



Challenges of the Quranists' Intellectual Foundations



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Abstract

Islamic laws and/or hadiths make the second source of inference for Shiis and Sunnis next to the Holy Quran. Many of the jurisprudential laws of Islam were explicated by the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims in the early years of Islam and the following years followed the command of Allah and were faithful to His words.

The hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad have since been a guideline for Muslims. Although the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad have long been accepted, there has emerged a new offshoot of a Muslim sect who regard their cult as Quranism, i.e., the school of those who believe only in the Holy Quran. They consider the Holy Quran as the only source of Islamic laws.

This article attempts to investigate the ideas of the *Quranists*, their historical and geographical roots, and express their intellectual principles. It deals with their doctrinal bases from Shii and Sunni viewpoints.

Keywords: *Ahl al-Quran*, hadith argumentation, *Quranism*, Quranists, Quran Sufficiency.

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Introduction

Quranists hold that obeying the hadith is not clearly emphasized in the Quran. They hold that hadith or narrations were collected and written about two hundred years after the Prophet with some contradictions due to which we cannot establish religious faith, jurisprudential laws, and commands based on hadith and doubts around Sunna. It has been said that the Prophet Muhammad did not allow anybody to record his hadiths during his twenty-three years of prophethood; he meant to prevent distortion of the Quran. At the time of the Rashedin caliphs, these issues were banned just like the time of the Prophet! In order to carefully examine and respond to this point of view in this research, first, the Quranic and hadith views of the *Quranists* are studied and analysed.

Research Background

Regarding the formation and history of *Quranism*, some studies were made in the past decade, resulting in several books and articles. Some of these works are as follows: *Al-Quraniyun* and their Doubts about the Sunnah by Khādim Husayn Ilāhī-bakhsh (1988) wherein the followers of this sect are surveyed in the Indian subcontinent. Another work is "Hadith as a sacred text" by Aisha Musa (2008) in which the history of the formation of this sect is discussed. Prior to this, some parts of Khotir's works were published in the work of G. H. A. Yenbalt in *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt* (1969). 'Ali Naṣīrī presents an article entitled "Rābiṭah mutiqābil kitab wa Sunnat" in the 15th issue of the *Ulūm Hadīth Journal* (2000).



1. The Concept of the Term Quranism

Quranism (Arabic al-Quraniyun) is a designation given to a movement initiated by some Muslims in Egypt. It has gained limited followers in Egypt and other places. They came to call themselves "people of the Quran" (Ahl al-Quran) (Musa 2008, 9-12). The intellectual fountainhead of Quranism goes back to the idea of rejecting the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, collectively referred to as the Prophetic hadiths. In this way, Quranists consider the Quran as the sufficient and sole source for law-making. This is because they believe that Allah has promised to preserve the Quran and has remarked, (إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ) "and We Ourselves have revealed the Quran and (thus) We are its Protectors", (Al-Hejr: 9).

2. Intellectual Principles

Quranists call themselves "Muslims" and avoid being associated with Sunnis and Shiis so that they will not be known as either Sunni or Shii. Rather, their criterion of faith and religious behaviour is only based on the Quran. They cite this verse (تَبَيَّنَ لَكُلِّ شَيْءٍ), "Quran is indicating everything", (Al-Nahl: 89), and argue to prove that the commandments of the Quran are not tersely insufficient, hence should not be explained by hadiths which are not totally free from errors, defects of oblivions, or distortion (Shāfi'ī 1940, 9:6).

In modern times, the followers of the *Ahl al-Quran* believe that the Quran is a free-standing book. They believe that the Holy Quran can and should be released from the constraints of the hadiths. They have also spread this idea among other people who are never so rigid about the Quran. In their view, the Quran is the only source for religious orientation for interpreting it, hence nothing else is required save the Quran itself. As such, the Quran is crystal clear, available, and completely comprehensible. In fact, they hold that the Quran should be interpreted only based on itself. In addition, they hold that none of the Quranic verses had been abrogated,



because it requires accepting the timeliness of the Quranic verses which contradict the Quran's eternity. Likewise, they believe that the verses of the Quran were revealed to educate people at all times, hence they are universal and never exclusively specific to an individual or a certain people ('Ilāhī-bakhsh 2017, 267).

Another point is that the Holy Quran does not have a fixed meaning. Rather, this road is open and the Quran has different meanings under different conditions; these different meanings hold true for sure. It follows that every generation may find a new meaning on the basis of their capacity. Khajeh Ahmad Din claims that the Prophet had no exceptional understanding beyond what we do have, for his understanding of the revelation was based on his own wisdom and reasoning, hence he was apt to make mistakes just like any one of us (Brown 1996, 48-91).

