



Exploring Pedagogic Implication of the Qur'anic Stories

Suparjo*

*Suparjo is a Lecturer of Islamic Pedagogy at Purwokerto State College for Islamic Studies, Central Java, Indonesia.

Abstract: Tulisan ini secara spesifik bermaksud mengeksplorasi bentuk-bentuk cerita dalam al-Qur'an dan makna pedagogisnya. Kajian ini penting karena hingga sekarang ini para pemikir muslim saling silang pendapat tentang hakikat dari cerita-cerita yang tertulis di dalam al-Qur'an. Pokok pangkal perbedaan mereka sebenarnya sangat terkait dengan pandangannya tentang kedudukan al-Qur'an dalam sistem epistemologi Islam. Mereka yang memandang al-Qur'an sebagai kitab suci dan sekaligus kitab sains akan menganggap cerita-cerita di dalam al-Qur'an sebagai sejarah atau kisah nyata. Sebaliknya, mereka yang menganggap al-Qur'an sekadar kitab suci dan bukan kitab sains maka akan menganggap cerita-cerita tersebut sebagai ekspresi simbolis untuk mengajarkan nilai-nilai moral dan kehidupan. Hanya saja, semua pemikir muslim menganggap cerita-cerita tersebut benar-benar bagian otentik dari al-Quran dan mempunyai relevansi makna sepanjang masa seiring dengan perkembangan kemampuan manusia untuk menerjemahkannya dalam keragaman budaya dan peradaban. Bahkan secara pedagogis, mereka mengakui bahwa menyampaikan nilai-nilai-nilai moral dan kehidupan melalui cerita dengan ekspresi yang sastra merupakan metode yang sangat efektif. **Keywords:** *the qur'anic stories, esthetic expression, contextual meaning, impressive impact, and moral values.*

Introduction

The Qur'an expresses its ideas esthetically within all its verses and chapters. Therefore, it can be regarded as a book of information as well as esthetic expression along with its powerful diction and impressive notion. This was merely a counter balance to Arabian people who exalted poem and letters though all Muslims believe that its essential meaning will never lose. Principally, the Qur'an was not only functioned to build leadership and prophesy supreme of Muhammad¹ but it is also functioned as a universal guidance for human beings which is not limited by time and culture.

In this case, Muslims contradict one another in determining some of the qur'anic stories as whether myth or history. Those who regard them as historical reports try to prove their scientific evidences, whereas others who just regard them as mythical narration try to elaborate their implication for human life. Only do both actually try to keep their relevant and contextual meaning for people in entire history. Thus, to regard them as either history or myth will not decrease their important role for developing ideal values gratifying human sense and reason.²

To synchronize those two controversial views, therefore, it is better to elaborate their contextual and essential meanings than their textual ones.³ For instance, the contextual and essential meaning of the story of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, Abraham and Namruz's fire, Moses and Pharaoh's magic, and other similar stories are more important than their textual meaning.⁴ In such away, even though each Muslim scholar has its own view in regarding those stories, each understands that they have contextual and essential meanings. Principally, all Muslim scholars seem to understand that the qur'anic stories have significant meaning for human life and sustainable nature.



This point sufficiently encourages the importance of studying their pedagogic implication. Furthermore, since they take the largest part of the Qur'an, i.e. 1600 verses of 6320 verses,⁵ to study their important role for humanity is very important. Didactically, this quantity implies that the Qur'an tends to recommend of applying a story-style in promoting some values.

This paper intends to elaborate the genre of the Qur'anic stories and their pedagogic implication. To do so, this paper tries to analyze this problem through four steps. *Firstly*, it explores esthetic expression of the Qur'an in general way. It focuses on linguistic studies. *Secondly*, since the Qur'anic stories are vary in type, it, therefore, tries to explore their various types of narrations. However, it does not scientifically prove their validity but their esthetic clue and moral implication. *Thirdly*, it explores how Muslims regard those stories in general pattern as either myth or history. It focuses on the way by which Muslim scholars understand and imply them. *Fourthly*, it elaborates their pedagogic implication. The point is to apply pedagogic analyses concerning on their important role in internalizing moral values.

The Qur'anic Esthetic

The Qur'an can be regarded as book of letters with its specific character, i.e. esthetic expression. Based on linguistic study, M. Quraish Shihab claims that the Qur'anic narration has an effective meaning within an esthetic expression. It has a perfect accumulation between artistic style and rational ideas. He quotes exploration of Abdurrazaq Nawfal in his book, *al-I'jaz al-Adaby li al-Qur'an al-Karim*, proving the Qur'anic esthetic based on its diction. Nawfal identifies some balances of the Qur'anic words. For instance, there are some balances of numbers between words and their synonyms, words and their antonyms, words and words implying their effects, words and words implying their causality, and words and their evidences.⁶

Besides a balance in a number of words, the Qur'an has some balances in articulation. It has a harmonious rhyme that can be sharply proved through its diction. Even there is a chain of poetic sense among its words. Each has its harmonious articulation with the previous and the next words. This assists a harmonious intonation. In turn, the intonation makes the Qur'anic verses comfortably articulated and properly read within certain rules, *murottal*.⁷ All are in proportional way.

Those linguistic characteristics, according to Quraish Shihab, imply special impacts of the Qur'an for its readers. *Firstly*, its harmonious pattern in note and tone as well as its comprehensive meaning satisfies both human sense and reason. He agrees with a comment of a British intellectual, Marmaduke Picktall, saying that the Qur'an has its specific symphony without any equal. Each remark moves impulse to cry or joy.⁸ Such impressive impact is merely because of its esthetic expression and effective meaning.⁹ *Secondly*, the Qur'an uses a simple language easily understood by all people along with their intellectual capacity. Lay people can understand its basic meaning whereas intellectuals can get its sophisticated ideas. In a simple way, its pattern and language make it satisfy both reason and emotion of all people.¹⁰ This, pedagogically, makes it successfully promote ideas for its people from the prophet Muhammad era until recent time.¹¹



Genre of the Qur'anic Stories

The Qur'an uses esthetic expression for all kind of its narration, including its histories and stories. In his sense, the Qur'an can be regarded as a book of letters. This means that almost all of methods to study general literatures, such as hermeneutics, psycholinguistic, semantics and framing analyses can be applied to study the Qur'anic stories. For instance, a set of logic and nature of literatures can be applied for them and so can their classification.

