



## A Critical investigation of Burqa'ī's Reasons for Qur'ān to be Needless of Interpretation

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### Abstract

Noble Qur'ān contains all the knowledge and rulings and, therefore, needs to be explicated and elaborated by the Infallibles (a). Overlooking the role of the Infallibles in the explication of verses brings about irrevocable consequences like failing to attain the purpose of God and misunderstanding the divine aim. Those who are known as Qur'ānists believe that Qur'ān is understandable by the public and is needless of interpretation, even of the interpretation of the Infallibles (a). This view causes wrong perception of the text of Qur'ān and results in the risk of deviation in belief and practice. Sayyid Abulfāḍl Burqa'ī is a contemporary Iranian Qur'ānist. For his belief in Qur'ān's being needless of interpretation, he refers to reasons such as the understanding of Qur'ān by Arabs of Ignorant Era with no need for interpretation; lack of interpretation of Qur'ān by God, the Prophet (s), and the Infallibles (a); the Word of God's being clearer than the interpretation by humans; attribution of superstitions to most verses by the interpreters; the impact of interpreter's denomination and tendency on the interpretation of verses; the understanding of the Quran verses by its other verses with no need for interpretation; and completeness of the Book of God and its needlessness to be completed by the Servants. All of these reasons are controversial and the study at hand criticizes these reasons using a descriptive-analytical method. Nowadays, some, particularly Wahhabis, have tried to undermine Shī'a view by resorting to the views of Burqa'ī. Thus, probing and criticizing his views is necessary. The results of the present study which is done using a descriptive-analytical method show that fallacy, misunderstanding, incomprehensiveness, inaccuracy, etc. have incurred the reasons provided by Burqa'ī. The use of narrations by Burqa'ī himself to explain some of the verses indicates that interpretation and elaboration by the Infallibles (a) is needed for a complete understanding of Qur'ān.

**Keywords:** Qur'ān, interpretation, Burqa'ī, *A Gleam of Qur'ān*, Qur'ānism, Qur'ān by Qur'ān interpretation.

### Introduction

Of the most pivotal subjects in the interpretation of Qur'ān is determining an authentic epistemic source and also choosing a proper approach for understanding its content. Efficient interpretation of a text, including Noble Qur'ān, relies on the continuous and discontinuous indications of the theologian's speech, as two indispensable necessities. Overlooking or denying each of these indications causes interruption in understanding the theologian's speech and, thus, would lead to provision of an inefficient interpretation.

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Although noble Qur'ān invites all people to understand and ponder over itself (Qur'ān 4:82; 47:24), it is not possible for all people – except in the light of interpretation – to attain the divine purpose in some of the verses. This is due to the existence of some particular features like mentioning sublime and deep knowledge; containing esoteric meanings; using allusions, metaphors, and similes; and having abrogating and abrogated, unconditioned and conditioned, general and specific, ambiguous and manifest verses; and so on. That said, some Qur'ānists, including Sayyid Abulfaḍl Burqa'ī, hold that Qur'ān is understandable to all people and is needless of interpretation.

Burqa'ī, born in 1908, is an Iranian contemporary cleric. He was born in a Shī'a and religious family in Qum (Burqa'ī, 2008: 8), and started his traditional education at the age of ten. After the primary and higher levels of education in the seminary, he went to Najaf and after three years, he returned to Iran and began to teach and research religious sciences (Ibid: 9-11). He passed away in 1993.

In the first half of his life, Burqa'ī believed in the necessity of interpretation and also the narrations of the Infallibles (a) in explicating the verses, but in the second half of his life he denied the role of tradition in the interpretation and also the very interpretation itself. To his opinion, Qur'ān is a sufficient guidance and is understandable to all people. Due to this, it does need interpretation and relies on itself to convey the message (Burqa'ī, 2016, vol. 1: 80).

Burqa'ī only sees interpretation permissible about the revealed case and detection of the arguments for someone who is not an imitator and has the distinguishing faculty. In this way, such a person may not be deceived by the arguments and can choose an argument that is in agreement with the outward of Qur'ān (Burqa'ī, 2016, vol. 1: 92).

Disregarding the role of narrations in explicating the verses of Qur'ān has caused the intellectual deviation of Burqa'ī from the denomination of Shī'a and his tendency toward Wahhabites (Ja'fariyān, 2003: 363). Accordingly, criticism of his reasons as for Qur'ān to be needless of the interpretation is also a criticism of Qur'ānist thinking and Wahhabites. Unfortunately, the views of Burqa'ī have been abused by the Wahhabis. Therefore, criticism of this aspect of his ideas is also necessary.

Reviewing the literature of the issue showed that thoughts and views of Burqa'ī as to some subjects have been explored sporadically like *Exploring the thoughts and views of Burqa'ī* by Dhabīḥullāh Maḥallāfī, *A glance at the interpretation method of Abulfaḍl Burqa'ī* by Zaynab Aqārib Parast, and *The examination and evaluation of the reasons of Abulfaḍl Burqa'ī for the sufficiency of the Qur'ān in exegesis* by Ḥusayn Muḥammadī Fām and Sayyid Majīd Nabawī. However, what is not yet probed in the previous works (which needs to be explored) is the view of Burqa'ī about Qur'ān's being needless of interpretation as well as his propounded reasons, which will be discussed in the study at hand.

This study attempts to answer this question: what are Burqa'ī's reasons for Qur'ān to be needless of interpretation and what criticisms incur these reasons?

