūsa and Hazrat Haroon (A.S) to speak with Firaun (pharaoh) in gentle manner while inviting him to the right path as Allāh said:

“Go forth (O Mūsa), you and your brother (Haroon) with my miracles and do not slacken both of you in my remembrance. Go you both to Firaun (pharaoh). Indeed he has become a great rebel (transgressor), and both of you speak to him gently, so that perhaps he may be reminded or fear (Almighty Allāh).”<sup>19</sup>

So to guide the ignorant people of Makah Almighty Allāh made many rules of Islām easy for them and adopted the following steps:

1. Almighty Allāh revealed the Holy Qur’ān in gradual steps to make it easily understood by the people.
2. Almighty Allāh allowed reciting the Holy Qur’ān in seven dialects to make the recitation of the Qur’ān easy for the people.
3. Almighty Allāh revealed the Islāmic rules in gradual steps except the oneness of Allāh and giving up polytheism as He revealed the rule of making the wine unlawful in steps; in the first stage, He made them realize that its sinfulness is greater than its benefit.<sup>20</sup> In the second stage, He said to them that they should not offer prayer while they are drunk.<sup>21</sup> And in third stage, He declared the wine to be defilement and the act of Satan and forbade them from dinking it.<sup>22</sup>
4. Almighty Allāh abrogated and replaced many rules for the easiness of people.

All these steps proved beneficial for the gradual reformance of the people. So the people who were in full ignorance became themselves the reformers for the people of the whole world. Another example of facilitating people and creating easiness for them in their religion is also found in the occasion of Hajj (Pilgrimage) as Hazrat Abdullah bin Amr narrates that he saw the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) near the Jamra and the people were coming to him and questing him (about their religious matters). A person asked: “O Messenger of Allāh! I have slaughtered the animal (Hady) before doing the Ramy (stoning the Satan)?” The

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<sup>19</sup> Tā-hā 20:42,44.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Baqrāh 2:219.

<sup>21</sup> An-Nisa 4:43.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Maida 5:90.

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Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) replied to him: "You can do the Ramy (after slaughtering the animal) and there is no problem." Another man asked the question: "O Prophet of Allāh! I have got my head shaved before I slaughter the animal". The Holy Prophet said: "Slaughter the animal (now) and there is no problem (harm)." So on that occasion whenever, the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) was questioned about anything regarding the ceremonies of the Hajj (Pilgrimage) performed before its due time or after its due time, the reply of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) was: "Do it, and there is no problem."<sup>23</sup>

So the relaxation of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) in reciting the Holy Qur'ān in seven ways was to make the recitation and understanding of the Holy Qur'ān easy for the people who were in full ignorance and were new to accept Islām and all this kindness was with the mercy of Almighty Allāh, as He says in the Holy Qur'ān:

"And (O Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H) only by the mercy from Allāh, you dealt gently with them and if you had been severe (in speech) and harsh-hearted, they would surely have disappeared from around you. Therefore, pardon them and ask (Allāh's) forgiveness for them, and consult with them in the (important) matters. And when you have taken a firm decision then trust in Allāh, verily, Allāh loves those people who rely (on Him)."<sup>24</sup>

Imām Ibn-e- Qutaiba writes:

"It was a great facility by Almighty Allāh that He commanded His Messenger to teach every nation in their native language because it was a very difficult task for them to give up their mother tongue and the solid habits of their child-hood, young, and old age at once. It would take a struggle and hard work of a long period, so Almighty Allāh expanded the styles of the recitation of the Qur'ān as He had facilitated the people in many other rules of Islāmic Sharia."<sup>25</sup>

Doctor Muhammad Akram Choudhry explains the usefulness and need of the different dialects of the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān by saying that the narrations which deal about the seven accepted recitation styles and other stories

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<sup>23</sup> Bukhari, **Sahih al-Bukhari**, The Book of knowledge, chapter: To ask about religious matter and to give a religious verdict while doing the ramy of Jimar, Hadith: 124, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Sūrah Āl-e-Imrān 3:159.

