SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE IN THE STORIES OF BIBLE AND QURAN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN SONG OF THE SONGS AND CHAPTER OF ANTS

[1]ABDULRAHMAN HUSSEIN OBEID, [2]ADNAN MOHD SHALASH

[1,2]Islamic Science University of Malaysia
Email: [1]drabrahman@usim.edu.my, [2]dradnanshalash@usim.edu.my

Abstract - Religious texts are a wide field for the use of symbolic language in general, and this language deepens in historical stories so that it carries multiple connotations. The gap between those connotations widens with theologians, to the extent that the apparent meaning that comes to mind becomes an interpretation that no one pays attention to it! In Mishnah and Midrash, Jewish exegetes understood the Song of Solomon as an allegory of the love between God and the nation of Israel, while Christian theologian, started from Hippolytus, found a story of love in this song between Christ and the church. As for the stories of the Qur'an, Muslim theologians strictly interpreted the details of the prophetic stories as historical events that do not depart from the apparent meaning except in some simple rhetorical references, but Muslim Mystics had a completely different standpoint. For them, Quranic stories were a fertile breeding ground for the mystical imagination, and Ibn Arabi, for example, drifted with his interpretations in his two books: Fusūs al-Hikam and al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah and provided a mystical fantasy for the story of King Solomon in Chapter of Ants. Jalal al-Din al-Rumi made use of the Qur'anic stories based on dialogue - such as the dialogue of al-Khidr with the Prophet Moses, and the dialogue of Satan with the Creator - to compose other stories that have no basis in Qur'an or Hadith at all, but it served his preaching vision and his educational method. Mathnavi of Rumi is full of stories created by Rumi's imagination about prophets, shepherds, Caliphs and ferries, which he presented in a fascinating way to extract lessons and wisdom from them, noting that his justification of this invented stories lies in interpreting them symbolically exactly as Ibn Arabi did in Fusus al-Hikam. This paper is presenting three different approaches relevant to symbolic language of sacred text and its theological or mystical interpretations.

Keywords: Symbolic Language, Song of the Songs, Mishnah. Rumi, Ibn Arabi, Allegorical.

I. INTRODUCTION

Symbolic interpretation of the Quran is a rhetorical approach used by Sufis in the early centuries of Islam and was not well receives by the classical scholars, but at the same time the traditional opponents couldn't definitively refute this type of interpretation. It provided a deeper meaning of the signs of Quranic verses and modify it through eras into symbols. There is an intersection between the esoteric interpretation of religious texts and the symbolic language of religions in general, since both are giving an inward touch to the apparent meaning of the words. The deep esoteric interpretations of the Qur'an began with the Ismailis and matured with obvious political influences, however, that influence diminished with Sufi approaches that transcended the sectarian impact and at the same time deepened the philosophical tutelage. Sufis succeeded in expressing the esoteric interpretation in symbolic language by developing the new understanding of some verses into a complicated conception, for instance, the word sea in verse 22 from chapter Jonah (It is He who conveys you on the land and the sea) was interpreted by Al-Sulami as a sign of happiness, spiritual ecstasy and self-rapture. All of those meanings were confined to (Wine) by many Sufis like Rumi who described his existence as a drop of wine from heavens (Qetreyiazbadihayiasiman) in a dialogue between him and Shamsi Tabrizi. In another mystical experience, Ibn Arabi interpreted the barrier (Barzakh) in verses 19 and 20 from chapter Al-Rahman (He let forth the two seas that meet together, between them a barrier they do not overpass) as separator between soul and body! Later, Barzakh become a comprehensible symbol to many mystical poets especially in Persia, who, by developing the use of Barzakh, rejected any attempt of validation for their symbols because it is beyond our ordinary experience or logical definition and could be understood only in communicating mystical experience. According to Vernon: In The Meccan Illuminations, Ibn 'Arabi notes that we can perceive things through both our physical senses and our imaginative capacities, and learn to detect the difference between the two: what is called the barzakh.

II. ALLIGORICAL APPROACH OF THE CANTICLE OF CANTICLES

Tanakh (the Old Testament) is a combination of three concentric circles – tripartite Division: Torah (the first five chapters of Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers & Deuteronomy), Nebeem (prophets) and Ketubim (Collected Writings), from the first letter of these three divisions (T.N.K) Tanakh is formed. According to the Textual and Historic – literary Criticism school, that used Form, literary and motive criticism: "The Old Testament is today, in its literary form and leading characteristics, it owes to the differing historical environments within which its various parts were written then successively brought

