

Literary Aspects and Purposes of the Qur'anic Narrative between Classical and Modern Scholars

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Abstract

Allah, the Exalted, revealed the Holy Qur'an to our Master Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and made it the final message of truth addressed to all humankind. The Qur'an employs various means and methods to guide people and direct them to the straight path, diversifying its styles and modes of discourse in order to achieve its intended purpose: the establishment of truth, the refutation of falsehood, and the affirmation of the doctrine of the oneness of Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He. Among these means and methods is the Qur'anic narrative, which constitutes a broad and significant aspect of the Qur'anic text and its themes. It conveys the accounts of past nations and of Allah's prophets and messengers to their disbelieving peoples with complete truthfulness and a remarkable ability to communicate its message within an authentic, aesthetically appealing, and engaging artistic framework. Furthermore, the Qur'anic narrative has been "constructed with utmost precision from the elements of absolute truth, untouched by any trace of imagination and inaccessible to any intrusion thereof."¹

Accordingly, the Qur'anic narrative attained a high degree of beauty, perfection, structural coherence, and diversity in style and modes of presentation. It also fulfilled objectives and purposes that earned it the status of the finest of stories, as indicated in the Almighty's saying: "We relate to you the best of stories through what We have revealed to you of this Qur'an, although before it you were among those unaware of it"² (Qur'an 12:3).

Among the finest of these narratives are the story of the People of the Cave and the story of Dhul-Qarnayn. The story of the People of the Cave is the finest account of Allah's righteous servants and believing devotees, while the story of Dhul-Qarnayn is the finest account of kings.

Keywords: Qur'anic narrative, literary aspects, purposes, classical scholars, modern scholars.

1. The Concept of the Qur'anic Narrative

The term qissah (story or narrative) refers to "the account of an event absent from the knowledge of the person being informed. Therefore, the references in the Qur'an to circumstances that were present at the time of its revelation are not considered narratives, such as the mention of the Muslims' encounters with their enemies. The plural of "qissah" is "qisas" (with a kasrah on the letter qaf),

¹ Abd al-Karim al-Khatib, *The Qur'anic Narrative: Its Literal and Conceptual Dimensions, with an Applied Study of the Stories of Adam and Joseph*, p. 40.

² The Holy Qur'an, Surat Yusuf (12), verse 3.

Whereas “qasas” (with a fathah on the letter qaf) denotes the narrated account itself. It is originally a verbal noun that has come to designate the object of the action. Thus, it is said: “qassa 'ala fulan” when one informs someone of a piece of news.”¹

The terms “Qur'anic story” and “Qur'anic narrative” refer to the accounts related by Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, in the Holy Qur'an concerning past nations and earlier generations within the context of divine messages, as well as the conflicts that surrounded them between good and evil, truth and falsehood.²

The words “qissah” (story) and “qasas” (narrative) are mentioned in several Qur'anic verses, such as the Almighty's saying: “He said, ‘That is what we were seeking.’ So they retraced their footsteps, following their tracks.”³ (Qur'an 18:64). Likewise, He says: “Thus do we relate to you some of the accounts of what has passed before; and We have certainly given you from Us a Reminder. Whoever turns away from it will surely bear a burden on the Day of Resurrection.” (Qur'an 20:99–100).⁴

The Qur'anic narrative possesses a complete literary form, enabling every taste to find within it what suits and appeals to it. Each individual is affected by a particular aspect of it and responds to its call or admonitions according to his abilities and perceptions.⁵

Accordingly, the Qur'anic narrative has attracted the attention of numerous scholars and researchers, both classical and modern, due to its artistic features and coherent structure in which form and content harmoniously converge, captivating minds, intellects, and hearts.

2. The Qur'anic Narrative According to Classical Scholars

Arab scholars made early efforts to study the Qur'anic narrative, which received considerable attention from researchers of various backgrounds and orientations, including linguists, exegetes, rhetoricians, and scholars of Qur'anic inimitability (i'jaz).

