Literary and Linguistic Excellence of the Holy Qur'an & Its Psychological impact

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Abstract

This article mainly deals with the literary and linguistic excellence of the Holy Qur'an and how the Holy Qur'an overwhelmed Arabs with its linguistic and literal supremacy at the dawn of Islam influencing them in a way that reformed their mentality and they turned towards Islam. In fact, the literal and linguistic excellence of the Holy Qur'an became one of the most effective measures to call pagans towards Islam. The entire discussion emphasizes that the Holy Qur'an carried out a successful reformation with respect to the psyche and behaviors of people.

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Almighty Allah revealed the Holy Qur'an in the most eloquent, articulate, and elaborate style of Arabic. It is a book of inimitable quality, not only from an intellectual standpoint, but also by its linguist and literary aspects.

A brief glimpse of the Holy Qur'an is presented below with regard to its literary and linguistic features.

i) Novel themes and use of illustrations

A distinctive aspect of the novelty of the Qur'an is its themes. Rather discussing the topics familiar to pre-Islamic Arab such as incidents and events of ruins, camels, long journeys in the desert or longing for the beloved and love, the Holy Qur'an deals with the oneness of God, His attributes such as His Omnipotence, Omniscience and Lordship and the creation of heavens and earth. Another innovative aspect of the Holy Qur'an is the presentation of these novel themes through examples having effective use of illustration and persuasion.

Translation: "So do they not see the camel – how it has been created? And the heaven – how it has been raised? And the mountains – how they have been established? And the earth – how it has been spread out? Therefore advise; indeed you are a proclaimer of advice." i

The Holy Qur'an uses this stylistic technique of novel themes with illustration very often which exhibits the literary competence of the Holy Qur'an.

ii) The Innovative Narrative Style

The Holy Qur'an narrates the stories of Hazrat Nuh عليهاسلم, Ibrahim عليهاسلم, Yousuf عليهاسلم, Moosa عليهاسلم, and Isa عليهاسلم and other Prophets in an innovative way. It presents the dialogues that took place in such stories and the claims and counterclaims made by each of the opposing parties. The Holy Qur'an refers itself to the benefit in telling such stories:

Translation: "We relate to you the best narrative because We have sent the divine revelation of this Qur'an, to you; although surely you were unaware before this." iii

Arabs were familiar with storytelling as a number of parables, epics, and myths. The novelty of the Narrations in the Holy Qur'an was the type that is well refined and integrated, involving a meaningful theme with proper scheme and well-developed characters.

iii) Use of figures of speech

The Holy Qur'an extensively uses illustrations, imagery, and metaphor which adds beauty, life, and color to the plain words. The abundant use of figures of speech in place of simple words seems to be a general trend that permeates the entire Holy Qur'an.

The Holy Qur'an confirms the impossibility of the nonbelievers' entry into Heaven:

Translation: "Nor will they enter Paradise until the camel goes through the needle's eye." v

The Holy Qur'an affirms that the disbelievers' all actions will be in vain as,

مَثَلُ الَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّؤُمُ آعُمَالُؤُمُ كَرَمَادِّاشُتَكَّتُ بِوَ الرِّيُحُ فِيٰ يَوْمِ عَاصِفِ
$$\Box$$

Translation: "The state of those who disbelieve in their Lord is that their deeds are like ashes which the strong wind blew away on a stormy day." vii

Referring to those who do sympathetic and charitable acts yet spoil them by reminding others of such acts the Holy Qur'an states:

Translation: "His example is similar to that of a rock covered with dust and hard rain fell on it, leaving it as a bare rock" ix

While those who spend sincerely for the sake of Allah rather than to boast, are also expressed through imagery:

Translation: "And the example of those who spend their wealth in order to seek Allah's pleasure and to make their hearts steadfast, is similar to that of a garden on a height – hard rain fell on it, so bringing forth its fruit twofold; so if hard rain does not reach it, the dew is enough; and Allah is seeing your deeds." xi

Translation: "The example of those who spend their wealth in Allah's way is similar to that of a grain which has sprouted seven stalks and in each stalk are a hundred grains." xiii

The Holy Qur'an likens the actions of those who worship gods other than Allah to that of a spider building a web:

Translation: "The example of those who choose masters other than Allah is like that of the spider; it makes the web its house; and indeed the weakest house of all is that of the spider; if only they knew." xv

These verses display the superb literal standard of the Holy Qur'an. It does not only attract

the reader's interest and involvement in the subject but also incite him to heed the lesson

presented in them.

iv) Anthropomorphizing

Another very characteristic stylistic style of the Qur'an is that of anthropomorphization. Thus, it depicts the dawn as breathing away the darkness, the night as concealing the sun and veiling the day; (Surah An-Naba: 78:10), the wind as fertilizing, causing the rain to fall; (Surah Al-Hijr: 15: 22). The sea is likened to ink which, if applied, will not suffice to write the words of God:

