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Revista de Antropología, Ciencias de la Comunicación y de la Información, Filosofía,
Lingüística y Semiótica, Problemas del Desarrollo, la Ciencia y la Tecnología

Año 35, 2019, Especial N°

19

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

ISSN 1012-1587/ ISSNe: 2477-9385

Depósito Legal pp 198402ZU45



Universidad del Zulia
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas
Maracaibo - Venezuela

The Power of Symbolism in the Holy Qur'an: A Literary Analysis

¹Muslihed-Dien Nassief, ²Fahmi Salim Hameed

¹Al-Yarmouk University College; Musliheldein380@gmail.com, ²Imam Kadhum College for Islamic Science; Fahmi88@yahoo.com

Abstract

The present paper aims at identifying the term symbolism, specifying some symbols manifested in the Holy Qur'an, presenting a literary analysis to the specified symbols, and highlighting the power of symbolism technique as a literary miraculousness of the Holy Qur'an in presenting vivid images. The significance of the present paper arises from the fact which says that the symbolism technique is used in the Holy Qur'an before more than 1400 years to present vivid sermonic and social lessons, whereas recently it has become an essential technique in modern writings in presenting social images. The significance also came from that the paper intends to glorify the symbols used in the Holy Qur'an in presenting sermonic and lessons in the present life to preserve the moral and to get a reward in the life to come. The present paper follows the descriptive method in collecting and analyzing the data manifested in the Holy Qur'an. Due to the procedures, the paper arrives at certain findings. Depending on these findings, recommendations and suggestions are put forward.

Keywords: The moon, place, colors, fire, blindness, death.

El Poder Del Simbolismo En El Sagrado Corán: Un Análisis Literario

Resumen

El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo identificar el término simbolismo, especificando algunos símbolos manifestados en el Sagrado Corán, presentando un análisis literario a los símbolos especificados, y destacando el poder de la técnica del simbolismo como un milagro literario del Sagrado Corán al presentar vívidos imágenes. La importancia del presente artículo surge del hecho de que la técnica del simbolismo se usa en el Sagrado Corán antes de más de 1400 años para presentar lecciones sermónicas y sociales vívidas, mientras que recientemente se ha convertido en una técnica esencial en los escritos modernos para presentar Imágenes sociales. La importancia también vino de que el documento intenta glorificar los símbolos utilizados en el Sagrado Corán al presentar sermónicos y lecciones en la vida presente para preservar la moral y obtener una recompensa en la vida venidera. El presente documento sigue el método descriptivo para recolectar y analizar los datos manifestados en el Sagrado Corán. Debido a los procedimientos, el documento llega a ciertos hallazgos. Dependiendo de estos hallazgos, se presentan recomendaciones y sugerencias.

Palabras clave: La luna, lugar, colores, fuego, ceguera, muerte.

1- Introduction

As a definition, symbolism is a figure of speech that is related to the semantic level of the language. It is usually used to create a psychological effect. About this effect, Siebenschuh (1999:1) argues that symbolism plays a subconscious role in our life that unconsciously helps us understand different concepts that are difficult to be understood. This might be the main cause of why symbolism plays an extraordinary role in religious concepts.

Due to the above definition, it may be said that it is an important technique used in a speech which is usually used to take the listener to the different mood in terms of surprise, emotion, or sense. It happens when an expression is figuratively used to illustrate an idea, object, or person. Furthermore, it is a common technique used in Arabic, English and other languages. The decryption of the symbolic code is mainly depended on the culture of the community. For example, the cross is a symbol for Christianity and the six-pointed-star (David Star) as a symbol of the Jews.

2- Etymology

Symbolism is a derived term from the Latin (*symbolum*) which refers to a sign of recognition. It was widespread during the late 19th century. In terms of Literature, symbolism is a movement which stands against realism and naturalism. Eagle (1970; 68) argues that symbolism as a literary movement is originally emerged in France during the 1880s then spread to be used in English and other literary cultures. The first appearance of symbolism was in poetry. The aim behind using symbolism is to stimulate the feelings not to describe the events. In so, it is originally an impressionistic, emotional and sensual device.

3- The aims

The present paper aims at:

- 1- Identifying symbolism,
- 2- Specifying some symbols manifested in the Holy Qur'an,
- 3- Presenting a literary analysis to the specified symbols, and
- 4- Highlighting the power of the symbolism technique as a literary miraculousness of the Holy Qur'an in presenting sermonic and lessons in the present life to preserve the moral, and to get a reward in the life to come.

4- The Significance

The significance of the present paper arises from the two following dimensions:

First: The present paper intends to argue the literary miraculousness of the Holy Qur'an in using symbolism technique before more than 1400 years to present vivid sermonic and social images, whereas, this technique emerged during the 1880s. Recently it has become an essential technique in modern writings in presenting social images.