A. The Qur'anic Narrative According to Linguists

Linguists did not address the concept of the Qur'anic narrative as a distinct term in their dictionaries. Rather, they confined themselves to explaining the meanings of the word *qissah* and its related derivations from the same root, or to discussing terms similar to it in meaning. Their focus was on the word itself without attaching the qualifier “Qur'anic” to it. This approach is characteristic of linguists in general, whose task is to explain the meanings of words and the images they evoke in the mind, rather than to formulate technical definitions, artistic concepts, or scientific classifications, along with the comprehensive and systematic discussions that such terminology may require.⁶

Several meanings of the term “qissah” (story) have been recorded by linguists in their dictionaries. Among them is Ibn Manzur, who identified numerous conceptions and meanings of this term. In “Lisan al-'Arab”, he states: “Al-qass” is the act of the storyteller when he narrates stories, and the “qissah” (story) is well known. It is also said: “fi ra'sihi qissah”, meaning a

¹ Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, *Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir (The Liberation and Enlightenment)*, Vol. 1, p. 64.

² See: Uthman Fawzi Ali, *Studies in the Miraculous Nature of the Qur'an*, p. 179.

³ The Holy Qur'an, Surat al-Kahf (18), verse 64.

⁴ The Holy Qur'an, Surat Ta-Ha (20), verses 99–100.

⁵ See: Sa'id 'Atiyyah 'Ali Mutawa', *The Narrative Miracle in the Qur'an*, 1st ed., Dar al-Afaq al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo, Egypt, 2006, p. 35.

⁶ See also: *Ibid.*, p. 36.

statement or a piece of discourse. Similarly, in the Almighty's saying: "We relate to you the best of stories", that is, we explain to you in the finest manner. The "qissah" is the report, which is also "al-qasas". One says: "qassa 'alayya khabarahu" he narrated his account to me. "Al-qasas" (with a fathah on the qaf) denotes the narrated report and was originally used in place of the verbal noun until it became predominantly associated with that meaning¹. The plural of "qissah" is "qisas" (with a kasrah on the qaf).

There are also terms in the Holy Qur'an whose meanings approximate that of "qissah", such as "khabar" (report), "naba" (tidings), and "hadith" (account or discourse). However, Allah, the Almighty, distinguished between these terms in usage, thereby manifesting the precision and miraculous nature of the Qur'anic composition. The terms "naba" and "anba" are employed to refer to events that occurred in the distant past, whereas "khabar" and "ikhbar" are used to disclose events that occurred more recently or whose scenes remain visible and observable.²

Abu Hilal al-'Askari pointed out several distinctions in this regard. Concerning the difference between "qasas" (narrative) and "hadith" (account), he states: "Qasas" refers to lengthy accounts transmitted about previous generations. Hence the Almighty's saying: "We relate to you the best of stories through what We have revealed to you of this Qur'an, although before it you were among those unaware of it" ³(Qur'an 12:3), and His saying: "And all that We relate to you from the accounts of the messengers is that by which We strengthen your heart; and in this has come to you the truth, and an admonition and a reminder for the believers"⁴ (Qur'an 11:120).

It is not said of Allah that He is a "qass" (storyteller), because this designation has become associated with those who practice storytelling as a profession. The original meaning of "qasas" in Arabic is 'one thing following another.' From this comes the Almighty's saying: "And she said to his sister, 'Follow him'; so she watched him from a distance while they were unaware"⁵(Qur'an 28:11). A lengthy account is called "qasas" because its parts follow one another in succession until it becomes extended."⁶

There is no doubt that the linguistic meaning of any term is often closely related to, or connected with, its terminological meaning and serves as the basis for determining the intended concept.

B. The Qur'anic Narrative According to the Exegetes

In their treatment of the term "qasas" as it appears in the Holy Qur'an and the forms derived from the same root, some exegetes combined both the linguistic and the religious-terminological perspectives. In Surat al-Kahf, Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, mentions this term in His saying: "He said, 'That is what we were seeking.' So they retraced their footsteps, following their tracks."⁷(Qur'an 18:64). This occurred when Prophet Moses and his servant

¹ Ibn Manzur, Lisan al-'Arab, Vol. 7, pp. 73–74.

² See: Sa'id 'Atiyyah 'Ali Mutawa', The Narrative Miracle in the Qur'an, p. 37.

³ The Holy Qur'an, Surat Yusuf (12), verse 3.

⁴ The Holy Qur'an, Surat Hud (11), verse 120.