Translation: "Proclaim, "If the sea became ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would indeed be used up and the Words of my Lord would never – even if we bring another like it for help." xvii

Slandering is likened to eating another person's flesh:

Translation: "And do not slander one another; would any one among you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?" xix

In literal perspective, anthropomorphization is fascinating and highly helpful in the portrayal of a concept or forthcoming result of an action. This technique is wisely and widely used by Allah in the Holy Qur'an.

v) Innovational Presentation

The Holy Qur'an is outstandingly innovative with respect to its method of presentation, which involves four different techniques. One common technique is that to begin a story with a short summary, followed by the details from beginning to end, as in Surah al-Kahf (18). The second technique is that of beginning a story by presenting the conclusion first, then the lesson to be derived from it, and then the story from beginning to end, as in the story of Moses in Surah al-Qasas (28). The third technique presents the story directly without introduction, as in that of Mary following the birth of Jesus in Surah Maryam (19), and the story of Prophet Suleman and the ants in Surah al-Naml (27). The fourth, and perhaps most innovative, technique is that of presenting the story through dramatization. This technique gives only a brief introduction signaling the beginning of the scene,

followed by a dramatization of the story by a dialogue among the various characters, as in the story of Ibrahim and Ismail in Surah al-Baqara (2). **

vi) Element of Surprise

The varied use of the element of surprise is the distinctive element in the structure of Holy Qur'an. In the tale of Hazrat Musa and Hazrat Khizar in Surah al-Kahaf (18), the anticlimax is unfolded towards the end. While Holy Qur'an also frequently utilizes the technique of revealing the anticlimax to the audience, but conceals it from the characters, who act in total ignorance in situations where satire is intended (satire which is aimed at the actors and their behavior) as in the story in Surah al-Qalam (68). In addition, the other technique of using the element of surprise is to reveal part of the anticlimax to the audience while keeping part of it concealed from both the audience and the characters, as in the story in Surah al-Naml (27). *xxi

vii) Change of Scenery

The structure of Qur'anic narrative displays the well-developed elements of an integrated literary work. One of the elements indispensable to dramatize the narrative is a change of scenery, which the Holy Qur'an utilizes fully. In the story of Hazrat Yusuf Surah 12, the reader is presented with a succession of scenes, each of which leads to the next, picking up the main thread of the narrative. Hazrat Yusuf's story comprises some twenty-eight scenes, each of which leads to the next in a manner which preserves the organic integrity of the entire narrative. All such scenes are presented through dialogues replete with details and ideas. The outcome of such a well-knit passage is that the reader finds himself attracted to the narrative, moving anxiously from one scene to another. This effect is achieved through a coherent series of events which sustain his curiosity and interest. Moreover, the use of dialogue makes the scenes more vivid and closer to life. This is an art in which the Holy Qur'an excels, and an art in which it is remarkably innovative. It is clearly a form of

literary composition which the Holy Qur'an, the first book in Arabic, introduced to the language. xxii

This is very unique and interesting element which was quite fascinating for all those who love literature and understand it like the then Arabs.

viii) The Rhythmic Pattern

The rhythmic patterns of speech found in the Holy Qur'an are a reflection of the special array of words and arrangement of phrases found in the Holy Book. In the view of many scholars such verses combine the characteristics of both poetry and prose. Unlike some poetry, the verses of the Holy Qur'an do not have one single rhyme, thus there is more room for flexibility and freedom of expression. The Holy Qur'an does, however, reflect certain aspects of poetry, particularly with regard to its use of words with identical numbers of syllables. This 'music' is more noticeable in short verses than it is in long ones. Surah Al-Najm (53) is the best example of it. *xxiii

The Holy Qur'an has, no doubt, provided a level of linguistic and literary excellence unparalleled in the history of the Arabic language. It exceeded the best of Arabic in all facets of the language such as, poetry, literature and expression which is the proof of the unbeaten, unchallenged, and unmatched beauty of the words of the Holy Qur'an and its Divinity. The linguistic and literary beauty of the Holy Qur'an exceeds anything of human origin. The language and style of the Holy Qur'an were so splendid that the Holy Prophet's opponents, who included great poets and masters of the Arabic language, could not match it even though they had been challenged to do it. This is supported by the fact that no-one has ever been able to write anything remotely resembling it in its linguistic, literary, or conceptual elegance. This point is repeatedly emphasized in the Holy Quran itself.