together". For absolute idealists like Solomon Formstecher and Samuel Hirsch, Judaism is a part of an evolving conception of spirit that manifests with greater clarity in successive ages. For Kantians like Moritz Lazarus, it is ritual system designed to foster socially constructive emotions like sympathy, charity, or regard for the welfare of others. Jewish approaches to the interpretation of the Bible is rigidly fixed - but by the Talmud rather than by the Bible itself. And in the case of the Talmud - contrary to that of the Bible - the literal sense of the text is binding, and one is not allowed to interpret it away. Many, perhaps most, biblical verses prescribing religious acts and obligations are 'understood' by classical Judaism, and by present-day Orthodoxy, in a sense which is quite distinct from, or even contrary to, their literal meaning as understood by Christian or other readers of the Old Testament, who only see the plain text. The same division exists at present in Israel between those educated in Jewish religious schools and those educated in 'secular' Hebrew schools, where on the whole the plain meaning of the Old Testament is taught. The essential contribution of the Jews, as Jews, to the cultural life of the medieval world, and of medieval Europe in particular depended basically upon two factors. They were literate: and they were international....Their work as intermediaries between the two mutually-exclusive cultural worlds [Moslem and Christian] was without any doubt the characteristic Jewish function in the Middle Ages: it was a function that they performed by virtue of their specific position and circumstances as Jews. That did not however preclude them from making memorable contributions to European civilization as individuals.

Tanakh and Talmud together are the holy Jewish text: "religion (Tanakh) become the basic constitution of the state. Therefore, the rights and laws of the state (Talmud) become at the same time religious laws. With this, the borderline of pure moral laws is touched, and their purity is endangered. The third section of Tanakh, The Writings or Hagiographa, included Song of the Songs or Song of Solomon, also called Canticle of Canticles, which is one of the most ambiguous text that has been symbolically interpreted with esoteric approaches. It is song of love spoken by man and woman, describing the beauty of the beloved in a very difficult linguistic structure, but has been interpreted by Jewish commentators allegorically as a covenant of love between God and his favored nation Israel, and interpreted by Christian theologians as love of Christ for His church. Some orientalist in 19th century found no religious significance in this song; it was simply a song of human love without any religious implications. The esoteric exegesis of the divine text is an attempt to explore meaning beyond the apparent understanding. This could be as a result for the perplexity of the text or an attempt to get rid of an undesirable apparent meaning. According to Britannica encyclopedia Hagiographa are a miscellaneous collection of liturgical poetry, secular love poetry, wisdom literature, history, apocalyptic literature, a short story, and a romantic tale. They were composed over a long period of time—from before the Babylonian Exile in the early 6th century BC to the middle of the 2nd century BC, Therefor, such love covenant between the Lord and His chosen ideal Israel is not out of the context but it conflicts with the literal meaning.

The philosophers based all of their arguments and evidence upon reason itself. Therefore they believed in whatever they concluded from their use of reason. In order to fit with their rationalistic views, they regarded revelation as a representation of symbolic events or as some type of personal experience, such as dreaming. Tanner noted that Martin Luther was still not able to embrace the literal erotic sense of the book. So he "propounded the theory that the bride of the Song is the happy and peaceful State under Solomon's rule and that the Song is a hymn in which Solomon thanks God for the divine gift of obedience. Such tendencies could be influenced by Gnostic, Ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian scriptures or platonic attitude and were not repeated in other text, however, not every esoteric inclination is necessarily valid. In this concern, poems of Hafiz Shirazi is full of lustful allusions, adoration and lovers, which were interpreted as a sign of divine love and longing to the creator.

III. THE MYSTICAL APPROACH FOR CHAPTER ANNAML (THE ANTS)

Chapter Annaml (27) is consisted of 93 verses, 20 verses are about King Solomon, his wisdom, power, miracles and his legendary story with queen of Sheba. The legendary story shows the domination of deferent style of leadership in middle east and ascendency of feminine characteristics. Queen of Sheba, Arabic Bilqīs, Ethiopian Makeda, according to Jewish and Islamic traditions, ruler of the kingdom of Sabaʾ in Yemen and become a subject of legend in middle east. In the biblical account of the reign of King Solomon, she visited his court at the head of a camel caravan bearing gold, jewels, and spices. When she crossed the pavilion with a glass floor, she pulled up her skirt thinking it is a water! But king Solomon told her that the pavilion is made of glass, after that she announced her submission to the God of Solomon. The story provides evidence for the existence of important commercial relations between ancient Israel and southern Arabia. According to the Bible, the purpose of her visit was to test Solomon's wisdom by asking him to solve a number of riddles. Muslim commentators found in the revelation of queen of Sheba story in Mecca a special concept, where Muslims were under serious pressure from the side of their enemies, and all the doors were shut to them. Its aim was to strengthen their spirits, sooth them, and make them hopeful of the grace of Allah and to the future victories.