⁵ The Holy Qur'an, Surat al-Qasas (28), verse 11.

⁶ Abu Hilal al-'Askari, Al-Furuq al-Lughawiyyah (Linguistic Differences), edited by Muhammad Ibrahim Salim, Dar al-'Ilm wa al-Thaqafah for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, Egypt, pp. 41–42.

⁷ The Holy Qur'an, Surat al-Kahf (18), verse 64.

forgot their fish and retraced their steps. Thus, “qasasan” means that they followed their tracks closely, or that they returned while tracing their footsteps.¹

According to al-Zamakhshari's interpretation, the word “qasasan” in this noble verse carries the meaning of following or tracking, as noted by Abu Hilal al-'Askari. It may also convey the meaning of narration or recounting stories and accounts, especially given the length and difficulty of the journey. Al-Zamakhshari indicated the acceptability of both meanings by presenting them as alternatives connected by the conjunction “or.”

In examining the approaches of classical exegetes to the contents of the Qur'anic narratives, two trends may be identified.

The First Trend

This group focused primarily on the moral lesson ('ibrah) contained in the Qur'anic narrative, which often led them to neglect supporting their views and interpretations with the arguments and evidence necessary to refute the claims and opinions of deniers and skeptics. As noted: “In the major works of Qur'anic exegesis, such as “Jami' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an” by Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, “Al-Kashf wa al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an” by Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Tha'labi, “Al-Siraj al-Munir fi al-I'alah 'ala Ma'rifat Kalam Rabbina al-Hakim al-Khabir” by Shams al-Din al-Shirbini, and “Lubab al-Ta'wil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil” by Ibn Muhammad al-Shayhi, known as al-Khazin, among other works of exegesis, one finds a greater emphasis on moral instruction, prolonged attention to the events themselves, and a meticulous investigation of the authenticity of narrations, particularly those stories that became proverbial.”²

This preoccupation with moral lessons and with lengthy, detailed accounts, rather than with strong argumentation as a means of persuasion, proof, and support of a particular position, contributed to the weakness of these interpretations when confronted by the enemies of Islam and those seeking to undermine it.

These exegetical works introduced numerous details and Isra'iliyyat (Judeo-Christian traditions) into the stories of the prophets, which led Orientalists to characterize them as weak. Some even used them as evidence against religion, describing them as myths or as forms of artistic creation a position notably associated with Muhammad Ahmad Khalaf Allah.

Nevertheless, this does not diminish the merit of those distinguished scholars in their comprehensive treatment of the Qur'anic narratives from various perspectives, particularly the linguistic and rhetorical dimensions. They also attributed accounts and legendary reports to their original transmitters and endeavored to discuss the circumstances and details of each narrative³, as well as the events and situations connected to it, specifying its time and place (including the names of locations) and identifying its characters.⁴

¹ Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Ta'wil, p. 625.

² Khalid Ahmad Abu Jundi, The Artistic Aspect of the Qur'anic Narrative: Its Methodology and Structural Foundations, Dar al-Shihab for Printing and Publishing, Batna, Algeria, p. 86.

³ See: *ibid.*, pp. 86–87.

⁴ See: Al-Tahami Naqrah, The Psychology of the Qur'anic Narrative, Doctoral Dissertation, Third Cycle, University of Algiers, 1971. Tunis: Tunisian Distribution Company, 1974, p. 29.

For example, in al-Tabari's exegesis, the name of the cave to which the youths retreated in Surat al-Kahf is given as “Banjalus,” while the name of the city from which they fled is “Afsus.”¹ This leaves no room for doubt regarding the sincerity and integrity of these scholars' intentions and demonstrates their scholarly honesty and their reverence for Allah, the Almighty, in their study and interpretation of His noble words.

The Second Trend

Another group of exegetes adopted an analytical approach while remaining committed to the boundaries of the Qur'anic text. They highlighted the lessons and admonitions contained in the narratives, responded to the doubts and objections raised concerning them, and explained the factors underlying the effectiveness of their rhetorical style and rational arguments. Among the representatives of this approach are Ibn Kathir in “Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim”, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi in “Mafatih al-Ghayb”, al-Zamakhshari in “Al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Ta'wil”, and Nasir al-Din ibn 'Abd Allah al-Baydawi in “Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil”.