For his opinion that Qur'ān does not need interpretation, Burqa'ī has propounded reasons which are as follows: **a)** the understanding of Qur'ān by Arabs of Ignorant Era with no need for interpretation; **b)** lack of interpretation of Qur'ān by God, the Prophet (s), and the Infallibles (a); **c)** the Word of God's being clearer than the interpretation by humans; **d)** attribution of superstitions to most verses by the interpreters; **e)** the impact of interpreter's denomination and tendency on the interpretation of verses; **f)** the understanding of the Quran verses by its other verses with no need for interpretation; **g)** completeness of the Book of God and its needlessness to be completed by the Servants.

In the following, Burqa'ī's reasons that Qur'ān is not in need of interpretation are put forward elaborately and then criticized.

## 1. The understanding of Qur'ān by Arabs of Ignorant Era with no need for interpretation

To Burqa'ī, at the time of revelation of Qur'ān, Arabs of Ignorant Era understood the verses of Qur'ān, were influenced by them, and were fascinated by hearing them. Owing to these verses, Arabs of Ignorant Era left their beliefs and tribal superstitions and as a result of this, conquered the world of that time, with no need to have the interpretation of the verses. If Qur'ān could not be understood without the interpretation, how did the Arabs of Ignorant Era understand it? (Burqa'ī, 2016, vol. 1: 88).

This reasoning can be rejected from some aspects:

a) With some search regarding the beginning history of Islam, the opposite of Burqa'ī's opinion can be proved. Although part of Quranic concepts were revealed based on the general usage (Ma'rifat, 1997, vol. 1: 75), some verses had complex expressions and words that even the Arab linguists could not comprehend their concepts and intentions properly. They deemed themselves in need of interpretation for these expressions and words (Jalāliyān, 1999: 44). Accordingly, they demanded the help of the Prophet (s) for understanding them. For an instance, Arabs of the Prophet's time were astounded by the outward of the verse 82 of chapter 6, which reads, "It is those who believe and confuse not their beliefs with wrong - that are (truly) in security, for they are on (right) guidance" (Qur'ān 6:82). Based on the outward of the verse, security was only for those true believers who did not confuse their beliefs with wrong. The wrong interpretation of the Companions was that no one could be found not oppressing himself or herself with committing sins. Therefore, everybody is oppressor and nobody is secure in any society (Suyūṭī, 2000, vol. 2: 429). This is because the word "ẓulm" (oppression) is used as an indefinite noun in negation context to express generality. This is the exoteric interpretation of the verse, whereas this meaning is not an exact interpretation. Referring to the verse, "[F]or false worship is indeed the highest wrong-doing" (Qur'ān 31:13), the revered Prophet (s) interpreted polytheism as oppression (Ṭabarī, 1991, vol. 7: 168).

b) To express meanings, Qur'ān has used words from various clans and has not limited itself to words of a certain clan (Suyūṭī, 2000, vol. 1: 418). This causes the existence of words in Qur'ān which are unfamiliar and ambiguous to some of Arab clans and are difficult for the mass to understand (Ma'rifat, 1997, vol. 1: 16). For this, some of the contemporaries of revelation did not know the meaning of some words, as 'Umar expressed he did not know the meaning of "abb"<sup>1</sup> (Qur'ān 80:31; Suyūṭī, 1984, vol. 6: 317) and "takhawwuf"<sup>2</sup> (Qur'ān 16:47) (Suyūṭī, 1984, vol. 4: 119). Ibn 'Abbās confessed that he did not know the meanings of "fāṭir"<sup>3</sup> (Qur'ān 35:1; Qur'ān 42:11; Suyūṭī, 2000, vol. 1: 426), "ḥanān"<sup>4</sup> (Qur'ān 19:13), and "ghisliyn"<sup>5</sup> (Qur'ān 69:36) (Suyūṭī, 2000, vol. 1: 373; Ibid, 1984, vol. 4: 212). Also Abū Bakr was doubtful about the exact meaning of "kalāla"<sup>6</sup> (Qur'ān 4:12, 176) (Suyūṭī, 1984, vol. 2: 250). These instances indicate the unawareness of Arabs of revelation era regarding the meaning of some words of Qur'ān, showing the need for explication and interpretation of the verses. It is noteworthy that description and explanation of unfamiliar words is, per se, an instance of interpretation (Suyūṭī, 2000, vol. 2: 427). Because of this, there are books written with the title of *Gharīb al-Qur'ān* (Āqā Buzurg Ṭihirānī, 1987, vol. 4: 16) to remove meaning ambiguity from the words of Qur'ān.

1. "abb" means pasture.

2. "takhawwuf" means to account by a process of slow wastage.

3. "fāṭir" means creator.

4. "ḥanān" means kindness and compassion.

5. "ghisliyn" means the corruption from the washing of wounds.

