

**DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v6i3.990**

**Citation:** Esfahani, S., & Hosseini, S. (2017). Comparative Analysis of "Nature of Interpretation by Qur'an Judgment" from Shia and Sunni Commentators' Perspective. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 6(3), 1199-1207. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v6i3.990>

## **Comparative Analysis of "Nature of Interpretation by Qur'an Judgment" from Shia and Sunni Commentators' Perspective**

**Seyyed Abdullah Esfahani<sup>1</sup>, Seyyede Masoome Hosseini<sup>2</sup>**

### **Abstract**

The intellectual and religious prohibition and indecency of the "interpretation by Quranic judgment" is agreed by the Shia and Sunni commentators and the scholars of Qur'an, though the reason behind the different attitude is in their perspectives' "basics, sources and rules of interpretation" in the assertion of diverse "nature of interpretation by judgment". The main question posed in this paper developed by descriptive analytical-systematic method is to comparatively contrast the Shia and Sunni commentators regarding the nature of interpretation by Quranic judgment, suggesting the comprehensive principle and integrity of Folk of Household's view in this respect.

**Keywords:** Quran, Islam, Interpretation by Quranic judgment, Interpretation of Islam, Shia and Sunni.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D., Associate Prof., University of the Holy Qur'an Science and Culture. E-mail: [esfahaniquran@gmail.com](mailto:esfahaniquran@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D., Associate Prof., University of the Holy Qur'an Science and Culture. E-mail: [masoomhosseini@gmail.com](mailto:masoomhosseini@gmail.com)

## **Introduction**

Forbidding the interpretation by Quranic judgment raised by rational inducing. Qur'an and Islamic traditions are not hidden from the Quranic scholars and thinkers, so that the prohibition and indecency of the interpretation by judgment is agreed by Shia and Sunni commentators. But Shia and Sunni commentators' assertion is different. This paper represents the difference of Shia and Sunni commentators' deduction on the originality as well as integrity and infallibility of the basics of Folk of Household's school of thought in this issue.

## **Sharing the views of Shia and Sunni Commentators about "the Nature of Interpretation by Judgment"**

It seems in what is related to the area of "manifestation"—the sorts of manifestation on the meanings of words—the understanding and interpretation of the text, there is no difference in the Shia and Sunni scholars' views on the interpretation by Quranic judgment. The most important of these cases are the following:

a. The argument by the most famous Shia and Sunni scholars is that: the interpretation of Qur'an has to be based on colloquial rational principles and rules of Arabic literature—that means the Arabic rules related to knowledge and terminology, syntactic, semantics, expression, exquisite and the literary rules on clear-cut terms (text, the exterior and firm) and the non-clear-cut terms (abstract, hidden and ambiguous). It seems that those examples of interpretation by judgment originated from any disorder in the mentioned rules and criteria are accepted by all Shia and Sunni scholars and there is no doctrinal difference in this regard.

The description and interpretation of Qur'an verses in which the above rules and criteria are not observed are taken into account as the interpretation by judgment by the Shia and Sunni scholars' consensus:

A) The interpretation in which the rules of etymology about the words of Qur'an are not observed, such as: overlooking the meaning of word at the time of revelation; the necessity behind the commitment to science and certainty of the meaning of the words of Qur'an; and in the hypothetical and speculative meaning of the word, the obligation to expert's opinion, not sufficing subjective meaning on the word of Qur'an; the obligation to the sequence of words, verbal unity, and virtual unity, not focusing on the complementary role of some verbs such as verbs with preposition conveying a different meaning (Rajabi, 2006: 57-65).