The authors of these exegetical works generally relied on the method of interpreting the Qur'an through the Qur'an itself, as well as through the Sunnah and authentic transmitted reports. If they included certain accounts concerning Qur'anic narratives from biographers and historians, it was either because such reports were widely transmitted and well known, consistent with the truths of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and capable of shedding light on matters requiring clarification and explanation, or because they were fabricated reports that necessitated refutation and warning.²

These exegetes were careful to verify information and ensure accuracy. Whenever they cited material from the Isra'iliyyat traditions, they explicitly identified and drew attention to it. Likewise, when discussing a particular issue, they supported their interpretations with appropriate evidence that strengthened and substantiated their exegetical conclusions rather than weakening them.

C. The Qur'anic Narrative According to Scholars of Rhetoric and Qur'anic Inimitability

In their study of the Qur'anic text, rhetoricians and scholars of Qur'anic inimitability (i'jaz) focused primarily on demonstrating its miraculous nature and identifying the aspects of this inimitability, particularly those related to its composition, style, arrangement of words, and the harmony of its letters and verse endings. They generally did not move beyond the level of the individual verse to examine the text or narrative as a complete unit. This is because the rhetoricians of that period “occupied themselves with fruitless debates concerning whether eloquence resided in wording or meaning. Some were so dominated by the spirit of rhetorical rules that they obscured the coordinated overall beauty of the text, while others turned away from it in favor of classification and categorization.”³ Among the distinguished scholars of Qur'anic inimitability who devoted their efforts to the study and service of the Word of Allah, the Almighty, were al-Rummani in “Al-Nukat fi I'jaz al-Qur'an”, al-Khattabi in “Bayan I'jaz al-

¹ See: Al-Tabari, Tafsir al-Tabari from his book Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an, edited, verified, and annotated by Bashshar 'Awwad Ma'ruf and 'Isam Faris al-Harastani, 1st ed., Mu'assasat al-Risalah for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Beirut, Lebanon, 1415 AH/1994 CE, Vol. 5, pp. 84, 88.

² Al-Tahami Naqrah, The Psychology of the Qur'anic Narrative, p. 31.

³ Sayyid Qutb, Artistic Imagery in the Qur'an, p. 29.

Qur'an", al-Baqillani in "I'jaz al-Qur'an", 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani in "Dala'il al-I'jaz", and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti in "Mu'tarak al-Aqran fi I'jaz al-Qur'an". Most scholars of Qur'anic inimitability devoted considerable attention to the repetition of certain passages within a single Qur'anic narrative in different styles. They regarded such repetition as evidence of the excellence of the Qur'an's composition and the perfection of its structure, while also viewing it as a point of weakness for the polytheists, who were incapable of producing anything comparable to the Qur'anic text. According to al-Baqillani, the benefit of this repetition lies in the fact that: "The repetition of the same narrative in different expressions conveying a single meaning is among the most difficult forms of discourse, through which eloquence and rhetorical excellence become manifest. Many narratives are repeated in different places and according to varying arrangements, thereby demonstrating to them their inability to produce anything comparable, whether initially or through repetition."¹ Thus, the deniers were incapable of producing anything that could rival the verses and chapters of the Holy Qur'an. Meanwhile, Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, displayed the beauty and eloquence of His speech in diverse forms, varying the narration of the stories of His prophets and repeatedly mentioning them as evidence of His supreme and miraculous power.

In this regard, al-Suyuti states: "When the same narrative is repeated, its wording in each instance contains additions and omissions, advances and delays, and is presented in a style different from that of the others. This demonstrates the remarkable ability to express a single matter through diverse forms of composition. It also attracts souls to listen, since human nature is inclined toward variety and takes pleasure in renewed forms. Furthermore, it reveals a distinctive characteristic of the Qur'an, for despite such repetition, no awkwardness appears in its wording and no weariness is felt upon hearing it. In this way, it differs fundamentally from human speech."²

Several narratives are repeated in the Holy Qur'an, such as the story of Prophet Adam (peace be upon him), as well as the stories of Moses and Noah (peace be upon them).