At least, there are seven types of stories as the best way to classify them. They are history, sage, social fiction, myth, folktale, legend, and fable. Neither does this paper tend to regard some of them as folklores, which are lack of meaning, nor does it tend to claim them as historical accounts. Instead, it focuses on how their esthetic expression has pedagogic implication. In this sense, to elaborate some scientific evidences does not imply that it tries to justify their validity but this is just a way to analyze them pedagogically. Principally, it explores those seven types of the Qur'anic stories and then elaborates their essential meaning. All are within the perspective of pedagogy.

History

History is a written of past events especially concerning on social, political, and economic development of nation.¹² The essential characteristics of history are real, detail, chronic, and comprehensive. However, those conditions to some extent are not fulfilled by all narrations. The most important point then is realness implying scientific evidences.

There are many Qur'anic stories that can be regarded as a kind of history. Almost all of the stories of the prophets, except Adam, can be regarded as history. However, the Qur'an does not tell them comprehensively and chronologically. For instance, it does not mention date and years except their social context. It also does not mention some figures, except prophets as the central figures and their enemies as antagonist figures.

For a basic analysis, it is a good idea to explore one of them, i.e. the story of *Húd* or 'Ad people. The Qur'an actually does not adequately reports city of Ad' people well known as *Iram* city, which recent archeologists find its site. In a brief way, the Qur'an, chapter *al-Fajr*, 89: 6-14, reports it as follow.

“Seest thou how thy Lord deal with the 'Ad people, of the city of **Iram** with lofty pillars; the like of which were not produced in all other land; and with the Thamud people who cut out huge rocks in the valley; and with Pharaoh Lord of stakes; all these transgressed beyond bounds in the lands; and heaped therein mischief on mischief; therefore, did thy Lord pour on them a scourge of diverse chastisements; for thy Lord is as a Guardian on a watchtower.¹³”

Thalhas and Hasan Basri concluded from many interpreters that *Iram* city sank on earth because of its people's rebellion to Allah and His messengers. As well, *Thamud* people's rebellion to Allah made them and their city, *Gomorrah*, destroyed by typhoon.¹⁴



The most interesting of that story is that its narration is in a simple way and in a poetic expression. Since the story is concerned with historical fact, therefore, besides confirming it with other verses, books of ancient mythological account, i.e. Ancient Near Eastern Text,¹⁵ and other literatures,¹⁶ it needs scientific explanation. For practical reason, this paper just focuses on its scientific elaboration.

Thalhas and Hasan Basri presented scientific observation and analyses concerning on *Iram* city. In classical map of geography, *Omanum Emporium* made in the 2nd century by Claudius Ptolemy, *Iram* city laid between two big cities, *Gemorra* and *shoddom*. In recent map of geography, it supposes to stretch out between Arabia, Yemen and Oman. The historical evidence is that those cities are centers of the trade of incense as pointed by the Qur'an. Nowadays, French satellite, SPOT (*System Pour L' Observation de la Terre*) reported straight route of convoy about 300 kilometers in the desert assumed as *Iram* city. Then, Clapp, a lecturer of archeology at University of Southwest Missouri, excavated area pointed by the SPOT. He found a site of city pointed by the Qur'an as *Iram* city. In that place, he also found ceramics with Syrian style of 4000 years ago, vessels with Greek style, and statues with Indian style. He, then, concluded that *Iram* city was a big city, which had relation with other countries, i.e. Greek and India. Even it had an important role in developing world trade and culture.¹⁷ Furthermore, Ronald Bloom gave an assumption on the destiny of this city. Geologically, *Iram* city might be built over the lime land with hole in it. Because of earthquake, it sank into earth and covered by sand.¹⁸

Those scientific evidences inspired Thalhas and Hasan Basri to conclude that the story of *Iram* city is historical fact. Both then state that the moral value of this story is that arrogance and all destructive acts will reciprocally induce their actors as such. This further implies that God involves within human history.¹⁹

Sage

Almost all of the Qur'anic stories about prophets can be regarded as sages meaning stories that tell patriotic, wise, and strong men in heroic events.²⁰ Two examples of them are the story of Abraham and that of Moses. Both Abraham and Moses successfully took revolt to the tyrant kings. Abraham with his bravery defeated his enemies, the King Namruz. He killed the king and took command for Sumerian people.²¹ Similarly, Moses successfully coordinated Egyptian people to take revolt to Pharaoh autocracy.²² Principally, both stories imply that everyone who is under God's guidance always defeats his/her enemies. S/he also successfully governed his/her people and built a great civilization within the spirit of *tawhid*.

Social fiction

Social fiction illustrates a structure and culture of certain society. Therefore, its concern may be either people's philosophy or their behaviors. Since a fiction may particularly have factual evidences, it can be understood as a combinative work on imagination and reality.²³ Its important point, then, is not only its validity, but also its pedagogic implication for people. In this sense, its setting and context are more important than its figures are.



Some Qur'anic stories can be regarded as a kind of social fiction. The story of *Luqmán*, *asháb al-kahfi*, and *sháhib Músá (Khadhir)* are the best representation of this type. In pedagogic perspective, the story of *Luqmán* is a model of teaching ethic and metaphysics. Even many Muslims take it as an inspiration for an alternative system of education; i.e. the objectives, materials, methods, means, and environment of education. In short, it reveals a system of education of ethics and metaphysics.²⁴

Asháb al-kahfi (people of the cave) is a symbol of youth's characters to respond social phenomena. The story might represent youth's confusion to choose between two dilemmatic alternatives or more. They came in conflict about the best way to respond destructive and chaos society, whether to face it frontally, migrate to other place, or other ways. After taking a long time, they got answer. However, everything had been changed. Their alternative solution, then, had no significant role anymore.²⁵ Pedagogically, this story reminds people about the impact of effective and efficient attitude and acts in life otherwise they are nothing.

