

FAMILY LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF QUR'ANIC METAPHORS

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the delicate Qur'anic metaphors related to the teachings on family life. The Quran is said to be a code of life for man. This study sets out to explore the guidelines related to family life, the basic unit of a society and human civilization, provided through metaphors in the Qur'an. It attempts to analyze those metaphors in depth in order to inform humans in different roles in a family set up as this fulfilling the duties related to these roles is the foundation of a balanced household which in turn is a fundamental unit of society. Moreover, it tries to relate the thin lined difference between metaphor, simile, and analogy through examples.

Keywords: *Simile, Metaphors, Analogy, Family life, Ilm ul bayān, Rhetoric*

INTRODUCTION

The greatest quality of a work is its comprehensiveness and eloquence. It is a quality that circumvents and encompasses all qualities of the work. Arabic language is especially gifted with this quality and undoubtedly, the *Qur'an* displays the height of comprehensiveness and eloquence. It is full of beauties of various rhetorical devices including allegories, metaphors, analogy, simile, metonymy, and brachylogy and profuseness of speech. Metaphors are very abundantly found in the Qur'an. This study sets out to explore and analyze metaphors related to a person's roles in different relations in a family. For the purpose of analysis, this study chose the metaphors related to spouses, children and parents as they compose a nuclear family set up in any society and their duties and responsibilities are correlated. This study attempts to provide an in-depth analysis of those Qura'nic metaphors as a guideline for anyone in any of these relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family life

God has created man as an individual. Therefore, Islam protects his individuality fully but it is possible only through the appropriate development and nourishment of humanity. For this purpose, Islam has correlated the duties and rights of an

individual and society so that they are helpful to each other instead of being at war with each other. Family is the basic unit of a society and only those societies can be considered exemplary that have all families models of excellence in moral and social values. A society will work smoothly only if all its families work properly. Therefore, Islam takes all those measures that ensure the establishment of a sound and secure family life system. Man and woman are its fundamental components. And the head of the family is responsible for fulfilling the financial/economic, educational and grooming needs of the whole family so that the atmosphere remains pure and men and women have their distinct responsibilities.

Therefore, in order to be helpful to each other and to make the Islamic society an exemplary one, the Creator has created in man and woman a need, desire and yearning for each other without which neither can find peace and solace. This need and desire for living in close connection with each other has forced them to make a home and family of their own. The same desire and wish gave rise to families and clans and this very desire became a basis for civilizations. *The Qur'an* mentions the verses related to family life very beautifully though very subtle and fine metaphors so as to inform the readers thoroughly of the delicacy and significance of the teachings and orders and thus no part of the teachings remains undisclosed.

Meaning and Significance of (*Isti 'ārah*) Metaphor

According to the famous Arabic dictionary *Tāj ul 'urūs*, the word (*isti 'ārah*) metaphor is from the Arabic scheme *Istaf'āl*. This word is used to mean 'to borrow', 'to demand or request', 'to ask for loan and to do the engagement with someone. *Muhammad al-Murtazā Husānī Alzubaīdī* (d. 1205/1790) defines the term thus: 'This word means borrowing something temporarily', 'to lend an article for use for a specific time duration', or 'to adopt a similar behavior with someone in some situation'. The definition of (*isti 'ārah*) present in *al mu' jam al wasītis* is 'using a word or an expression in place of a word or expression due to a similarity or resemblance between the two in behavior like the word 'lion' is used as a metaphor for bravery'. *Al-Jāhiz* is among the experts in rhetoric who defined metaphor but has not mentioned metaphor under the study of rhetoric. According to *al-Jāhiz*, metaphor is a word or expression used *ghair mūzū lahū* meaning due to some similarity and along with that a pattern and behaviour also exists. In short, metaphor is a type of comparison like a simile but more comprehensive than a simile.