Second: the paper intends to draw attention towards the important role of natural signs in recognizing and comprehending our present life and the life to come. In other words, the paper crystalizes the relationship between man and nature.

5- The Analysis of the Selected Symbols

The present paper tackles some important symbols manifested in the Holy Qur'an. The selected symbols are:

5-1 The Place

The place is a universal fact that can be easily recognized by man through the events of his daily life. The place gets its significance from the event on which it takes place (Adabu', 1998:68). The Holy Qur'an mentions the place several times, not for itself but to mention something else. In other

words, it is mentioned not for the purposes of aesthetic, description or recognizing. In fact, it is mentioned in the sense of affecting the awareness towards a certain theme.

The cave, for example in Surat Al-Kahaf, is used to highlight the concept of worship. The Holy Qur'an uses the cave to symbolize a spot in which a group of youths gathered to practice their warship in life and to get a reward in the life to come. God says (When you isolated and hurt them because they worship God, We ordered that it is better to take refuge in the cave. Your Lord bestows his mercy and facilitates your affair) Al-Kahaf/16 So the place in the Holy Qur'an represents a spot of sermon and lesson in the present life and the life to come. In so, the place is a background to present events and characters in spiritual, emotional, and worshipping terms.

5-2 Time

Due to human appreciation, time is restricted to the boundaries of the lived life. In other words, the man looks at the concept of time from a very narrow-angle which is totally connected to the present lived life in terms of time and place. Whereas time is presented in the Holy Qur'an due to God appreciation in terms absolute, being, resurrecting, and continual changing. For example in Surat Al-Bakara, verse 259 God says (Or like the man who passed by a village which lay destroyed upside down. He said: how can God restore this? So God made him die for a hundred years, and then brought him back to life, and inquired: how long did you stay in this village? A day or less, he replied. God said no it was a hundred years, yet look at your victuals, they have not decomposed, and look at your ass! This is to make your evidence. And look at the bones, how We raise them with flesh. When this became clear to him, he said indeed God has power over everything).

Notice the three repetitions of the word (look) in the above verse which reveals the changing of the time and its effects. Moreover, through looking man stands astonished behind the wisdom of time taking sermons and lessons about the ability of God during the present life and the life to come. Due to the above verse, the appreciation of man should be linked to events that have significant in terms of death, life and resurrect, civilization, destruction, movement, and static.

5-3 Light and Darkness

Light and darkness are other symbols used in the Holy Qur'an. They are represented by mentioning the sun and the moon. One presents the day and the other presents the night. The alternative role between night and

day regulates life. It is

worthy to say that without the light of the sun, life would perish. Again, it is worthy to say that in most cultures, the concept of darkness is defined as the absence of light.

The symbols of darkness and light are frequently used in the Holy Qur'an. The word 'Nur' is employed to suggest the light, while the word 'Zulumat' is employed to mean darkness. They appear in different positions that carry different interpretations. For instance, darkness is either to mean the absence of light or absence of guidance towards the right path. It carries the meaning of the original of the universe. God says (And He Gave darkness to its night and then gave brightness to its day) Al-Nazi'at\29.

Again, the Holy Quran refers to light and darkness as amongst the first created aspects, as in (Praise be to Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and the light. Yet those who reject Faith hold (others) as equal, with their Guardian-Lord. (Al-An'am\1).

In another position, the symbol of darkness appears to refer to the ignorance and unknowing that leads to the perdition, while the light refers to knowing and awareness that leads to safety and peace. As in (He is the One Who sends to His servant clear signs that He saves you from the depths of Darkness into the Light and verily Allah is to you most kind and Merciful. Al-Hadeed\9

The above-mentioned verse presents two contrasted images of light and darkness. According to the Qur'an, man is first experienced by darkness. It represents ignorance, unknowing, and lifelessness. The light, from another hand, is a synonym to life. It is presented in Qur'an to mean faith, hope, bliss, guidance, and happiness. The upcoming Qur'anic verse supports this idea (God is the sponsor who supports those who believe and leads them out of the darkness into light) Al-Bakarah\257.

5-4 Colors

Bourn (2011:1) argues that colors have great perceptual, emotional, and spiritual effects. In addition to the moral and aesthetic aims, colors in the Holy Qur'an, carry a significant indication of symbols. This is because colors simulate human senses in terms of incorporeal spirit. It may be said that colors have a direct effect on an individual's mood.

Different colors are mentioned in the Holy Qur'an to convey different messages. Some are:

5-4, 1 White Color

Traditionally, the white color is a symbol of hope. The white color is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an more than one time and in different contexts to

mean different intentions. This is because the white color is distinguished by its relation to the individual's behavior and sense. The white color is mentioned in Qur'an to represent joy, gladness, and hope. For example, as in (And for those whose faces will become white, they will be in Allah's Mercy (Paradise), therein they shall dwell forever) Ale-Imran\107.