The story of a man well-known as *Khadhir* who accompanied Moses (*sháhib Músá*) in his journey implies a metaphysical system of education. This story implies fighting between formal (*shari'ah*) attitude of Moses and moral (*hikmah*) attitude of his company (*sháhib Músá*) who used to keep universal wisdom.²⁶ Since Moses was a prophet who ruled his people, therefore, this story pedagogically reveals that to rule society does not only need formal law but also moral principles.

Myth

Myth tends to account about immaterial things especially about divine or heavenly life. It also mostly improves the early history of people or natural events but things or persons within it are imaginary or not true.²⁷ Principally, it implies divine involvements within natural events and human history.

Some Qur'anic stories can be regarded as a kind of myth. For instance, the Qur'an reports dialogues between God and angels, God and Adam, God and Iblis, and Adam and Iblis.²⁸ There are also some mythical events, i.e. *abábil* bird.

As myth, those events had never happened in history yet. However, they have significant meaning especially in developing human culture and civilization. For instance, the Qur'anic report on how God taught Adam can be understood as a way by which God gives humans potencies to understand and anticipate natural phenomena as well as to explore and cultivate natural resources. As well, the story of *abábil* birds might represent God's protection to the Ka'ba in Mecca. *Abábil* birds, then, might be mythical expressions concerning natural phenomena, i. e. malaria mosquitoes, typhoon, or heat weather destroying elephant army of *Abraham* of Babylon.²⁹ Principally, those stories imply that God is involved within all natural processes and human history.

Folktale

Folktale is narrations concerning traditions, stories, customs, and other characters of community. It is a story passed on in spoken form from one generation to the next. However, many of them recently



have been written. Principally, folktales were created to promote and preserve certain values as well as social culture, structure, and rules.³⁰

Some Qur'anic stories can be regarded as a kind of folktale. For instance, the story of Cain and Abel could be a critique for human materialistic perspective in performing religious doctrines. The sacrifice model (*Qurban*) of Cain and Abel is not really part of the Qur'anic doctrines. God had never chosen and taken a sacrifice animal of Cain³¹—though many Muslims understand as such. It might criticize human conduct in performing it. People may do it to satisfy their ego, not for humanity. Similarly, the fight between Cain and Abel might imply that there is always fight between evil and righteous power that already exist in human nature.³² This further implies that humans must be responsible to their own acts and conditions.

Legend

Legend is a story from the past that may or may not be true. It is mostly relating to extremely famous person.³³ However, it merely focuses on the material evidences or cites than persons who take part in creating those cites.

Some Qur'anic stories can be regarded as a kind of legend. Some of them are fountain water of Moses,³⁴ *Zam-Zam* wheel of Samuel,³⁵ and the Ka'ba of Abraham.³⁶ However, one thing making them differ to general pattern of legends is a notion of divine involvement. While the Qur'anic legends initialize a divine power whereas common legends initialize a magic power of human and nature. The Qur'anic legend illustrates that person who has a great power unconsciously get such miracle from God. Those figures are just media for God to be a sign of His involvement in human history.

Fable

Fable is a short story that is intended to teach a moral value. Fables are not based on fact and often have animals as characters.³⁷ It merely illustrates ancient life where humans and nature were a unity of life in harmony. In theistic perspective, it implies direct involvement of God within human and natural history. In other words, it implies close relationship between God, human, and nature. Principally, the important point of fable is its characters to identify certain moral values.

Some Qur'anic stories can be regarded as a kind of fable. For example, there is a story of Solomon and bird *hud-hud* as well as that of Solomon and ants.³⁸ Another example is a story of reddish yellow buffalo (*baqarah shafrá'*) of Israel people (*bani Israil*), which could determine the actor who killed someone in the ancient Israel era.³⁹ One more, there is a story of two birds that taught Cain a way to bury his younger brother, Abel, who died.⁴⁰ Those stories imply the involvement of God within human and natural history.

Determining Myth and Reality within the Qur'anic Stories



Those seven types can be divided into two categories, i.e. symbolic expression (myth) and historical accounts (reality). However, when the term “myth” and “reality” are applied in analyzing the Qur’anic stories, both terms should be understood carefully and proportionally. The term “myth” is not only meant an expression of imaginative work, which is lack of meaning, but it is also meant “symbolic expression” which may be built by either historical or non-historical fact—by which the idea becomes contextual in along time. Therefore, the term myth tends to be regarded as symbolic expression. Some Qur’anic stories may have some historical evidences. However, the most important of them is not their plots but their moral values. In this sense, some figures which tend to be regarded as real figures function to be symbolic figures. In the same time, some Qur’anic stories, which are regarded as history, are not comprehensive passages of history. Rather, they are history in the sense they have been proved scientifically. Still, the most important point of them is not their plots, but their essential meaning for human and nature. Such a way is the general understanding of history. Figures within a history are not longer personal figures, but ideal figures. In this sense, to differ between the idea of myth and history of the Qur’an should be wise and proportional.

The Qur’an expresses esthetically to all that are regarded as either imaginative stories or historical accounts. All of them are expressed in poetic words and in a simple way. In simple, the Qur’an applies esthetic expressions for imaginative expressions as well as actual information.⁴¹ This style is different from that of the common literatures, which generally use formal language for historical accounts and esthetic words for imaginative stories. Moreover, common literatures mostly express historical accounts in detail, comprehensive and analytic ways and express imaginative stories in general, partial, and impressive ways. Differently, the Qur’an expresses both in the same way, i.e. general, partial, and impressive ways.