The Queen of Sheba, Bilqiys, was a wise intelligent one and possessed a high standard of the ability of recognition. She had also some men and counselors with whom she used to propound the news and events of the locality.The story of Bilqīs, as the Queen of Sheba is known in Islamic tradition, appears in the Qurʾān, though she is not mentioned by name, and her story has been embellished by Muslim commentators. The Arabs have also given Bilqīs a southern Arabian genealogy, and she is the subject of a widespread cycle of legends. Some of the commentators have cited that she sent five hundred selected slaves and five hundred particular slave-maids for Solomon, while slave-men were clothed with beautiful dresses and having ear-rings in their ears with bracelets on their bands; and slave-girls were clothed with men clothing and ornamented with beautiful hats. According to one account, Solomon, having heard from a hoopoe, one of his birds, that Bilqīs and her kingdom worshipped the Sun, sent a letter asking her to worship God. She replied by sending gifts, but, when Solomon proved unreceptive to them, she came to his court herself. However, the officials of the Queen of Sheba, carrying the caravan of presents, left Yemen toward Syria, where Solomon lived.

They imagined that Solomon would become happy by seeing those abundant presents and might praise them. But when they confronted Solomon, there appeared a surprising scene in front of them. Not only Solomon did not receive them well, but also he said whether they wanted to help him with their wealth, while wealth was nothing in comparison with knowledge, guidance and prophethood. He added it was worthy for them to become happy with presents, but it was worthless for him.The king's jinn, meanwhile, fearing that the king might be tempted into marrying Bilqīs, whispered to him that she had hairy legs and the hooves of an ass. Solomon, being curious about such a peculiar phenomenon, had a glass floor built before his throne so that Bilqīs, tricked into thinking it was water, raised her skirts to cross it and revealed that her legs were truly hairy. Solomon then ordered the jinn to create a depilatory for the queen. the most important inconvenient thing that the hoopoe told Solomon (as) about this nation who lived in Yemen was that they had ignored the Mighty Lord Who dominates both the unseen and the scene of the skies and the earth and they were worshipping the sun, a worldly creature. Solomon became inconvenient with this problem, and we know that idolatry is not something that the divine religion remains silent for it or bears the idol worshippers as a religious minority. By applying force, he (as) may destroy the idol temples, if necessary, and vanishes idolatry and the polytheistic creed.

Tradition does not agree as to whether Solomon himself married Bilqīs or gave her in marriage to a Hamdānī tribesman. She did, however, become a believer. The Queen of Sheba appears as a prominent figure in the KebraNagast ("Glory of King"), the Ethiopian national epic and foundation story. According to this tradition, the Queen of Sheba (called Makeda) visited Solomon's court after hearing about his wisdom. She stayed and learned from him for six months. On the last night of her visit, he tricked her into his bed, and she became pregnant. She returned to her kingdom, where she bore Solomon a son, Menilek. Menilek I was made king by his father, thus founding the royal Solomonic dynasty of Ethiopia, Regarding the Sufi approach of interpretation, Al Ansari (d. 481 H) considered Hadith of Ehsan a sententious description of Sufism. Al-Ansari divided the rank of Ehsan into three deferent categories: first is Ehsan in your intention, second is Ehasan in your practice, and the third is Ehsan beyond the time (to remain in the stage of illumination).

That type of philosophical speculation for Ehsan dominated the early compositions of Sufi literature and the modern ones too. For other Islamic sect, the Mutazilitehermeneutic methodology proceeds as follows: if the literal meaning of an ayah (verse) is consistent with the rest of scripture, the main themes of the Qur'an, the basic tenets of the Islamic creed, and the well-known facts, then interpretation, in the sense of moving away from the literal meaning, is not justified. If a contradiction results from adopting the literal meaning, such as a literal understanding of the "hand" of God that contravenes His transcendence and the Qur'an mention of His categorical difference from all other things, then an interpretation is warranted.
The apparent interpretation of Quran is not an issue of dispute among the scholars of Sufism who possess the obscure signs, as they accept it and present it to the common people whom they called, the followers of the law. As for the esoteric meaning of the verses, only the followers of truth can comprehend it. In Ibn Arabi mystical interpretation of the story of Solomon, the soldiers became spiritual forces, and humiliation became a reason of their weak rank in morals. As for the genie who has knowledge from the book, it is the practical reason or practical wisdom and the law derived from the Preserved Tablet. The meaning of: before the tip of your eye returns to you is king Solomon meditation in himself, the spiritual advancement in the holy Kingdom and consciousness of universal knowledge.

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FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Despite the objections of classical exegetes, not every allegorical and esoteric interpretation is valid and acceptable, consequently, some new allegorical trends will be developed and produced over the time. Necessity of allegorical approach is subjected to the nature of the religious text, but at the same time, the effects of ancient Egyptian, platonic and gnostic hermeneutic of love stories cannot be eliminated. Song of Solomon has been interpreted by Jewish commentators allegorically as a covenant of love between God and his favored nation Israel and interpreted by Christian theologians as love of Christ for His church. A similar method was adapted by Muslim Sufis to explain events or figures relevant to the prophetic stories as the story of king Solomon with queen of Sheba and was professionally used by Assulami, Alhallaj and Ibn Arabi.

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