Translation: "Proclaim, "If all mankind and jinns agree to bring an equivalent to the Qur'an, they will not be able to bring its equal – even if they were to help each other." xxv

The Arabs who were at the peak of their poetry and prose during the time of revelation of the Holy Qur'an could not even make the smallest Surah of its like. They had a treasure of innumerable words and remarkable articulate skills. Yet, despite having all such skills and a number of highly linguistic experts amongst them, they could not respond to the challenge of the Holy Qur'an to bring a single phrase similar and parallel to the Holy Qur'an. There is not a single tradition available which testifies that any of the pagans Arabs could even think of articulating anything similar to the Holy Qur'an. Rather, out of their jealousy and helplessness they started labeling the Holy Quran with different names such as magic, poetry, fiction, etc., they took swords and lost their lives, they took their women and children captives; they lost a great deal of their wealth but could not break the challenge of the Holy Qur'an. If they could bring something similar to the Holy Qur'an, they did not have to suffer these hardships and adversities to falsify Islam and to refuse the Divinity of the Holy Qur'an.

The Psychological Impact of the Literary and inguistic excellence of the Holy Qur'an upon Arabs

All miracles given to the previous Prophets of Bani Israel were physical as their nation was unintelligent and clumsy. On the other hand, the miracles given to the Holy Prophet Muhammad are mostly logical. The reason behind is the intellectual level and brilliance of his nation. Moreover, the religion brought by the Holy Prophet Muhammad is to exist till the Day of Judgment, therefore

he was given such miracle (the Holy Qur'an) which can be recognized and respected in all eras and by all generations. The miracles of all Prophets ended along with their <u>periods</u> as they were observed by only those who lived during their time. Nevertheless, the Holy Qur'an is the miracle till the Doomsday as its linguistic supremacy and par excellence narration surpasses the human capability and intelligence.

The Arabs were highly proficient in the Arabic language during the period of the revelation of the Holy Qur'an. Without any doubt, the 6th century was the supreme period of the Arabic language in all linguistic and literal aspects. The Arabs used to feel great pride due to their excellence in the language skills. The language proficiency was the leading factor for high status, prominence and praise in their society.

Allah addressed the articulate Arabs in the language which was the most comfortable for them. As it is a natural phenomenon that if a person is made subjugated and helpless in the field in which he is highly proficient and has vast and thorough knowledge about all its excellences, he will surely surrender and accept the superiority. The effectiveness of the Holy Qur'an was thus guaranteed by the fact that it represented a level of eloquence unattainable even by their most eloquent speakers. Arabs were moved by the excellence of Allah's word and categorically understood that these words are not from any man. It was the reason that from the beginning of prophethood anyone who heard the Holy Qur'an surrendered to it.

Pagans of Makkah were astonished at the literary excellence of the Holy Qur'an; they tried to stop people from listening to it because they knew that once anyone heard the Holy Qur'an, he could easily distinguish between the Divine words and the human speech. Therefore, pagan leaders always tried to forbid Arabs from listening to the Holy Qur'an. During the period of pilgrimage, these people would sit at the route leading towards Makkah and would say to the Arab tribes coming for pilgrimage, "Do not listen to the words brought by Muhammad bin Abdullah. It is a magic, it breaks off the

relationship of a person with his parents, brothers, wife, children and relatives." xxvi

Arabs were not that ignorant that they could not distinguish between the Holy Qur'an and poetry or spells of their poets and magicians. The Holy Qur'an was no way resembled to their parables related to their wars and gods. Hence, to reject the revelations upon the Holy Prophet , they put different allegations on the Divinity and the truthfulness of the Holy Qur'an and gave all types of false statements. They expected that with such allegations and arguments they could stop people from listening to the Holy Qur'an. They began monitoring the Holy Ka'ba. They stopped Muslims to recite the Holy Qur'an there lest the people of Makkah should not hear the recitation and accept Islam.

As the content of the Holy Qur'an includes, narratives regarding previous prophets, detailed description of Bani-Israel's stubbornness etc., the unbelievers proclaimed that the Holy Book was merely a collection of stories. The Holy Qur'an highlights this attitude of the pagan Arabs and announces a fearsome punishment for such people:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوْ النَّ وَلَا الْآلَا اِفْكُ افْتَرْعُو وَ اَعَانَهُ عَلَيْوٌ قَوْمُ اخْرُوْنَ ثَفَقَ اللَّهُ الْآوَلِيْنَ الْكَتَبَوَّا فَوْقَ مُمُلَى فَقَدُ جَآءُوا ظُلْمًا وَّرُوْرًا ﴿ وَقَالُوْ السَّاطِيْرُ الْاَوَّلِيْنَ الْكَتَبَوَّا فَوْقَ مُمُلَى عَلَيْو بُكُرُ وَ اَطْلَعَ فَوْقَ اللَّهُ الْوَقِ وَ الْأَرْضِ عَلَيْو بُكُرُ وَ السَّمُوتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ عَلَيْو بُكُرُ وَ السَّمُوتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ لَا السَّمُ فَيْ وَاللَّهُ اللَّهُ اللْفُولُولُولُولُولُولُولُولُولُ