Abdus Shabur Syahin gives three other obstacles making difficulty to classify the Qur’anic stories into each of both. *Firstly*, even though the Qur’an is revelation of God, its language cannot avoid its limited meaning and multi-interpretation because of passages of time and multitude of cultures. Therefore, the Qur’an including its stories should be interpreted contextually. *Secondly*, since there is no exact understanding about metaphysical phenomena described by the Qur’an, therefore, such topic always implies long-lasting discourses. Since many Qur’anic stories are concerned with metaphysical existences, therefore, they must be studied hermeneutically. *Thirdly*, since many interpreters interpret them within the spirit of ancient near eastern texts (*isrāīliyyat*), therefore, to objectively understand them becomes more complicated. In this sense, it is important to differ their role as scientific information, moral guidance, or just folklore.⁴²

Those difficulties, in turn, also cause difficulty in making typology of Muslim scholars’ attitude towards those stories. For academic purpose, the writer tries to divide Muslim scholars into two views based on theological perspective. The first view belongs to literalists who mostly hold an extreme attitude. They strictly assume that all of the Qur’anic stories are real or history. The second view belongs to contextualists who may hold either moderate or extreme attitude. Moderate contextualists see part of



them as real and part others as myth. For them, their differentiation and classification is not important because the most importance of them is their contexts and principal doctrines. On the contrary, extreme contextualists see all of them as symbolic expression.

It is a good idea to elaborate those both theological views, i.e. literalists and contextualists. The elaboration focuses on how each classifies the Qur'anic stories and theological impact of classification.

Literalistic view

Literalists understand that the Qur'an is a book of both guidance and scientific information. This further implies that all of its stories are historical accounts that are true, valid, and real.⁴³ For them, God is the All-Knowing and All-Seeing; therefore, He knows all phenomena and He properly describes them in His revelation. In this way, stories about the life of spiritual beings, the origin of human and that of universe, and the destiny of all existences are under control and knowledge of God. In this sense, the Qur'an as a collection of God's revelation must be valid information about realities, not just imaginative work. In other words, if God the All-Knowing inform untrue realities, His qualities will theologially decrease.

Moreover, from linguistic studies, many literalists, such as Shahrur, believe that all of the Qur'anic stories are historical accounts. Shahrur finds that the Qur'an always begins its narrative stories with some statements declaring that they are factual accounts. For instance, the Qur'an begins the story of Joseph with a statement: "*Alif lám rá. Those are verses of a valid book.*"⁴⁴ Other statement also supports it: "*If you were people before the Qur'anic era, you might not believe it.*"⁴⁵ The story ends by a statement: "*Really, all of the Qur'anic stories have moral values for rationalists.*"⁴⁶ Other stories also begin with such statements. Each of the chapter *al-Syuará'* and *al-Qashash*, which consists of many stories, begins with a statement: "*Thá sín múm. They are passages of a valid book.*"⁴⁷ The chapter *al-Naml*, which reports a story of Solomon and ants as well as that of Solomon and a bird, begins with a statement: "*Thá sín. They are passages of a valid book.*"⁴⁸ Those evidences imply that the Qur'an makes an assertion that those stories are part of history.⁴⁹

Harun Yahya and Kurshid S. Nadvi also regard all of the Qur'anic stories as a kind of history. Harun Yahya tries to prove them through scientific theories and evidences, whereas Kurshid S. Nadvi proved them through linguistic perspective besides scientific evidences. For instance, both adequately elaborate the story of Adam in the Qur'an as history, not myth.⁵⁰

Contextual view

There are two different views among contextualists in regarding the Qur'anic stories as either history or myth. The first view consists of those who take moderate view and they are called moderate contextualists. They classify the Qur'anic stories into two categories, i.e. history and myth. The second view consists of those who take extreme attitude and they are called as extreme contextualists. They extremely regard all of the Qur'anic stories as myth, which their important point is to promote moral values.



To understand the contradictory between those two contextual views, we can understand both through how each understands the Qur'an. The moderate contextualists simply understand it as a book of both guidance and science; therefore, they regard some qur'anic stories as history and some others as myth. On the contrary, extreme contextualists understand it just as a book of guidance; therefore, they regard all of them as symbolic expressions.

The first view becomes mainstream of contextualists. Nevertheless, to properly get representative figures of the first view is quite difficult because they contradict one another in identifying some qur'anic stories which can be regarded as myth and those which can be regarded as history. However, their classification has no significant impact in understanding the qur'anic stories because the most important point for them, as general contextualists' thought, is the essential values of the stories.

However, the writer tries to elaborate some proponents of this view. Some of them are Achmad Baiquni, Teuku Jacob, and Deliar Noer. They elaborate some qur'anic stories, which they regard as information about reality, scientifically. To get clear distinction of their arguments, it is a good idea to explore how each uses certain perspectives in understanding a certain narrative story, i.e. the origin of man. Principally, each tries to elaborate the descriptions of the Qur'an concerning on it within scientific perspectives. Baiquni elaborates them within a perspective of natural science.⁵¹ Teuku Jacob elaborates them within a perspective of biology.⁵² Deliar Noer elaborates them within a perspective of social science.⁵³ In short, they try to integrate between the qur'anic description and scientific theories concerning the origin of man.

On the contrary, those who hold all of them as symbolic expression just try to elaborate their contextual meaning. The proponents of the theory of *'ibrah* (moral lesson) can be regarded as the proponents of this views. Some of them are Muhammad Abduh, al-Maraghi, and 'Aisyah Abdurrahman bin Shati. For instance, Muhammad Abduh promoted to study the essential meaning of qur'anic stories. One may use scientific theories as a way to get the allegorical logic and essential meaning, not to prove scientifically, of some qur'anic stories.⁵⁴ As well, al-Maraghi focuses on the symbolical meaning (*'ibrah*) in explaining the qur'anic stories. 'Aisyah Abdurrahman bin Shati reminds us to elaborate the qur'anic meaning within the qur'anic perspective itself. Since the Qur'an is not a book of history and science, therefore, its stories tend to explain moral lesson.⁵⁵

Ismail Masyhar can also be regarded as the proponent of this view. For Ismail Masyhar, as quoted by Armaedi Mahzar, the qur'anic stories have important roles because of their function to construct society. In this sense, they function as an alternative way to construct society and their thoughts. Therefore, to some extent, other social authorities, i.e. science, can replace their roles.⁵⁶ For him, if a scientific theory is more effective to be an alternative way to construct society than the qur'anic explanation, it can be an alternative way.

