

Critical Assessment of the Meaning of the Word "Rafth" in Fourteen Translations of the Qur'an

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نقد و ارزیابی واژه "رفث" در ترجمه های معاصر (فارسی) قرآن کریم

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Abstract

Considering that the Qur'an was revealed and translated in Arabic, the translation is the only way to transfer the valuable meanings of the verses of this book. Some scholars in this field, as translators and commentators, have transferred the Qur'anic verses from Arabic to other languages, including Persian, and have paved the way of referring to dictionaries. The current research, with descriptive-analytical method, deals with the issue of how the contemporary Persian translations of the Holy Qur'an have transferred the good interpretations of the Qur'an in the word "Rafth" to the target language. Before dealing with this issue, the word "Rafth" has been analyzed in the Qur'an, I'rāb al-Qur'an, dictionaries and interpretations. Then, under the discussed verses, contemporary Persian translations are compared, and finally, the appropriate translation of this word is chosen according to its structure. The result of the research is that a number of translators have used Arabic (Mu'arrab) and long (Iṭnāb) words to translate this word. And they have included Arabic synonyms in their translation language.

Keywords: Holy Qur'an, Rafth, Tafsir, Contemporary Translations.

چکیده

با توجه به اینکه قرآن به لسان عربی مبین نازل شده و ترجمه، تنها راه انتقال مفاهیم آیات این کتاب ارزشمند، می باشد. افرادی متخصص در این زمینه، به عنوان مترجم و مفسر آیات قرآنی را از زبان عربی به زبانهای دیگری از جمله زبان فارسی انتقال داده اند و مراجعه به کتب لغت را برای مراجعین تسهیل کرده اند. پژوهش حاضر با روش توصیفی-تحلیلی، به این مسئله می پردازد که ترجمه های فارسی معاصر قرآن کریم چگونه حسن تعبیرهای قرآن در واژه "رفث" را به زبان مقصد انتقال داده اند. قبل از پرداختن به این مسئله واژه "رفث" در قرآن، اعراب القرآن، کتب لغت و تفاسیر بررسی و تحلیل شده؛ سپس در ذیل آیات مورد بحث، ترجمه های فارسی معاصر قرار گرفته و مقایسه شده و در آخر ترجمه مناسب از واژه مذکور با توجه به ساختار آن انتخاب شده است.

رهاورد پژوهش چنین است که تعداد انگشت شمار مترجمین از الفاظ عربی (معرب) و طولانی جهت ترجمه این واژه استفاده کرده اند. و واژه مترادف عربی را وارد زبان ترجمه خود نموده اند.

کلمات کلیدی: قرآن کریم، رفث، تفسیر، ترجمه های معاصر.

Introduction

The transmission of sciences and knowledge of other languages for the use and conflict of opinions has been continuous and coherent since very distant centuries. This transfer, which is possible through translation, is not only limited to the transfer of meaning from the source language to the target language, but having complete knowledge on both languages, paying careful attention to the topic and text, and the type of writing among other components are other important factors of translation and it is of special importance in the translation of the Qur'an.

In this research, some verses from the Holy Qur'an (verses 187 and 197 of Surah Al-Baqarah) in which the word "Rafth" is mentioned, were extracted. And fourteen contemporary translations including the translations of Ayati, Arfa', Elahi Qomshe'i, Ansarian, Bahrapour, Payandeh, Khorramshahi, Reza'i Esfahani, Safavi, Fooladvand, Kavianpour, Meshkini, Mo'ezzi and Makarem are listed under each verse. The current research, while examining the meaning of the word "Rafth", tries to answer the following questions:

1. How is the use of the word "Rafth" in the Qur'an?
2. How is this word defined in dictionaries and interpretations?
3. Has the equivalence of the word "Rafth" been observed in modern Persian translations?

Background of research and necessity of discussion:

In the recent decades, researchers have made many criticisms on the examination of various words in the translations of the Qur'an and have written various articles on the examination of the words "Rūh, Nasht, Ḥalāl Ṭayyib, Ḥashr, ar-Raḥmān, etc." but so far, no independent research has specifically analyzed the word "Rafth" in detail. Although some articles and researches have been written, but while examining the general issue, they have only made a brief mention of this word.