Whatever the case may be regarding the Qur'anic narrative, the undeniable fact remains that it constitutes a unique artistic phenomenon within the Qur'anic text. It has attracted considerable attention from both classical and modern scholars, regardless of the particular aspect examined by each researcher or school of thought. It is sufficient that it forms part of the Word of Allah, the Almighty; consequently, it shares in the Qur'an's qualities of inimitability, eloquence, and rhetorical excellence. These are precisely the aspects upon which the scholars of this trend concentrated in their studies of the Qur'anic narrative.

3. The Qur'anic Narrative According to Modern Scholars

Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, mentions the act of narration (qass) in several passages of the Holy Qur'an as noted previously which indicates that the reports, accounts, and stories He relates concerning earlier prophets and other peoples fall within the category of narrative. Since these accounts originate from Allah and are contained within the Holy Qur'an, they are regarded as Qur'anic narratives.

¹ Al-Baqillani, *The Inimitability of the Qur'an*, p. 64.

² Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Mu'tarak al-Aqran fi I'jaz al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1, p. 264.

What is remarkable, however, is that some modern scholars and authors have denied the existence of this important category within the Qur'an, despite its significance and its prominent artistic, moral, and religious dimensions.

Bakri Khalaf al-Shaykh, for instance, notes that literary scholars have identified three essential artistic elements of a narrative: theme, characters, and dialogue. They further establish precise criteria and conditions for these elements that qualify a work as artistic narrative.¹

If we examine the Qur'anic narrative closely, we find that these three elements are indeed present, along with other artistic features such as modes of presentation, narration, description, and imagery. Nevertheless, this researcher excludes the Qur'anic narrative from the category of artistic storytelling as defined by modern literary critics. He states: "The narrative in the Qur'an is not an independent artistic work in terms of its subject matter, method of presentation, or sequence of events, as is the case with artistic storytelling. Rather, it is one of the many means employed by the Qur'an for its fundamental purpose, namely legislation and the formation of the individual and society. The narrative that appears in it does not differ in its objective from the parable that it presents to people."²

Although this view contains elements of validity, it should not lead to the denial of the artistic dimension of the Qur'anic narrative, which, like the Qur'anic text as a whole, is itself miraculous. Indeed, it may be acknowledged that the Qur'an employs narrative as a means of religious and social exhortation, moral guidance, and the transmission of messages to humanity at large. However, all of this is presented within a miraculous artistic and narrative framework. If the Qur'anic narrative were not artistic in nature, why would it captivate minds, astonish intellects, and profoundly affect human souls? Moreover, why should the Qur'anic narrative be evaluated according to artistic standards established by modern critics when the Qur'an historically preceded them and represented the earliest and most extraordinary example of artistic and narrative expression?

In reality, there is no justification for such a position. As one scholar observes: "The artistic narrative in the Qur'an provided me with both the artistic method and the moral lesson. In the latter sense, it became a part of the Holy Qur'an, contributing to the formation of the individual and society and guiding human life. In the former sense, it was never separated from the Qur'an, for it constituted the miraculous model of the art of narrative construction."³

The original model or prototype is not ordinarily subjected to rules formulated much later than itself. Despite its chronological precedence, the Qur'anic narrative has demonstrated its coherence and the completeness of its constituent elements. While it undoubtedly serves religious purposes, it simultaneously fulfills artistic purposes through its presentation of scenes and images. Qur'anic expression deliberately employs artistic beauty as a means of emotional influence, addressing the religious sensibility through the language of aesthetic expression.⁴

In a different context, Dr. Muhammad Ahmad Khalaf Allah acknowledges the literary and artistic dimensions of the Qur'anic narrative but classifies it into three categories: historical,

¹ See: Bakri Shaykh Amin, *Artistic Expression in the Qur'an*, 4th ed., Dar al-Shuruq, Beirut, 1980, p. 216.

² Ibid., p. 217.

³ Khalid Ahmad Abu Jundi, *The Artistic Aspect of the Qur'anic Narrative: Its Methodology and Structural Foundations*, p. 134.