As well, Irwandar can also be regarded the proponent of this view. He tries to answer a question about why many Muslims regard some qur'anic stories as a kind of history. For example, he explains the process of demythologization of the story of Adam. For him, such story is a symbolic expression or



myth. Since myth deals with phenomena beyond reality, which human have not scientifically proved its evidences yet, and they need an instant answer about it, therefore, not to come in serious and long-lasting conflict, they regard it as real. As such, Muslims, then, apply this idea to regard the story of Adam as a kind of history. In this sense, some qur'anic stories that Muslims regard them as real accounts actually are quasi-real. Therefore, the best way is to regard them as symbolic expressions but they have significant meaning. Their essential meaning is to inform that God is involved within human history and natural events. Again, they are real in the sense they have significant meaning, not persistent real. Alternatively, as Taylor says, myth actually is a combination between imagination and reality.⁵⁷

Beyond Literalistic and Contextual view

Actually, both literalistic and contextual views try to keep sacredness and validity of the Qur'an. While literalists merely build their arguments through hermeneutic and theological perspective, contextualists build their argument through hermeneutic and scientific perspectives. However, both regard the Qur'an and its contents including its stories as valid information in the sense that it is really revelation of God to Muhammad. A valid evidence to support this idea is historical setting and contexts of the Qur'an. As M. Quraish Shihab says, Muhammad was illiterate man and lived among majority of illiterate people. Muhammad had never lived within highly civilized people, i.e. Egyptian, Persian, and Roman people. This inspires Muslims to reject an assumption regarding that Muhammad adopted some narrations of western (Greek and Roman) texts, eastern (Persian, Chinese and Indian) Texts, ancient near eastern (Sumerian, Syrian, and Israelite) texts, and other texts.⁵⁸

Principally, both literalistic and contextual views regard the qur'anic stories as really part of the Qur'an. They just become different in regarding and positioning them as myth, reality, or diffusion between both. However, both accept their significant meaning for human life.

The Qur'anic Stories as a Way of Pedagogy

How is the best way to understand multitude types of the qur'anic stories? The answer is that those stories should be regarded as a unity of story, which has a singular meaning. As a unity of story, they actually tell about the relation between God, human, and nature. They reveal divine involvements within natural processes and human history. In this sense, their forms can be differentiated and classified, but their essential ideas cannot be separated because they essentially have a singular meaning. The essential meaning is to develop human awareness as God vicegerent on earth meaning to be His partners to rule and cultivate earth and universe. In this sense, to prove their validity is not the only important point, but to adequately understand their essential and contextual meanings is also an important one.

Then, what is pedagogic implication of the qur'anic stories? Pedagogically, a story style is an alternative way to internalize moral values. In other words, a story-style is the best way to construct society and to build certain culture and civilization. In this way, the qur'anic stories have effective impact to construct and rule society by promoting ideal values and figures of identification as foundations of Islamic culture and civilization. For instance, some of them promote figures for identifying the best way



to cultivate natural and human resources. As well, they promote the best attitude to response natural, social, and psychological phenomena. They further explain the results of all human conducts in responding all phenomena.

In addition, a story style is relevant for all human in all stages. In this sense, the qur'anic stories have relevancies for all people along with their intellectual capacities. Children as well as adolescences can understand them. Likewise, all people along with their cultural levels can easily understand them.

Moreover, a story style has impressive impact for people. Even its impressive impact becomes more effective when they are written in poetic expression. The qur'anic stories within esthetic expression, then, have double effectiveness to guide people to the right path with full of awareness. In this sense, they truly induce an impressive impact for all people.

Furthermore, poetic expression within the stories makes the stories live in human mind and feeling. This condition makes people memorize the stories and their ideal values for a long-term memory. People always keep the core values of the stories as long as they remember them. In this way, the qur'anic stories play their important role in human minds. Muslims impressively remember the moral values of the qur'anic stories as long as they remember them.

How is the best way to understand moral values within the qur'anic stories for recent time? Since the Qur'an is an ancient text and it exists up to now, therefore, to understand their meaning we need to contextually interpret them. This means that we need hermeneutic approach to understand them contextually. The idea is that the essence of the qur'anic values does not require any change but they have to be understood and applied contextually. In this sense, the qur'anic stories actually just promote alternative ideas and values that are welcome to all dynamic interpretations.

Concluding Remark

Since Muslims simply understand the Qur'an as a book of guidance than as a book of history, therefore, they do not regard its stories as empirical description of phenomena but as a way to teach people and construct society. For Muslims, the most important point of the Qur'anic stories, then, is not their validity but their moral values.

The essential meaning of the Qur'anic stories is to lead people to be His vicegerents on earth by internalizing its ideal values. In this sense, the qur'anic stories simply present alternative models in developing Islamic culture and civilization. They, then, promote some figure of identification, i.e. person, people, society, government, social culture, and construction. In this sense, the textual meaning of some qur'anic stories may be out of date but their contextual meaning still up to date.

Pedagogically, to use stories as a way to guide people is effective because they will remember them easily and impressively. As long as they remember them, they automatically remember their moral values. This, then, makes them keep and follow those moral values. Likewise, the qur'anic stories make people impressively understand, accept, and practice some qur'anic values.



Such impression and effectiveness of the Qur'anic stories becomes stronger because of their poetic expression. As a nature of human mind, humans come to have impression with esthetic diction. Since the Qur'an including its stories uses highly esthetic expression, it effectively induces human mind to practices its essential meaning in their life.

Endnote

¹ Even though people of Mecca regarded poem and letters as prestigious works, this condition theologically was not an entry point for them to accept the Qur'an as a system of moral values in the early era of Muhammad. They just honored it as a stem of letters. Most of them did not accept Muhammad's prophecy. Moreover, because of their inability to compete highly poetic words of the Qur'anic verses, they accused Muhammad as a shaman who had quoted poem of ancient people. This reason is easily understood through historical accounts notify that most of them were illiterate people.