<sup>25</sup> Abdullāh bin Muslim Ibn-e-Qutaiba, **Ta'wil Mushkil al-Qur'an**, (Egypt, Dar at-Tūrath, 1973), 39.

regarding this, indicate that while teaching the Holy Qur'ān, the Holy Prophet always made it sure and confirmed that the message was fully understood by the people who were being taught. In such a condition, especially in the starting period of the history of Islām, it looks, very natural to facilitate by allowing to recite in variant styles and to use synonyms and similar words when it is necessary.<sup>26</sup>

Maulana Shams-ul-Haq Afghani writes while justifying the permission of reciting the Qur'ān in seven dialects that it has been made easy and clear for mankind, because the dialect of some tribes of Arab was different from the dialect of Quraish. It was very difficult for them to adopt the dialect of Quraish. Therefore, it was allowed to them temporarily that they could use some words in their own dialect with the condition that meanings should not change. On the other hand, the Arab tribes had become habitual of preserving their individual specification and they had reached to the extent of prejudice in this matter. So Almighty Allāh with His great wisdom decided to allow every tribe to read few words in which there was difference of dialect in their own dialect so that all the branches of Arabic language could avail blessing of Almighty Allāh by revealing the Word of Almighty Allāh in their language. On the other hand the Arab Tribes should not feel deprived of and there should not be any concern of linguistic prejudice. When Hazrat Uthmān compiled the Holy Qur'ān, at that time the circle of Islām had widened and the tribal specifications had been converted into the Arab unity, rather all the Arabic tribes had been painted in the colors of Islām. So there was no more need for tribal specifications or seven different dialects. Therefore, the dialect of Quraish considered enough in the Mus'haf compiled by Hazrat Uthmān (R.A). This consensus of the companions of the Prophet on the dialect of the Quraish was either by the commandment of the Holy Prophet or it was a shape of cause and effect principle. Its example can be quoted by the "*Muallafat-ul-Qulub*" (the people who have newly embraced Islām) that in the Prophet-hood era, they were included in the receivers of Zakāt but in the caliphate of Hazrat Umer, they were excluded from the receivers of Zakāt (Obligatory Charity).<sup>27</sup>

Allama Ibn-ul-Jazari mentions the reason for the revelation of the Qur'ān in seven dialects that the previous Prophets were sent to their one specific nation but the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was sent to the whole world consisting of Arabs, Non-Arabs, Reds and Blacks. All the tribes had their different dialects. It

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<sup>26</sup> M.A Chouhdry, **Orientalism on Variant Readings of the Qur'an the case of Aurther Jaffery**, P.172.

<sup>27</sup> Shams-ul-Haq Afghani, **Uloom-ul-Qur'an**, (Lahore, Al-Maktaba Al-Ashrafia), P : 129.

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was difficult for the old aged, children, women and illiterate people to read in the dialect of others, In such a condition, if it was made compulsory to adopt only a single dialect, it would have created hurdles for the people in benefiting completely from the lights of the Qur'ān and they would have become incapable of reciting the Holy Qur'ān. To keep in view this facilitation and mercy on the Ummah, Almighty Allāh, on the demand of His Prophet (P.B.U.H), allowed reciting the Holy Qur'ān in seven dialects.<sup>28</sup>

Allāh has also explained it in the Holy Qur'ān:

“And We sent not any Messenger but (he addressed) in the language of his people, so that he could make (the message) clear to them and Allāh causes to go astray whomever He wills and guides whomever He wants. He is the Exalted in might and All-Wise.”<sup>29</sup>

Another reason for revealing the Qur'ān in seven dialects is that at the time of the revelation of the Holy Qur'ān, the Arab people were famous for their eloquence, oratory, fluency and art of speech. They claimed to have good command on Arabic language. They used to show their integrity, maturity and perfection in language before the qualified people in their fairs, meetings and contest programs. The center for these activities was Baitullah (the Sacred Mosque). The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) presented the Word of Almighty Allāh, the Holy Qur'ān in front of these people they named it the sayings of a poet<sup>30</sup>, human being<sup>31</sup>, and magic<sup>32</sup> etc. So Almighty Allāh challenged them by sayings:

“Say (to them O Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H): “Verily, if all the mankind and all the jinn gathered to produce the equivalent of this Holy Qur'ān they could not be able to produce the like of this (Qur'ān), even if they were the helpers of one another.”<sup>33</sup>

It was a challenge for the whole Arab to produce a book like the Holy Qur'ān, and the different tribes of the Arab had different dialects. So if the Qur'ān was revealed in only one dialect, the other tribes which had different dialect would have the chance to object that if the Qur'ān had been revealed in their dialect, they would have produced a book like the Qur'ān. So Almighty Allāh

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<sup>28</sup>Ibn al-Jazari, *An-Nashru fil-Qira'at al-Ashr*, V: 1, P: 22.

<sup>29</sup> Ibrahim 14:4.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Anbiyā 21:5.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Muddaththir 74:25.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid 74:24.

<sup>33</sup> SAl-Isrā 17:88.

revealed the Holy Qur'ān in seven dialects to reply to their objection and to make the recitation of the Qur'ān easy for the people of all the tribes.