The word "Rafth" in the Holy Qur'an

The word "Rafth" is Thulāthī Mujarrad rooted from "Ra fa tha" which is used twice in the Holy Qur'an with "Al and Lam" and without them:

- One is about having intercourse with one's wife in the night of Ramadan: "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast. They are raiment for you and ye are raiment for them. Allah is Aware that ye were deceiving yourselves in this respect and He hath turned in mercy toward you and relieved you. So hold intercourse with them and seek that, which Allah hath ordained for you, and eat and drink until the white thread becometh distinct to you from the black thread of the dawn. Then strictly observe the fast till nightfall and touch them not, but be at your devotions in the mosques. These are the limits imposed by Allah, so approach them not. Thus Allah expoundeth His

revelation to mankind that they may ward off (evil)." (Baqarah: 187)

- And another is on the issue of the prohibitions of *Ihrām*: "The pilgrimage is (in) the well-known months, and whoever is minded to perform the pilgrimage therein (let him remember that) there is (to be) no lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage. And whatsoever good ye do Allah knoweth it. So make provision for yourselves (Hereafter); for the best provision is to ward off evil. Therefore, keep your duty unto Me, O men of understanding." (Baqarah: 197)

The concept of "Rafth" in the word and idiom

First, we must define the meaning of the word "Rafth", the word "Rafth" in Arabic is as follows:

Ibn Manẓūr considers "Rafth" to mean intercourse and what is going on between a man and his wife, such as kissing, lovemaking, although he considers the original word to be an ugly speech (Ibn Manẓūr, 1414 AH, Vol. 2: p. 153). And its transitive form with "Ilā" has come to guarantee the meaning of *Ifḍā* (to reach someone or something, and it means intercourse and stewardship) (ibid: p. 154). Farāhīdī also believes that the original meaning of the word is an ugly word, which is an allusion to sexual intercourse (Farāhīdī, 1409 AH, Vol. 8: p. 229). And he considers it in the absolute sense of being ugly and indecent, whether it is related to sexual affairs or not (Ibid: p. 221). According to Rāghib, "Rafth" in Arabic means to

say or behave in an obscene and indecent manner, which is exchanged during marital intercourse, that is, it is permissible to have sex with your wife during the night of fasting (Rāghib Isfihānī, 1412 AH, p. 650). And the allusion is to sexual intercourse (ibid.: p. 359). Ṭurayhī, who is of the same opinion as Rāghib (RA), then writes: Before Islam, during the nights of fasting, one could eat, drink and enjoy one's wives before they fall asleep, but whenever they went to sleep, it became *Ḥarām* for them. Then the verse: "Don't touch them" (Baqarah: 187) solved the problem that the condition was removed before dawn or before sleep and after sleep (Ṭurayhī, 1408 AH, vol. 2: p. 255).

Ibn Fāris writes in *Maqāyis al-Lughah*: "It is all words that are ashamed to reveal it, and its origin is *Al-Rafth*, which is marriage." (Ibn Fāris, 1420 AH., vol. 2: p. 421) (Firouzabadi, 1952, vol. 1: p. 227 / Zubaydī, nd, vol. 3: p. 217)

Jawharī called it sexual intercourse and talking to a woman about sexual intercourse and also said: It is meant in the verse as intercourse, which is permissible in the night of Ramadan (Jawharī, 1990, vol. 1: p. 283), but in Arabic terms, Ṭabrasī said: the meaning of *Rafth* in the verse is intercourse, and they have said that its original meaning is the ugly word and is ironically applied to sexual intercourse. The author of *Qāmūs* said: It means that sexual intercourse is forbidden while in *Ihrām*. (Qarashī, 1412 AH., Vol. 3: p. 109) Azharī writes: *Rafth* means sexing

and enjoying, and its main concept is ugly, open and frank speech. (Azharī, 1967, Vol. 15: p. 58) Zajjāj says: This word is comprehensive of all man's desires from his family and his wife, and regarding the verse "No lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage" (Al-Baqarah: 197), it says that sexual intercourse and words that are the cause and prelude to this action should not be performed in Ḥajj. (Zajjāj, 1416 AH, vol.2: p.703).

It should be noted that the common point between the literal and idiomatic meaning of the word "Rafth" is that this word is considered an allusion to sexual intercourse. And in the blessed verse 187, because of the word "Women", it means sexual intercourse, but it comes with the word "Ilā" and said: "It is made lawful to you to go into your wives on the night of the fast" refers to intercourse.

