A FOURTEEN-CENTURY-BACK TRIP: A READING IN THE REPRESENTAION OF FEMALE FIGURES IN THE QURANIC STORIES

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Abstract- This paper is an attempt to present a feminist study of the presentation of the Female Figures in the Quranic Stories, It is indeed, a re-visitation of the texts to seek a contemporary reading of how to read these figures while they envisioned in action.

Like male figures, the female characters are unquestionably humans who share with all people "human qualities and attributes" (Styan, 163). These characters are formulated according to situations wherein they respond to surrounding events and stimulates drives that require a stance, on which occasions the female figures exhibit their actual nature and behavior operating under circumstances, hence demonstrating "how the faculty of mind and power of possession" (Hameed, 73ff) work. The truth of the characters' nature is best exhibited in the Quranic discourse because any one female response is "a manifestation of the 'self' and a reformation of the 'ego' defined by the actual motivation" (Hameed, 73). In truth, this paper undertakes to illustrate how the Quranic female figures demonstrate stances that prove them equal to male figures: on other occasions, they are displayed as even more dynamic and outstanding, when they examined as active/passive or even negative.

Nevertheless, it is really evident that unlike the representation of various women in mythology and ancient history, the female figure in the Quran is treated differently. Indeed many of the female figures in the Quran are already familiar to the audience, be they pre-Islamic or modern. The audience's familiarity with these women is due to their marked roles in human life activities and distinctive traits of their image. The Quranic discourse invariably depicts the women in numerous life conditions on different occasions where they exercise their might and exhibit their graces and talents. Splendid are the spaces wherein the women figure explores more powerful stands and experiences, as well as more dominant roles than these even of men.

Most likely, the Quranic representation of the women figures aesthetically enhances an act of de-familiarization of the women stories that enrich the image and the incident associated with more fresh dimensions other than the ones the audience (who are familiar with the basic story) already comprehend. The process of de-familiarization is not meant to alter the incidents per se, but to make the audience more insightful to the contemporariness of the 'new' image as conceived by the audience afresh. Hence, the process of 'insight' and 'new' realizations. The newly conceived images provide the audience with a new process of 're-familiarization' that can aptly serve treatment of novel issues for which the Quranic discourse is widely reputed.

In the public memory of humanity, especially Eastern culture, it is erroneously believed that it is Eve who tempts Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. Such opinion most likely rests on what Genesis 3:5 states in relation to the temptation scene. The verse frankly mentions that it is Eve who first yields to the temptation that if she eats "thereof, then (her) eyes shall be opened, and (she) shall be as gods." with the power to know "good and evil." The next verse openly discloses that when Eve beholds the tree as "pleasant" to the eyes," she "took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat."(3:6) This , however, explains why in the folkloric tales and public arts of the East, Eve, coupled with Satan, is envisaged as a temptress. Accordingly, her image in human memory is formulated as such. The Quranic representation of Eve does not actually display anything like that. The Quranic verses hold both Adam and Eve responsible for the sin, and the discourse is primarily addressed to Adam. The verses devoted to the incident heavily place the major blame on Adam as the one who easily yields to Satan's temptation. The Quranic verses read:

But Satan whispered evil
To him: he said, "O Adam!
Shall I lead thee to
The Tree of Eternity
And to a Kingdom
That never decays?" (XX: 120)

And the discourse proceeds, placing more weight on Adam's role of such conduct:

Thus did Adam disobey
His Lord, and allow himself
To be seduced. (XX:121)

It is not, however, meant that the Quranic discourse bestows no blame on Eve. The Quranic verse

mutually holds both Adam and Eve sinners of disobedience. Eve is not displayed as a victim who easily succumbs to temptation.

