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## THE ARTISTIC CREATION OF THE NARRATIVE IN THE HEAVENLY BOOKS: YUSUF SURAH AS A MODEL

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## ABSTRACT

In a noticeable artistic-based structure, stories in heavenly books assume fine narrative pieces. The literary construction and various devices employed in the narrative exhibit a fairly noticeable piece of art. In general, the heavenly books follow an allegoric art to emphasize ethical and typical behavioural ends. However, the intended message in the heavenly books have moulded this end in a fine artistic methods. To explore this scope, this paper examines the distinctive narrative form delineated generally in the heavenly books with particular focus on the Holy Quran. The researcher applies the aspects of narrative including form, technique on the text to identify the artistic creation on the basis of the narrative approaches. The chosen sura "Yusuf" is taken from the Holy Quran, which noticeably and artistically traces the development of its protagonist early from childhood up to maturity. It sheds the light on the ups and downs of the central character, in relation to the surrounding characters and circumstances; and their influences on the ultimate outcome. The narrative in Yusuf sura text interweaves various psychological, sociological, familial constrains which ultimately result into a fine literary portrayal. With a fine artistic touch, the narrator follows the all-knowing mode whose narration includes the multitude aspects of the characters –the internal and external world. The text, further, gives a panoramic view of the entire world of the narrative which is arranged in an episodic plot with the employment of the cinematic technique of scene shifting. It is observed that the plot-organization, characters and struggle are dynamically presented away from the boredom of the historiography.

**Keywords:** *narrative, Holy Quran, artistic, Yusuf sura*

### Definitions:

Sura: chapter or section of the Holy Quran

Yusuf: the prophet Joseph

Al-Aziz: a prince in the Egyptian court

### INTRODUCTION

The heavenly narrative is, at the same time, history-like and fiction-like text which refers to a world out and similarly delineate a world in (Ganzevoort 2014). In a sense, the nature of the narrative presents itself as history following the literary stream in constructing its elements. According to Hayden White, the historical text, is like the literary text, presents a construct which is termed as 'emplotment'. This means that a storyteller-historian attaches to his text the perquisites of the

story form such as plot, character development, drawing conclusion. He, further, argues that such a text is '*essentially poetic*' (Tolan 209). The narrative form is a distinctive part in reporting religion and theology. Being earlier religious books, the Old and New Testaments can be an explicit example of the inclusion of the narrative mode. Stories of Jesus and other prophets including their struggles, ups and downs, with their parable end or conversional narrative, or miracle story— which is interpreted as an act of God— are an adequate

manifestation of the use of the narrative form in conveying the heavenly messages. On a based-storytelling form, the Old and New Testaments present various independent stories and episodes which basically follow the narrative characteristics. Stories like Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the Flood, the Birth of Jesus and many others are created with various features of narration in so far as theme, struggle, point of view, characterization are concerned. Likewise, what is presented in Bible is also applicable in the Holy Quran.

Indeed, this will take us to refer to the concept 'mimesis' in appreciating the work of narrative in the heavenly books in which the mimic representation is used as a tool to report things in the narrative text (Ganzevoort 2014). It can be said that the meaning in the heavenly book is basically approached through mimesis or representation of reality which is a means to fulfil the allegorical representation.

### **THE FORM OF THE NARRATIVE IN YUSUF SURA**

Interestingly, Yusuf sura exhibits a highly artistic pattern of narrative. This piece of narrative is different from any literary narrative text in Holy Quran as it appears in one independent sura. It differs from the common literary narrative—as it fuses between fact and fiction—simply

because the religious narrative is merely based on historical facts. Tracing the literary construction of the narrative in the sura highlights a lot of remarkable artistic qualities. The story basically deals with mankind's motives which are intensified to run the tension; these motives are jealousy, envy, erotic love and the struggle of dominance. Suspense accompanies the course of the episodes all along the narrative early from the beginning as the vision proposes an enigma which actions gradually attempt to decode.

The narrative is rather a fusion of two types of novel: a bildungsroman novel and didactic novel. In general, Yusuf's story traces the formation of the central character who is a typical of his contemporaries; and whose life is accompanied with ups and downs; bringing out these experiences. This fits the term bildungsroman (Madden 17). In the same respect, the story of Yusuf fits the requirements of the category 'didactic novel' in which the central character is set in relation to its society; and is organized to profit the recipient with knowledge by instructing him/her particular sets of ethical, religious or philosophical values—didactic novel is often a novel of character (23). This is clearly indicated as the sura is entitled after the name of its protagonist in which he lies at the centre of the narrative. The delineation of Yusuf

character in the narrative is parallel to the nineteenth century and early twentieth century concept of a character. In this respect, the external forces interact with the individual impulses within a social context so as to highlight the qualities of a character(24).