6. "kalāla" means a dead person who does not have parents and children, but has siblings.

c) Qur'ān, to suggest its sublime knowledge at the level of the laypeople (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2009: 49), inevitably, deems some layers of meaning. According to Imām Bāqir (a), Qur'ān has various levels regarding its meaning. He says, "Qur'ān has an inward and that inward has another inward, and Qur'ān has an outward and an outward for that outward" (Qumī Mashhadī, 1989, vol. 1: 4). Thus, it has layers and treasures of meaning (Kulaynī, 1988, vol. 2: 609), and has esoteric and deep meanings (Nahj al-balāgha, 1993: sermon 198), each layer of it in need of an independent explication and interpretation. Regarding this, interpretation also has various planes (Zurqānī, n.d., vol. 1: 519), and one cannot attain the deep meaning of Qur'ān with relying on its outwards.

d) In addition to the deep meanings, even the outward of the verses can have various meanings, with regard to the eloquence, rhetoric, accumulation of expression beauties, allusion, metaphor, simile, allegory, and so on. As to a certain verse, some meanings may be provided parallel to each other while all of them are correct (Sa'īdī Rawshan, 2017: 194). Without resorting to interpretation, Arabs of revelation era just understood the outward of Qur'ān which sometimes this outward lacked any metaphor and simile; they were unable to understand its deep meaning (Zarkashī, 1989: 107). Also, sometimes they had disagreements of understanding even as to the outward. Narrations left by the Companions in interpreting a verse indicate their disagreement of understanding Qur'ān (Ṭabarī, 1991).

e) Qur'ān has been revealed to provide principles of religious beliefs, ethical virtues, and the generalities of practical rules (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2009: 23). In view of that, Qur'ān has talked concisely and has eschewed mentioning the details. This expression approach of Qur'ān itself causes ambiguity. Arabs of Ignorant Era were unable to remove this ambiguity. Thus, to attain the elaboration of the details, the revered Prophet (s), as the clear Qur'ān, was needed to explicate it (Ayāzī, 1993: 195).

f) Divine verses have been revealed to this world from the protected Tablet. Mentioning superb and supernatural materials, in the form of this world of matter, causes the ambiguity of verses (Ma'rifat, 2009, vol. 3: 19), as Qur'ān itself states the necessity of referring to the unambiguous verses for the ambiguous ones (Qur'ān 3:7). Also, Qur'ān has exoteric meanings (seeming intention), but in the interpretation of Qur'ān the intentions of sublime God is explained in the form of real purpose. Namely, it is necessary to use general and specific verses, unconditioned and conditioned verses, intellectual and scientific indications, and other transmitted indications to clarify the final intention of God (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī, 2008: 35). These were affairs that most Arabs of Ignorant Era might not understand and identify without the help of the Prophet (s), and were in need of Qur'ān interpretation.

g) Some words and verses of Qur'ān are multi-dimensional, as Imām 'Alī (a) says, "[T]heir meanings could be construed differently" (Nahj al-Balāgha, 1993: letter 77). This issue requires the exploration of various possibilities as to the meaning of the verse, not to limit it to the outward of the text (Ayāzī, 1993: 195). Naturally, exploration of various possibilities as to the meaning of a verse was not within the capability of the Arabs who were contemporary to the revelation time, a matter which is in disagreement with the view of Burqa'ī (i.e., limiting the understanding of Qur'ān to the outwards of it).

h) Cause of revelation has a significant influence on understanding the verses of Qur'ān. Considering the cause of revelation as well as the social and cultural situations of revelation time may give rise to, in some cases, different meanings for the outward of the verses<sup>1</sup>, and the outward of these verses, perhaps, causes improper meanings to spring to the minds (Shākir, 2003: 64-65). Therefore, relying on the exoteric meaning of Qur'ān, without

1. Like this verse that reads, "Verily the transposing (of a prohibited month) is an addition to Unbelief" (Qur'ān 9:37) which can be misunderstood if one does not know its cause of revelation.

considering the exterior indications including the verses' cause of revelation, is not enough for understanding the purpose of God.

It should be noted that every theoretically deep and significant book cannot be understood without interpretation and Qur'ān is one of those books (Jawādī Āmulī, n.d., vol. 1: 56). Therefore, concerning the importance of understanding the knowledge and rules of Qur'ān for Muslims and complete effort of true believers for comprehending its content, there remains no doubt that Qur'ān interpretation was also common in the era of Companions. Eye witnesses for the existence and continuation of interpretation in that era were interpreters from the Companions and also their interpretive works (Bābā'ī, 2008: 52).

All these reasons indicate that the claim made by Burqa'ī (i.e., understanding Qur'ān by the Arabs of Ignorant Era with no need for interpretation) is rejected.

## 2. Lack of interpretation by God, the Prophet (s), and the Infallibles (a) for the verses of Qur'ān

Burqa'ī holds this view: if Qur'ān had needed the interpretation, the sublime God would have revealed an interpretation for it, or the Messenger of God would have written an interpretation for it. This is whereas he did not do so, and even the guiding Infallibles (a) who had fairly enough free time did not write an interpretation for Qur'ān. Thus, it becomes clear that Qur'ān did not need interpretation. (Burqa'ī, 2016, vol. 1: 88).

To answer this reason of Burqa'ī, it should be said that if God were supposed to provide an interpretation for Qur'ān, why He would not reveal it in a way needless of interpretation. Mentioning something ambiguously despite its need for interpretation and then providing an interpretation for it independently seems a futile act which does not fit the All-Wise God.

God was able to reveal heavenly books in a way needless of interpretation. However, human life in this world is based on test and suffering. Thus, the test would not happen and success and failure would not make sense if everything were available to the human (Juwaynī, 2008: 161).

This statement of Burqa'ī is a fallacy where he says if Qur'ān had needed interpretation, the Messenger of God or the guiding Infallibles (a) would have written an interpretation for it, making it clear Qur'ān does not need interpretation (Burqa'ī, 2016, vol. 1: 88). The need of Qur'ān for interpretation cannot be demonstrated just by writing the interpretation, but also it can be met by elucidation. Interpretive elucidation made by the words of the Prophet (s) and the Infallible Imāms (a) meets the need of Qur'ān for interpretation.