On the contrary, many Arabian people out of Mecca, such as people of Medina, were literate people. They successfully developed and promoted their civilization as well as easily adopted their neighbor people's culture, i.e. Persian and Roman culture. Theologically, this condition made them more easily accept Qur'anic values than Quraish people did. For further reading, see! M. Quraish Shihab, *Mukjizat al-Qur'an* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002); M. Quraish Shihab, *Memburnikan Al-Qur'an* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002); and Taufik Adnan Amal, *Rekonstruksi Sejarah Al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: FkBA, 2001).

² Quraish Shihab comprehensively elaborates the miracle aspect of the Qur'an in many of his books, especially through linguistic perspective. See! M. Quraish Shihab, *Mukjizat*. Likewise, Harun Yahya proves its miracle from scientific evidences. See! Harun Yahya, *Ketiadaan Waktu* (Jakarta: Robbani Press, 2003), Harun Yahya, *Penciptaan Alam Raya* (Bandung: Dzikra, 2003). Achmad Baiquni elaborates the Qur'anic miracle within perspective of natural science. See! Achmad Baiquni, *Al-Qur'an dan Ilmu Pengetahuan Kealaman* (Yogyakarta: Dana Bhakti Prima Yasa, 1997) and Achmad Baiquni, *Al-Qur'an, Ilmu Pengetahuan, dan Teknologi* (Yogyakarta: Dana Bhakti Yasa, 1995).

³ See! Bultman's theological hermeneutic, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic, and Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutic in Joseph Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as method, philosophy and critique* (London, Boston, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 104-127 and 217-236. Principally, each text has its own contexts. Its context gives essential meaning that makes it have its everlasting relevance. Thus, to use the texts means to use the essential or contextual meaning of the text.

See also! Muhammad Shahrur, *Prinsip dan Dasar Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an* translated by Sahiron Syamsuddin, (Yogyakarta: Elsaq, 2004) Principally, Sharur claims that the Qur'anic stories, *al-qashash*, are part of the Qur'an. Since Muslim scholars contradict one another in understanding them, therefore, those stories are alternative views of the Qur'an which creates everlasting discourse.

⁴ Dealing with the Qur'anic stories, many books can be referred. One of them is book of Ibn Kathir. See! Ibn Kathir, *Qashash al-Anbiya'* (Jeddah, Singapore: al-Haromain).

⁵ This is based on research of Hasan and Hanafi as quoted by Howard M. Federspiel. This number is larger than law verses, about 330 verses. See! Howard M. Federspiel, *Kajian al-Qur'an di Indonesia* translated by Tajul Arifin, (Bandung: Mizan, 1996), p. 43.

⁶ These are elaboration adopted from Quraish Shihab. *Firstly*, there is a balance of number between words and their synonyms or their inherent meaning. For instance, each of *al-harts* and *al-zir'ah* (gardening) is mentioned 14 times. Each of *al-ushb* and *al-gurur* (racialism or egoism) is mentioned 27 times. Each of *al-dhállun* and *al-mawtá* (un-wise men) is mentioned 17 times. Each of *al-Qur'án*, *al-wahyu*, and *al-Islám* is mentioned 70 times. Each of *al-aql* (brain, thought, or enlightenment) and *al-núr* (light) is mentioned 49 times. Each of *al-jahr* and *al-'alanyah* (loud voice) is mentioned 6 times.



Secondly, there is a balance of number between words and their antonyms. For instance, each of *al-hayah* (life) and *al-maut* (death) is mentioned 145 times. Each of *al-naʿ* (benefit) and *al-madhárát* (ham) is mentioned 50 times. Each of *al-har* (hot) and *al-bard* (cold) is mentioned 4 times. Each of *al-shálihát* (good) and *al-sayyíát* (evil) is mentioned 167 times. Each of *al-thuma'nínah* (harmony) and *al-dhayyiq* (chaos) is mentioned 13 times. Each of *al-rahbah* (anxiety) and *al-raghbah* (optimism) is mentioned 8 times. Each of *al-kufr* (infidelity) and *al-ímán* (belief) is mentioned 17 times. Each of *kufr* (an infidelity) and *ímán* (a belief) is mentioned 8 times. Each of *al-shaif* (dry season) and *al-syitá'* (rainy season) is mentioned one time.

Thirdly, there is a balance of number between words and words implying their effects. For instance, each of *al-infáq* (alms) and *al-rihdá* (kindness) is mentioned 73 times. Each of *al-bakhl* (miserly) and *al-khasarah* (un-fortune) is mentioned 12 times. Each of *al-káfirún* (the infidels) and *al-ahraq* or *al-nár* (to be burned or hell) is mentioned 154 times. Each of *al-zakáh* (purification) and *al-barákah* (blessing) is mentioned 32 times. Each of *al-fáhisyah* (evil) and *al-ghadlab* (anger) is mentioned 26 times.

Fourthly, there is a balance of number between words and words implying their causality. For instance, each of *al-isráf* (profusion) and *al-sur'ah* (careless) is mentioned 23 times. Each of *al-mauizhah* (wisdom) and *al-lisán* (mouth, speak, or language expression) is mentioned 25 times. Each of *al-asrá* (captives) and *al-harb* (war) is mentioned 6 time. Each of *al-salam* (peace) and *al-thayyibát* (goodness) is mentioned 60 times.

Fifthly, there is other specific harmony of the qur'anic diction. For instance, the word *yaum* (day) in a singular form is mentioned 365 times, which is the same as the number of days in a year. The word *ayyám* or *yawmain* is mentioned 30 times, which is the same as a number of days in a month. The word *syahr* (month) is mentioned 12 times, which is the same as a number of months in a year. The Qur'an explains an idea of seven-heaven by the term *sab'a samáwát*, which is mentioned seven times. In addition, an explanation of creating the universe in six days is mentioned seven times. The words to point to messengers of God, such as *nabi*, *rasúl*, *basyir*, or *nadzir* are mentioned 518 times. This number corresponds to 518 times the Qur'an mentions names of messengers of God. See! M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan*. pp. 29-30.

