

Contemporary Theoretical Insights of the Qur'anic Stories: A Case Study of the Narrative Elements in the Holly Qur'an

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Abstract

The glorious Qur'an is the everlasting miracle, the divine message and the words of Allah (SWT) as revealed by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Peace be upon Him) by whom Islam is set and introduced. Qur'an contains the main guidance of all people, regardless to their origins, colors and races, to the right way and everlasting happiness. The fact is due to the power of Qur'an because it is the only ultimate truth from Allah (SWT); the only one creator of all creatures. However, the glorious Qur'an is introduced in different ways ranging from direct and indirect speech, dialogue, monologue and story –telling.etc. All these means aim at explaining the message of Islam. This article aims at discussing how the story is used in explaining the message of Islam as revealed in the Holy Qur'an. Also it discusses the main functions of the story as presented in the Holy Qur'an. Finally, the study proves that by using the story, regardless to its style, the theme is one; that is Allah (SWT) is all-knowing and wants people to be away from astray and have refuge in the mercy of Allah (SWT) represented in Islam. In other words, the divine guidance for all people is simplified and introduced in a narrative form.

Key words: The Holy Quran, Islam, The story, Narration, Divine Guidance, Qur'anic Stories.

1. Introduction: The Qur'anic use of the Story

Story in Qur'an is used to guide people to truth by telling them about the stories of ancient cultures including not only prophets, but also ordinary people in different varied periods starting from the era before the creation of Adam and Eve passing to the story of Adam and Eve creation and the creation of Earth and the stories of the prophets sent by Allah (SWT) to their people ending by the narrative details of the end of the world and the events following the day of judgment. As one can realize, the Holy Qur'an contains a considerable part of the story as a major element which has many functions which support other purposes clarifying the message of Islam and the words of Allah (SWT); including legislative matters that organize Muslim life. All these regulations are revealed by Allah (SWT) to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to remind people from all origins and races of this divine message as represented in Islam. Therefore; the story was one of the techniques used to give people a message to think about their life and have their right judgment to reach truth, the secret behind creating this world that is worshipping Allah (SWT) and knowing his mercy and well. This fact could only be reached by using their minds to think about the signs of the existence of Allah (SWT) as the only one God that creates everything around us. So, in the Holly Qur'an many stories are told as a guidance for people to think and evaluate their position as believers or non- believers. Allah (SWT) the almighty says: { thus we relate to you { o Muhammad (peace be upon Him) }some information of what happened before and indeed We have given you from Us a reminder (this Qur'an)}(Ta-Ha,aa,99).

2. The Significance of Qur'anic Story

A story in Qur'an is any narrative form narrated in Qur'an by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as revealed to him by Allah (SWT). This narrative technique is used to be set as a model of guidance and having lessons from the past events of the nations for all people, regardless single individuals and groups of people. The importance of the story in Qur'an is not literary in the first place; though there are many artistic elements in the story; still it is the Qur'an, the main source of information and guidance for all Muslims. In this context, the story is one of the means by which Allah (SWT) (simplifies the main goal of creation of people which is thanking Allah (SWT) the only God who deserves worshipping. The story includes many scenes of the good end of the believers on the one hand; and other horrifying scenes describing the events of the Day of Judgment for the non-believers. All these scenes are integrated with the artistic, aesthetic linguistic narrative form to give the expected end which is the knowledge of the Ultimate truth that is Allah (SWT) the only one God that deserves worshipping.