In the result, they both

Ate of the tree, and so
Their nakedness appeared
To them (XX: 121) (Italics ours)

. Most likely, Satan's secures more success with Adam than with Eve. The discourse foregrounds Adam's contribution to the 'act,' and only implicitly conceives Eve as a 'partner' in the act. This process does not necessarily imply she is lesser, or that she only comes in the second place, but it is also likely that Eve is more difficult to 'tempt' than Adam.
In another verse, the Quranic discourse highlights Adam's role in the act. Adam is addressed by his Lord, wherein his Lord must have blamed him, but as God is most merciful:

Then learnt Adam from his Lord
Words of inspiration, and his Lord
Turned towards him (II: 37)

It is likely that God's wrath is bestowed on Adam first due to Adam's submission to Satan's will, easily yielding to the devil's temptation. The fact that the text keeps Eve off-stage may focus on her lesser role in disobedience. Hence, her figure surpasses Adam's: she does not easily yield because she is most likely aware of the symbolic implication of the 'act of eating'. In a speech act more of 'directive' than 'prohibition,' the Quranic verse literally warns Adam and Eve against approaching 'this tree' (VII: 19), but the actual meaning explored is far beyond the physical closeness to the tree: it is the 'experience' and the action of metaphorical eating. It is probable to infer that Eve already acquires (and has experienced) one means of seeking 'immortality' which, practically, is more manageable than temptational invitation offered by Satan. It is the begetting of offspring performed by male-female intercourse, which is metaphorically indicated by the Quran verse:

When they
Tasted of the tree,
Their shame became manifest
To them, and they began
To sew together the leaves
Of the garden over their bodies. (VII: 22)

This is the 'knowledge' Eve seems to have acquired as an alternative frank disobedience insinuated by Satan. Such reading may be enhanced by the plural pronouns used in the Quran verses (II: 36 and 38).
The Quranic discourse clearly attributes the sin to Satan: "Then did Satan make them slip/ From the Garden, and get them out" (II: 36), an act because of which God decrees that Adam, Eve and Satan "get ye down, all/ With enmity between yourselves." (Ibid.) Indeed, the text is addressed to all of the three, hence through them to people. But in verse (II: 38), the discourse is addressed to only Adam and Eve and the plural pronoun is used instead of that used for two in Arabic.

We said: "Get ye down all from here [Paradise];
And if, as is sure, there comes to you
Guidance from Me, whosoever
Follows My Guidance, on them
Shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (II: 38)

The use of plural pronouns may both literally and metaphorically imply that Eve already performs the source of line of human race to inhibit the universe. Hence, the plural pronoun indicates the couple and the awaited race to live on earth after Adam and Eve have been sent down from Eden. In fact, although Eve is not structurally foregrounded, she still poses as dynamically potential.
If Eve represents a vitally strong but negative figure, the wife of Imran is remarkably a great figure of powerful devotion; she displays a potential sense of decision when in the Quranic discourse, she dedicates unto God the child she bears:

Behold! A woman of Imran
Said: "O my Lord! I do
Dedicate unto Thee
What is in my womb
For Thy special service (III:35)

Irrespective of the religio-historical framework, the Wife of Imran (henceforth: Anne) is graced with a remarkably distinct feature of independent will. It is Anne who apparently acts as a decision maker. She oversteps the common hierarchical familial conventions and obligations: she herself decides to dedicate what she bears unto God without asking her husband's opinion. It does not actually imply that Imran may refuse , but the 'act' of devotion is independently offered, hence highlighting Anne's strong will as well as her self-confidence. She is displayed as obtaining full willpower to act mutually to her husband, or even more insightfully.
The Quranic discourse indeed sheds more light on Anne's figure when she names the female child delivered of. Nonetheless, it is the wife who names the child, commending her and her offspring to God's protection (III: 36). Unlike the priestly familial conventions, in the Quranic verse, Anne self-confidently adds: "I have named her Mary," (Ibid). Once more, Anne's voice sounds much louder. It is true that the incident itself shows a marvelous prophecy, but according to the prevalent norms common by the time, Anne's seems to have eclipsed other figures, including those of the males in the family. It is evident that Anne is endorsed with more

insight, and the audience is aware of it. Besides, the stance helps the audience acquire more recognition of the incident: Anne's foresight is embedded in her confident offer and wisdom of her choice of time. A special trait of prophecy underlines the entire act: it displays Anne with a halo of grandeur that renders her more poignant, as a figure, than the people around her. The foregrounding of Anne's figure emphasizes the fact that the Quranic text treats the figure presented according to the sort of act performed, but not according to gender prejudice. It is the situation as the theme that requires this kind of representation.