The narrative is episodic in its plot construction in which four episodes occur in the story: the first, the struggle between Yusuf and his envious brothers, takes the earlier ordeal—the ordeal of childhood. Here, Yusuf is involved in an encounter with his envious brothers who plot together to kill him or banish him in every possible way. This episode ends with Yusuf's rescue by the passers-by who carry him to Egypt. The second episode is the rise of Yusuf in the prince(Al-Aziz) palace where the story of seduction also takes place. In this episode, the second ordeal begins, which witnesses the purchase of Yusuf, as a slave, by Al-Aziz and his wife. This episode states the growth of Yusuf to be a young man whose youth and beauty attract all the court women and particularly Al-Aziz wife. The latter seduces him, and in return he struggles to conserve his chastity, therefore, she rebels against him and revengefully accuses him of an attempt of rape. This episode ends with Yusuf's imprisonment which inaugurates a new episode. The third episode deals with Yusuf's ordeal inside the prison where the

important incident of decoding his companions' visions take place. This incident ends Yusuf's ordeal of the prison and later approves his innocence. The fourth and last episode centres on Yusuf's moral and material victory and his empowerment as a minister (Al-Aziz).Then, his reunion with his brothers and parents takes place. This incident actualizes the early vision as his parents and all the twelve brothers kneel down before him. The four episodes are united by the central character who brings the fragmented plot together.

All episodes mark an end and a beginning; the end of a trouble(ordeal and encounter) and beginning of another one. Early in the beginning the reader senses the dramatic tension with the opening of the sura as Jacob, the father, precautions Yusuf of not revealing vision to his stepbrothers. The incident of the vision serves to be foreshadowing to what will come next. This vision is essential as it conjoins the beginning with the end ,and serves a technical device to link the whole. However, as soon as the first episode ends with the rescue of the kid, Yusuf, by some passers-by, which apparently seems good. Nevertheless, this does not settle down everything but it rather takes Yusuf to involve in a new dilemma—the episode of seduction and its aftermaths. The latter episode ends with Yusuf's unjust

imprisonment. Though Yusuf's imprisonment is seemingly unfair, but still it enables him to prove his chastity and innocence, and consequently awarded by the king to be his minister. Hereafter, Yusuf is reunited with his brothers, and later with his parents. Here, the early vision of prostrating the eleventh planets, and sun and moon comes true (Hameed 343).

The narrative follows the narration of the omniscient narrator, the dramatic dialogue and cinematic scene shifting. The story proves its narratives as it manipulates the omniscient mode of narration with the cinematic technique in constructing the story. This can give the story a cinematic compatibility which conjoins the incidents and allows a fluid and exciting scene shifting. The text is figuratively coloured with motifs and symbols; particularly the shirt motif which occurs three times. This motif is artistically interwoven in the course of the actions; and seemingly participates in determining the ends of the episodes. The first reference to the shirt is associated with the fabricated story of the wolf who is charged with devouring Yusuf. However, this charge is refuted by Yusuf's father who sees the brother's claim is unconvincing. The second reference to the shirt is associated with Yusuf's chastity and innocence of the sexual assault claimed by Al-Aziz's wife. The third

reference serves to end the father-son separation and miraculously recovers Jacob's blindness. Here, the shirt serves to refer to the recovery and reunion with the parents. Thus, the shirt is of two facets, it is a symbol of crisis and mitigation at the same time.

### **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ORDEAL**

In order to understand why human behaves, we need to verify their psychological motives. A great deal of psychology motivates the struggle in the story and intervenes in shaping the destiny of the characters. Various psychological motives arouse the tension in the narrative. As the story begins, the reader feels the tension as Yusuf's father, Jacob, cautions Yusuf of his son's plotting after revealing the vision. This focuses the attention on some psychological motives that govern Yusuf's relationship with his brothers and induce their driving motives. Remarkably, unlike other sons, Yusuf is massively loved by his father for being the youngest, and endowed with extraordinary moral and ethical features. This prestigious status stirs his stepbrother's envy, and attempt to dismiss Yusuf away from their father in every possible way and win their father's attention. Yusuf, here, begins his ordeal and goes up to the end with the consequences of these multiple psychological motives. In this form of

relation, the enormous love of the father results into the deadly envy and jealousy of the brothers. However, these negative motives are quieted at the end after engaging in a lot of hard experiences. An adequate impact of conscience returns the sinned stepbrothers to their brethren normality, and they end remorsefully. This experience exhibits the enormous challenge Yusuf falls in, in his early life which really states the inconvenience of such hardship to a boy as little as Yusuf.