- B) The interpretation in which the semantic rules are not followed in identifying the structure and nature of a word. For example, the difference between the content of likeness adjective and noun agent, the difference between a diminutive form and other than this, analyzing the derivation difference originality of a word, attention to the different meaning of a noun and verb in compound categories and (ibid: 262-264).
- C) The interpretation in which the semantic rules are not observed in identifying the structure of compound words, i.e., the position of every word, the relationship between various words with each other, the association between the successive verses, for instance, the difference between the content of circumstantial clause and verbal sentence, subject placed behind and subject in the front, definite predicate and indeterminate predicate and etc. (Babaei et al., 2000: 345-347).
- D) The interpretation where the semantic rules are not followed in the secondary meanings. Explanation: complying with the audience's requirements and satisfying the speaker's intention, in addition to observing the main provisions of the word, semantics is in charge of focusing on and expressing the secondary meaning of the word raised by the special conditions and status of the words and sentences. For instance, words with emphasis, priority, delay, restriction, concision, produce secondary meanings (ibid: 106, 347-351).
- E) The interpretation in which the figurative language rules in explaining the mysteries of the ironic, metaphorical, virtual and simile word are not taken into account and the clarity and rhetoric of the Word of God are not stressed in this area.
- F) The interpretation in which the spiritual virtues of the Word of God such as homonymy, digression, observance of the similar taxis, opposition, paradox, exaggeration and etc. are not observed (Hashemi, 2003: 240-280).
- G) The interpretation where the principles of jurisprudence rules about clear-cut terms (text, the exterior and firm) and the non-clear-cut terms (abstract, hidden and ambiguous) are not followed.

The interpreter has to be principled about the esoteric interpretability of text, the authority "literal meanings" of Qur'an; the necessity behind the non-literal meaning integration with the rational and traditional evidence; the necessity for citing one of the possible meanings in the "abstract" by the rational and traditional evidence; the obligation to refer to the metaphorical expressions of Qur'an to the unambiguous and etc. (Shaker: 2010: 182-192).

b. All Shia and Sunni commentators consider the interpretation of Qur'an without the education on the interpretation basics requiring the judgment of Qur'an (Rajabi, 2006: 252-254; Suyuti, 1407 AH: 191).

As an example, Suyuti quoting Mohammad Ibn Suleiman Balkhi about the hadith on interpretation by the Prophet's (PBUH) judgment states five quotations and one of the discourses is "the interpretation of Qur'an without the education on the science required with the interpretation of Qur'an (Suyuti 1407 AH: 191 and Rezaee Esfahani, 2011: 312).

c. By the consensus of all Qur'an interpreters and scholars of judgment despotism and the interpreter's argument on his own commentary judgment –will mean lack of commitment to interpretation basics, sources and rules and interpretation produced by the commentator's carnal desire requiring the interpretation by the judgment of Qur'an (Tabatabaee, 2004: 77; Marefat, 1418 AH: 69, Qurtabi, 1966: 32; Suyuti, 1407 AH: 191).

### **The Difference between Shia and Sunni Interpreters' Views about "the Nature of Interpretation by Judgment"**

Regarding, what are the "basics of interpretation" are? What the resources of interpretation are? And how the interpretation rules are? There is a different perspective about them among Shia and Sunni commentators and this issue naturally has led to difference in the nature and definition of interpretation by judgment in the perspective.

For example, the Shia and Sunni consider the interpretation of judgments verses as interpretation by judgment without referring to the traditions while about this issue that which one is more valid – what the source of traditional interpretation is-they are in conflict (Imam Khomeini, 1991: 115; Khoi, 1401 AH: 288; Tabari, 1412 AH: 25-27).

Some of the most basic differences in Shia and Sunni perspectives are as the following:

a. About narrative-traditional source, because Shia considers "practice" including the practice of the profits and his Household, thus for his traditions, they believe authority in interpretation and for the sayings and actions of the Companions and Successors, they do not believe inherent and independent authority, rather they think of other non-infallible interpreters' attitude, as interpretation symmetry and attestation and not as a source of interpretation. Thus about the "interpretation narrative -traditional source", the Shia's attitude is different from the Sunni commentators' view where "tradition" includes the Prophet's rule and the words and actions of the Companions and Successors that consequently the nature of interpretation by judgment will be different in terms of tradition in Shia ad Sunni's perspective.