In matters of public's concerns, wont of Ahl al-Bayt (s) was spoken words, exposition of which was a task done by the Companions and the pupils. Imāms (a) themselves did not write a book independently due to overriding political limitations, dissimulation, confinement, and so on, except "Kitābu 'Alī" which was the writing of the revered Prophet's (s) speeches and was at the hand of the Imāms (a). This also includes the interpretation of Qur'ān verses. Of course, some books have been attributed to them<sup>1</sup>, but their authenticity has not been confirmed (Āqā Buzurg Ṭīhrānī, 1987, vol. 4: 284). Nonetheless, many narrations have been stated from Ahl al-Bayt (a) for the interpretation and esoteric interpretation of verses, and these narrations are enough for demonstrating the effort of Ahl al-Bayt (a) for providing the interpretation and the need of Qur'ān for interpretation (Ifikhārī, 2008: 460-463).

God did not reveal interpretation for Qur'ān, but introduced a clarifier and teacher for it and referred the audience to him (Qur'ān 16:44; 62:2). Assigning the responsibility of

1. Like the interpretation attributed to Imām Ḥasan 'Askarī (a)

explicating divine verses to the Messenger of God and commanding the revered Prophet (s) for teaching and explaining the verses by God is the biggest reason for Qur'ān to be in need of interpretation. If there were no necessity for the interpretation of Qur'ān, such a command would not be issued by God. Assignment of this responsibility to the Messenger of God shows that even the Arab addressees of Qur'ān needed interpretation and explication for an exact understanding of Qur'ān verses. Thus, the Companions referred to the Prophet (s) for understanding the verses (Zarkashī, 1989: 107). After the Prophet (s), the responsibility of explicating the verses was taken over by the successors of his Holiness. There are hundreds of interpretive narrations, particularly from Imām Bāqir (a) and Imām Ṣādiq (a), which prove this claim (Iftikhārī, 2008: 460-463).

One of the contemporary interpreters says, "Necessity of interpreting Qur'ān is clearer to the knowledgeable individuals of related sciences and various disciplines. Therefore, from the revelation time to now, interpreting Qur'ān by the revered Messenger (s) and Ahl al-Bayt (a) has been prevalent as a good tradition (Jawādī Āmulī, n.d., vol. 1: 56).

Exploring the sources shows interpretation of Qur'ān has been continued during the 250 years of the presence of Imāms (s). Also, there have been individuals knowing the meanings of Qur'ān and capable of interpreting it. They have been teaching the concepts of Qur'ān to talented and interested persons, answering the questions about interpretation, and writing the interpretation books; so the interpretation has never ceased (Bābā'ī, 2008: 50). Writing more than one thousand interpretation books, big and small, ordinal, and thematic by Shī'a and Sunni interpreters is an evidence for this claim (Mu'addab, 2000: 135).

On the whole, the people of Mission time were not very lettered so that the revered Prophet could or would provide all the meanings inserted in Qur'ān for them. The thinking capacity of that time's people did not necessitate the provision of the layers of verses (Shāhrūdī, 2004: 85). It was not also supposed all the inserted meanings in Qur'ān to be provided at the revelation time because the language of Qur'ān is teemed with allusions, metaphors, similes, and mysteries. It is in a way that in every era and generation, one may, at the time of facing Qur'ān, find precious and new points, as Imām Sajjād says, "God knew that at the end of time, some investigating and meticulous people would come. Therefore, He revealed the chapter 112 and the first verses of chapter 57 (verses 1 to 6), saying, 'He has full knowledge of the secrets of (all) hearts'" (Kulaynī, 1988, vol. 1: 91). On the other hand, Qur'ān has not been sent for a specific tribe and a certain geographical border (Baḥrānī, 1994, vol. 1: 66). Hence, Qur'ān talks about common and everlasting topics and meanings which are needed by everybody. Moreover, these meanings are layered and are usable by people with various levels of knowledge, though these meanings are endless (Shāhrūdī, 2004: 86). Thus, Qur'ān is always in need of explaining, explicating, and decoding the mysteries.

### **3. The Word of God's being clearer than the interpretation by humans**

Burqa'ī believes, "The interpretations written are all by humans, and the Word of God is clearer than the words of these persons. The Sublime God is more skillful than every human in talking clearly and making the materials understandable. If one does not understand the clear Word of God, he cannot, a fortiori, understand the words of the interpreters (Burqa'ī, 2016, vol. 1: 88).

In other words, Burqa'ī holds that the extant interpretations have made the materials of Qur'ān more ambiguous, rather than making them clearer. He asks the addressee to compare the texts of the interpretations and the verses of Qur'ān so that he could comprehend the difficulty of the interpretations vividly (Ibid: 89). Of course, Burqa'ī does not refute Qur'ān

translation is necessary for one who does not know Arabic language. He believes that Qur'ān does not need interpretation of any kind, but it should be translated correctly in every language for the understanding of the people of that language; however, translation differs from interpretation (Ibid: 88).

As instances, Burqa'ī points to *Manhaj al-ṣādiqīn*<sup>1</sup> and *Majma' al-bayān*<sup>2</sup> as two of the best interpretations (to his opinion), and says, "They have mentioned some possibilities for one verse, have provided some meanings for one word, and under it they have mentioned some contradictory narrations without stating which one of these possibilities is correct and which one false, leaving the reader wondering" (Ibid: 89). To Burqa'ī, if one (who knows Arabic language and Qur'ān register well) has not read these interpretations, it is easier for him to refer to Qur'ān and to perceive that meaning which is more manifested and clear (Ibid).