Some of the questions that are taken up here include the following: What are the intellectual foundations and thoughts of the *Quranists* and their method in considering the Quran? What are the views of the *Quranists* about the authenticity of the Hadith?

3. Quranists in the Contemporary Era

From among those who already promote the idea of the Quran's sufficiency, the following names can be mentioned: Qasim Ahmad of Malaysia, Ahmad Sobhi Mansour of Egypt; and Adib Yuksel of Turkey. They hold that the secret of the success of the early Muslims was that they used only the Quran as their reference. According to his beliefs, the Muslim community started to decline since the time the hadiths were placed next to the Quran as a reference.

4. A critique of the most important thoughts of the Quranists

A great majority of Shii and Sunni scholars have not accepted the thoughts of the people of the Quran and made various criticisms of their intellectual foundations. Here, some of such counter-arguments of the Shii and Sunni Muslims are cited, all in refutation of their thoughts and conceptions.



4.1. Shii Reasons for Rejecting the Intellectual Foundations of the *Quranists*

The most important views of the *Quranists* deal with the belief that the Quran is the only source of legislation. As for the holy Prophet, they hold that he could only speak by referring to the Quran, and his understanding had no superiority over those of others. There is no Quranic verse to support this claim (Subhi Mansour 2005). Their argument is based on the following Quranic verses: (مَا لَهُمْ مِّنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا يُشْرِكُ فِي حُكْمِهِ أَحَدًا. وَائْتَلُ مَا أَوْحِيَ) (al-Kahf: 26-27). Hence, only Allah, is the leader of those who do not refer to any other decree except His and the Quran is the only book that the Lord revealed to the Prophet, And there is no one who can change the words of Allah, and the Prophet does not find a book to take refuge in except the Quran. According to verse (فَلْإِنِّي لَنْ يُجِيرَنِي مِنَ اللَّهِ أَحَدٌ وَلَنْ أَجِدَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مُلْتَحَدًا) (Al-Jin: 22) “Say: No one ever rescues me from the (punishment) of Allah, and I never take refuge except in Him,” he does not resort to any other divinity but Allah, and there remains no other reference for the Prophet except the Quran. This is according to the verse (وَائْتَلُ مَا أَوْحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ كِتَابِ رَبِّكَ لَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ مِنْ دُونِهِ) (al-Kahf: 27) “And recite what had been revealed to you of the book of your Lord, there is none who can alter its words; And you shall not find any *refuge* besides Him.”

The word *refuge* means that there is no (source of legislation) but the Holy Quran. When it is not so for the Prophet, it is not for others for sure. Thus, the believers considered Allah and His book, the Holy Quran as a sufficient source. (See Mansour, Quran Karim as the source of Islam at <http://www.ahl-al-Quran.com>).

The most important answer to their arguments comes through proving that the obligation made by Allah refers to obeying and following the orders and laws made by the Prophet. Yet, Mansour lowers the Prophet as an individual to the level of all people in the society and deprives him of

the possibility of any kind of explanation, legislation, and receiving people's obedience, hence he has based his weak opinions on arguments that are as infirm as a spider's web. Among the broad dimensions of the duties and characteristics of the Prophet that Allah has mentioned in the Quran, the following can be mentioned: The special understanding of the Prophet, the functions of education, explication, hence the necessity of obeying the Prophet, and his legislative and law-making authority. Below the particular status of the Prophet in the Quran is reviewed.

4.1.1. The task of training and purification of people

According to the explicit verses of the Quran, the duty of training and purification of people rests with the Prophet: (كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُواْ) (Al-Baqara: 151), “Just as We have sent a messenger to you from among yourselves to recite My signs to you, and to cleanse you and teach you the Book and wisdom, and to teach you what you did not know.” (See also al-Baqara: 129; Al Imran:164; al-Jum’a: 2). In these verses, reciting the Quran to people, educating them, teaching wisdom to people are among the duties and tasks of the Prophet.

4.1.2. The task of explication

One of the duties of the Prophet is to explain the Quran to people. It comes thus: (بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالزُّبُرِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ) (al-Nahl: 44), “With clear arguments and scriptures; and We have revealed to you the reminder that you may make clear to men what has been revealed to them, and that they may reflect.” Likewise, (وَمَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا لِتُبَيِّنَ لَهُمُ الَّذِي) (al-Nahl: 64), “And We have not revealed to you the book except that you may make clear to them that about which they differ.” Explication is something other than mere recitation. As indicated, the communication of the revelation was presented with the word “*balāgh*”. In addition, the word “*tabyīn*” means explication, elucidation, and interpretation. The interpretation of the Prophet is his *sunnah*.