For example, Ayatollah Khomeini and Imam Khomeini consider the interpretation of the verses and rules without referring to the narrations of Imams resulting in the interpretation by judgment while Tabari and Ibn Anbazi view the interpretation of the verses and rules without referring to the statements of the Prophet, the Companions and Successors' doctrine and

predecessor Imams as the interpretation by judgment (Imam Khomeini, 1991: 115; Khoi, 1401 AH: 288; Tabari, 1412 AH: 25-27).

b. Also the difference in the opinions of Shia and Sunni scholars about the pure and impure narration and reliable and unreliable narrator in "taking the narration valid" and in turn, it plays role in the interpretation by Qur'an judgment (Babae, 1991: 365-367).

c. The difference in the opinions of Shia and Sunni scholars on defining "consensus"—a source of jurisprudence and interpretation—naturally has led to difference in their perspective on the authority of consensus and interpretive views and ultimately, results in difference in attitude in the nature of interpretation by Qur'an judgment.

The Sunni commentators view "consensus" as one of jurisprudence and interpretation sources, independent authority and accompanied with the Book and tradition and allow to cite it in order to deduce the meaning of the verses of Qur'an; however, Shia commentators do not consider "consensus" the reason behind the independence and along with other sources – Qur'an, reliable traditions, demonstrable reason, rather they take it as part of tradition that in fact reveals the infallibles' word and adopts its authority from the infallibles' word. Therefore, suppose "definite consensus" –which is in practice difficult and impossible- is realized, its authority is just the trustworthy one as news only authoritative in the jurisprudence, verses and traditions not in Quranic theological verses (Babae, 1991: 214; Javadi Amoli, 2004: 112-115; Shookani, n.d.: 78; Malaki Esfahani, 2011: 45; Rezaee Esfahani, 2011: 99-100).

d. Undoubtedly, the effect of the interpreter's verbal basics on the Qur'an theological and legal verses is inevitable. If the difference in the foundations of the Muslim theologians is clear –the people of tradition and Zahirits, Ash'arites, Mu'tazila and Shiite-in presenting diverse approaches to the Quranic verses' inference, perception and understanding, causing to offer diverse and contradictory interpretations of the Quranic verses, especially in the area of conviction verses and particularly about the attributes of God, Imamate, Caliphate, and determinism and free will. Naturally, the difference in the theologians' verbal basics in presenting diverse views about the interpretation by Qur'an judgment cannot be denied.

The people of tradition and Zahirits, such as Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, the follower of the method for obtaining the verses and hadiths by the literal meaning and believing in their literal meaning interpretation, though requiring the simile and humanization of God. Thus, they assume hand, face and body for God.

- Mu'tazila from the Sunni believe in referring to the literal meaning of the Book along with exploiting wisdom and esoteric interpretation in cases where the significance of the literal meaning of the verses requires simile and humanization.

- Ash'arites from the Sunni, the founder of which was Abul Hasan Al-Ash'ari and his beliefs are considered as the formal religion of the Sunni in the fundamentals of belief, while referring to the outwards of the Book and tradition and not its literal meaning requires simile and humanization and not for stating how their meaning's reality is exploited by esoteric interpretation, rather for example, they claim: God has hand, but it is not clear how and with what quality, and neither they say: God has human like hand to require simile and humanization, and nor they say: hand is the allusion to power in order to necessitate esoteric interpretation rather they assign its meaning to God (entrusting).

- Following the Prophet's Household's practice, the Shia assumes something between affirmation and negation. That is, they neither deal with the affirmation of the outwards to require simile and humanization of God and nor negating simile (delegators) and nor they deal with blameworthy interpretation (absolute preference of wisdom to narration); rather using two methods, i.e., allegorical return to the unambiguous and using the infallibles' inference, they establish their interpretation (Alavi-mehr, 2002: 233-235; Maarefat, 2005: 255-273).

e. Although, the Shia commentators have presented different assertions on the hidden meaning of Qur'an, their attitudes differ from the Ash'ari and Mu'tazila' interpreters' perspectives. Normally, the difference in the hidden meaning's assertion and definition and the different hidden meaning mechanism and extraction method from the literal meaning from the Shia and Sunni commentators' point of view has resulted in the interpretation by judgment in the area of Qur'an hidden meaning with a different nature in Shia and Sunni perspective.