In the next phase of Yusuf's life, love and revenge dominate Al-Aziz wife's relationship with Yusuf whom she is enormously stirred by his extraordinary beauty; and consequently she attempts to seduce him. This seduction also exhibits a massive challenge to Yusuf, who is naturally filled with conservative potential. This conduct is acted by an amorous woman, and later by the court women. This enormous sensual love from the part of Al-Aziz wife paradoxically turns into unbalanced psychological motives. She attempts to revenge upon Yusuf as he rejects her love and endeavours of seduction. This, of course, tramples her feminine dignity, and she aggressively and surprisingly charges him with an attempt to rape her. Further, she arranges a plan to defend her attempt of sensuality with Yusuf by inviting the city women—who always gossip about her scandal of

seduction—to see the beauty of Yusuf. She succeeds to indirectly convince the women—who later attempt to seduce Yusuf—to justify her sensuality. The women's excessive obsession with Yusuf unconsciously lead them to cut their palms with knives. This proves again the psychology of revenge that Al-Aziz's woman follows against those who accuse her; and also an attempt to reconsider her trampled reputation (Balqasim 82). The given knives in the hands of the women are a part of her plot, and an implied symbol of her tendency to revenge,

31. So when she heard of their accusation, she sent for them and prepared a banquet for them; she gave each one of them a knife (to cut the foodstuff with), and she said [to Yusuf: "come out before them. "then, when they saw him, they exalted him (at his beauty) and (in their astonishment) cut their hands. They said: "How perfect is Allah (or Allah forbid)! No man is this! This is none other than a noble angel! (Al-Hilali Al-Hilali and Khan 307)

Characters involve in multiple psychological drives in their conduct with Yusuf. However, Yusuf's self-control,

patience and wisdom validate his positive perpetuation in his community.

### **A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE /THE SETTING**

The narrative delineates two settings where all the incidents take place—the nomadic and urban settings. The earlier incidents take place in the nomadic setting where Yusuf, his parents and brothers live together. This setting portrays the hardship of the desert life where people struggle to live in various tough circumstances such as the states of drought and infertility. These circumstances sometimes oblige people to involve in a mode of quest for food as it happens to Yusuf's stepbrothers when they quest for food in Egypt. There, the organization of life is characterized by the tribal system in which the tribe (a big family) is led by an elderly figure. Jacob is the leading figure in Yusuf's family who lives with his sons and grandsons in one big joint family. This setting also depicts the ordeal of the bottom of the drain well which witnesses one of the most critical incidents in Yusuf's life. The well is one of the topographical features of the desert and a natural symbol of its hardship.

The narrative, then, depicts another setting after Yusuf is saved by a group of passers-by. He is then enslaved and sold to an authoritative family. This part of the

narrative witnesses various phases of the protagonist's life: his rise in the house of Al-Aziz family, the dilemma of seduction, imprisonment and his nomination to be a minister. The urban setting embraces the bigger part of the narrative in which the stately system and governmental rules are indirectly portrayed. Here, the mode of life the narrative states is basically different from the nomadic life in so far as the social, commercial, political and the moral aspects are concerned. In this urban complexities, the king stands for the supreme power who rules people as well as his ministers and army commanders. The material urban features are distinctive as the reader can notice that there are a lot of gates, palaces where the authoritative people live. There is also a prison which represents the penal constitution. The urban commercial system is referred to by trade caravans and the commercial transactions represent an advanced system of living., "*And they sold him for a low price—for a few Dirhams(i.e. For few silver coins).And they were of those who regarded him insignificant*" (Al-Hilali and Khan 306) Noticeably, the atmosphere of urbanization conveys the idea that people in general and women in particular are rather liberal.

.And women in the city said:" The wife of Al-Aziz is seeking to seduce her (slave) young man, indeed she loves him violently; verily we see her in plain error.<sup>31</sup>... She said:" This is the (young man)about whom you did blame me, and I did seek to seduce him, but he refused. And now if he refuses to obey my order, he certainly be cast into prison, and will be one of those who are disgraced.(307)

The episode in Egypt depicts a rather liberal role for women in the daily life and their participation in the public life actively as in the references the sura mentions. However, the references to the women's actions rather exhibit a negative implications as it is referred to Al-Aziz's wife whose actions are concerned with her attempts of seduction and self-defence; and how she attempts to prove that this is justifiable as Yusuf is endowed with irresistible beauty.