Other time, and in the context of challenging of Musa to Pharaoh, the white color is mentioned to represent a miracle. Consider the verse (And he drew forth his hand, and lo, it looked white to the beholders) Ash-shu'ra\33.

In another context, the white color is used to represent the purity and fineness as in (With cups from a flowing stream being passed around. Clear white, delicious to drink) As-Saffat\44-45

5-4, 2 Red Color

the red color is a distinctive color. In other words, it is to make the thing distinguishable. Bourn (2011:1) argues that the red color has great emotional effects. He adds that it is the color of both fire and blood. It is associated with different aspects such as; love, heat, passion, emotion, longing, sensitivity, danger, anger, etc.

Pour (2016:3), on his side, argues that red color is a symbol that refers to warmth, strength, and energy. He adds that red is an exciting color that brings headaches if one looks at it for a long time. Due to Islamic concepts, red color stimulates the emotional feelings, thus for women, it is unloved to be wearied, except for those who are newly married. In the Holy Quran, red color is mentioned only one time as (Humr\Red) as manifested in Fater\ 27 when God says (Do you not see how God sends down water from the sky, then We produce fruits of different colors; and as for mountains, they are tracts of white and red and are of various shades and (others) are ravens black).

In this verse, God addresses his worshipers referring to the dissimilarities of the colorful mountains on earth. Some of them are red. It is clear that red color is mentioned by God between two so distinguishable and contrasting colors which are

white and black. This distinguishable rank is because red is the dominant color among others. However, geologically, red mountains are considered as a clear reference of volcanoes. Moreover, red mountains are featured with heat and activity of explosions and outburst (Bolourdi, 2012:11)

5-5 The Fire

Traditionally, all over the world fire is used to celebrate a certain memorial. It could be an anniversary or a centenary. Moreover, it could be reli-

gious or social or political occasion. Customary, the symbol of fire is in a contrasting position to the darkness. It usually ignited in association with joyful occasions.

The Holy Quran mentions fire in different verses. it is mentioned to represent happiness and hope as in "When Musa saw a fire; he said to his family you wait here, I have seen a fire, I may haply be able to bring to you an ember from it, or find direction by it" Taha\10.

In another verse, the fire is mentioned to be a symbol of punishment for those who are unbelievers such as in (Those who disbelieve our revelation shall be cast into hell\fire) Alnisa' \56.

Socially, the fire symbolizes passions and pleasures. In this sense, fire is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an when God says (Have you considered the fire that you ignite? We have risen its tree to be a reminder and convenience for the needy) Alwaqi'a\71-73.

5-6 Blindness

Due to the social traditions, blindness indicates the mind-blindness or heart blindness. To explain this sense, it may suggest that man is cultured with certain knowledge and experiments on which he depends and practices. He used on it to degree that he thinks the knowledge he knows is the only correct knowledge. In other words, he is afraid of changing his experiments in life. He thinks that if he changes his beliefs or his lifestyle, he may face a disaster or may face a tragic fate. This is why man sometimes pretends blindness, and negatively affects himself.

In this sense, Temblett (1975:11) believes that any person with a certain culture comes to a new or different culture; he treats it with a partial mind. This is because misunderstanding, mysterious, and deception take place.

The same interpretation of blindness can be found in the Holy Qur'an. Blindness symbolizes to a stray and the loss of guidance. The loser loses both the first life and the life to come. In other words, loses himself. In Al-An'am \104 God says)To you have some signs from your Lord, so anyone who sees does so for himself, and anyone who turns blind shall suffer the consequence alone).

The intention here is that God explains everything by his accurate instructions, so the winner who understands and behaves himself, while the loser who does not understand. In another context, God says (Can a man who knows what has been revealed from the Lord is the truth, and one who cannot see, be the same?) AR-Ra'd\19

5-7 Death

According to the Islamic perspective, death means a predetermined step

to leave the worldly life and access the world of the afterlife. Practically, death is understood as the separation of one's soul from his body. Moreover, death is an inevitable fate for each creature on the earth. God confirms this idea in Ale-Imran- from verse\185 when He says (Every soul {with no exception} will taste the death).

In so, no one can escape from death in spite of all his attempting to do. God says (Death will overtake you wherever you be, even in the mightiest of towers) An-Nisa'\78

What exactly happened after death is not clear except some hints given by the Holy Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad (May the blessing and Peace of God be upon him) such as Melak-Elmout, the exit of the soul, grave's torture, the difference between a sinner and repentant, believer and unbeliever, and so on.

So, according to the Holy Qur'an, death is inevitable. But after death, there is the regeneration (Alba'th). God confirms this idea by saying (He will make you die, and then He will bring you back to life after death: to Him then you will return) Al-Bakara- from verse\28

So, life is a journey from God to God including death. Death is a meeting with God. Furthermore, it is a natural step towards the second life which is the everlasting life.