4.1.3. The necessity of following the Prophet

The Quran emphasizes the necessity of following the Prophets in several verses: (رَبَّنَا آمَنَّا بِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ وَاتَّبَعْنَا الرَّسُولَ), (Al-Imran: 53), “Our Lord, we believed in your Book and followed your Prophet, inscribe our names as the faithful”; also (إِنَّ أَوْلَى النَّاسِ بِإِبْرَاهِيمَ لَلَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَذَا النَّبِيُّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا), (Al-Imran: 68), “Most surely the nearest of people to Ibrahim are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who believe....” A clear example of following the Divine prophets is to act according to their practical conduct. While a great part of the Quran includes the life stories of the Prophets, what could be the rationale for the citation of these factual stories in the Quran? Is there any reason other than considering them and learning from them?

4.1.4. The necessity of obeying the Prophet

In several verses of the Quran, believers are instructed to obey the Prophet: (قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَارْتَبِعُوا الرَّسُولَ), (Al-Imran: 32), “Say: obey the order of Allah and the Prophet.” Elsewhere, practical obedience to Allah and His Prophet is a requisite for entering Paradise (مَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ يَدْخُلْهُ جَنَّاتٍ), (al-Nisa:13), “And whoever is the follower of Allah and His Prophet will enter the heavens.” And in some contexts, it is a condition of having the blessing of guidance (وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَيُخَشِ اللَّهَ وَيَتَّقِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ), (al-Nisa: 69), “Whoever obeys Allah, and the messenger, they are with those whom Allah has favoured.” Likewise, it is true of salvation (وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَيُخَشِ اللَّهَ وَيَتَّقِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ), (al-Noor: 52), “And those who obey Allah and His messenger, and fear Allah and do right, then they will win (at the end).” Even obeying the Prophets has been introduced as the aim of sending them: (وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رُسُولٍ إِلَّا لِيُطِيعُوا اللَّهَ), (al-Nisa: 64), “We sent not a messenger but to be obeyed, in accordance with the will of Allah”. Furthermore, obedience to Allah lies within the context of obeying the Prophet (مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ), (al-Nisa: 80), “He who obeys the messenger, obeys Allah.” This is crystal clear that obedience to the Prophet is an obligation.

4.1.5. The Prophet's legislative superintendence (wilayah)

In multiple verses of the Quran, the Prophet's superintendence (wilayah) is mentioned beside that of Allah. The law-making (*tashrī'ī*) and the ontological (*takwīnī*) guardianship (*wilāyah*) rests, in essence, with Allah: (اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ) (al-Baqara: 257). Meanwhile, Allah also highlights the guardianship of the Prophet: (وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا لِمُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَىٰ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُّبِينًا) (al-Ahzab: 36), "It is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His messenger to have any option about their decision; If any one disobeys Allah and His messenger, he is indeed on a clearly wrong path." He has bestowed this guardianship to His Prophet, all along with His. In addition, He has clearly denied the believer's right to choose against the Prophet's ruling.

(النَّبِيِّ أُولَىٰ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ مِنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ) (Al-Ahzab: 6), "The Prophet has a greater right on the believers than their own selves." This verse indicates that no believer has the right or freedom to choose anything in contrast to the Prophet's order. Furthermore, Allah threatens those who evade His and His Prophet's commands to be thrown into Hell and shall receive severe punishment (وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَإِنَّ لَهُ نَارَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدًا فِيهَا أَبَدًا) (al-Jinn: 23), "For any that disobey Allah and His messenger, for them is hell; They shall dwell therein forever."

All of these verses show that the status of the Prophet has been in the view of the Quran that of the guardian, protector, and legislature of religion. They, therefore, assert that he was not merely in charge of conveying the revelation to his own people.

4.2. Sunnis' reasons for rejecting the intellectual foundations of the Quranists

In addition to Shii communities, Quranist ideas are rejected by many Sunni scholars who have criticized their thoughts and criticized their standpoints. In the following lines, some of the notable views are reviewed.



4.2.1. The first view

It implies that the Holy Quran is a comprehensive book, so it alone is sufficient for religious teachings and need not be explained by hadiths.

