



**MUSTANSIR MIR AND A CONTEMPORARY  
LITERARY APPROACH TO THE QAŞAŞ AL-QUR'ĀN:  
STUDY OF QUR'ANIC STORY OF JOSEPH**

**Akrimi Matswah**

Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Jember

Email: [akrimi.matswah@iain-jember.ac.id](mailto:akrimi.matswah@iain-jember.ac.id)

**Abstract:** The textuality of the Qur'an contains a high quality of literary aspect. Therefore, a literary approach to the Qur'an is one of the ways in the understanding of the meaning and message of it. This approach has been used by modern and contemporary Muslim scholars, and even by western scholars of Qur'an studies. This paper discusses Mustansir Mir's thought and literary approach to the Qur'an, focusing on the story of Joseph. This study shows that Mir reflects on the nature and power of God and reveals the moral messages in the scene and structured dialogue on the passages in Sūra Yūsuf. It also reveals that Mir's approach to the story is structural where he elaborates the structure, plot, and scene of the story and connects them with the moral message of the story.

**Key word:** *Qaşaş al-Qur'ān*, Literary criticism approach, Joseph Story

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v21i2.274>

## Introduction

LITERARY APPROACH is the one of current trends in the field of Qur'anic studies. This approach is based on the view that the Qur'an is a literary text. In the modern period, the idea was represented by Amīn al-Khūlī with the basis of the view that the Qur'an represents the greatest Arabic literary book (*kitāb al-'arabiyyah al-akbar*).<sup>1</sup> The idea was developed by some of his

<sup>1</sup> Literary method initiated Amīn al-Khūlī covers two aspects. The first is concerned with analysis of the external aspects of the Qur'an, which includes specific and general aspects. Specific aspects related to the revelation, the writing and the collection of the Qur'an and its distribution. While the general aspects are

pupils, such as Bint al-Syathi' who applied the thematic interpretation<sup>2</sup> and Aḥmad Khalafullāh who used literary criticism to *Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ān*.<sup>3</sup> The similar studies are even expanded by Mustansir Mir by adopting some literary theories developed in the West. In this paper, I will discuss his ideas, especially related to his reading of the Qur'anic story of Joseph.<sup>4</sup>

---

related to geographical and sociological conditions of the Arabs when the revelation of the Qur'an. The second is analysis of the internal aspects of the Qur'an from the Arabic language and science, such as grammar (*naḥw*) and literature (*balāghah*). Amīn al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd fī al-Naḥw wa al-Balāghah wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab* (Cairo, 1995), 233–239.

<sup>2</sup> Bint al-Shāṭi' developed the literary method of Amīn al-Khūlī and applied in reviewing 14 short letters in his work of *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. She implemented four thematic interpretation methods. The first method is identifying all the letters and verses related to the topics to be discussed. The second is to draft a letter and verse accordance the chronology of revelation. The third is analysis of language (semantics) of the Qur'an. The forth is adhering to the meaning and the spirit of the Quran, then confronting the opinions of the exegete. Aishah 'Abd al-Raḥmān Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 10–11.

<sup>3</sup>Modern literary methods applied Aḥmad Khalāf Allāh include internal and external aspects of story (*Qaṣaṣ*) of the Qur'an. Internal aspects related to the discussion on the development of the art of the Qur'anic stories and its relation to the situation and the personality/psychology of the Prophet, as well as the development of mission of Islam. As for the external aspect includes historical development of literature and art in general, both literary texts before the Qur'an was revealed. The next step is the understanding of the text. It is applied in two steps. First, understanding of the text including meanings, phrases and forms of sentences. Second, understanding of literature, which is to understand the text in terms of logic, psychology and art. Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalafullāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣ fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Beirut, 1999), 44–66.