The prophetic expectation of the blessed child's destiny is witnessed by Anne's decision to devote the female miracle child born to the temple service contrary to the Mosaic law of the time. The incident denotes that both Anne and the female child are endowed with special graces and power that define women as different from the rest of their sex.

Indeed, if Anne is graced with the independent will to devote her child to religion as well as her foresight of expecting a blessed miraculous destiny for the child, Mary is more powerfully endowed with features that display her as really a marked female figure, independent of what surrounds her, sharp-witted, self-confident, and self-composed enough to cope with the exceptionally amazing event that all people have found impossible to believe if not to comprehend. It is a situation wherein one single female figure is required to transcend the boundaries of time, decorum of the mind, and faculties of collective intellect in order that her logic may be approved. Normally, her stand requires both the valour of confrontation and the power of persuasion both of which are to be simultaneously called to face all physical and intellectual reaction of her people. And she is apt for the challenge.

The Quranic discourse shows Mary in the midst of turmoil too far for human perception, when she is addressed that:

"O Mary! God giveth thee
Glad tidings of a Word
From Him: his name
Will be Christ Jesus,
The son of Mary, held in honour
In this world and the Hereafter." (III:45)

The multi-layered dilemma Mary has to face is first biologically oriented. She is single and has never been touched by a man. Truthfully, this is naturally what haunts Mary's (as well as all people's) mind when child begetting is an issue. First, she is well-composed enough to argue the case plainly and physically:

She said: "O my Lord
How shall I have a son
When no man hath touched me?" (III: 47)

She resorts to physical interpretation that all people who will know of the matter do. It is exactly what her people amazingly require about once she enters carrying a baby:

"O sister of Aaron!
Thy father was not
A man of evil, nor thy
Mother a woman unchaste!" (XIX:28)

Given the fact that people know Mary single, there is no one justification of her parading a baby in her arms but that she must have committed a disrespectful act of adultery.

Nonetheless, Mary's power of sharp-wittedness that the amazing incident is a sort of miracle leads her to constantly resort to what the miracle can manifest. In fact, seeking a rescue in such a critical situation requires wit as well as full trust in faith both of which are not easily recalled unless one is self-controlled and well-composed. The censorious mood of the people cannot accept any theoretical explanation of the scene: it is so far-fetched that they cannot perceive it logically. Hence, the need for metaphysics, the unnatural, and the miraculous:

But she pointed to the babe
They said: "How can we
To one who is
A child in the cradle?" (XIX:29)

And to the people amazement, the child talks:

"I am indeed
A servant of God:
He hath given me
Revelation and made me
A prophet" (XIX:30)

Mary's spiritual insight and might is a continuation of her physical power when alone she experiences the pain and agony of delivery. In the midst of her fear to be seen by her people and the physical pain of childbirth, she undergoes an experience no female can alone endure its anguish:

And the pain of childbirth
Drove her to the trunk
Of a palm-tree:
She cried (in her anguish):
"Ah! Would that I had
Died before thus! Would that
I had been a thing
Forgotten and out of sight!" (XIX:23)

The uniqueness of Mary's distinguished figure lies in the fact that, both physically and psychologically, she surpasses all her sex in the management of a serious crisis. She is human, and she has suffered the pangs of expectant mother alone wherein all circumstances are either hostile or peculiar to her. But she withstands as strongly as any woman free from pain.

Her feminine faculties prove her outstanding: she is not only mutual to male capabilities, but on occasions, she even surpasses them.

Potiphar Wife, on the other hand, frankly oversteps the social hierarchical structure when almost publically, she eclipses her husband's character. She is self-centered and even more daring than her husband who holds both familial responsibilities as well as official ones. The Quranic discourse focuses on Potiphar Wife early in Yusuf story when Yusuf has grown into full manhood, arousing her lust and lasciviousness. Potiphar Wife is so infatuated with Yusuf that she has been ready to transcend all socio-familial limits to arrive at her end. Her self-centeredness and blatant lust figure powerfully and, moreover, publically. She seems to have 'rejected' a patriarchic 'system' that calls her to 'impress' her 'desire'; but she openly oversteps the boundaries of ethos, conventions and morals; she insists on attempting to force her will on 'the object of her love' and the social-familial structure that restricts her.