Metaphor as Compared to Simile and Analogy

According to (*ilm ul bayān*) rhetoric, Metaphor is different from simile and analogy in the following respects: Metaphor, simile and analogy are very popular terms of (*ilm ul bayān*) rhetoric prevalent in all languages of the world. However, they are used profusely in Arabic literature. The Arabs use figuration, metonymy, metaphors, similes and analogy keeping in mind the minute difference among all these so beautifully that the literature displays a beautiful combination of vastness and convenience that is unprecedented anywhere else. Simile is an expression used to compare one thing with another in one aspect is called simile. Analogy is a simile in which the reason of similarity is evident in many aspects is called analogy. Metaphor is an expression created with a combination of figuration and simile. `Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d 538/1143) and 'Imād al-Dīn Ibn Kathīr, (d 774 / 1373) believe that analogy and simile are one and the same thing. However, the other rhetoricians have differentiated between the two. Simile compares one thing with another due to any one similarity. For example, 'Zaid is brave like a lion. On the other hand analogy presents a similarity or comparison in the form of a whole incident. Therefore, it is a complete comparison between two things, qualities or two persons.

Amīn Aḥsan Islāhī (d. 1997) describes that though an analogy is somewhat similar to a simile but there is a great difference between the two. In a simple simile, the real attention is on *mushabah* (the thing that is compared to something else) and *mushaba bihī* (the thing to which that thing is compared) and their components are separated and compared with each other to find out how much similarity and compatibility is present in them according to which the beauty or otherwise of that simile is determined. On the other hand, in analogy, the components are not very important. If a situation is completely comparable to the other, and analogy is completely presenting its whole picture to the mind's eye, it is a complete analogy even if it does not meet all the criteria that rhetoricians suggest for a simile to be complete.

Metaphor in Arabic Rhetoric

Rhetoric is a combination and is composed of three parts: meaning, bayān (the study of state of Arabic words according to the demands and needs of time) and *badī'* (taking care of the beauties of words and their meanings for stylistic effects). In his book '*Al Bayānal Tibiyīn*', al-Jāhīz (d.255/ 868) terms '*ilm ul bayān*' as the

pillar of knowledge, interpreter, vision, eye sight and its life and metaphor is also part of ‘ilm ul bayān. Al-Jāhiz (d.255/ 868) is a very prominent figure among the scholars of (‘ilm ul balāghat) rhetoric who have penned down different definitions of metaphor and have written about it. Al- Sannān (d.870/1466), in his book ‘SīrulFasāhat’ has elaborated upon simile, metaphor and analogy wonderfully. Abu Hilal -Al-'Askarī (d. after 395/1005) in his books *Kitab al-Sina'atayn* and ‘Kitāb ul Zaetīn al kitābet wal ash‘ār’ has described metaphors, similes, metonymy, brachylogy and the other kinds of metaphors in the light of examples from the verses from the *Qur’an* and Arabic poetry.

Moreover, Al -Zarkashī (d.794/1391)), in his book ‘Al Burhān fi ‘ulum ul Qur’an’ has commented on the use of metaphors in the Qur’an and has explained the clarity and comprehensiveness of *Qur’anic* metaphors from different literary perspectives. Moreover, he has declared the Arabic literature, which is full of metaphors, similes, metonymy, and brachylogy and analogy, to be a ‘rhetorical ocean’ due to its beauty and richness. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/ 1350) has also narrated the philosophy and importance of metaphors in his discussion on ‘ilm ul bāyn.

ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION

Family Life in the light of the *Qur’anic* Metaphors:

Metaphor on Spouses as Seeds and Field in Al-Quran (Q. 2:223)

In this verse the wives are discussed as tilth which means (*harth*) ploughed field or land, it is a very subtle metaphor including all the teachings about the fundamental unit of social life.

Meaning and significance

(*harth*) means ploughed field or land. (*wa yuhlikal harth wa al nasl*) (Q. 2:205). His aim everywhere is to spread mischief through the earth and destroy crops and cattle. (Q.2:205).

Comments and interpretations

Harth means the path full of dust due to being trodden down frequently, *harth al duniyā* means the earning of this world, i.e. money and children and (*harth al ākhirah*) (Q.26:20) refers to the sustainable deeds. The above verse mentions the relationship of spouses and the sustenance/continuation of the human race through a very beautiful metaphor. Simply speaking, the metaphor signifies that as the

natural law is that seeds are sown in the field at the right time in a proper season and no farmer can break that rule or routine, similarly for a woman, nature's law is that her willingness and status should be kept in mind. (*fā'tūḥarthakumānnāshi'tum*) (Q.2:223), so "approach your tilth when or how ye wil"; clarifies this further.