Critique: All Muslims, including hadith adherents, agree that the Quran is a comprehensive book. The debate revolves around the point of whether the Quran's comprehensiveness has any contradiction with the authenticity or verification of the hadiths, or whether it has been in need of the hadiths of the Prophet for receiving explication. It is true that the first-rate audience of the Quran was the Arabs who spoke the Arabic language. However, to understand any book, language proficiency is not enough, in many cases, the aim of the explicator is masked by and beyond an extensive dialogue, common words, metaphors, and so forth. When a book containing the speech of a human is like this, how could it not be expected of the Quran to be crystal clear for other people? (Allamah Badr 2019,138-142).

In the following verse, the purpose of the mission of the Prophet is said to be reciting and teaching the Quran: (لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَ يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ), (Al Imran: 164) "Allah did confer a great favour on the believers when He sent among them a messenger from among themselves, rehearsing unto them the signs of Allah, sanctifying them, and instructing them in scripture and wisdom." On the one hand, the recitation of the Quranic verses is a duty of the Prophet and, on the other hand, teaching the book is another duty. This shows that mere listening to the verses is never sufficient for understanding the Quran.

4.2.2. The second view

The mission of the Prophet was only to deliver the Quran, and it is obligatory for all Muslims to obey the Quran but not the Prophet. Hence, there was no obligation for his Companions and, by extension, for us to obey him! In other words, the Divine revelation is something revealed, hence worthy of being obeyed. In contrast, those discourses that are not fragments of the Divine revelation, whether hadiths or otherwise, are not needed for understanding the Quran.

Critique: In several Quranic verses, it is asserted that Muslims must obey the injunctions and orders of both Allah and the Prophet. It is asserted thus: (أطيعوا الله وأطيعوا الرسول) (al-Nisa: 115) In case the Prophet had not been infallible, then why has Allah the Exalted made it mandatory for people to obey him next to Himself?

Many of the Divine Prophets were appointed without any Divine scripture being given to them. In that case, if the speeches of any of such prophets had no authority, how could they exert any influence on their own communities?

4.2.3. The third view

The Prophet's instructions are proof for everyone; however, the hadiths that have come to us have not been reliable. Therefore, we are not obliged to accept them.

Critique: Hadiths have come to us in the same way that the Quran has reached us. If the same medium is not reliable, the Quran could also be denied. Hadith deniers say in response that the Quran has been protected by Allah based on this verse: (إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ) (al-Hijr: 9), "We have sent down the Quran to thee, and We certainly will have it safe." Allah has undertaken the protection of the Quran, but there is no guarantee in the case of the hadiths. The answer is that the very verse (إِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ) as well as the rest of the Quran is conveyed to us by the same trustworthy people. If according to you, they are not reliable, what guarantee could be there that someone might have added this verse on their behalf?

4.2.4. The fourth view

Quranic instructions are proofs only for the Companions, but not for us (Subhi Mansour 2005, 200).

Critique: This view expresses that the mission of the Prophet was limited to his own lifetime period and those of the Companions. Such a view is refuted by the following verses:



(قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا), (Al-A'raf: 158), "Say: 'O mankind, I am the messenger of Allah to you all.'" (وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا), (Saba: 28), "We have not sent thee but as a universal (messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them against sin."

(وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ), (al-Anbiya: 107), "We have not sent you (Prophet Muhammad), except as a mercy to all the worlds."

(تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفُرْقَانَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ لِيَكُونَ لِلْعَالَمِينَ نَذِيرًا), (al-Furqan: 1), "Blessed is He Who Hath revealed unto His servant the criterion (of the right and the wrong), that he may be a warner to the peoples." It is surprising to see how the Companions needed the Prophet's teachings, but we no longer need them. While his companions had witnessed the revelation and descent of the Quran, hence completely aware of the revelation of the verses and were living in the context of the revelation of the Quran, how can we remain deprived of all such benefits and grace?

Conclusions

The Quranism idea is based on two basic assumptions: (1) the sufficiency of the Quran and (2) denying the authority of the hadiths. The sufficiency of the Quran means that it is the only religiously justified source, hence there is no need for interpreting it, a view that requires nothing other than the Quran itself. Denying the authority of hadiths is due to the lack of features of the Quranic revelation in the body of hadiths. It has been the Quran that has been the very Divine revelation; the words and deeds of the Prophet were not based on revelation and refer to the human dimension of the Prophet; therefore, it is not binding for Muslims to look up to them as models.

The personality and thoughts of Quranist scholars indicate that they are modernists and pseudo-intellectuals in that their opinions and interpretations show that they have provided the ground for the broadest opportunity of producing personal interpretations of the Quran. Quranists interpret some of the verses that refer to obedience, subordination, and authority of the Prophet; they reject the verses that sound inconsistent with their attitudes toward the Quran.

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