The word "Rafth" in Arabic (Morphology knowledge)

In the study of the word "Rafth" in morphology knowledge, the word Rafth is a noun and an infinitive in the verse "It is made lawful to you to go into your wives on the night of the fast". (Al-Rafth) is Nā'ib Fā'il Marfū' (Ilā Nisā), Jar and Majrūr related to Al-Rafth because it is an infinitive and includes the meaning of disclosure, the sentence: "It is made lawful ... al-Rafth" does not have a place of I'rāb because it is appellative (Safi, 1418 AH, vol. 2, p. 377). And in the verse: "The pilgrimage is (in) the well-known months, and whoever is minded to

perform the pilgrimage therein (let him remember that) there is (to be) no lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage "(Baqarah: 197) (Lā) is the negation of gender, (Rafth) is the noun of La based on Faṭh and Maḥallan Manṣūb (ibid.: Vol. 2: p. 408).

Although "Falā Rafth" is a news sentence, but it is used in the position of Inshā', that's why in many traditions, the word Rafth in the verse has been interpreted as an allusion to intercourse (ibid.).

The concept of "Rafth" in interpretations

Allameh Tabataba'i, following the interpretation of the verse "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast", considers Rafth to mean any obscene speech that is spoken only in the marital bed, and in another position it is hateful and ugly to say. But here it is an allusion to the act of intercourse, which shows the politeness of the Holy Qur'an (Tabataba'i, 2013, vol. 2: p. 30 / Ṭūsī, nd, vol. 2: p. 136). Verse 197 of Surah Al-Baqarah and the verses before and after it are also related to the months of Ḥajj and the rulings related to it, which are stated in the phrase: "No lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage" some of the forbidden acts are stated. Makarem writes below this verse: "Rafth" basically means a speech that involves something that is considered obscene, whether it is sexual intercourse or its preliminaries, then the allusion is made for sexual

intercourse" (Makarem Shirazi, 1992, Vol. 2: pp. 50 and 54). Sadeghi Tehrani, unlike the opinion of other commentators about the interpretation of this verse, considers "Rafth" to be any ugly word and deed in human custom and divine law, and not only in sexual relations. Because it is the noun negating the gender, and contrary to the verse: "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast" it is not accompanied by the word "Women". And it includes all examples of ugliness, whether small or big, moral or practical, sexual or behavioral, personal or social, etc. "Ihrām is a prohibition of any kind of obscenity; Whether customary or Shar'i, such as sexual and sensual intercourse and all its preliminaries and attendants, which are abominable in all customs, and Shari'a has declared it Ḥarām while in Ihrām because it is a hard fence on all human desires; whether it is Ḥalāl or whether it is Ḥarām " (Sadeghi Tehrani, 1406 AH, Vol. 6: p. 133). Author of Kashshāf considers it equivalent to sexual intercourse (Zamakhsharī, 1407 AH, Vol. 1: p. 206) and Suyūṭī in Al-Dar al-Manthūr, quoting other commentators, also uses the word "Rafth" Here, it is defined as equivalent to sexual intercourse of women (Suyūṭī, 1404 AH, vol. 1: p. 218) and this is also the case in Jāmi' al-Bayān (Ṭabarī, 1412 AH, vol. 2: p. 156). From all the interpretations, it is understood that the meaning of the word "Rafth" in the verse "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast" is conjugal sexual intercourse, and

according to the author of Al-Furqān in the verse "No lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage", it means any ugly act that is mentioned ironically in both verses.

In the holy verse "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast" God Almighty talks about marital issues in the structure of irony and expresses this issue with the utmost good interpretation. The word "al-Rafth" in the verse is an allusion to sexual intercourse (Faiz Kashani, 1415 AH, vol. 1: p. 224). Allameh's interpretation of this word in verse 187, where he said: "The word Rafth means specifying every ugly word that is spoken only in the context of marriage, and in other cases, saying it is ugly and hateful." The irony is to the marital act, which brings the utmost politeness of the Qur'an (Tabataba'i, 2013, vol. 2: p. 30). Now, both verses should be examined in terms of the way of conveying meaning in contemporary translations of the Holy Qur'an.

