privilege to have read so many of his books. And as much as he would have had it otherwise, I remain terribly moved by the man, and I mourn for his passing .... on this day not gone unnoticed, one day and two years after his death.

Lisa Sheble


As is evident from the title, Qarā’ī’s venture prides itself on being the first phrase-by-phrase English translation of the Qur’ān. Qarā’ī proclaims: “Mirror paraphrasing is a new approach to (sic) translation of sacred Islamic texts ... In this approach, the translation of the source text develops phrase by phrase, with the translation appearing opposite the corresponding phrase in Arabic. Each phrase in the target or receptor language mirrors the semantic import of the phrase in the source text” (p. xvii). This jargon-laden statement is as unhelpful for average English readers as the present venture is. Ordinary English readers, who cannot be presupposed to have any mastery over Arabic, stand more in need of grasping the meaning and message of the Qur’ān than appreciating “the semantic import” of phrases in source or target language. Moreover, it is not some novel approach adopted for the first time by Qarā’ī. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1937) and Abdul Majid Daryabadi (1957) had attempted, in their own ways, to achieve the same effect. Nonetheless, Qarā’ī’s venture on this count is much more focused and succeeds largely in affording “direct access to the Arabic Qur’ān.”

Equally suspect is Qarā’ī’s other claim — of having produced his translation “according to what appeared to be the most probable among the interpretations mentioned by the commentators” (p. xviii). And he lists Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), Mahmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) and ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) among Sunnī works, and Muhammad Ḥusayn Ṭabarānī (d. 1402/1982) Ṭabarīzī and Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī (d. 1107/1696) among Shi‘ah works. However, his work
is essentially a representative of sectarian, Shī‘ah understanding of the Qur‘ān. Not unsurprisingly, therefore, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is bracketed with “his Household” as being the recipient of divine revelation, in elucidating verse 4 of al-Baqarah (p. 2). Traditions are narrated on the authority of “the Imams of the Prophet’s Household” (p. 54). More intriguingly, the divine favour of “a great kingdom conferred upon the people of Prophet Abraham” (verse 54 of al-Nisā’ (p. 118). Verse 174 of al-Nisā’ is seen to be endorsing “the Wilayah of Imam ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭalib” (p. 143) on the authority of Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), Imām Muhammad al-Baqīr (d. 114/732), al-Kūfī and Muḥammad b. Mas‘ūd al-‘Ayyāshī (d. 320/932). Again, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib (d. 40/661) is projected as “the portent of the Hour,” as inferred from verse 61 of al-Zukhruf (p. 696). For Qarā‘ī, Fātimah (d. 11/632) is the subject of these Qur‘ānic verses — A‘ī ‘Imrn 3: 61; al-Rūm 30: 38; al-Dūkhān 44: 3; al-Rahmān 55: 19–20; al-Muṣādalah 58: 1; al-Ḥashr 59: 9 and al-Insān 76: 6 and 22 (p. 901). Likewise, in his judgment the Qur‘ān speaks pointedly of Ḥusayn (d. 61/680) in verses 107 of al-Ṣaffāt, 22 of al-Rahmān and 27–30 of al-Fajr (p. 908). More bewildering is Qarā‘ī’s insistence that as many as 40 Qur‘ānic verses deal with “al-Imam al-Mahdi” 60 with “Imamah and wilayah;” 68 with “deniers of Imamah and their followers” and 73 with the “followers of Imamah” (p. 908). Qarā‘ī, however, does not substantiate the above claims. Notwithstanding this pronounced Shī‘ah approach, Qarā‘ī’s work is decidedly far less polemical and tendentious than other Shī‘ah translations of the Qur‘ān namely by S.V. Mir Ahmad Ali (1964), M.H. Shakir (1968) and Muhammad Baqir Behbudi (1997).

A valuable element of Qarā‘ī’s work is his introduction to the Qur‘ān in his “Preface” (pp. xi–xiv) for the benefit of English readers. He does a good job in placing the Qur‘ān in the perspective of other Scriptures in order to bring out its excellence as being “the latest and last, and, therefore, the most up-to-date” Scripture “which has been preserved in the original form” (p. xii). More insightful is his elucidation how the Qur‘ān, in comparison to literary masterpieces, is not limited to any particular culture or period, and hence its relevance and universal and everlasting appeal for men and women of all time and place. He has done well also to bring into sharper relief the moral, ethical and spiritual bearings of the Qur‘ān and its eternal message. Take this passage as illustrative: “To a youth languishing on the plane of animal existence, captive of materialistic values and rendered spiritually impotent by sensual pursuits and indifferent to struggle against oppression and injustice the Qur‘ān suggests a spiritual diet and a programme of spiritual rehabilitation, self purification and jihād. To the world bewildered by the din of communication
media orchestrated by Satanic forces bent on the deception of thinking minds, the Qur’ān gives a light to walk by, enabling the faithful human being to see facts through the apparently impenetrable curtains of deceit and disinformation” (p. xiv). It is a great pity, however, that Qarā’ī shies away from bringing out the above universal, life-giving Qur’ānic message in his commentary on the Qur’ān. He rests content with providing only a few notes and these too are restricted to explaining the titles of Sūrat. Other notes, again few in number, betray his sectarian zeal. For, as illustrated above, these unabashedly seek to vindicate peculiar Shi‘ah beliefs. That he is widely familiar with things Qur’ānic is borne out also by his impressive “Index” (pp. 877–938), identifying Qur’ānic subjects, names and terms. Had he elucidated these in his notes on relevant Qur’ānic verses, it would have enhanced the academic value of his work.

Qarā’ī deserves credit for his pious commitment to Qur’ānic scholarship. His erudition, it is to be regretted, is, however, misplaced with a marked sectarian, bias.

A.R. Kidwai


Several scientists in Europe in the 19th century came close to the discovery of the laws of heredity, but they got bogged down because of the inclusion of too many characteristics in their study. Ultimately it was the Austrian monk, Johann Gregor Mendel (1822–1884), who succeeded in discovering the laws governing heredity in 1865 and his epoch-making research paper, “Experiments in Plant Hybridisation” was published in 1866. He enunciated the three laws of heredity which formed the backbone of all subsequent studies in genetics, viz. the non-blending nature of hereditary characteristics, segregation of these characteristics in the gametes, and independent assortment of the gametes to form the next generation of offspring (p. 1).

Mendel’s research paper remained in oblivion for 35 years because of the spell of the dominating influence of the French scientist, Jean Baptiste Lamarck (1744–1829), who had articulated the theory of evolution through