Notwithstanding Yusuf's physical graces, Potiphar Wife's attraction to him fundamentally lies in his masculine sexuality. The first reference to Yusuf – Potiphar Wife story is solely related to her advancement. The temptation is direct and frank:

But she . . .
. . . ,sought to seduce him
From his (true) self: she fastened
The doors, and said:
"Now come, thou (dear one)!" (XII:23)

Potiphar Wife is only suddenly aware of this love which must have broken in her violently driven by the powerful urge to desire fulfillment. That 'urge' has stricken Potiphar Wife and rendered her helpless before its pull:

And with passion did she
Desire him, and he would
Have desired her but that
He saw the evidence
Of his Lord. (XII: 24)

And when that passion is not fulfilled, Potiphar Wife experiences a state of frustration resulting from 'hedonistic' lust unsatisfied. In defiance, Potiphar Wife hardheartedly resorts to threat of dire punishment, because the love she asks for is merely lustful, hence it "gives rise to material cupidity and possessiveness." (Scarry, 7) Remarkably, she acts in thorough fearlessness, which, according to the people of her time, is definitely non-feminine; indeed, fear was femininity and courage masculinity , hence, Potiphar Wife reworks the patriarchal belief of man as supremacist. (Dworkin, 51-2) However, her 'injured' pride and failure to satisfy her sexual need drive her into forceful action, displaying more of her determination and strong will. She resorts to siege and pull him hard, notwithstanding what she exhibits of frank beauty and attraction; and when, to her dismay, he escapes to leave:

So they both raced each other
To the door, and she
Tore his shirt from the back (XII: 25)

Potiphar Wife's wounded arrogance and frustrated lust transform her now into more revengeful and vindictive, especially when Potiphar encounters them whilst they race out:

They both found her lord
Near the door. She said:
"What is the (fitting) punishment
For one who formed
An evil design against
Thy wife, but prison
Or a grievous chastisement." (XII:26)

The sharp contrast between the poignancy of Potiphar Wife's character and that of her husband is quite evident here. Apparently, it seems easy for her to control the critical situation by her subtle wit and abrupt scheming. She simply manages to confirm her 'innocence'; simultaneously, she usurps the power of her husband and undertakes, on his behalf, to pass a penalty. Potiphar is fully eclipsed in this incident: the scene is entirely occupied by Potiphar Wife who despite the pressure of the complicated situation, acts comfortably as well as decisively.

The relation between Potiphar and his wife can most likely be viewed in a political light in the sense that sexual politics can widely expand to mean "stratagems designed to maintain a system." Interestingly, Potiphar Wife is endowed with the scheme for the domination of her husband against the common scheme that prevails in the area of sex. The institution of patriarchy that predominated by then was defined by techniques of male control; hence, man as the superordinate and law.(Kate, 51)Potiphar's 'falloff ' is verbally witnessed by his nonverbal response and almost utter silence to what the image should entail. Most interestingly, Potiphar's reaction frankly opposes the Biblical laws that prescribe the wife as man's "economic asset and exclusive sexual property," and only if he slightly imagines that his wife is infidel, he is permitted by law to inflict death penalty as long as a "woman's sexuality belongs exclusively to her husband."(Fuchs,116) Notwithstanding, the turn-taking tactics exercised by Potiphar Wife renders her husband literally speechless, and preventing him from "getting a word in edgewise," especially when the husband has not attempted at all to interrupt his wife, a cue that the wife proves much superior. This sheer verbalization is, however, a form of dominance, given that in popular myth, men talk much more than women do.

However, Potiphar's inability, and failure, to scarcely take a place in the vacuum and properly react within the time decorum is a subtle paralinguistic feature of his impaired/usurped dominance that he failed to maintain (Don Zimmerman,)Potiphar Wife seems to have fully reformulated the contemporary thought that implies humanity as male, whence man defines woman "not in herself but as relative to him", because woman is not considered an autonomous being. (De Beauvoir, xv-xvi)

It is assumed that the audience reading the Quranic discourse admires the manipulation of the hard times. This incident shows how fast her mind operates, and how brilliantly she manages a crisis. Subtly, her response is a multi-layered message: for, Yusuf, it is an implicit threat that he must comply to her design; otherwise, what awaits him is dire chastisement, and for the audience, it reveals that the superiority of her figure is exceptionally amazing: nevertheless, when Potiphar, out of discreet conduct, asks his wife to beg Yusuf's pardon upon having discovered that she lied to him, she does not do.