This reason of Burqa'ī is comprised of some parts that each of which needs a separate answer. In the following, they are criticized:

a) Burqa'ī holds that the Word of God is clearer than the words of interpreters who are humans (Ibid: 88).

First, Burqa'ī's method of argument in this expression is in a way that not only it limits the scope for the interpreters, but also it denies any clarifier for Qur'ān. This is because it sees God more able than any human in making the materials understandable. Therefore, it sees divine inability in providing His goals a requirement for the existence of clarifier (Raḥīmiyān, 2018: 13-14). This is whereas Qur'ān, evidently, sees the Prophet (s) as its clarifier (Qur'ān 16:44).

Second, there seems to be a fallacy in this part of the discussion. No one denies the clarity of God's Word. What matters is that the clarity of words is related to the application purpose, whereas the scope of interpretations is related to the real purpose (Riḍā'ī Iṣfahānī, 2008, vol. 6: 186). In other words, to understand the real purpose of God, it is needed to explicate His purpose in the form of interpretation.

b) Burqa'ī claims that Qur'ān does not need interpretation of any kind, but for the people of a certain language to understand, it should be translated into that language correctly, and that translation differs from interpretation (Burqa'ī, 2016, vol. 1: 88).

As an answer, it should be said that, first of all, reaching a correct and precise translation of verses is not possible except through referring to the interpretation of verses. To do so, it is needed to consider the context of the verse, the cause of its revelation, its being Meccan and Medinite, and so on. Therefore, a correct interpretation is a prelude to a precise translation of the verses and every correct translation is based on an interpretation. That is, every translator is an interpreter before being a translator because he should choose the best choice from the possible and various meanings of the verses, and translate the verse based on it (As'adī, 2015, vol. 1: 15). To be more exact, Najjār states, "Translation and interpretation are the synopsis and elaboration of the same fact, and the conditions of Qur'ān interpreters and their required knowledge are applicable to the translators of Qur'ān as well" (Najjār, 2002: 35). Thus, the translated text is, in fact, an interpretation which states the meaning of Qur'ān according to the opinion of the interpreter.

Moreover, every verse of Qur'ān contains many materials for which sometimes, when translating, the translator uses long and dull sentences. For that reason, explanation in translation becomes necessary which is itself a kind of interpretation (Rafī'ī, 2001: 74-85).

It should be noted that a translation which does not rely on interpretation and does not consider the cultural and historical bases as well as the aspects of simile, metaphor, and allusion and their associations can be deviating in most cases (Bī Āzār Shīrāzī, 1997, vol. 1:

1. By Faṭḥullāh Kāshānī (d. 988 H.)

2. By Faḍl b. Ḥasan Ṭabrisī (d. 548 H.)

244). Therefore, translation merely cannot convey the deep Qur'ānic concepts, and it may also fail to express the exoteric meaning of the verse precisely.

Secondly, Burqa'ī claims Qur'ān does not need translation. This is whereas he himself in the book *A Gleam of Qur'ān* interprets the verses, though he does not see it a book of interpretation, and in the prelude he emphasizes that his intention has been translating Qur'ān simply and fluently (Burqa'ī, 2016, vol. 1: 32, 126). On one hand, the four-volume size of the book and on the other hand, his confession that his book is an interpretation (Ibid: 115, vol. 4: 359) show that he has understood the need of Qur'ān for interpretation and has practically done an act of interpretation.

Thirdly, the sublime God has asked people to understand Qur'ān (Qur'ān 47:24) and has reprimanded those who do not consider it with care (Qur'ān 4:82). The written interpretations are for contemplation and thinking which Qur'ān itself calls its addressees for it. God says, “(Here is) a Book which We have sent down unto thee, full of blessings, that they may meditate on its Signs, and that men of understanding may receive admonition” (Qur'ān 38:29). Meditation is an intellectual effort, and its results include being influenced, receiving admonition, and becoming judicious (Qaradāwī, 2003: 329). On the other hand, deep and precise meditation is impossible except in the light of interpretation. If exploring and explicating the Word of God were deemed disparaged, God would not command people to meditate (Muḥammadī Fām, 2018: 107).

Fourthly, in the verses of Qur'ān, the addressee has been called for holding to Qur'ān (Qur'ān 43:43), and the Prophet (s) also has recommended it (Kulaynī, 1988, vol. 2: 599). What is more, holding to Qur'ān is based on understanding its meaning which in most cases is in need of interpretation.

c) Burqa'ī holds that interpretations provide many possibilities and contradictory narrations under the verses without determining one of them as the true one. This itself makes the reader confused (Burqa'ī, 2016, vol. 1: 89).

As an answer, it should be said that, first, all the interpretations are not like this; many of them have mentioned only one meaning.

Second, after mentioning some possibilities, most interpretations provide the true one along with mentioning the reasons. A short glance at various interpretations during different centuries proves this matter.

Third, most factors leading to mentioning various opinions and possibilities under the verses are also influential for the precise translation of the verses. As a result, if the correct interpretation of the verse cannot be attained, then certainly the exact translation cannot also be achieved. Thus, mere translation that Burqa'ī sees it a solution for understanding Qur'ān and an outlet for being needless of interpretation cannot facilitate the issue.