⁷ For instance, each verse of the chapter *al-ikhlash* is ended by a *qalqalah* articulation, i.e. *dal*. Each verse of the chapter *al-falaq* is ended by *qalqalah* articulation, i.e. *qháf*, *ba'*, and *dal*. Each verse of the chapter *al-fatihah* is ended by voice *in* and *im*. As well, each verse of the chapter *al-dluha* is ended by *mad* with *alif maqshur* (*á* articulation).

⁸ M. Quraish Shihab, *Mujizat*. p. 119.

⁹ The Qur'an states that none can create a verse which is more effective, esthetic, and impressive than that of the Qur'an. This fact is actually proof of the qur'anic statement. For instance, the Qur'an, chapter *al-isrá'*:88 states: "Please tell them that although all of human and jinn work together to create a verse which is in the quality of a qur'anic verse, they will not able to do so."

¹⁰ In such way, the Qur'an can be similar with general scriptures and ancient books, such as *Veda*, *sutras*, *Tripitaka*, *Mahabarata*, and *Ramayana*. Those books promote ideas and moral values within poetic and impressive expression. I Made Titib shows by giving many examples of beautiful words, effective sentences, and impressive meaning of Veda. See! I Made Titib, *Pengantar Weda* (Jakarta: Hanuman Sakti, 1997) See! Dharma Lok To, *The Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra* (New York, San Francisco, Toronto: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1995) and Upasaka Aryaphala, *Sutra Suranggama* Volume I and II (Jakarta: Ekayana Buddhist Centre, 1997) Those two present passages and their contextual meaning of Sutras. Nyoman S. Pendit gave general comment for the Mahabharata that it was a book representing an accumulative notion of fiction and factual accounts. See! Nyoman S. Pendit, *Mahabharata* (Jakarta: Gramedi Pustaka Utama, 2003) C. Rajagopalachari claims that Ramayana is luxurious literatures to teach people through simple and interesting way. See! C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana* (Yogyakarta: Fajar Pustaka Baru, 2001).

¹¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Mujizat*. pp. 118-131.

¹² See! A.S. Homby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 564 For specific sense, see! Mahmud Ayyoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters* Volume 1 (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984), pp. 73-171.

¹³ T.H. Thalhas and H. Hasan Basri, *Spektrum Saintifika al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Bale Kajian Tafsir al-Qur'an Pase, 2001), p. 95.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 99.



¹⁵ See! James B. Pritchard (Ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Relating to the Old Testament* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955) Actually, this book is concerned with parallel ideas between ancient near eastern texts with the Old Testament. Since many Muslims regard the Qur'an as a continuation of the Old and New Testament, therefore, it is reasonable to construct parallel ideas between the qur'anic reports on ancient histories and ancient near eastern texts.

¹⁶ Begin with the era of Islamic Hellenism of the 8th centuries, the era of al-Makmun of the Abbasid, Muslims adopted culture of their neighbor people. See! Osman Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science* (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1999).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 99-102.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 103.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 103-105.

²⁰ See! A.S. Homby, *Oxford*. p. 1036.

²¹ The Qur'an, chapter *al-Anbiyá'*: 50-71.

²² The Qur'an, chapter *al-A'raf*: 99-141 and chapter *Yúnus*: 70-92.

²³ A Fiction is a type of literature describing imaginary events and people, not real ones. There are many kinds of fictions. One of them is science fiction that means a type of writing based on imagined scientific discoveries of the future, and event dealing with space travel, life of other planets, etc. Another one is social fiction that means imaginary story of any ideally imaginary system of society. See! A.S. Homby, *Oxford*. pp. 431 and 1050.

²⁴ The Qur'an, chapter *Luqmán*: 12-19.

²⁵ The Qur'an, chapter *al-Kahf*: 13-22.

²⁶ The Qur'an, chapter *al-Kahf*: 60-82.

²⁷ See! A.S. Homby, *Oxford*. p. 770.

²⁸ Those stories are in a setting story of the creation of Adam. See! The Qur'an, chapter *al-Baqarah*: 30-39.

²⁹ Even though many Historians understand the event relating to it as real event, but they differently understand this term (*abábil*). Many understand *abábil* as a real figure, whereas others understand it as a representation of natural phenomena. See! The Qur'an, chapter *al-Fil*.

³⁰ See! A.S. Homby, *Oxford*. p. 456.

³¹ the Qur'an, chapter *al-Maidah*: 27.

³² the Qur'an, chapter *al-Maidah*: 28-31.

³³ A.S. Homby, *Oxford*. p. 673.

³⁴ The Qur'an, chapter *al-Baqarah*: 60.

³⁵ The Qur'an, chapter *Ibrahim*: 37 Actually, this verse does not explicitly point such story. Nevertheless, Muslim scholars regard as such.

³⁶ The Qur'an, chapter *Áli Imrán*: 96.

³⁷ A.S. Homby, *Oxford*. p. 413.

³⁸ For the story of Solomon and Ants, see the Qur'an, chapter *al-Naml*: 18. For Solomon and his bird, see the Qur'an, chapter *al-Naml*: 20-30.

³⁹ The Qur'an, chapter *al-Baqarah*: 67-71.

⁴⁰ The Qur'an, chapter *al-Máidah*: 31.

⁴¹ This is the meaning of myth and reality as explained by Mircea Eliade in his book, *Myth and Reality*. See! Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* translated from the French by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row Publisher, 1975)

⁴² Dr. Abdus Shabur Syahin, *Penciptaan Adam: Mitos atau Realitas* translated by Hanif Anwari (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ PRESS, 2004), pp. 78-97.

⁴³ See! Howard M. Federspiel, *Kajian*. p. 43 Howard M. Federspiel makes a conclusion that almost all of Muslim interpreters believe that the qur'anic stories are a kind of history. Even they insist Muslims believe the qur'anic stories as factual description.

⁴⁴ The Qur'an, chapter *Yúsuf*: 1 (*Alif lám rá. Tilka áyát al-kitáb al-mubín*).

⁴⁵ The Qur'an, chapter *Yúsuf*: 3 (*Wa in kunta min qablihí lamin al-gháfilín*).



