

Home > The Collection and Preservation of the Qur'an > The Claim that Tahrif was caused by the Caliphs

---

## The Claim that Tahrif was caused by the Caliphs

Some hold that the interpolation, alteration, omission may have occurred after the death of the Prophet (‘s), perpetrated by the first two Caliphs or by Uthman when he came to power, or by someone of the later period. All these claims are invalid. If abu Bakr or Umar did it, then there can be two assumptions. They either did it unintentionally, because, as it is believed, the Qur’an was not available in its entirety as it had not yet been compiled. Or they did it intentionally. In any case, the verses in which they interfered by way of *Tahrif* would be those concerning their leadership or even others. In all, there are three considerations:

First, to say that they had no access to the whole of the Qur’an is totally out of question. The Prophet (‘s) had taken great pains to see that it was committed to memory, and was constantly recited, slowly and elegantly, and the companions had compiled during the Prophet’s time and after his passing away. This makes us certain that the Qur’an was with them, well guarded, all in one place or at various places, in the hearts of people or noted down on the papers. They were the people who had proudly preserved the poems and speeches of the pre-Islamic era. How could they be expected to ignore the great Book whose laws they proclaimed, for which they had staked their lives, left their homes, spent their wealth, abandoned their families and children, and had taken a firm stand in the brilliant history of Islam. Can a reasonable person believe that they would be so indifferent so as to cause any loss of the Qur’an? A loss which could not be retrieved without the evidence of two witnesses? Is it not tantamount to believing that there has been an addition or an omission in the Qur’an which was revealed to the Prophet (‘s)?

Then there is the famous and widely acknowledged tradition of *thaqalayn* which invalidates all presumption, about *Tahrif*. The Prophet (‘s) said:

**'I leave behind me two invaluable things: the Book of Allah and my Ahl ul-Bayt'.**

This statement becomes meaningless if it is believed that the Qur’an had been lost during his time, because that which was lost would definitely be parts of the Book. In fact, this tradition points to the collection of the Qur’an during the Prophet’s era; because scattered or memorised literature cannot be termed a book. We will deal with the subject of the collection of the Qur’an later. The question is that if

the Muslims did not care to collect the Qur'an while the Prophet ('s) lived, why did the Prophet ('s) himself neglect it, in spite of his vehement emphasis on its importance? Did he not foresee the result of such carelessness? Or was it impossible for him to do so? Obviously, these are all invalid excuses.

If we were to propose that the first two Caliphs effected *Tahrif* in those verses which did not deal with their leadership, and the leadership of their friends, then this seems to be unlikely because it serves no purpose. Definitely, this did not occur. The Caliphate was a political matter, ostensibly based on their concern for the religion, and as such there was no need for touching the Qur'an. Even those like Sa'ad b. Ubadah and his companions who objected to the rule of Abu Bakr, and those who refused to swear oath of allegiance to both of them, never accused the Caliphs of having tampered with the Qur'an. Did Ali b. Abi Talib ('a), in his famous discourse of *Shaqshaqiyyah* or elsewhere where he objected to Abu Bakr taking precedence over him, mention anything about the Caliphs effecting any changes in the Qur'an? It is not conceivable that the Muslims cited any such instance without us knowing about it. Therefore, this proposition cannot be true.

Finally, it is an indisputable fact that the two Caliphs did not cause any purposeful interpolation or omission of those verses which may have dealt adversely with their leadership. Ali b. Abi Talib ('a) along with his wife Fatimah Zahra ('a) and certain friends from the companions of the Prophet ('s) protested against the two Caliphs on matter of Caliphate, basing their objection on what they had heard from the Prophet ('s), presenting witnesses from among the Muhajirin and Ansar, and also on the famous tradition of *Al Ghadir* and others. In the book of *Al-Ihtijaj*, it is reported that twelve men protested against the Caliphate of Abu Bakr, quoting the text of what they said. Allamah Majlisi has set out a complete chapter on the subject of the objections by Ali b. Abi Talib in the matter of Caliphate<sup>1</sup>.