Thirdly, the narrations about the revelation of the Qur'ān in seven different dialects indicate that the difference in the seven dialects was only the difference of words not the difference of meanings, as it has been clarified in the narration of Hazrat Abu Bakra that Hazrat Gabriel said to the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) that all the seven dialects are sufficient and healers till a verse of mercy is not mixed with a verse of punishment and a verse of punishment is not mixed with the verse of mercy, as *ta'āl* and *'aqbil, halumma* and *idh'hab, asri'* and *ajjil* (are different words but their meanings are same.)<sup>34</sup>

This Hadīth clearly indicates that the difference among the seven various styles of reading was only in words, their meanings did not differ rather they were same in meanings as the case is in synonyms.

Imām Ibn-e-Qutaiba writes while explaining this point that there are two kinds of difference; one is in the meaning of various, there is no opposition and contradiction in it. The second kind of difference is in the meaning of contradiction and opposition. (The first can be called synonyms and the second can be called antonyms). The difference of contradiction and opposition is not present in the Holy Qur'ān. You will never find any conflict of second type in the Qur'ān by the Grace of Almighty Allāh except of that any commandment or order has been abrogated and replaced by other order. Though the first kind of difference of “variousness” is found in the Holy Qur'ān.<sup>35</sup>

So the intension by the seven letters in which it was allowed to recite the Qur'ān, was to use synonyms. This permission was awarded only in the initial period of Islām for those people who could not adopt the dialect of Quraish. But this vastness in the usage of words was conditional with the similarity of the meanings. As Ali Abd-ul-Wahid Wafi writes in his book *Fiq'h-ul-Lugha*:

“Likewise the Holy Qur'ān was revealed in common Arabic language “*al-lughat-ul-Arabia, al-Mushtarika*” and it was the language which was understood in Arabian Peninsula and it was the effective source of communication for the poets and the orators”<sup>36</sup>

Salah-ud-Dīn Al-Munjid writes:

“Though there was a deep impression of Quraishian dialect on this common Arabic language, yet some other dialects were also found

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<sup>34</sup> Hanbal, Al-Musnad, Hadith: 20425, 34 : 70.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn-e-Qutaiba, Ta'wil Mushkil al-Qur'an, 33.

<sup>36</sup> Abd-ul-Wahid Ali Wafi, **Fiqh-ul-Lughah**, (Nahdhat Misr ( Egypt)), 79.

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in it, as a concise book attributed to Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbas, which consisted of different (Arabic) dialects, has reached us by the narration of Ibn-e-Hasnoon. In that book, a content list consisting of different dialects has been written, according to which the origins and the sources of minimum two hundred and sixty five words used in the Holy Qur'ān have been determined.”<sup>37</sup>

Imām Ibn-e-Qutaiba mentioned some examples of differentiation in the Arabic dialects, which clarify that it was the demand of that time that the Holy Qur'ān should be revealed in seven dialects. For example the people of Huzail tribe used to read “*atta*” (with “ain”) instead of “*hatta*”. Likewise, in the dialect of one tribe it was recited “*ti'lamuna*” instead of “*ta'lamuna*”<sup>38</sup> and “*tiswaddu wajuhun*” instead of “*taswaddu wajuhun*”<sup>39</sup> and “*alam ia'ahad ilaykum*” instead of “*alam ā'had ilaykum*”<sup>40</sup> and likewise, the people of Qais and Asad tribes used to read “*an'ka*”, instead of “*annaka*”<sup>41</sup>

These and many other examples clarify that the Arabic language was very old, vast and spread out language therefore, like other languages, the dialects of Arabic language also differed at tribal and regional level. But by nature, this difference was not to the level of semantic contradiction and conflict. Rather, it was just superficial and verbal difference. Because the Arab nation was illiterate and restriction of a single dialect could create hurdles for the Arab people, therefore, the Holy Qur'ān was revealed in seven dialects.

### **Analysis of Burton's Objections Regarding Saba' Ahruf**

Most of Burton's objections belong to this kind of difference in dialects which has been explained above as he has quoted a narration that Hazrat Anas (R.A) recited: “*hiya ashaddu wat'an wa aswabu qilan.*” Someone objected and said that the correct recitation was “*aqwamu*”. Hazrat Anas said: “*aqwamu, aswabu and ahyau, they all are the same.*”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Salah-ud-Dīn Al-Munjind, **Kitab-ul-Lughat fi al-Qur'an**, (Dar-ul-Kutub al-Jadid, Bairut, 1972)

<sup>38</sup> Al-Baqara 2:42.

<sup>39</sup> Āl-Imrān 3:106.

<sup>40</sup> Yaseen 36:60.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn-e-Qutaiba, **Ta'wil Mushkil al-Qur'an**, 39.

<sup>42</sup> Burton, John, **The Collection of the Qur'an**, P : 34.