5-8 The Moon

Every society all over the world lives with certain beliefs, maxims, and proverbs. A well-known English proverb says "No moon, no man". The interpretation of this proverb is that the perfect man is born during the days when the moon is full. In so, the perfectness of man is symbolized by the relationship between the moon and a man defining his personality. In other words, a full moon means full man, half-moon means half man, no moon means no man.

In the same sense, the Holy Qur'an presents the same idea when Prophet Joseph says to his father Prophet Jacob (May the peace of God be upon them) (O my father, I saw in a dream eleven stars and the sun and the moon kneeling for me) Joseph\4.

The interpretation of the eleven stars is the eleven brothers of Joseph, while the sun is his mother and the moon is his father Prophet Jacob. So the symbol of the moon is associated with the perfect man that is Jacob, the Prophet.

In Holy Qur'an, the eclipsed moon carries the idea of bad omen. God says (Yet when the eyes are dazzled – the moon eclipsed – and the sun and the

moon are conjoined – that day man will say ‘where can I find escape) Al-Qyama\7-10.

The moon in this verse occurs to indicate a sign of the death and the ending of life. This verse presents an expressive image that warns man from the last day on the earth in which, to nowhere man can escape.

6- Conclusions

It is concluded that symbols are used is to create a deeper meaning than the text carries. It is to portray an abstract idea or subject into a popular concept. This portraying is called symbolic meaning in which the idea or the subject abandons its literal meaning.

In this regard, the Holy Qur'an employs the technique of symbolism to represent the intended idea. A fact to be mentioned is that the interpretation of the symbolism depends on the traditions, conventions, and customs of the community.

Another fact to be said is that God did not invent a new language when He uses symbolism. It is a concept that is already existed in the Arabic language.

Literature by its symbols made the same. An idea to be argued is that literary symbolism accepts more than one interpretation. This is because the interpretation of the literary works accepts diligence. For instance, a Shakespearian poem comprises

different coded ideas that are exploited by a large number of researchers each one decodes its symbols according to his point of view and due to the angle from which he sees the theme of the poem. In other words, literary interpretation is a matter of culture, logic, and rationality.

Holy Qur'an accepts no such diligence because Qur'an comprises texts and there is no diligence in dealing with the text. In other words, interpretation of the Qur'anic verse is not points of view, because Qur'an is not a book of secrets and mystifications. God addresses people in a clear Arabic language and due to their traditions. In different positions, God describes Qur'an as ‘statement, “ن ايب”- Nur, - “زون” Guidance, - “ىده” Carries no Doubt, . “يف بير ال” because they are rigid verses (ayatu-muhkamat) Ale-Emran, from verse\7. This confirms that the Qur'anic verses accept no diligence and carry not more than one interpretation. They are instructions in the form of rules and orders.

In so, interpretation of Holy Qur'an needs just for deep insight, mental, and spiritual awareness. Simply, the contemplation of the Qur'anic symbol is concerning with sermons and lessons in two terms: the present life and the life to come. Whereas the interpretation of the symbolism in literature

is concerning only with the present life including its future. In other words, interpretation of the symbolism in the Holy Qur'an sometimes needs further than culture, logic, and rationality to be penetrated.

For example in Surat As-Saffat, verse 102 God says (when Ibrahim goes about with his son, he said O my son I dreamed that I am sacrificing you. Consider what you think? The son replied; father, do as you are ordered, you will find me, patient).

This verse carries two sermons: the first is the lesson of obedience for both God and parents. For God, because He is the creator to be obeyed and He alone who knows what is the right for His creatures. For parents, because obeying them is a part of God obedience. In so, this verse carries a sermon in the worldly life and a reward in the life to come. The second lesson is patience, and this is also a worldly value that deserves a reward in the second life.

Another concluded fact to be mentioned is that the interpretation of the symbolism in the Holy Qur'an is achieved by what called 'key-phrase'. For instance, God confirms that (It is He who created you from dust) Ghafir- from the verse\67.

In this verse, God points to the lowest level of the biological origination of man.

Finally, it may be said that there is a great power in symbols where the same symbolic act can have a positive and a negative impact at the same time. It is

important to understand this power because it plays such a huge part in our lives despite most people not knowing about it at all. Therefore, once we understand it, we might be able to understand our religion better. It might bring a deeper meaning to our worship and even help us understand our reactions to symbolic acts of troublemakers and enemies of Islam as well.

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**UNIVERSIDAD
DEL ZULIA**

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Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

Año 35, Especial N° 19, 2019

Esta revista fue editada en formato digital por el personal de la Oficina de Publicaciones Científicas de la Facultad Experimental de Ciencias, Universidad del Zulia.
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