3. The Functions of the Qur'anic Stories

The story in Qur'an has many functions starting from the narrations of events which reveal the great ability of Allah (SWT) for creation. Allah (SWT) in the holy Qur'an foretells that the non-believers will claim that the holy book is just a story-telling of about myths of ancient civilization. This is refuted by Allah (SWT) who says that these stories are included in this book as a proof that this book is sent from the all-knowing Lord, "(Allah (SWT)), the omniscient of what is past and what is coming:

But the misbelievers say: "naught is this but a lie which he [Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)] has forged, and others have helped him prophet Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at it." In truth, it is they who have put forward an iniquity and a false head. And they [the misbelievers] say: "Tales of the Ancients, which he has caused to be written: and they are dictated before him morning and evening. Say: "the (Quran) was sent down by him [Allah (SWT)] who knows the secrets (that are) in the heavens and the earth: verily Allah (SWT) (is oft-forgiving, most merciful. (The Holy Quran, Al-Furqan, chapter 18, verses 4-6).

An example of this is the stories of the creation of skies and earth. The lovely narrative description of Heaven and the galaxy and other creatures. Besides, other stories describe the natural phenomenon as a reminder of the will of Allah (SWT); for instance the story of Noah and the flood, Moses and Pharaoh and division of the sea and many other stories which include natural phenomena such as thunder, earthquake, lightening and wind which are all means by which Allah (SWT) punished those who disobey the message of Allah (SWT) and at the same time they could be sent as a mercy to give life and a source for inspiration and relief.

Moreover, stories correcting the falsification of information mentioned in other divine books which were distorted by saints and clergymen. For instance the story of Mariam (Virgin Mary) and Isa (Jesus). This is an example of correcting the false belief that Jesus is a son of Allah (SWT), and denies his fructification by stating that Jesus is only a messenger sent from Allah (SWT) with the Bible as a word to believers:

- (1) Say: He is Allah, the One and Only;
 - (2) Allah, the Eternal, Absolute
 - (3) He begetteth not, nor is He begotten;
 - (4) And there is none like unto Him.
- (The Holy Quran, Al-Ikhlās / Sincerity chapter 30, verses 1-4)

The concept of trinity is corrected by many stories mentioned in Qur'an presented in narrative and dramatic dialogue to guide people to the monism which is the divine message of all holy books (Christianity, and Islam. Probably the last part of "(An-Nissa)" chapter 6 is a good example of such corrections:

O People of the Book! Commit no excess in your religion: or say of Allah (SWT) aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah (SWT), and His word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding From Him: so believe in Allah (SWT) and His messengers Say not "three.": desist. It will be better for you: for Allah (SWT) is One God: Glory is to Him: (far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah (SWT) as a disposer of affairs. (An-Nissa, chapter 6:171)

As indicated earlier, some stories came to shed light on some mysterious events that people could not understand in their times such as the story of the Cow which reveals the mystery of the murdered man about whom the Jews requested Moses to justify: "Remember ye slew a man and fell into a dispute among yourselves as to the crime: But Allah (SWT) was to bring forth what ye hide." (AL-Baqarah, chapter 2:72).

Another example of the correction of the falsification that were distorted is the fact that is repeated more than once in different parts in the holy Qur'an which is concerned with the nature of Jesus Christ. As known, Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of Allah (SWT) (God), however, Islam as the last message sent by Allah (SWT) to all humanity correct this belief. As mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, Christianity as any other Holy Divine book was sent with the same message that Allah (SWT) sent to humans by their prophets which is monism. But as mentioned in Qura'n, this concept was distorted by the saints and attributed trinity to Jesus, a fact that Allah (SWT) has corrected; because Allah (SWT) has no son or a daughter! Jesus was chosen to be a prophet for his people like other prophets before him. He does not claim that he is the Son of Allah (SWT):

"They say: "Allah (SWT) (SWT) hath begotten a son":
Glory be to Him- Nay, to him belongs all that is in the
Heavens and on earth: everything renders worship to Him.
(Al- Bakarah, chapter 2:116).

This same fact is re-emphasized in many parts of Quran; for instance it is represented in a dramatic form in which the narrative technique is transformed into a dialogue between Allah (SWT), the only one lord who deserved to be worshipped and Prophet Isa (Jesus Christ). This dialogue is presented in Al-Maida:

And behold Allah (SWT) will Say:
'O Jesus the Son of Mary! Didst thou
Say unto men, ' Take me and my mother
For two gods beside Allah (SWT) ' ? "
He(Jesus) will Say:" Glory to Thee! Never
could I Say what I had no right (To Say)"
(Al- Maida, chapter 7:116).