⁴ See: Sayyid Qutb, *Artistic Imagery in the Qur'an*, p. 143.

representational, and mythical narratives. At the same time, he recognizes that classical exegetes did not treat myth as an element of the Qur'anic narrative and that modern scholars have likewise shown little acceptance of such an approach. Indeed, there has been a clear reluctance to associate anything described as mythological with the Holy Qur'an.¹

This position raises certain reservations, particularly regarding the claim that the Qur'an employs myth in its narratives. Nevertheless, Khalaf Allah had previously asserted the existence of fictional narrative in the form of representational narrative, stating: "We shall find no one who disputes the existence of representational narrative in the Holy Qur'an, nor that it is a product of imagination. Imagination necessarily dominates this type of narrative because human beings have a need for it and because it has long been employed in their rhetorical expression. Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, addresses them through forms of discourse to which they are accustomed."²

The reason for this reservation lies in the rejection of imagination as a constituent element of the Qur'anic narrative, since myth generally departs from truth toward imagination and irrationality. In this regard, John Cohen states: "I cannot agree with Claude Lévi-Strauss that myth is a 'logical' structure."³

As previously established, the Holy Qur'an addressed the Arabs through forms of expression familiar to them, employing eloquence and remarkable mastery of style and rhetoric. It surpassed them and rendered them incapable of producing anything comparable. However, this does not mean that it addressed them through narratives founded upon imagination, even if imagination itself may constitute an artistic device. If the Qur'an makes use of imagination, it does so in the mind of the recipient, who employs his intellect to envision and reconstruct the scene being described, not because the scene itself is a product of imagination. If, from the outset, we maintain that the Qur'an in its entirety serves as proof for the righteous and as evidence against the deniers, how could persuasion be achieved through imaginary arguments when the Qur'an fundamentally relies upon reason and reality?

In this context, 'Abd al-Karim al-Khatib rejects the presence of imagination in the Qur'anic narrative, stating: "What we wish to affirm here is that the Qur'anic narrative has been constructed with utmost precision from the elements of absolute truth, untouched by any trace of imagination and inaccessible to any intrusion thereof. Yet, despite this, it remains a narrative, for the Qur'an has designated everything presented in this manner as "qasas" (narrative)."⁴

The Qur'anic narrative is founded upon truth, despite containing events that may appear strange or extraordinary. It is sufficient that the narrator is Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, for believers to accept all the accounts and stories contained in the Qur'an as part of their faith in the unseen and in realities that remain unknown to them. At the same time, these narratives are understood as actual events that truly occurred in the distant past and are described and

¹ See: Muhammad Ahmad Khalaf Allah, *The Narrative Art in the Holy Qur'an*, 1st ed., Beirut, 1950–1951, p. 197.

² *Ibid.*, p. 195.

³ John Cohen, *The Higher Language: Poetic Theory*, translated, introduced, and annotated by Ahmed Darwish, 2nd ed., Supreme Council of Culture, 2000, p. 195.

⁴ Abd al-Karim al-Khatib, *The Qur'anic Narrative: Its Literal and Conceptual Dimensions*, p. 40.

portrayed in a realistic manner, leaving no place for imagination. Nevertheless, they retain an element of suspense and possess the ability to captivate the reader.

4. The Purposes of the Qur'anic Narrative and Its Impact on the Recipient

Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, devoted great attention to the narrative dimension of the Holy Qur'an, considering it one of the principal means through which He sought to influence people, persuade them, and present truths before them. Through this narrative method, the intended and expected response may be achieved: guidance toward what is right and adherence to the teachings of Islam, the religion of truth and righteousness.

The Qur'anic narrative is "a purposeful narrative. It is neither an ornament of the Qur'anic text nor a form of artistic luxury, nor is it a record of history for the sake of history itself, or a narrative intended merely for entertainment and aesthetic enjoyment. Although it possesses refined artistic qualities and exerts a unique influence upon the recipient, it is truth devoid of imagination and reality free from falsehood."¹ Since the Qur'anic narrative forms an integral part of the Qur'an, it shares in its inimitability, excellence, beauty, elegance, and coherence in both presentation and structure, as well as in its objectives.