Potiphar Wife's will is also manifest in the women of the town episode especially her quest for what she believes as her interest. Potiphar Wife invites the women of the town who gossip about her passion and schemes to mock their gossip:

When she heard
Of this malicious talk
She sent for them
And prepared a banquet
For them: she gave
Each of them a knife (XII: 31)

And when Yusuf appears before them, they extol him and in full amazement, "cut their hands" (Ibid.). Frankly, she does not deny her infatuation, but, on the contrary, she admires her act of seduction and threatens Yusuf with more frightful punishment if he does not give in:

"And now if he doth not
My bidding, he shall certainly
Be cast to prison
And (what is more)
Be of the company of the vilest!" (XII:32)

In view of the modern philosophy and theories, Potiphar Wife must be seen as a pre-feminist female figure who seeks to enjoy her role irrespective of patriarchal conventions. To make that possible, she displays a diversity of character that fascinates the reader and places her on the foreground, whereas her husband is kept in full dimness, without any appropriate space to make the reader feel his presence. Potiphar Wife's voice is persistently present and very often sounds aloud, whereas her husband's is almost always absent. It is symbolically significant that he is 'childless', which clearly infers his being 'disabled', hence, he is displaced as [a] subject, and fetishized as [an]object; he is defined as "deficit ", for him "sexuality either is not a problem, because it is not an issue, or is an issue, because it is seen as a problem."(Shakespeare, 18)inspires a rich amount of argument in various aspects of the matrix of human life.

Despite the prominent space Eve, Mary and Potiphar Wife occupy in the Quran, they are, in fact, not the only potentially powerful females who exhibit characters that exercise effective roles in the incidents wherein they survive: systematically, other female figures equally display vitally effectual stances notwithstanding the fact that may occupy a lesser space in the Quranic discourses. Moses' mother, his sister and the two damsels; Lut's wife; and the Queen of Sheba (Saba') markedly demonstrate exciting tasks that prove them impressive enough to stand as tall as man is, if not, occasionally even much taller.

Moses' biological mother is one controversially powerful character who independently plays a significant role in shaping her baby's future life. She consents to throw her newborn into the sea without consulting the father or even involving him in such a seemingly hideous act. She decides to follow her protective maternal instinct. It is, however, normal for Moses' mother to feel heavily saddened to witness how her son is left to face what she anticipates as a fatal risk of drowning. Therefore, the Quranic text vividly clarifies that "She was going almost to / Disclose his (case)."(xxviii:10) Nonetheless, she is so well-composed that she overcomes her 'fear' and defies her feminine 'weakness', instructing her daughter to check up on him all the way to wherever the basket lands.

On the other hand, the young girl is sent alone to undertake a poignant mission that is much more serious than her might, yet, courageously enough, she is portrayed as aptly responsible to set off without fear, hesitation and arguing why it she herself and not the parents (assuming there are no boys old enough) to undertake the task. The girl is so ingenious and initiative that she, in disguise of a stranger, dares stand and wait for long hours, watching the baby in the palace, until they are eventually desperate enough to settle the breastfeeding problem of the newborn, whence, with an impressive sense of initiation, she tranquilly suggests:

……..:"Shall I point out to you the people
Of a house that will nourish
And bring him up for you
And be sincerely attached to him?" (xxiii:12)

This is, indeed, a task far larger than both her physical and mental faculties; yet, she smartly lives up to the expectations of responsibility. The young girl's audacity of the perilous act of challenging a male/authority-dominated system and

power highlights the girl's potentials in defiance of patriarchy. The action exercised by this young girl is equally sounded by the two damsels whom Moses helps to water their flocks. Upon his arrival in Madyan (Sinai), Moses beholds two maidens "who were keeping/ Back (their flocks)"; and when he attempts to seek the reason for that, they reply that they cannot water their flocks until the group around are done with theirs.(xxviii:23) It is interesting that the two damsels are aware of their inability to affiliate with the 'scene', yet, the Quranic discourse reveals them bright and diligent enough to seek a means to arrive at their goal; therefore, they resort to the employment of 'social interaction', and despite the apparent pressures, biological features and absent modes of socialization, they employ "distinct communication styles to achieve" their goal. (Larner,5)

The two maidens must have wisely understood that the more practical and powerful means to reach their aim lies in confining to 'private domain' and choose to develop preferences for 'establishing intimacy and maintaining unity."(ibid.)