- ⁴⁶ The Qur'an, chapter *Yūsuf*: 111 (*Laqod kána fi qashashihim 'ibrah li uli al-báb*).
- ⁴⁷ The Qur'an, chapter *al-Syuará'*: 1 and *al-Qashash*: 1 (*Thá sín míim. Tilka áyát al-kitáb al-mubín*).
- ⁴⁸ The Qur'an, chapter *al-Naml*:1 (*Thá sín. Tilka áyát al-Qur'an wa kitáb mubín*).
- ⁴⁹ Muhammad Shahrur, *Prinsip*, p. 122.
- ⁵⁰ See! Harun Yahya, *Penciptaan*, Harun Yahya, *Ketiadaan*. and Kurshid S. Nadvi, *Darwinism on Trial* (London: TA-HA Publisher, 1993).
- ⁵¹ See! Achmad Baiquni, *Al-Qur'an dan* . and Achmad Baiquni, *Al-Qur'an, Ilmu*.
- ⁵² See! Teuku Jacob, "Natural History of the Earth and Living Being: Scientific and Religious Views" presented on international conference on "*Religion and Science in the Post Colonial World*" hold by Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, January 2nd to 5th, 2003.
- ⁵³ Deliar Noer, "Al-Qur'an, Sejarah, dan Studi Masyarakat" in Iwan Kusuma Hamda, *Mukjizat al-Qur'an dan as-Sunnah tentang IPTEK* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1995), pp. 77-117.
- ⁵⁴ See! Ahmad Musthafa al-Maraghi, *Tafsir al-Maraghi Juz I* translation in Indonesia (Semarang: Toha Putra, 1992), pp. 163-165.
- ⁵⁵ See! Irwandar, *Demitologisasi Adam dan Hawa* (Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Press, 2003), pp. 12-13.
- ⁵⁶ See! Armaedi Mahzar, "Melawan Idiologi Materialime Ilmiah: Menuju Dialog Sains dan Agama" in *Dan Tuhan Tidak Bermain Dadu* (Bandung: Mizan, 2000) See also! Mahmud Ayyoub, "Evolusi Testik Vs Ateistik" *Republika* 9 April 2003.
- ⁵⁷ Irwandar, *Demitologisasi Adam dan Hawa* (Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Press, 2003), pp. 20 and 105.
- ⁵⁸ M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan*, p. 29.

References

- Amal, Taufik Adnan. 2001. *Rekonstruksi Sejarah Al-Qur'an*. Yogyakarta: FkBA.
- Ayyoub, Mahmud. "Evolusi Testik Vs Ateistik" in *Republika* 9 April 2003.
- . 1984. *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*. Vol. 1. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Baiquni, Achmad. 1997. *Al-Qur'an dan Ilmu Pengetahuan Kealaman*. Yogyakarta: Dana Bhakti Prima Yasa.
- . 1995. *Al-Qur'an, Ilmu Pengetahuan, dan Teknologi*. Yogyakarta: Dana Bhakti Yasa.
- Bakar, Osman. 1999. *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science*. Cambridge: Islamic Text Society.
- Bleicher, Joseph. 1980. *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as method, philosophy and critique*. London, Boston, and Henley: Roudledge & Kegan Paul.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1975. *Myth and Reality*. Translated from the French by Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper & Row Publisher.
- Federspiel, Howard M. 1996. *Kajian al-Qur'an di Indonesia*. Translated from English to Indonesian by Tajul Arifin, M.A. Bandung: Mizan.
- Hornby, A.S. 1995. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Irwandar. 2003. *Demitologisasi Adam dan Hawa*. Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Press.
- Jacob, Teuku, "Natural History of the Earth and Living Being: Scientific and Religious Views" presented on international conference on "*Religion and Science in the Post Colonial World*" hold by Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, January 2nd to 5th, 2003.
- Kathir, ibn. *Qashash al-Anbiya'*. Jeddah & Singapore: al-Haromain.



- Mahzar, Armaedi, "Melawan Idiologi Materialime Ilmiah: Menuju Dialog Sains dan Agama" in Keith Ward. 2000. *Dan Tuhan Tidak Bermain Dadu*. Bandung: Mizan.
- al-Maraghi, Ahmad Musthafa. 1992. *Tafsir al-Maraghi Juz I*. Translation in Indonesia. Semarang: Toha Putra.
- Noer, Deliar, "Al-Qur'an, Sejarah, dan Studi Masyarakat" in Iwan Kusuma Hamda, et.al. (Ed.). 1995. *Mukjizat al-Qur'an dan as-Sunnah tentang IPTEK*. Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1995.
- Pendit, Nyoman S. 2003. *Mahabharata*. Jakarta: Gramedi Pustaka Utama
- Pritchard, James B. (Ed.) 1995. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Relating to the Old Testament*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Rajagopalachari, C. 2001. *Ramayana*. Yogyakarta: Fajar Pustaka Baru.
- Shahrur, Muhammad. 2004. *Prinsip dan Dasar Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an*. Translated by Sahiron Syamsuddin, M.A. Yogyakarta: Elsaq.
- Shihab, M. Quraish. 2002. *Membumikan Al-Qur'an*. Bandung: Mizan.
- . 2002. *Mukjizat al-Qur'an*. Bandung: Mizan.
- Syahin, Abdus Shabur. 2004. *Penciptaan Adam: Mitos atau Realitas*. Translated by Hanif Anwari. Yogyakarta: eLSAQ PRESS.
- Thalhas, T.H. and Basri, Hasan. 2001. *Spektrum Saintifika al-Qur'an*. Jakarta: Bale Kajian Tafsir al-Qur'an Pase.
- Titib, I Made. 1997. *Pengantar Weda*. Jakarta: Hanuman Sakti.
- To, Dharma Lok. 1995. *The Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra*. New York, San Francisco, Toronto: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation.
- Yahya, Harun. 2003. *Ketiadaan Waktu*. Jakarta: Robbani Press.
- . 2003. *Penciptaan Alam Raya*. Bandung: Dzikra.