Translation: "And the disbelievers said, 'This is nothing but a slur he has fabricated and others have helped him upon it'; so indeed the disbelievers have stooped to injustice and lie. And they said, 'These are stories of the former people, which he has written down, so they are read to him morning and evening.' Proclaim, 'It is sent down by Him Who knows all the secrets of the heavens and the earth; indeed He Oft Forgiving, Most Merciful." xxviii

However, none of their atrocious trick worked. In order to counter the idol worshipping, the Holy Prophet had nothing but the Holy Qur'an. Hence, the Holy Book was the major source to challenge the eloquent Arabs. The expressive style and linguistic excellence of the Holy Qur'an affected and moved them. Its recitation shook the basis of idolatry and political orientation of the pagan Arabs.

It should be remembered that it was the recitation of the Holy Qur'an which attracted the six people of Khazraj at the first pledge of Aqabah. After listening to the verses of the Holy Qur'an, they approached the Holy Prophet who presented them the message of Islam what they readily accepted. They returned back to Yathrib and preached the true religion. As a result, the Holy Qur'an entered in all the houses of *Al-Ansar*. Therefore it is said that other regions were conquered through sword while Madinah was conquered through Holy Qur'an.

It has also been reported that Hazrat Jubair bin Mutim came to Holy Prophet to pay ransom of a pagan. Holy Prophet was reciting Surah 'At-Toor'. When the Holy Prophet reached at the verse, "Undoubtedly, the punishment of your Lord is certain to occur. But there is none to avert (it)." **xxix* he shivered with fear and accepted Islam at once saying that I was afraid that the torment might not fall upon me. **xxx*

These are the few examples of many such events which endorse that the superlative linguistic qualities and the inevitability of the Holy Qur'an was a strong psychological attempt which primarily helped the Holy Prophet in his missionary work. Whoever knew linguistic and literal features of Arabic acknowledge the superiority and excellence of the Holy Qur'an. Even the arch enemies of Islam, despite all their opposition acknowledged the par excellence of the Holy Qur'an. Hakim reported a tradition from Hazrat Ibn-e Abbas that once Walid bin Mughaira came to the Holy Prophet and the Holy Prophet recited the Holy Book to him. The recitation of the

Qur'an softened the heart of Waleed and he was influenced by the words of Allah. When Abu Jahl heard this news, he went to Waleed and said, "Dear Uncle! People of your clan want to contribute in order to give you some money so you would not go to Muhammad for listening to his words." Waleed replied, "Quraish tribe knows very well that I am the richest amongst them." Abu Jahl said, "Then say something about the Holy Qur'an which reflects that you dislike it." Waleed said, "What should I say? God knows no one has more knowledge about Arabic poetry, eulogy, ode, lyric and poems better than me amongst you. I swear to God, whatever he says does not have any resemblance with any of it. Swear to God, the words (Holy Qur'an) Muhammad speaks have sweetness and elegance. I have no doubt that these words would certainly overcome above the rest and it is also a fact that it would destroy all inferiors altogether." ***

The Holy Qur'an brought an unprecedented arrangement (Nazm), a new literary configuration and a completely unique and distinctive approach of speech which is superior to all the existing literary patterns and recognized as 'Ahsan-ul-Kalam' amongst Arabs. The Arabs were overwhelmed by the Holy Qur'an because of its linguistic beauty which made them helpless and astonished. The unique poetic features and distinctive pattern of prose was quite unprecedented for them. In addition, they were evoked by the details of the previous nations and religions what was not known even by the most learned and knowledge people of that time. And the Holy Prophet being unlettered told them as per previous holy scriptures.

Hence, the Holy Qur'an with this psychological trait directly affected the behaviors of the Arab nation. Supremacy and eloquence of the Holy Qur'an effectively impressed the Arabs as when proficiency of a highly proficient person is challenged and when he is left helpless and all defeated in his mastery, he is certain to be impressed and he would acknowledge one's greatness. The same happened to the Arab nation. The language supremacy of the Holy Qur'an brought about a complete and astonishing change in the attitude and behavior of Arabs

to the extent that they accepted Islam and defended it at the cost of their life. It is a reform which seems impossible to come by through human proficiencies.

The above discussion reveals that the Holy Qur'an hit the most proficient quality of the Arabs and when they were overwhelmed in it they had no choice but to accept the truth and the Divinity of the Holy Qur'an. Thus, at the initial stage in Makkah this trait of the Holy Qur'an was highly successful to reform the nation. The same nation in very short period ruled over a large part of the world. Therefore, it is strongly suggested and humbly requested that scholars of Islam, while addressing any specific group or community, should work out the most proficient field of that particular community and present the respective pearls of Islam to them with thorough study. Naturally, as the Arabs were impressed and turned towards Islam, similarly it is hoped that people will incline towards the guidance and message of Islam being delivered to them.

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