The Qur'anic narrative serves several purposes, foremost among them the religious purpose, with which it is fully aligned and which Allah, the Almighty, seeks to achieve through it. The religious and doctrinal dimension constitutes the foundation of the Islamic message brought by Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). Accordingly, the Qur'anic narrative was: "Closely connected to the broad Qur'anic mission of calling people to Allah, guiding them to the truth, leading them to faith in Allah and submission to Him, and bringing them out of the dense darkness of their corrupt and confused reality into the light emanating from the heart of the divine message and extending across the horizons of Allah's mercy and dominion."²

While literary authors may employ fabrication or artistic invention as a means of creating suspense and encouraging readers to follow the narrative, the Qur'anic narrative focuses on actual truths and refrains from imagined artistic fiction. This is because its message and purpose are noble: the reform of life, the formation of individuals and societies, and the establishment of guidance and legislation. Such objectives can only be achieved through truth and reality, not through imagination and illusion.³ Allah, the Almighty, says: "There was certainly in their stories a lesson for those of understanding. It is not a fabricated tale, but a confirmation of what came before it, a detailed explanation of all things, and a guidance and mercy for a people who believe." (Qur'an 12:111)⁴ He also says: "We relate to you their story in truth. Indeed, they were youths who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance."* (Qur'an 18:13)⁵

Thus, all the narratives of the Qur'an serve to support the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and affirm the truthfulness of his message. In addition, the Qur'anic narratives provide lessons and admonitions through the accounts of the prophets and former nations. They encourage believers to follow the example of the Messengers of strong resolve in enduring the

¹ Hassan Fadl Abbas, *Stories of the Holy Qur'an*, 1st ed., Dar Al-Furqan for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan, 1420 AH/2000 CE, p. 43.

² Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, *Dialogue in the Qur'an*, p. 230.

³ See: Khalid Ahmad Abu Jundi, *The Artistic Dimension in the Qur'anic Story*, p. 133.

⁴ The Quran verse 111

⁵ The Quran verse 13

harm and persecution they suffered in the cause of Allah and in conveying His message. Despite these hardships, they remained steadfast in their noble principles and true religion;

They were neither overcome by weakness nor deprived of determination, nor did doubt enter their hearts until Allah fulfilled His decree and realized His promise to them¹. Through these narratives, the believer takes the prophets and righteous servants of Allah as models, learning patience in the face of adversity and perseverance through trials, however severe they may be, because of complete trust in Allah's support and in the fulfillment of His promise.

These narratives also stimulate reflection and intellectual contemplation while simultaneously engaging the emotions and providing spiritual consolation. Allah, the Almighty, says: "And if We had willed, We could have elevated him thereby, but he clung to the earth and followed his own desires. So his example is like that of a dog: if you drive it away, it pants, and if you leave it, it pants..." (Qur'an 7:176)²

No matter how much we enumerate and classify the purposes of the Qur'anic narrative, we can never do it full justice. Everything contained in the Holy Qur'an was revealed for a purpose and a wisdom known to Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, and ordained for the benefit of His servants. Indeed, "in those narratives there are abundant lessons and benefits for the community; therefore, we find that the Qur'an selects from each story its noblest themes and disregards what lies beyond them, so that its presentation of narratives remains free from any intention of mere entertainment."³ Through various methods and approaches, Allah intended guidance and salvation for humankind, and the narrative form was among the finest, most effective, and most beautiful means of reaching the different human, educational, psychological, aesthetic, and social dimensions.

The Qur'anic narrative possesses this remarkable capacity to influence, particularly on the psychological and emotional levels, because it presents ideas and purposes in a vivid and dynamic manner. Characters appear moving, conversing, and speaking; life is infused into events, which are brought before the recipient as though they were unfolding before his eyes, even when they concern peoples who lived long ago.⁴

The Qur'anic narrative engages the recipient's mind, intellect, and emotions simultaneously. It begins with the human being and ultimately returns to him; its central concern is humanity, and its ultimate objective is humanity itself. It speaks of trials and temptations in order to warn people against them; it speaks of reward and punishment to encourage the former and caution against the latter; and it recounts the stories of messengers and prophets so that they may serve as examples and lessons. Through the experiences of those who came before, it offers guidance and instruction, while the recipient, in turn, responds to its educational, moral, and reformatory approach.

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¹ Othman Fawzi Ali, *Studies in Qur'anic Miraculousness (I'jāz al-Qur'an)*, p. 184.

² The Quran verse 176

³ Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, *Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir (The Liberation and Enlightenment)*, Vol. 1, p. 64.

⁴ See: Fadl Hassan Abbas, *Stories of the Holy Qur'an*, p. 43.

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