On the one hand, it signifies freedom, frankness and independence and on the other hand, it points towards discipline and responsibility that how the husband, being the leader of the family, should behave towards the wife. Wives have been compared with fields because the sperms injected in their uteruses are like seeds. It means doing intercourse with women is just for the continuation of the human race. Just as fields are a source of the reproduction of crops; women are a source of the reproduction or increase of the human race. Just as the life and sustenance and survival of people depends on food and crops, the sustenance and survival of the human race depends on women. According to *Fataḥ al bīyānfi maqāsid al Qur'an* the uteruses of women are like fertile fields and sperms are useful like healthy seeds and the children are one's best harvest. Declaring women to be fields metaphorically portrays the life of a society and all the teachings related to it as a house is the fundamental unit of a society and husband and wife are its fundamental parts.

Metaphor on spouses as clothing

Permitted to you, on the night of the fasts, is the approach to your wives. They are your garments and ye are their garments. In this verse very beautifully, husband and wife have been declared to be each other's clothing metaphorically.

Meaning and significance

Libās means clothing, dress or attire, something to wear, the cloth that covers the body, attire, covering, or sheet. In other words, spouses are a sort of covering for each other.

Comments and interpretations

The verse under discussion refers to the relation between spouses in a very beautiful manner. Spouses are each other's clothing due to extreme closeness. According to *Rabī'*, 'husband and wife are (*liḥāf*) blankets for each other' and both of them are a source of comfort and solace for each other. As the *Qur'an* says in *Al-a'rāf*: it is He Who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in love) (Q. 7:189).

According to the interpretation of *al-Ṭabarī*, covering and clothing are required to cover anything and hide it from the sight of others. In this sense, they are each other's clothing because they cover each other and protect each other from others' gaze. Dress or clothing hides the faults of the body and beautifies it hence the metaphor. It implies that spouses should be a sort of covering to hide each other's faults and shortcomings; and to increase each other's beauty such that they cover each other's weaknesses and express each other's qualities.

Husband and wife live in such a way that they are a source of comfort, covering of faults and a shield against sins for each other. Just as a dress hides or covers the one wearing it, man and woman hide or protect each other from *haram*, i.e. illicit relationships. The Prophet *Muhammad* (P.B.U.H) said, whosoever weds has saved two third of his (*īmān*) faith with him. They are like your dress, clothing and garments and you are like their clothing/dress, neither they can pull you apart nor can you pull them apart.

Just as clothes beautify a person along with covering his/her body and protect him/her against the weather, husband and wife cover all the faults of the self like straying of gaze and heart, along with fulfilling each other's natural desires. *Hayā* i.e. modesty itself is invisible or symbolic clothing or covering which helps in maintaining the outer covering or clothing. The Prophet (P.B.U.H) said, "Faith (Belief) consists of more than sixty branches (i.e. parts). And *ḥayā* (This term "*ḥayā*" covers a large number of concepts which are to be taken together; amongst them are self-respect, modesty, bashfulness, and scruple, etc.) is a part of faith.

So the most important thing to limit one's gaze is getting married. Husband and wife are a source of beautification for each other because through them the civilized life progresses and life becomes full of beauty, civilization, culture and decency because both of them are sources of motivation for each other to go ahead with life and life takes a specific, special, smooth and even turn. The relation between the first man and woman was the first step towards human civilization. Heat and cold of the weather or time or the world signify the extremities of the weather on the one hand and the dangers from the enemy on the other hand. The *Qur'an* says:

It was We Who taught him the making of coats of mail for your benefit, to guard you from each other's violence: will ye then be grateful? (21:80). ethically, the same is the case with spouses that they are *dhāl* (shields) for

each other against the attacks/assaults of Satan, their eternal enemy. When each of them is equipped with their *zirah* (chain armour) and *dhāl* (shield), Satan's assaults cannot harm them and if they are bereft of this clothing or shield, they remain vulnerable to the assaults of Satan.

The relation of spouses has been beautifully expressed meaning that both of them not only are a source of physical comfort for each other but also have equaled right and duties. They are such companions or partners that without any one of them, the life's cycle/vehicle cannot run smoothly. Islam is a religion based on nature and instinct and this nature demands that the basic unit of society i.e. house has its inhabitants who are cooperating and sharing in every aspect of its life.

This gives rise to the following guidelines:

- It is essential for the dress or clothing to be neat and clean so you should also live in this society with a pure and clean heart, clean self and pure in practices.
- Clothing remains attached to the body so both of you should also remain attached to each other with love, sincerity, and unity.
- Clothing is soft as well as coarse/rough so you also make a combination of softness or kindness and strictness part of your nature in dealings.
- Clothing covers the bodies so you also make it a habit not to reveal rather conceal each other's matters.