Hence, they shrewdly redirect the issue into one private question when they successfully manage to secure Moses' assistance now, and, most likely, in the future. With the modest maidens' remark: "And our father is / A very old man."(xxviii: 23), they intelligently offer Moses a key to the situation. The two girls' act discloses an early pre-feminist attempt to "make 'feminine' (and 'masculine') represent social conduct (patterns of sexuality and behaviour imposed by cultural and social norms)"(Moi,122-3) And the effect is instantly beheld, as

…he watered (their flocks)
For them; then he turned back
To the shade;…… (xxviii:24)

Undoubtedly, the two maidens must have narrated to the father the story of the young man who has offered them a great help when they were badly in need for it; nevertheless, it is most expected that, at least one of them, must have also shown prejudice and immense favour of him, which culminates in inviting Moses so that the father shows gratitude for his assistance. Interestingly, that one of the damsels is quite aware of 'her goal', and must have behaved with the notion that the 'feminine', indeed, "represents nurture, and 'female' nature'" (Italics ours)(Moi, 123) It is assumed that with that intention in mind, the maiden "Came (back) to him, walking/ Bashfully…." (xxviii:25) to carry the father's message of honorary invitation. Most likely, the maiden's bashful and graceful stance is meant to win Moses' attention in the same way the two damsels keep back reluctant to water their flocks. She must have been aware of her worth, and been keenly able to assess Moses' situation whilst standing aloof in the shade. It seems that the maiden (though instinctively) transcends the usual patriarchy that consists of imposing specific social standards, and magnificently redirects the 'patriarchal values' when most likely that same damsel frankly suggests to her father:

" O my (dear) father! Engage
Him on wages: truly the best
Of men for thee to employ is
The (man) who is strong and trusty" (xxviii:27; italics ours)

Nevertheless, when the father intends to wed one of his daughter to Moses(xviii: 27), it is not suggested in vacuum: the father must have judiciously understood the context of his daughter's speech and her allusion to Moses' graces. The maiden manages to enforce her 'will', evading the 'female' fear but evocatively preserving the 'feminine' nurture instead.

Indeed, although Pharaoh's wife and Lut's wife occupy a much lesser space in the Quranic stories, they act similarly in relation to strong will and effective role in the course of actions. Pharaoh's wife is mentioned only twice in the Quran during which she poses as delicate and decisive. First, she employs her experiences of living with a tyrant, and an arrogant freak; she is subtly trained to tame him and win what she wants. She meritoriously uses paternal pride to soften Pharaoh's heart, but, in the meantime, the pronoun employed to address him comes only next to hers, given the fact that he is both the husband and the ruler: " (Here is) a joy of the eye,/ For me and for the:/ Slay him not." (xviii: 9) (Italics ours) She seems to have anticipated her success of departing 'female fear'; instead, however, she plays on his love for her through exercising the 'feminine nurture' impulse he must have felt. It is very ironic that the tough tyrant is defeated by his own weapon. Besides, his wife is equally astute, because once she secures his softheartedness, she immediately takes advantage of his 'sonlessness' to save the newborn:"…he will be of use/ To us, or we may adopt/ Him as a son."(ibid.) On the second occasion, Pharaoh's wife frankly denounces his evil deeds and tyranny: she is so powerful that she seems ready to sacrifice her life in defiance of injustice; hence, resisting the patriarchal system despite the cost she could have paid for that. Outspokenly, she prays God to "…save (her) from Pharaoh/ and his doings, … ."(lxvi: 11)

Though Lut's wife resembles Pharaoh's in overstepping the patriarchal standards and norms, she is essentially different in the 'reason'. Lut's wife adamantly disregards the common and normal sexual interests: she has made up her mind to yield to evil passions and abominations. She frankly disobeys her husband and transcends all boundaries imposed by social decorum and determines to even disobey the one opportunity of saving grace: all the people including Lut and family must leave while a "part of the night remains," and no one of the people must absolutely "Look back: but thy wife" (xi: 81).