Also, the story is used to prove the ability of Allah (SWT) to give life after death presented in a simplified form to make it easier for people to understand. Probably the best example is the dialogue between Moses and Allah (SWT) in which prophet Ibrahim prays for Allah (SWT) to show him how Allah (SWT) can give life for the dead:

"Beheld! Abraham said: "My Lord! Show me how Thou giveth life to the dead." Allah (SWT) said: "Dost thou not then believe? He said:"Yea! But to satisfy my own heart." Allah (SWT) said: " Take four birds; tie them (cut them into pieces), then put a portion of them on every hill, and call to them: They will come to thee (flying) with speed. Then know that Allah (SWT) is exalted in Power, Wise."
(AL-Baqarah, chapter 3: 261).

Another example is the story of the companions of the Cave who were believers in Allah (SWT) and ran away with their religion from the tyrant who wanted to kill all believers in Allah (SWT). They entered the cave; and being tired, decided to sleep to continue their flight the next day, this is narrated in a very touching manner:

Or dost thou think that the companions of the Cave and of the Inscription were wonders among our Signs. Behold, the Youths betook themselves to the Cave: They said, "Our lord! Bestow on us Mercy from thyself and foretelling our affair for us in the right way... (Al kahf, chapter 15:10)

However, the element of surprise comes to play an important role in this story; instead of sleeping one night, they remained sleeping for about 309 years; " So they stayed in their Cave Three hundred years, and Nine(more)." (Al kahf, chapter 15:25) Other stories didn't take place at all instead they are told about future predicting events and situations that didn't take place during the time of the revelation of Qur'an by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)1336 years ago. These stories predicting events of life in future some of these are fulfilled after the death of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)and others are not full filled until our recent times which may happen any time. An example is the confirmation of the predication of the victory of Romans:

A.L.M. the Romans have been defeated- in a land close by: but they, (even) after (This) defeat of theirs, will soon be victorious. Within a few years with Allah (SWT) (SWT) is the command in the past and in the Future. (Ar- Rum, chapter 21: 1-4.)

Another fantastic narrative technique is the description of the Day of Judgment which is described in a very touching manner in which the sensuous, cognitive, imaginative powers collaborate together to visualize the scene; this narration is described in details in AZ-Zumar:

No just estimate have they made of Allah(SWT) , such as is due to Him: on the day of judgment the whole of the earth will be but his handful, and the heavens will be rolled up in his right hand: Glory to him high is he above the partners they attribute to him. The Trumpet will (just) be sounded, when all that are in heavens and on earth will swoon, except such as it will please Allah (SWT) (to exempt). Then will a second one, be sounded, when, behold, they will be standing and looking on). (AZ-Zumar, chapter 24: 67)

Besides, there are other examples of the stories which predict the end of the world and the appearance of new nations who will destroy the world and bring the end of life on earth such as the Story of " Yajooje and Ma'jooje" .Another function of the story is giving promise (for believers) of the blessings and perfect mortality in Heaven. A good example is the dialogue of people in Heaven after passing the Day of Judgment:

Verily for the righteous there will be an achievement. Gardens enclosed, and grape vines. Maidens of equal age. And a cup full (to the Brim). No vanity shall they hear, therein, nor UN truth. Recompense from thy Lord, A Gift, (amply) sufficient, (from) the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all between, the most Gracious: none shall have power to argue with him." (An-nabaa, chapter 30: verses 31-37).

To sum up, the Qur'anic story is mentioned as a divine guidance for those who refuse the true religion, as a means of giving them a chance to find the right way before time will be too late.