### CHARACTERS' DELINEATION

The story implies a lot of characters; but the very evident focus lays on few of them to avoid distracting the attention of the recipient, and maintain the artistic and dramatic coherence in the narrative (Ganem 37). Yusuf is the central

character with whom the reader goes up and down. He is the protagonist who involves in clash with his stepbrothers—who all together stand for the antagonist—as it is referred to earlier in the paper. According to E.M.Foster, flat and round characters are characters which are described in the light of their development in the work of literature. Flat characters are simple, and never witness any change throughout the course of literary work. On the other hand, round characters are complex, and witness various changes and development to bring suspense and surprise to the readers. Yusuf and his brothers are basically round characters who psychologically and morally undergo a lot of changes(103).The brothers appear envious and jealous in the beginning of the story; they later express their regret and subservience to their younger brother. This happens after involving in various experiences which enable them to restore their brotherly normality, "*They said: By Allah! Indeed Allah has preferred you above us, and we certainly have been sinners.*" (Al-Hilali and Khan 316). So is Al-Aziz's wife who appears, at the beginning, seductive and then revengeful – as Yusuf shows an extreme piteous behaviour towards her seduction—she expresses regret and admits her sinful act later on. All other characters, though minor but take part in producing an effect on the



course of actions in general, and the main character's development which acquires the pivotal concern. Though their presence seizes a smaller dimension in the map of the narrative, yet they push actions forward, such as the king, the king wine servant, Al-Aziz, women of the city, Yusuf's companions in the prison. However, the presence of Yusuf and his step-brothers involves the major episodes of the narrative while Jacob, Al-Aziz wife, younger brother primarily take less presence as well as other characters. This denotes a thematic indication which focuses the tension and the central struggle around Yusuf and his foes.

Yusuf is the central character (protagonist) whose struggle with his envious step brothers—who all together represent the antagonist—dominates the plot of the narrative (Ganem 38). Envy and jealousy are the psychological motives which turn the brothers against their step-brother, who is profoundly loved by his father, Jacob the prophet. On the basis that they take one standpoint, share one opinion, follow one action, they functionally occur as one entity. They function as one round character but with little exception and prominence related to the eldest brother and the younger one.

The only name mentioned is Yusuf whereas other characters are referred to by using their common nouns or by their functions or by kinship. Literarily, this adds more adequacy to the significance of the roles they played (40). For example, using only "Yusuf's brethren" is rather significant when the kinship is mentioned in a context of insincere brotherhood; or referring to Al-Aziz's wife as "*she, in whose house he was*" (Al-Hilali and Khan 306), this may represent to the idea that she lacks the motherly love her husband wants her to have, as Yusuf is bought to fulfil this purpose. Similarly, using the words "*And women in the city said*" (307) is to arouse the idea that the news of seduction overspreads through the gossiping of the women. However, the inclusion of this technique expresses an adequacy to condense the references in as less wordy detail as possible to fit the compacted text.

## CONCLUSION

Noticeably, the narrative presented in Yusuf sura proves a highly artistic construction which parallels to narrative texts much ahead of its time of occurrence. Every aspect in the narrative is literarily interwoven to present a fine artistic portrayal. The various narrative elements in this religious text correspond to the literary perquisites in any nineteenth or modern literary narrative. Although the

story narration is compacted but still this does not violate the plot-construction as the semantic treatment provides a sufficient literary perspective. Further, the incident of the vision serves to relate the ending of the story to its beginning which confirms the idea that plot-construction is never left loose. The narrative presents a typical delineation of the protagonist and antagonist whose characteristics are artistically exposed as individuals and as a whole (Yusuf's brothers). The psychological depths of the characters relate them to the core of the struggle; and similarly equips the narrative with extra artistic layer. The technique of flashback and the cinematic presentations of the incidents reduce the boredom resulted from narrating the historiography in the heavenly book; and give enough space to cover the long-term phases of the protagonist's life and his major life incidents as well. Though the story is episodic but still the whole text is unified with the presence of the central character, Yusuf, whose appearance in all episodes never let the recipients' attention be shattered. Noticeably, the narrative artistically delineates the relevant settings with various sociological aspects which distinguish the urban from the nomadic settings as far as the commercial, political, moral systems, and geography are concerned.

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