From Shia commentators' view, the hidden meaning refers to the meaning that in addition to containing a sort of secret, is associated with the area of the utterances indication so that it is considered as the hidden implicit reference of the verses or the verses hidden agreed indication reference and etc; though, most of the Sunni commentators assume Qur'an hidden meaning so that Zahabi views the inner meaning of Qur'an agreed by the population of the commentators, though, the Sunni commentators' assertion differs about the hidden meaning. So that Suyuti in the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of Al-Atqan defines and analyzes the esoteric traditions in six ways and Ibn Taymiyyah also classifies the esoteric science of Qur'an in several classes and accepts some of them and claims Abu Bakr as the most learned of Qur'an esoteric and literal meaning (Rezaee Esfahani, 2011: 200; Shaker, 2010: 259; Marefat, 1418 AH: 27-79; Suyuti, 1407 AH: 236).

f. According to some Sunni scholars' view based on "the monopoly of knowledge to the ambiguous verses of the Qur'an, by God", the ambiguous verses' interpretation by someone other than God, is taken as interpretation by judgment; while Shia interpreters do not consider

the knowledge about the ambiguous verses only the monopoly of God, rather they believe that the Prophet (PBUH) and His Household (AS) –and even the non-infallible commentators firm in science –the lower examples of the ambiguous verses-are aware of the ambiguous verses' interpretation via referring to the ambiguous verses based on the collective contents of the clear verses. Thus Quranic ambiguous verses' interpretation was possible by the Prophet (PBUH) and His Household (A.S) and even the non-infallible commentators firm in science and its interpretation isn't taken as by judgment (Esfahani, 2009: 237-240; Sobhani, 1422 AH: 168-169).

g. Concerning this matter that the Sunni consider "false rationalism" and "the rational hypothetical reason "-under the titles such as analytical reasoning (logical analogy), approval, Mursala interests, blocking the means and etc. that are in fact the rational misconception, as the jurisprudence and interpretation sources and the Shia commentators view the "absolutely rational proof" as the sources, because of this "interpretation by judgment" will be different from the Shia and Sunni perspectives (Maleki Esfahani, 2011: 44, 68, 272, 400; Javadi Amoli, 2004: 48).

h. It seems that Shiite scholars' conflict with each other and with Sunni scholars based on "the monopoly of interpretation by judgment" indecent and non-systematic interpretation and opposition to the division of interpretation by judgment as "praised" and "condemned " is just literal and has no conception since based on Allame Tabatabaee's view (Tabatabaee, 2004: 143; Ibn Manzur, 1997: 12) "judgment" means a belief raised by striving and efforts, whether obtained through rational proof or traditional documentation or otherwise ad whether according to the fact or otherwise. Thus the monopoly of "judgment "under the dominance of woman and believing this matter that "judgment" in the Book and tradition has not been used in rational understanding sense (Makarem Shirazi, n.d.: 22) is not acceptable. The outcome is that the praised interpretation by judgment, is the interpretation produced by the commentator being knowledgeable about the basic science of interpretation and according to the authentic basics, references and rules and in contrast, the interpretation lacking the above evidence is the condemned interpretation by judgment (Javadi Amoli, 2002: 181 and 207; Amid Zanjani, 1987: 230; Zarghan, 1988: 66; Alak, 2009: 168-171; Rezaee Esfahani, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

From Shia and Sunni commentators and scholars' attitude, "interpretation by judgment" in the area of complying with Arabic literature rules, the colloquial rational principles, are the rules governing the literary rules related to clear-cut terms (text, the exterior and firm) and the non-clear-cut terms (abstract, hidden and ambiguous), the necessity behind being trained on the

basic science of interpretation for a commentator, the requirement of the interpreter avoiding despotism and independence of judgment in interpretation, the requirement of the interpreter avoiding the judgment raised by carnal desire and etc. have common nature and definition.