Burton has further quoted that Muhammad bin Sirin said: “We read “*in kānat illa saiha wahida*” while Hazrat Abdullah used to read “*illa zaqya wahida*”<sup>43</sup>

He also quotes the narration that Hazrat Ubayy used to read: *Kullama ada’a lahum mashaw fihi (Marru fihi, sa’aw fihi)*<sup>44</sup> and that Hazrat Abdullah used to read: “*lilladina amanu anzirunna (amhiluna, akhkhiruna)*”<sup>45</sup>

All these words are synonyms. Their meanings are same. The difference is only in words not in meanings. To what extent, the other objections of John Burton belong as the addition of *salāt al asr* after “*salāt al wusta*”<sup>46</sup> and the reading of Hazrat Abdullah as “three (consecutive) days” and what is attributed to Hazrat Ubayy bin Ka’b the addition of (*ilā ajalin Mūsamman*) after the verse “*fa ma stamta’tum bihi minhunna*” etc. All these are of the following types:

1. Firstly, the above mentioned words are not the words of the Holy Qur’ān, rather, they are explanatory notes written in the footnotes of the mus’hafs of some companions for their own understanding and memory because when the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) used to teach the Holy Qur’ān, he also explained it to his companions, so the companions wrote those explanatory notes under or within the words of the Qur’ān as footnotes to explain them to their students, as many students and teachers do the same while teaching or studying in the present days. There are many examples for this. For example Hazrat Sa’d bin Abi Waqās wrote: *walahu akhun awo ukhtun (min ummin)*<sup>47</sup> Likewise, Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbas (R.A) wrote: *Laisa aluakum junahun an tabtaghu fadhlan min rabbikum (fi mawāsīm al hajj)*<sup>48</sup>. So “*min ummin*” and “*fi mawāsīm al hajj*” are not the part of the Qur’ān rather they are explanatory notes.
2. Secondly, some of additions of such kind are from those invalid recitations which someone lead the prayer and by forgetting he recited in wrong way but someone of those who were offering prayer behind him, memorized it as it was recited.
3. Thirdly, sometimes, a verse was revealed and after sometime it was abrogated but some people who were unaware of its abrogation continued reciting it for some period.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, 39.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> An-Nisa 4:12; Abd-ul-Latif Al Khatib, **Mua’jam al-Qira’at**, (Al-Qahira, Dar Sa’d ad-Din, 1422 A.H.), 2 : 31,32.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Baqara 2:198, Ibid.

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To resolve these problems and to gather the whole Ummah on one correct and agreed upon mus'haf, Hazrat Uthmān compiled one official mus'haf consisting of all the seven dialects, keeping in view the mus'haf compiled by Hazrat Abu Bakr which was with Hazrat Hafsa (RA). After compiling it with the help of Hazrat Zaid bin Thabit, the authorized writer for the revelation of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) and three Quraishian men, Hazrat Uthmān sent its copies to all the provinces of Islāmic kingdom and ordered to burn out all other personal mus'hafs consisting of mix material.<sup>49</sup>

### **Summary of the Article**

John Burton has misunderstood the concept of the revelation of the Qur'ān in seven letters. The reason for allowing the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān in seven letters was to facilitate the people and to make the recitation and understanding of the Qur'ān easy for them and the difference was just in words not in meanings. The objections made by John Burton in this regard are of three types; Firstly, the above mentioned words are not the words of the Holy Qur'ān, rather, they are explanatory notes written in the footnotes of the mus'hafs of some companions for their own understanding and memory. Secondly, some of additions of such kind are from those invalid recitations which some one lead the prayer and by forgetting he recited in wrong way but some one of those who were offering prayer behind him, memorized it as it was recited. Thirdly, sometimes, a verse was revealed and after sometime, it was abrogated but some people who were unaware of its abrogation continued reciting it for some period. To resolve these problems and to gather the whole Ummah on one correct and agreed upon mus'haf, Hazrat Uthmān compiled one official mus'haf consisting of all the seven dialects.

### **Recommendations**

1. Advanced research centers should be set up to make advanced studies of Islām.
2. The scholars who have solid knowledge of the Islāmic teachings should analyze and satisfy the objections raised by the orientalist about the Qur'ān and Islām. Otherwise, their un-authentic work will be considered as authentic and it will mislead many Muslims.

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<sup>49</sup> Bukhari, **Sahih al-Bukhari**, The Book of virTūres of the Qur'an. Chapter: the collection of the Qur'an Hadith: 4987; Mahmūd bin Ahmad Badr-ud-Dīn Aini, **Umdat-ul-Qari sharh Sahih al-Bukhari**,(Bairut, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmia, 2001), 20 : 25, 26.

3. Qur'ānic studies should be made compulsory in every field of life.