Fourth, no one claims that the words of the human are the same as Divine Word in fluency and articulateness. The effort of interpreters to achieve the purpose of God and also the closeness of their interpretations to Divine Word and their fluency in comparison with His Word are all aimed at this point. This is not exclusive to interpretation; in other sciences also – in which a text is described and elaborated for the addressee's understanding – the explainer does his best to convey the aim of the speaker.

#### **4. Attribution of superstitions to most verses by the interpreters**

To Burqa'ī, the written interpretations often have attributed superstitions to the verses of Qur'ān, have cited exaggerated declarations along with the verses, and have teamed Qur'ān with superstitions, the book which is itself full of truth (Ibid). To prove his claim, he mentions

the word “ba‘ūḍa” (gnat) in verse 26 of chapter 2<sup>1</sup> as an example. He is surprised by some interpretations like *Tafsīr Qumī, Al-Burhān, Nūr al-thaqalayn*, and the like in which they – copying each other—have cited that ‘Alī (a) is meant by “ba‘ūḍa” (gnat) and the Messenger of God is meant by “famā fawqahā” (something above it). Opposing this view, he writes, “Was not there anybody to ask these interpreters this question: could not God name ‘Alī (a), rather than mentioning “ba‘ūḍa” (gnat), or was He fearful to do so? Everywhere there is a name of an animal, these interpreters interpret it esoterically as ‘Alī (a) so that they could make the other Islamic sects understand that ‘Alī (a) has been the cause of revelation of some verses. By this, inadvertently, they have insulted that Imām, have played with Qur’ān, and have shown it to be weak and full of superstitions (Ibid).”

These materials which are mostly narration-based – regardless of their authenticity – have been for the esoteric interpretation of the verses and inwards of Qur’ān, which is something beyond the exoteric interpretation of the verses (Bahrānī, 1994, vol. 1: 46; Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1994, vol. 1: 29), and that esoteric interpretation differs from mere interpretation. The claim of Burqa‘ī is that Qur’ān is needless of interpretation, but he has provided an example from the esoteric interpretation. Mentioning esoteric interpretations of Qur’ān is inclusive to non-manifest interpretations wherein they cite the inward meanings of the verse through referring to some narrations. Other than the non-manifest and esoteric interpretations, the aim of the other interpretations – which constitute most interpretation books – is explicating the outward of the verses.

Nonetheless, as to the authenticity of interpretive narrations, there are regulations, including the lack of opposition of the intellect and science with the texts of Qur’ān and tradition (Bābā‘ī, 2002, vol. 2: 41; Shākir, 2003: 315). This is because the presence of some superstitions, forgeries, and Isrā’īliyyāt cannot be denied in some of the esoterically interpreted narrations (Riḍā‘ī Iṣfahānī, 2008, vol. 1: 61). Based on these regulations, the proper narrations – regarding the chain of transmission and textual implication – are distinguishable from forged ones. Mentioning the narration simply in an interpretation book cannot be a reason for its authenticity, and one cannot prove the absolute falsehood of interpretation by this.

## 5. The impact of interpreter’s denomination and tendency on the interpretation of verses

To Burqa‘ī, the meanings of Qur’ān verses have been determined based on the interpreter’s denomination and that the attachments and spites have influenced the interpreters’ works. This is to the extent that every interpreter “attributed the verses of blasphemy and hypocrisy to those with whom he was in conflict and, conversely, he saw the verses of faith and goodness related to those with whom he was in agreement. He set Qur’ān a book of eulogy or slander of individuals, provoking the flames of civil war among Muslims. If there was predetermination, he took the verses of Qur’ān to mean predetermination, and if there was volition, he took the verses to mean volition” (Burqa‘ī, 2016, vol. 1: 91). He has deemed this act of previous interpreters as betrayal which is followed by subsequent naive interpreters, those who have spent all their effort to curse or praise individuals (Ibid). Due to this, Burqa‘ī prohibits the interpretation of Qur’ān.

To answer this doubt, it should be said that, first, if some interpreters attribute their own beliefs and intellectual attitudes to the verses of Qur’ān, it cannot be a reason for Qur’ān to be needless of interpretation. Rather, one should expurgate the interpretations from specific

1. Indeed Allah is not ashamed to draw a parable whether it is that of a gnat or something above it (Qur’ān 2:26).

arguments and opinions which are contrary to the texts of Qur'ān and intellect, and introduce interpretations which are empty of any kind of tendency toward a particular thinking mode which is in disagreement with Qur'ān.

This statement of Burqa'ī is like this: because some Muslims do not practice the commands of Islam in a real sense, then one should avoid the promotion of Islam and should set it aside.

Next, regarding the approach Burqa'ī has taken in his interpretation as well as his thinking and beliefs, what is meant of "set Qur'ān a book of eulogy or slander of individuals" by him is mentioning the virtues of Ahl al-Bayt (a) and particularly the topic of guardianship under the respected verses, concerning the revelation cause of those verses. Burqa'ī is intensely opposite to the meaning just stated in the previous sentence. Due to this, he does not cover the revelation cause of guardianship verses (Ibid: 291), or after citing the revelation cause, he takes it as superstition, tribal prejudice, and the like, and reject it in some way (Ibid, vol. 2: 31-33). If Burqa'ī objects those who have interpreted the verses of Qur'ān with particular aims and he sees their act a factor for interpretation prohibition, his act – repudiating the facts that are demonstrable by intersected verses of Qur'ān and narrations – can also be opposed. Thus, according to his own claim, he should refrain from interpreting Qur'ān.