The word "Rafth" in the Persian translations of the Qur'an (contemporary translations)

But it should be seen how the translators acted in the translation of these two verses and in what way they transferred this Qur'anic word to the Persian language (the target language): "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast." (Baqarah: 187)

"The pilgrimage is (in) the well-known months, and whoever is minded to perform the pilgrimage therein (let him

remember that) there is (to be) no lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage." (Baqarah: 197)

Ayati:

- Intercourse with your wives is Ḥalāl for you on the night of the month of fasting.

- Ḥajj is in certain months. Whoever fulfills this duty during those months should not have intercourse during it.

Arfa':

- It is Ḥalāl for you to sex with your wives during the nights of Ramadan.

- Ḥajj is in certain months, and whoever is obliged to perform Ḥajj, he must give up sexual intercourse, sin, and quarreling. Whatever good deeds you do, God knows so prepare luggage that piety is the best luggage, and be afraid of me, you possessors of wisdom!

Elahi Qomshe'i:

- It became Ḥalāl for you to have sex with your wives during the nights of Ramadan.

- Ḥajj (Wājib) is performed in certain months, so whoever performs Ḥajj in these months, should leave what is between husband and wife and leave wrongful deeds (such as lying and backbiting) and do not argue. And every good deed you do, God is aware of it, and take luggage (piety for the path of the hereafter) because the best luggage for this path is piety, and beware of me, O people of wisdom.

Ansarian:

- In the night of the days when you are fasting, intercourse with your women became Ḥalāl for you.

- Ḥajj is in specific and known months [Shawwāl, Dhu al-Qa'dah, Dhu al-Ḥijja], so whoever makes Ḥajj obligatory [by wearing Iḥrām and Talbīyah] in these months, [know that] during Ḥajj, intercourse with women, sin and quarrels are not permissible. And God knows whatever good deeds you do. And take baggage for your own benefit, which the best baggage is piety. O you possessors of wisdom Beware of me!

Bahrampour:

- It became Ḥalāl for you to have sex with your wives during the fasting nights.

- Ḥajj is in certain months; so whoever commits to Ḥajj during those months, sexual intercourse, disobedience, and arguing are prohibited during Ḥajj, and whatever good deeds you do, God knows it, and take baggage that is the best baggage of piety, and beware of me, you wise men.

Payandeh:

- Intercourse with your wives on the night of fasting became Ḥalāl for you.

- The time of Ḥajj is defined in certain months, and anyone who commits to Ḥajj should not engage in intercourse, bad deeds, and arguments during Ḥajj. And whatever good you do, God knows. Take baggage, the best baggage is piety. O, owners of wisdom! be afraid of me.

Khorramshahi:

- Your intercourse with your wives became lawful for you during the nights of fasting.

• Hajj is in specific and known months, whoever undertakes Hajj in those months should know that sexual intercourse, disobedience, and arguing are not permissible in Hajj, and whatever good deeds you do, God knows it, so take your luggage and know that the best luggage It is a burden of piety, and beware of me, you wise men. .

Reza'i:

• On the night of fasting, intercourse with your wives has become lawful for you.

• Hajj is in certain months; and whoever makes Hajj obligatory (upon himself) during these [months], then it is not permissible to have sex (with his wife), disobey and fight during Hajj. And whatever good deeds you do, God knows it. And take baggage, and in fact, the best baggage is piety (and self-preservation). So, O wise men protect you (from my punishment).

Safavi:

• At the night of fast, it is permissible for you to have sex with your wives.

• Hajj season is in certain months (Shawwāl, Dhu al-Qa'dah and Dhu al-Hijja). Therefore, whoever makes it obligatory to perform Hajj during these months by putting on Ihram, he should know that during Hajj it is not permissible to have sex with women, lie, and swear in the name of God.

Fouladvand:

• In the nights of fasting, it is permissible for you to sex with your wives.

• Hajj is in certain months. Therefore, whoever makes Hajj obligatory during

these [months], [know that] during Hajj, sexual intercourse, sin, and quarrels are not [permissible], and every good deed you do, God knows it. Take luggage for you, and the best luggage is piety, and O wise people! Beware of me.

Kavianpour:

• Intercourse with your wife became Halāl for you during the nights of fasting.

• Hajj is in certain months. Those who considered Hajj obligatory upon themselves (should know that) intercourse with wives, sinning, and quarreling during Hajj are not permissible in any way. Whatever good deed you do, God is aware of it. And take luggage, the best luggage is indeed piety. O people of wisdom and insight, be afraid of me.