Considering the Shia and Sunni views' difference in the basics, sources and rules of interpretation, the Shia and Sunni interpreters' perspectives differ in explaining the "nature of interpretation by judgment" in the following cases:

- a) In terms of interpretation narrative –interpretive source,
- b) In terms of authoritative narrator and reliable narration,
- c) In using "consensus" as the source in Qur'an verses interpretation,
- d) In the context of theologian basics of traditions and Zahirits, Ash'arites, Mu'tazila and Shiite and its effect on the verses' interpretation and especially the conviction verses,
- e) In terms of Qur'an hidden meaning assertion,
- f) In the area of knowledge of Qur'an allegorical verses interpretation and esoteric commentary,
- g) About the authority of "the rational hypothetical reason "in the form as: imperfect analogy, istihsan, mursala interests, means blocking and etc.

It seems that the conflict about the monopoly of the interpretation by judgment in two divisions as praised and condemned is the conflict over words and has no concept.

## References

- Al-Qurtubi, Mohammed (1966). *Al-Jamea al-ahkam (Al-Qurtubi interpretation)*. Dar Ehya al-turath al-Arabi.
- Alak, Sheikh Khalid Abdul Rahman (2009). *Osool al-Tafsir Le Kitab Allah al-Monir*, Damascus: Alfaraby Press.
- Alavi mehr, Hussein (2002). *Interpretive Methods and Orientations*. Qom: Osveh Publication.
- Amid Zanjani (1987). *Principles and Methods of Interpretation of Qur'an*. Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.
- Babaei, Ali Akbar (2000). *Qur'an interpretation methodology*. University & Theological center Research Institute.
- Hashemi, Ahmad (2003). *Description and translation of Javaher al-Balaghe*, (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Translated by Hassan Erfan. Qom: Belaghat publication.

- Imam Khomeini, Seyyed Rouallah (1991). *Flying in the kingdom in praying customs*. Tehran: Institute of Imam Khomeini's works arrangement and publication.
- Javadi Amoli, Abdullah (2002). *Tasneem interpretation*, (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Qom: Asraa publishing center.
- Javadi, Abdullah (2002). *Origin of Mentality*. Qom: Asraa publishing center.
- Javadi, Abdullah (2004). *Qur'an protection against from Distortion*. Qom: Asraa publishing center.
- Kamali Dezfooli, Ali (1995). *Recognition of Qur'an*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Osveh publication.
- Khoi, Abol Qasem (1401 AH). *Al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Quran*, (8<sup>th</sup> ed), Anwar al-Huda, BIJA.
- Makarem Shirazi, Naser (n.d.). *Interpretation by judgment and Literary chaos*. Qom: HADAF Press Institute, Qom.
- Maleki Esfahani, Mojtaba (2011). *Basic terms glossary*. Qom: International Centre of Al-Mustafa.
- Marefat, Mohammad Hadi (1418 AH). *Al-tafsir va'l-Mofaseroon fi Sobe al-qoshib*. Al-jame al-Razavieh Le'l-ooloom al-Islamiyah, BIJA.
- Marefat, Mohammad Hadi (2005). *Qur'an Science*, (6<sup>th</sup> ed.) TAMHID Cultural Institute.
- Rajabi, Mahmoud (2006). *Qur'an Interpretation Methodology*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). University & Theological Center Research Institute.
- Rezaee Esfahani, Mohammad Ali (2011). *Logic of Interpretation*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Qom: International Centre of Al-Mustafa for Translation and Publication.
- Shaker, Mohammad Kazem (2011). *Interpretation Basics & Techniques International*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Qom: Centre of Al-Mustafa for Translation and Publication.
- Shookani, Muhammad Ibn Ali Ibn Muhammad (n.d.). *Ershad Al Fohool*. Beirut: Dar al-Fekr, BITA.
- Suyuti, Jalaluddin (1407 AH). *Al-etqan fi Oloom al-Qur'an*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Elmiyyah.
- Tabari, Muhammad Ibn Jarir (1412 AH). *Jame Al-byan an Tavit Al-Quran*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Elmiyyah.
- Tabatabaee, Mohammad Hussein (2004). *Al-Mizan*. Qom: Press Institute of Ismaili.
- Zarghan, Abdul (1988). *Manahel al-Erfan fi Omor al-Qur'an*. Beirut: Dar al-Fekr.