Finally, Burqa'ī accuses others to set Qur'ān a book of eulogy or slander of individuals. This is whereas, in some cases, his particular beliefs and thoughts overshadow the translation of the verses, leading him to do the same thing (Ibid: 25-26).

## **6. The understanding of the Quran verses by its other verses with no need of interpretation**

Burqa'ī holds "One can understand the ambiguous verses by the other verses of Qur'ān because various parts of Qur'ān interpret each other, and every one can understand Qur'ān regarding his command of Arabic language and literature; derivation of grammatical rules; correspondence between Qur'ān generalities and the details; extraction of jurisprudential and intellectual rulings; and inference of materials" (Ibid, vol. 1: 92). He states, "A scholar understands many things from hyperbaton, accentuation, and context of the verses and their correspondence. By this, many words and verses of Qur'ān become clear by the other verses and similar words" (Ibid). With this line of thinking, after mentioning the related narrations, he writes under some verses<sup>1</sup>, "With the presence of clear verses of Qur'ān, there is no need for citing such narrations" (Ibid, vol. 3: 367-370).

To answer this doubt, it should be said that, first, the statement that "various parts of Qur'ān interpret each other" to which Burqa'ī refer and is based on the statement of 'Alī (a) who said, "One part of it speaks for the other part" (Nahj al-balāgha, 1993: sermon 133) does not deny the interpretive narrations, and one cannot deny interpretation due to this content. This is because demonstration of something does not mean the denial of its opposite.

Secondly, the knowledge and the abilities that Burqa'ī counts for understanding the verses of Qur'ān cannot be found within everybody. Rather, people need experts who help them in understanding the Divine Word. This is whereas Burqa'ī mentions the possibility of the public's understanding as one of the reasons for Qur'ān to be needless of interpretation.

Thirdly, for a proper and exact understanding of Qur'ān, the aforesaid points are necessary but not enough. Rather, understanding the real purpose of God is in need of numerous sciences that some scholars have counted them to be fifteen sciences (Suyūfī, 2000, vol. 2:

1. As an instance, q.v. Burqa'ī, 2016, vol. 3, pp. 367-370, under the verses of chapter 27: 78-81 and vol. 4, p.54, under the verses of chapter 39: 39-42.

424). One of those is the science of Bounty<sup>1</sup>(Ibid: 451). Certainly, all people do not possess this science.

It is interesting that Burqa‘ī claims simply referring the verses to each other suffices for understanding Qur’ān, and in fact he denies the role of the wont of the Prophet and the Infallibles. This is whereas in the first half of his intellectual life, he believed in the necessity of explicating the verses of Qur’ān by the narrations (Burqa‘ī, n.d., vol. 2: 95). Referring to the verse, “It is He Who has sent amongst the Unlettered an apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom,- although they had been, before, in manifest error” (Qur’ān 62:2), he stipulates the need of Qur’ān for teacher and interpreter. If the verses of Qur’ān were enough for understanding, the teaching of the Prophet (s) was a futile act. Burqa‘ī sees it certain that Qur’ān is concise and needs an interpreter and sees it the reason for the emphasis of the Prophet (s) on referring to the declarations of the Infallibles (Burqa‘ī, n.d., vol. 2: 96).

Moreover, Burqa‘ī rejects the opinion of Sunnis that the need for Imām is just for implementing the punishments, keeping the country safe, and executing the rules. He says that the Prophet has brought a complete but concise religion that needs to be elaborated. However, the short life of his Holiness and wars with pagans did not let him mention all the principals and derivatives. Also, although Qur’ān is complete and comprehensive, it is not enough because it has ambiguous verses as well as unambiguous verses that are concise. Besides, the possibility of detail extraction is not available to all people. Therefore, it needs an infallible clarifier who offers authoritative argument, comprehends the Qur’ān completely, and is approved by the divine affirmation (Ibid).

As it can be seen, Burqa‘ī, in first part of his life, denied the sufficiency of Qur’ān.

## 7. Completeness of the Book of God and its needlessness to be completed by the Servants

Burqa‘ī holds that, “The Book of God is complete and does not need a Servant to complete it, and the Book of God is needless of Servants in every way. Therefore, if it has not mentioned a material, it was because it was not necessary (not asking the knowledge of it from the Servants), or it was mentioned in the wont of the Messenger” (Burqa‘ī, 2016, vol. 1: 92). With this opinion, he writes about the expression “aḥsana tafsīran” (the best explanation) (Qur’ān 25:33), “Qur’ān is the best interpreter for itself and does not need these many interpretations that have been written” (Burqa‘ī, 2016, vol. 3: 313-314).

Burqa‘ī induces this point that referring to the words of the Infallible for explication of Qur’ān is some completion of God’s Word and removal of its flaws. Because of this, he sees this act contrary to the perfection of God’s Book.

This argument of Burqa‘ī is a fallacy because as it is possible that God does not provide a material in Qur’ān and does not ask us for it, it is also in the same manner possible that He puts a material in Qur’ān but ask us for it through, say, the tradition of His Messenger –as Burqa‘ī himself confesses this in the statement “it was mentioned in the wont of the Messenger.” Besides, it is possible that God puts a material in Qur’ān but makes its comprehension out of laypeople’s capacity, and makes its discovery dependent on the statement of a clarifier like His Messenger. None of these are impossible from an intellectual perspective (Raḥīmīyān, 2018: 21). Moreover, in this argument Burqa‘ī sees the need for interpretation in opposition to the perfection of Qur’ān. In fact, with an exceptive syllogism of

1. Science of Bounty means God-given provisions and talent (Qaraḍāwī, 2003: 345) that can be ascertained by referring to this tradition, “Whoever practices his knowledge would be gifted by God the knowledge of what he does not know” (Suyūfī, 2000, vol. 2: 451).