Meshkini:

• It became Halāl for you to sex with your wives on the night of fasting.

• (The time of) Hajj is certain months (Shawwal, Dhu al-Qa'dah and Dhu al-Hijja), so whoever makes Hajj obligatory (by wearing Ihram) in these months (should know that) in (the state of Ihram), should know that intercourse with women, sin, and arguments are not permissible in Hajj, and whatever good deeds you do, God knows, and take for yourselves baggage, and piety is the best baggage, and beware of me, you possessors of wisdom.

Mo'ezzi:

• It became lawful for you to have sex with your wives on the night of fasting.

• Hajj is known as a month, so if one performs Hajj in them, there is no

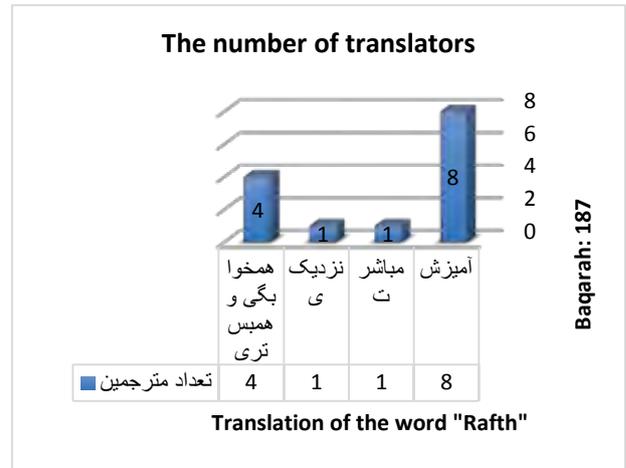
sexual intercourse, disobedience, or fighting in Hajj, and whatever good you do, God knows, and take luggage, the best luggage is piety, and fear me, O wise men!

Makarem:

- It is permissible to have sexual intercourse with your spouse in the night of the days when you are fasting.
- Hajj is in certain months! And those who (by putting on Iḥrām and starting Hajj rituals) have obliged Hajj upon themselves, (should know that) in Hajj, there is no sexual intercourse with women, and there is no sin or conflict!

Review and analysis of translations

From the point of view of linguists and commentators, it is considered that the translation of the word "Rafth" such as sex, intercourse, etc., is an ironic translation, which is considered a desirable translation feature. So based on this point of view, the translations of this verse "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast" show that the explicit meaning of irony has been mentioned by the translators and the correct meaning of the word has not been conveyed in the translation. It seems that the translator should be able to convey a good meaning with a synonymous and equivalent word and use the word "Relationship": "God made the relationship with your wives Ḥalāl for you on the night of fasting".



The translations of the verse "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast" can be divided into the following four categories:

- A. Sex: most translators have used the word "Intercourse" or "Sex" in the translation; Such as Arfa', Ansarian, Payandeh, Khorramshahi, Safavi, Kavianpour, Meshkini, Moe'zzi and Makarem.

- Mubāshirat: Only Elahi Qomshe'i has used the word "Mubāshirat" in the translation of the Qur'anic word "Rafth".

- Intercourse: only in Bahrapur's translation this equivalent is mentioned.

- Co-sleeping: Ayati, Reza'i Esfahani, Fouladvand and Meshkini belong to this category

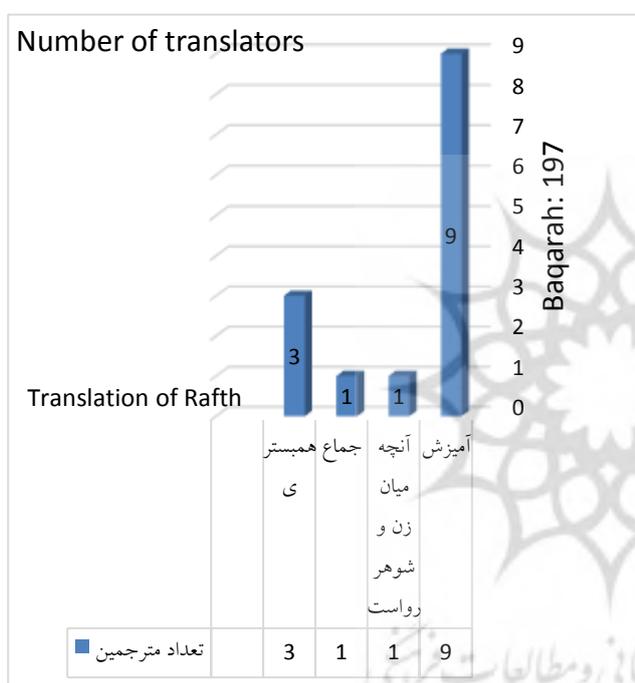
The translations of the verse "No lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage" can be divided into the following four categories:

- A. Sex: The translations of Arfa', Ansarian, Payandeh, Khorramshahi, Safavi, Kavianpour, Meshkini, Moe'zzi and Makarem belong to this category.

■ What is Halāl between husband and wife: Elahi Qomshe'i has used this expression to express the meaning of "Rafth".

■ Intercourse: Only Ayati has used the word "Intercourse" to translate "Rafth".

■ Cohabitation: Bahrampour, Reza'i Esfahani and Fouladvand have used the explicit word "Cohabitation" in their translation.



It is worth noting that in the translation of the verse "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast" by Elahi Qomshe'i, a lexical borrowing is used, which is adapted from the word "Mubāshirat" in the same verse and is somehow used to convey the good interpretation of the verse. Bahrampour used the word "Intercourse" for translation. Nine of the translators have used the word "Sex" in the translation, and some of them have brought the explicit word of

"Cohabitation", which; none of them can convey the true meaning of the word. An equivalent meaning should be found that is the same as the word. Therefore, the word relationship can be used. To check the translations of the verse "No lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage" under the word "Rafth", if the opinions of other commentators are considered effective, almost the same explanatory items related to the verse "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast" applies. But if we consider the opinion of the contemporary translator, author of al-Furqān (Sadeghi Tehrani), serious criticism is mentioned about all translations; because the meaning of sexual intercourse is included in the translations. In the translations of the verse, "no lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage", Ayati has used the word "Intercourse" and in the translation of cohabitation, the correct meaning of the word is not taken into account. And only the translation of Elahi Qomshe'i is consistent with the interpretation here, but in it is used in the form of *Iṭnāb* as "what is between husband and wife" which is general and includes all sexual acts that are forbidden. *Āyāt al-Aḥkām* are not excluded from this, but according to the translation of commentators, translators, and linguists, the chosen translation for the two verses is that in the verse, "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast", Rafth is used in the meaning of communication,

and in the verse, "No lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage", Lā Rafth should be translated as any (sexual) act.

Conclusion

"Rafth" basically means a speech that includes something that is obscene to mention, whether it is sexual intercourse or its preparations, then an allusion is made to sexual intercourse. The linguistic structure of the Arabic language, especially the Qur'an, is such that it has special characteristics that all its meanings cannot be easily translated, and even sometimes, the translation is unable to properly translate the words. Based on this, the translator is superior to the other one who is more familiar with the structure of the Arabic language and at the same time observes the structure of the Persian language and finds more suitable equivalents for the words. Based on this, looking at the translation of the verse "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast" in 14 contemporary translations shows that the translators have mentioned the explicit meaning of the irony and the correct meaning of the word has not been conveyed in the translation. Only Elahi Qomshe'i has used lexical borrowing in his translation and used the word Mubāshirat, and it seems that instead of the word Mubāshirat, he used the word relation: "God has made the relationship with your wives Ḥalāl on the night of fasting for you." The translations of this verse can be done in

four ways: Sex, Mubāshirat, Intercourse, Cohabitation, and sexual intercourse, and the translations of the verse "No lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage" were divided in four categories of sex, what is between a husband and wife, Intercourse and cohabitation. In the translations of the verse, "No lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage", Ayati has used the word "Intercourse" and in the translation of cohabitation, the correct meaning of the word is not taken into account. Only the translation of Elahi Qomshe'i is consistent with the interpretation here, but it is used in the form of Iṭnāb as "what is between husband and wife" which is general and includes all sexual acts that are forbidden. Āyāt Al-Aḥkām are not excluded from this, but according to the translation of commentators, translators, and linguists, the chosen translation for the two verses is that in the verse, "It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast", Rafth is used in the meaning of communication, and in the verse, "No lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage", Lā Rafth should be translated as no (sexual) act.

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