The author of *ḍiyā' ul Qur'an* interprets this verse thus: 'The relation between man and woman has been very splendidly expressed by saying that you are their clothing just as they are clothing for you. In this way, both have equal rights and duties. How meaningful is the metaphor of clothing in this verse!' In short, clothing is a cover, hides all faults and shortcomings, is an embellishment, and beautifies one. It is a source of comfort and protects against heat and cold of the weather. Is a good wife not a cover, comfort and beautification for her husband and vice versa? They definitely are. The world is no less than paradise for the nation who has this lofty standard and high concept of matrimonial relations in each household. *The author of ḍiyā' ul Qur'an* also says in this context, 'Those who object Islam saying that it has usurped the rights of women will come to know that they are mistaken if they look at this part of the verse. What Islam has done is, it has not let the daughters of *Ibrāhīm* remove the veil of *ḥayā* from their faces.'

Metaphor on old age (parenthood)

Praying: "O my Lord! Infirm indeed are my bones, and the hair of my head doth glisten with grey: but never am I unblest, O my Lord, in my prayer to Thee! (Q.19:4)

It is a natural metaphor which is called (*taba'iyya*) in Arabic. The advent and progress of old age has been compared with the spread of fire in the wood. The term (*ishti'āl*) meaning inflaming has been borrowed for meaning (*intishār*) anxiety.

Meaning and significance

Wāshṭa' al comes from *Sha'lat al nār* which means to burst forth in to a flame. Its literal meaning is flaring up of fire, to stir a fire, *ishta'alā fūlān ghaḍabān* means to burst forth in to a flame or to flare up with anger means *ashta'al* (there is a proverb regarding scorching heat and to blaze up), *alshīb fil rā's*, means having white or grey hair due to oldage. *wāshṭa'alaal rā's shībā* means hair of the head getting white profusely, meaning all hair getting white. This also includes the hair of beard. *shā'il* means white mark on the tail and forehead of a horse. This prayer by *Zakrīyā* relates his own helplessness and God's bounties and grace.

Comments and interpretations

The shining of the whiteness of old age has been compared to fire without smoke, and its appearance in the hair has been compared to flaring. Whiteness appears in the hair as if fire broke out. Just as wood burns on catching fire, head burns with white hair. It's a way of expressing the advent of old age and the accompanying weakness.

Zakrī yā did not have any child. He humbly prayed to God for children, also mentioning his physical state (because generally it is seen one does not beget at this stage) at that time (Though Allah knows all, *Zakrī yā* mentioned it as an expression of humbleness and helplessness). *wahan al' azmiwāshṭa'alaal rā's shībā*, means 'infirm indeed are my bones, and the hair of my head doth glisten with grey.' These words are evidence of the conciseness and eloquenceness of the *Qur'an*.

Bones have been specifically mentioned because all parts of the body are made up of bones and bones are the carriers of the body weight and healthy bones are symbols of strength. Infirmness of bones is an expression of internal weakness and the external or outer signs of old age are white hair.

Walam 'akun bidu 'ā'ika Rabbīshaqīyya. (Q. 19:4) Expressing his condition, *Zakrīyā* has mentioned the blessings bestowed upon him by God. Right graciously did her (Mary's) Lord accept her. He made her grow in purity and beauty. To the care of *Zakariyā* was she assigned? Every time that he entered her chamber to see her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said: "O Mary! Whence comes this to you?" She said: "From Allah. For Allah Provides sustenance to whom He pleases without measure." (Q. 3:37). There did *Zakariyā* pray to his Lord, saying: "O my Lord! Grant unto me from Thee a progeny that is pure: for Thou art He that heareth prayer! (Q. 3:38).

Metaphor on childhood

"And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: "My Lord! bestow on them thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood." (Q. 17:24)
This is implicit metaphor. The humbleness and modesty has been compared with birds with feathers. This metaphor is used for adopting a behavior of kindness and humbleness.