Irrespective of the type of defiance exercised by Lut's wife, still she represents a female figure who is not satisfied with the 'system' and undertakes to redirect the course of 'action' the way she wants, though what she is after is abnormal and sinful. Despite the fact that Lut's wife is recurrently mentioned in the Quran (in fact, eight times), the female figure does not develop the way, for instance, Potiphar Wife does. Compared with the latter, Lut's wife is hugely inferior.

The roles of the female-ant and the Queen of Sheba (henceforth, Balquis) are quite interesting in the sense that they reveal the females' crisis management and control, hence they shed light on the female figures' abilities to undertake governing critical situations of their nations. The ant (referred to by using a feminine pronoun qalat namlatun) is presented as a 'leader' of her nation, whom she addresses in terms of gender-inclusive concern: "O ye ants, get into/ your habitations, lest Solomon/And his hosts crush you"(xxvii: 18). The ant, despite her small and humble size, displays an impressive gender-aware empowerment measure that is brilliantly meant to overcome 'androcentric biases': she refers to Solomon and his soldiers as males.(ibid.). In terms of feminist economics, however, the ant resorts to make a choice that underlines the worth and values of the 'ant nation'; this is, most probably, an attempt to establish a 'belief-system' that is planned to rescue their 'gender' power.

On the other hand, Balquis is remarkably presented as a queen with a board of trusted men. She is so influential that she potently rules over a predominant country, reputed for its financial success and prosperity. Nonetheless, she is provided "With every requisite; and she/ Has a magnificent throne."(xxvii: 23)It is, in fact, evident that Balquis craves to have something unique, special, and one of a kind, a matter that the messenger's report impressively underlines. Besides, the Quranic discourse spotlights the grandeur of the queen by the use of the Arabic word tamlikahum instead of tahkimahum, both of which may mean (rule over), but the connotative implication of the former word denotes more power and authority. Systematically, the fact that a female is a powerful queen with magnificence rules a prosperous country attracts the attention of the readers. Balquis's case embodies a modern exemplar of feminist organizational view, wherein the women are no longer subordinate to men in workplace. (Hult,128) Balquis's embodiment of organizational rule and management foregrounds her graceful 'genderedness' of management experiences.

When she receives the letter delivered from Solomon, she wisely and wittily consults the board though she is quite certain what is best to do. Her description of Solomon's letter as ("worthy of respect") shows her ethical, hence entitled for the position. Besides, she declines to inform the board about her reply, but waits to hear what they may suggest: "Advise me in (this)/ My affair: no affair/ Have I decided/ Except in your presence."(xxvii: 32) Expectantly, the board is trusting enough to approve of her decision of the country's fate. They appreciatively address her in a way that emphasizes her power and authority: "But the command is/With thee; so consider/What thou wilt command."(ibid., 33). Balquis is so insightful that she subtly evades the suggestion resorting to force and war as the answer: the masculine-oriented tendency towards force. She may consider her people manly enough, but she is very prudent in policy and is aware of the risks and destructiveness of war and what it entails:"…. Kings, when they/Enter a country, despoil it,/ And make the noblest/ Of its people its meanest;"(ibid., 34)

The queen's final resolution is, therefore, not that of war as the board first insinuated. Alternatively, she chooses to wisely test the 'enemy' by sending "Him a present, and (wait)/To see with what (answer)/Return(my) ambassadors."(ibid., 35). She, however, justifies that if Solomon ever wins, her people will certainly be in serious danger. On the other hand, he threatens her so persistently that she is forced to make him a visit. Most aesthetically, Solomon attracts her attention with equal uniqueness and beauty: Solomon miraculously brings her same throne to win her attention with a scene that is equally magnificent: she is asked to enter the lofty palace, but when she does, she "Thought it was a lake/Of water, and she (tucked up/ Her skirts), uncovering her legs."(ibid., 44). Moreover, she is later informed that the palace is paved smooth "with slabs of glass." It sounds quite impressive that Solomon believes that an admirer of art, beauty and aesthetics will certainly appreciate what has already been done. As female figures qualified with traits of leadership, both the ant and Balquis exhibit potential leader personalities that transcend their time and ethos.