Qur'ān' perfection, he has concluded that Qur'ān is needless of interpretation. This is whereas perfection negates the flaw; it does not negate the need for interpretation. Interpretation is explanation, not completion; as a result, it is not in contradiction of perfection. It is possible that something is complete and at the same time in need of interpretation.

Therefore, perfection of Qur'ān does not accompany its being needless of interpretation and, so, it is not necessary to have perfection of Qur'ān and the need for interpretation both together. What contradicts perfection is completion, not interpretation. Qur'ān is complete in stating all the necessary requirements for guiding the human kind, but is not needless of interpretation. This is because the base of Qur'ān is declaring the generalities and it has assigned the elaboration of details to the Prophet (s) (Qur'ān 62:2). The wont of Ahl al-Bayt (a) also is regarded authoritative for interpreting Qur'ān due to many evidences like the traditions of Safīna and Thaḡalayn and many other evidences.

## Conclusion

Burqa'ī, a contemporary Iranian Qur'ānist, through resorting to some reasons, tries to prove Qur'ān to be needless of interpretation and also to negate the role of tradition in interpreting Qur'ān. All his evidences for his claim are summarized in seven reasons as follows, which were criticized in the study at hand:

1. Companions understood Qur'ān in the revelation time and did not need interpretation.  
**Criticism:** Arabs of revelation time, without resorting to interpretation, just understood the outward of Qur'ān. They were unable to understand its deep meaning and even sometimes they disagreed in their understanding of the very outward of Qur'ān.
2. Lack of interpretation of Qur'ān by God, the Prophet (s), and the Infallibles (a) is a reason for Qur'ān to be needless of interpretation.  
**Criticism:** Although they did not write interpretations, they answered the need of Qur'ān for interpretation with their verbal statements and explanations. There are many interpretive narrations from the Prophet (s) and Ahl al-Bayt (a), showing their effort for interpretation and the need of Qur'ān for it.
3. All the extant interpretations are the words of humans and the Word of God is clearer than the words of interpreters. This is because the sublime God is more skillful than any human being in speaking clearly and making people understood.  
**Criticism:** first, this view of Burqa'ī can be rejected by the Word of God because Qur'ān explicitly sees the Prophet (s) his clarifier, despite his being a human (Qur'ān 16:44). Second, the Word of God's being clear is more related to the stage of application purpose; however, to understand the real purpose of God, explication of His purpose in the form of interpretation is needed.
4. Referring to the weak narrations, the written interpretations often have attributed superstitions to the verses of Qur'ān, and have filled the Qur'ān with superstitions, the book which is itself full of truth.  
**Criticism:** to recognize the authenticity of interpretive narrations, there are regulations like lack of opposition with intellect, science, texts of Qur'ān, and wont. Based on these regulations, the sound narrations are distinguishable from the forged ones. Moreover, most narrations are for mentioning the esoteric interpretation of verses and the inwards of Qur'ān, which is beyond the exoteric interpretation of verses. However, Burqa'ī claims that Qur'ān is needless of interpretation.
5. Interpreters' denomination and even their attachments and spites have influenced their works of interpretation.

**Criticism:** if some of the interpreters of Qur'ān verses attribute their own beliefs and thoughts to the verses of Qur'ān, it cannot be a reason for Qur'ān to be needless of interpretation. Rather, one should strive to expurgate the interpretations from particular arguments and beliefs which are in opposition to the texts of Qur'ān and intellect and to introduce interpretations free from any type of bias toward any particular thinking that is against Qur'ān.

6. Various parts of Qur'ān interpret each other and one can understand the ambiguous verses by the other verses of Qur'ān. Therefore, there is no need for interpretation.

**Criticism:** first, that some of the verses interpret the meaning of some other verses is true, but it does not indicate the negation of interpretive narrations. This is because demonstration of something does not mean the denial of its opposite. Second, the required knowledge and abilities for understanding the verses of Qur'ān cannot be found within everybody, but rather laypeople are in need of experts to help them out in understanding the Divine Word. Therefore, the possibility of understanding the verses by all the people – which is a claim of Burqa'ī – cannot be proved.

7. Qur'ān is the Book of God and is complete, and does not need Servants to complete it with their interpretation, even if they are infallible.

**Criticism:** Qur'ān is based on stating the generalities, and has assigned the elaboration of details to the Prophet (s) (Qur'ān 16:44; 62:2). To assign the responsibility of explicating the divine verses to the Messenger of God and to command his Holiness for teaching and describing the verses is itself the biggest reason for Qur'ān's need of interpretation.

Thus, it became clear that the reasons propounded by Burqa'ī are not complete and comprehensive and do not prove his claim. It is noteworthy that he sees Qur'ān in need of translation, and not interpretation. However, it should be noted that attaining a proper and exact translation of the verses is not possible except through referring to the interpretation of the verses. A translation which does not rely on interpretation is in most cases deviating. Moreover, writing the book *A gleam of Qur'ān* by Burqa'ī is the best and firmest practical reason for his confession that Qur'ān is in need of interpretation.

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