Meaning and significance

Janāh in Arabic means to be convinced. Feathers of the bird, limb, shelter, *fulān fī janāh fulān* means He is in the protection of some one. *khafiz lahū janahahū* means 'to adopt or show humbleness towards someone', '*anā fī janāh fulān*' means I am in his shelter of protection. So this verse under discussion instructs children to take parents in the shelter of their protection. One has been instructed to deal with the parents with extreme kindness (*husn-i salūq*) and to pray to God for His grace and mercy for them.

Comments and interpretations

The teaching in the above verse uses hyperbole to deal with parents with extreme humbleness and benevolence. In other words, one has been advised to adopt a way of love and kindness to deal with parents and to obey them except for in Allah's disobedience. Look after your parents with care, kindness and love and attend to them extensively, it has been said by *'urwah bin Zubair*. 'Be kind to them. Do not deny to them what they want due to your extreme softness, keeping in mind that yesterday (in the past, i.e., your childhood), you depended on them, and today (at present, i.e., in their old age), they depend on you.

In the form of a metaphor, children have been instructed to obey their parents.

Qafara has mentioned two reasons for it:

1. When a bird takes its kids in its shelter of care, it lowers its feathers. So this verse means one should also deal with one's parents in a very nice and kind manner and look after them just as they looked them after in their childhood.
2. When a bird intends to fly and rise, it spreads its wings and when it comes down, it lowers its wings/feathers. Similarly, lowering the limbs in the verse would mean expressing humbleness and modesty in front of one's parents.

So the use of metaphor in this verse is not only meant to make the speech comprehensive but also to reveal all the ingredients of the instruction hidden in it with full entirety. There is also a delicate aspect of this metaphor, that is, a bird travels from one place to the other through its flight and for that, it spreads its wings/feathers, and when it stops somewhere, it contracts and lowers its wings or feathers. So a son's keeping the wings of humbleness low in front of the parents signifies that he should always obey them and never disobey them. Another aspect or argument could be that he should remain close to them and should not try to go far from them thinking that now he does not need his parents. Instead, he should remain with his parents, serving them just as a bird having lowered his wings and staying at a place.

The verse under discussion is a wonderful sample of inimitability of the *Qur'an* as it is a combination of verbal and practical instructions. So it instructs, along with *janāh al zul* to also keep praying to God for them with your tongue: "O my Sustainer! Bestow Thy grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!" (Q.17: 24). Man has been made to realize his helplessness as a child along with the words of the prayer because it is human psychology that he always remains influenced by the circumstances and incidents he has been facing in his life which helps him in moulding and improving his character and manners in the future.

The author of *Tafsīr Thanā`ī* writes, 'Bow before them with love and affection and this is not enough to be humble and caring towards them in this world, but keep praying for their hereafter as well.....so that they used to forget their rest if I were a little disturbed or ill, would keep walking with me on the shoulders the whole night, would sacrifice their rest to give me comfort and rest. Therefore, O my Lord, You too be as kind to them. Some people are kind to their parents just for showing off to others but don't love and respect them in their hearts of hearts

sincerely. So remember, that your Creator, your Lord knows very well what is in your hearts, if you are really pious and righteous.

CONCLUSION

During the analysis of metaphors, it was found out that the *Qur'an* lays special emphasis on family life as it is the basic unit of a civilized society and the smooth working of a family system and balance in all relations is desired for smooth functioning of a society. So, the Quran defines the roles of the most important and closest family members in different relations. It guides one on how to behave toward spouse, parents and kids through metaphors which once analyzed in detail give a great insight into how it requires one to act in different roles in a family system. The matters of family life which makes the foundation of a society are considered to be very complicated. The *Qur'an* guides man on how to spend a successful family life through its teachings using very beautiful metaphors like declaring husband and wife as clothing for each other which not only hides the faults but also increases man's beauty and makes his disposition impressive. Thus, through this metaphor, husband and wife are guided that they should be a cover for each other's faults and a source of increasing each other's respect.

Likewise, when children are ordered to obey and take care of their parents, humbleness has been compared to a 'bird with feathers' which is a beautiful metaphor to express the love and kindness and obedience that children owe to their parents. When a bird intends to fly, it spreads its wings and when it descends, it lowers down its wings/limbs which signify the humbleness that children should show towards their parents. Common observation is evidence of the fact that in households where such manners are practiced in playing different roles in relations by individuals are leading successful, satisfied, happy, contented, peaceful and balanced lives, free of unnecessary anxieties. It is also common observation that peace at home means peace at workplace. So, in turn, the society prospers.

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