Regardless of the space each woman character occupies in the activities of human life, the female figures in the Quran represent timeless life experiences, and show women acting in response to diverse life conditions, be they social, emotional, governmental or devotional. These incidents are indeed universal, and are not restricted to one community or nation at one time in one place: they do operate for all times and people irrespective of culture variations; on most occasions, the portrayals concurrently embody experiences most recent and contemporary, as long as they embody the general feelings of man.

It is obvious that the female figures in the Quranic stories compromise a good portion of characters who represent more models or types than individuals. Such figures as Eve, Potiphar Wife, the Women in Moses' story and Balquis develop timeless independent significance. It is best witnessed that Eve logically stands for equality, since she discloses an equal portion in the 'forbidden tree' experience: it is assumed that she even surpasses man's (Adam's)

scope of intellect; she does not literally understand the statement decreed by God (i.e., not to come close to the tree) on its face value in the first instance, the way Adam is thought to have physically comprehended it. It is believed that Adam must have linked the connotation of "closeness" to the tree with the act of "eating"; a notion that most likely some Israelitic readings associate with "sexual intercourse' relying on the Hebrew word for "eat", whose meaning is analogous to "coitus". (Millet, 38). Eve may have transcended the implication of "closeness" to the tree in terms of a quest for knowledge, which is attributed to the 'insightfulness' of a female whose mind is as wide as man. By the same token, Moses' mother and sister, and the two maidens equally represent types of female figures who exercise distinct independent magnitude through which they appear as potent enough to encounter serious situations much greater than their physical, emotional and intellectual capabilities. Moses' mother and sister powerfully ascend to withstand all dangers that may befall both the newborn's and their lives so well-composedly. Hence, they stand for females who, typically and individually, manage to maintain their nurturing spirits besides their 'power' and aptitude. The damsels who seek Moses' assistance to water their flocks display an interestingly keen mind, blended with impressive subtlety, through which they successfully manage to arrive at their current goal as well as future anticipated favours. Potiphar Wife is a unique female figure who remarkably exhibits rich complexity of character wherein sexual desire, cunning, love, fidelity and frankness are blended so profoundly that she is appropriate as a modern case of Freudian psychoanalysis. Potiphar Wife's character is highly rich; her female traits show her so penetrating in the domains of female psychology. Aside from her sexual aggressiveness, destabilization, and whimsical feminine lust, Potiphar Wife embodies a love motif that develops candid and virtuous perspectives.(Stowasser, 50) Both Potiphar Wife and Balquis display two interesting political managements: the former typically represents a female figure who effectively exercises sexual politics to control the circumstances that stand as serious threats to her worth and power. She manipulates whatever grace she is endowed with to serve her ends, and fearlessly steps ahead towards her goals. On the other hand, Balquis 'political overrule' of her people depends more on insightful tactics and wise empowerment: she is a keen pacifist that is aware of the bitter consequences of wars and armed disputes. In fact, the two figures extraordinarily exemplify two prominent female types and models, who are not unfamiliar to the scopes of the modern readers. The second category of the female figures in the Quran may include characters who are lacking in independent significance, and who are only slightly mentioned. Their role is generally more 'technical': they are employed to bring coherence to a story or an event. Besides, they are commonly employed to illustrate a moral point of view: Noah's wife, for instance, is only briefly referred to as a disbeliever in Noah call; then she is not mentioned at all. Zacharias' wife does not help as much: all is said about her is that she is very old and 'barren'; hence, her role is just to underline moral teachings. It is, however, appropriate to conclude that whether they are types or individuals, the female figures in the Quran are impressively portrayed to embody timeless 'creations' who can typically represent instances of freeing women from any bonds of prejudice, manipulation, and social injustice: these are undoubtedly issues of contemporary human life. The portrayal of such female figures actually induces that it undoubtedly spotlight immense respect for the human intellect.

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