4. The Narrative Qur'anic Style

4.1 Repetition

The same story may be repeated in more than one place, but in every time it is repeated; it has an additional function with a new glimpse that sparkles a certain issue which was not hinted in the first narration of the story. Though the incident of the story is the same, but other extra information and details are added; in other words the repetition has a function, every time the story is retold, there is a new dimension added.

4.2. Summarizing

Some stories are told briefly; they are reduced to the minimum. Some stories are so briefly summarized to shed light on a specific detail. However, this same story could be found in another chapter of the Qur'an, but with the addition of the information that were previously reduced. They are added and discussed in details, in different chapters, once you finish reading the whole Quran, the story could be seen from different perspectives.

4.3 Expanding

Another feature which could be seen in many stories is giving the details in depth to show the hidden motives on the one hand, and the psychological, mental, social background on the other hand. However, the details are coherently tied together in every charming style.

4.4. Starting and Ending

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Qur'anic story resides in the way the story it starts and ends. The reader feels impressed in the way the story is narrated. The reader feels himself / herself as a part of the story itself as if he lives in that world. Even more, the reader, sometimes felt that the dialogue, in which Allah (SWT) addresses the character, is directed to the reader himself /herself makes this manes himself not only feel the experience of the characters, but even more live the experience itself. This Magnificent narrative technique makes the reader feel that the story come back to life though it happened centuries ago. The revivals of the events make the story-telling so impressive.

4.5. The Dramatic Dialogue

The dramatic dialogue is another narrative technique to tell the facts in form of dialogue such dialogue is that which took place between Allah (SWT) and (Iblis) "Satan" after refusing the order of Allah (SWT) to prostrate to Adam," An example is found in SuratSaad in chapter twenty – three from the Holy Quran:

Allah (SWT) Said: O Iblis what prevents thee from prostrating thyself to one whom I have created with my hands? Or art thou one of the high (and mighty) ones?. (Iblis) Said: " I am better than he: thou createdst Me from fire, and him thou createdst from clay." Allah (SWT) said: " then get thee out from here: for thou art rejected, accursed, and my curse shall be on thee till the Day of Judgment," (Saad, chapter 23, verses: 75-78).

4.6 Individuality

Another stylistic feature of the Qur'anic character is the individuality each character has its unique individuality showing human feelings that are conveyed in a great psychological depth. An example of this human individuality is seen in the incident in which Zakria addresses Allah (SWT) (his Lord) to bestow him a son. Realizing that old age is an obstacle that prevents both his wife and him from having children. He starts with a reference to the increasing grey locks and the increasing suffering which is related to old age. The need to have a child is one of the inherent human needs. The father's emotion is introduced in a way that touches the hearts and felt the psychological conflict of the father who is eager to see his own child. Another example of the paternal feeling is seen in the story of Prophet Noah and his attempt to convince his son to join him in his ship, but the son refused to listen to his father's calls; and thus was drowned.

The Holy Qur'an is full of examples that reveal the individuality of the characters ranging from the mother's feeling during giving birth represented in Virgin Mary; to the individuality of the son who cares for his father and asks him to convert into the new religion represented in the story of Prophet Abraham with his father. Every story has its own world and people, but all of the stories are about the main conflict that is the conflict between evil and virtue. Every story, though it may differ in its events sheds light on human emotions, and individuality in a way so touching because it is described from the creator who knows his creatures' feelings, needs and conflicts.

5. Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is clearly settled that the story is used as a major element represented in the narrative passages of the holy Qur'an, to play specific functions, which though varied in form, but truth introduced in a simplified, interesting, glorified manner. Every time, the reader reads this book, he/she will find him/herself moved into a higher realm full of spirituality and find rest and peace among its pages. No matter what scholars said about the Qur'anic stories, the Holy book remains open for further readings and interpretations.

Every time one reads the story, a whole set of interaction, which includes verbal, moral, psychological, philosophical and human nature, is introduced to the readers. A fact that tells the readers that the Holy Qur'an is a miracle in itself.

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