Had there been anything in the Qur'an disparaging their leadership, they would have definitely quoted them in their protests, and so would all the Muslims. The Caliphate is a matter which came to transpire well before the so-called collection of the Qur'an. The silence of the companions on this subject, from the beginning till the end when Ali b. Abi Talib ('a) became the Caliph, is an indisputable evidence that such an interpolation or omission never occurred.

It is all the more difficult to accept that *Tahrif* was caused by Uthman, for the following reasons:

(a) Islam had gained a strong foothold by the time of Uthman, and was widely spread. It was not possible for Uthman to tamper with the Qur'an, nor for anyone else more influential and higher in status than him.

(b) If it were presumed that he tampered with the verses which had no bearing on the question of *wilayah* or the Caliphate of his predecessors, then it would be a futile exercise. And if he tampered with those verses which had such connections, then the Caliphate, in the first instance, would not have come to him, because the Qur'an would have guided the Muslims against him.

(c) His tampering with the Qur'an would have become a major and prominent reason for his

assassination. There would have been no need to ascribe to Uthman other reasons like squandering the Baitul Mal of the Muslims unlike his predecessors, or other such reasons.

(d) It would have become incumbent upon Ali ('a) to restore to the Qur'an what had been interpolated or omitted, and to bring it up to date with the original as it existed during the time of the Prophet ('s) and the first two Caliphs. In so doing he could not have been censured. In fact, Ali ('a) could have advanced a convincing reason against those who accused him of having condoned the killing of Uthman, and sought revenge from him.

It is known that Ali ('a) returned all the lands to their rightful owners which had been wrongfully granted to others by Uthman. In his sermon, he said:

*"By God, if I were to find that some women were married by that wealth or some maidservants were owned by it, I would return it to their rightful owners. Whoever finds justice stifling, must find injustice and tyranny all the more so".<sup>2</sup>*

This is what Ali ('a) said in respect of the wealth. One can easily imagine what his stand would be if he found out that the Qur'an was interpolated or tampered with. The fact that he accepted the Qur'an as it existed in his time is a convincing proof against any *Tahrif*.

No attempt at the interpolation of the Qur'an are known to have occurred after the era of the four Caliphs, except a report that Hajjaj omitted many verses from the Qur'an, which dealt disparagingly with the rule of the Umayyids, and also added to it some which were not there originally. Then he is alleged to have prepared a new codex for distribution in Egypt, Syria, Mecca, Medina, Basrah and Kufah. Thus, it is presumed that the present Qur'an is the one prepared by Hajjaj, who methodically destroyed all the previous copies, allowing not a single one to remain<sup>3</sup>.

Obviously, this is a claim based on conjecture and it smacks of delirium. For Hajjaj was merely one of the generals in the Umayyid regime, with little influence and almost no ability to do the Qur'an any harm. In fact, he was incapable of effecting any change in the most elementary laws of Islam, not to speak of the Qur'an which is the foundation of our faith, and pillar of Islamic Laws. One wonders how he could influence any change in the Qur'an after it had gained currency in so many Muslim countries. Not a single historian or commentator has chronicled this change which because of its importance should not have escaped their notice. No contemporary Muslim ever objected to this, and even after his rule, the Muslims seem to have condoned this abominable act.

If at all it is believed that he managed to withdraw all the previous copies of the Qur'an, replacing it with his new codex, how could he eradicate it from the hearts of the Muslims who had committed it to memory, and whose great number is known by none but Allah? Had there been anything in the Qur'an which was uncomplimentary to the Umayyids, Muawiyah would have been the first to see it omitted because, compared to *Hajjaj*, he was more influential and powerful. Of course, if Muawiyah had done this, the companions of Ali ('a) would have argued with him, the way they did on many occasions, as

recorded in the books of History, Hadith and Theology. As we said earlier, the pretence that the Qur'an has been tampered with has no substance whatsoever.

- 
1. Bihar al anwar, Majlisi, v8, p.79
  2. Nahj al balaghah
  3. Manahilul Irfan p257

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/the-collection-and-preservation-of-the-quran-extract-ayatullah-adul-qasim-al-khui/claim-tahrif-was>