<sup>4</sup>The Qur'anic story of Joseph has invited many scholars to conduct a study. A.H Johns is one of them who is discuss the literature aspects of the structure and dialogue of the *surah*. He argues that the story of Joseph has a direct significance to the life of Muhammad. For instance is the sadness and fortitude of Jacob when lost Joseph which is relevant to Muhammad grief when his grandson named 'Abdallah, son of Ruqayya and Uthmān, died in the year 618. Naming 'Abdallāh for his grand children is perhaps given in reminiscence of his son who died in 612 AD. Thus, the sadness was doubled when his grandson named 'Abdallāh died. A.H Johns, "Joseph in the Qur'an: Dramatic Dialogue, Human Emotion and Prophetic Wisdom", *ISLAMOCRISTIANA* 7 (1981): 40-42. Another scholar who discuss Sura Yūsuf is M.S. Stern. In the same tone to Johns, he noted that revealed of the *surah* at the end of the period of Mecca is relevant in the life of Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, he examines the story of Joseph in the context of

## Mustansir Mir and Literary Approach to the Stories in the Qur'an

Mustansir Mir is a Professor of Islamic Studies at Youngstown State University, Ohio, the US. He completed his undergraduate and master programs at Punjab University, Lahore, Pakistan. He finished his second master and obtained a Ph.D. from University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI in Islamic Studies. He taught colleges in Lahore, at the University of Michigan, University of Virginia, Oxford Center for Islamic Studies/University of Oxford, Youngstown State University and at the International Islamic University in Malaysia. His main research interests are Qur'anic studies, Islamic intellectual history, and South Asian studies.

Some of his works include:

1. *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Islahi's Concept of Nazm in Tadabbur-i Qur'an* (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 1986)
2. *Dictionary of Qur'anic Terms and Concepts* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987)
3. *Verbal Idioms of the Qur'an* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Near Eastern and North African Studies, University of Michigan, 1989)
4. *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Studies in Honor of James A. Bellamy*, ed. Mustansir Mir in collaboration with Jarl E. Fossum (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1993)
5. *Tulip in the Desert: A Selection of the Poetry of Muhammad Iqbal* (London: Hurst & Co., 2000 (concurrently published by McGill-Queen's University Press, Canada, and Orient Longman, India); Iqbal Academy Pakistan edition, 2007; later, a Malaysian edition)

---

Muhammad's prophetic mission. See, M.S. Stern, "Muhammad and Joseph: A Study of Koranic Narrative," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (1985): 193. Abdel Haleem also analyzes the story and sees that it aims at strengthening the heart of the Prophet Muhammad. It occurs when the prophet suffered the years of grief left by his wife and his uncle. At the time of the Muslims in Mecca also encountered many difficulties and persecution, thus requiring them to migrate to Medina. Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 155.

6. *Iqbal* (I.B. Tauris, New York, and Oxford University Press, New Delhi), 2006
7. *Understanding the Islamic Scripture: A Study of Selected Passages from the Qur'ann* (New York: Pearson Longman), 2007
8. Book (under contract with I.B.Tauris, in preparation; completion expected by mid-2016): *Mawdudi in the Makers of Islamic Civilization* series.<sup>5</sup>

Literary criticism is a critical analysis used in the field of a literary work. This approach aims to understand a literary work deeply and to appreciate it. That method is used to analyze literary aspects, such as point of view, symbol, tone, irony, by means of applying a variety of approaches, including:

*a. Formalism/new criticism*

This approach involves a close reading of a text. It means that the whole of information related to the interpretation of a literary work should be found in the work itself. Thus, the entire outside information about the history, politics, or the life of the author does not need to be discussed. This approach is more focused on what is expressed in the literary text than on the other aspects.<sup>6</sup>

*b. Reader-oriented approach*

This approach focuses on the reader's role in producing the meaning. A text will be meaningless if it does not interact with its readers. Thus, this approach illustrates what happens in the mind or perception of the readers during the process of analyzing the literature. The reader's awareness gained from reading the literature is the subject of this approach. This approach also does not position the text as the final result, but as a development process of meaning by the reader while analyzing the elements of the text.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> "Mustansir Mir," <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu>. See "Mustansir Mir," <http://philrel.yasu.edu>. The data accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Fifth Edition. (Great Britain: Pearson Longman, 2005), 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 45–46.

c. *Structuralism approach*

Structuralism approach focuses on the structure of the literary text without considering the author. It is based on the view that a literary work has been detached from its author. The author only has the power of creating and organizing his or her literary works, but he or she does not have the power of controlling the meaning when the text comes to the reader. Thus, this approach focuses on the linguistic analysis of the structure of the literary text and does not consider other aspects.<sup>8</sup>

The literary criticism approach has colored the contemporary literary study of the Qur'an in the Western scholarship.<sup>9</sup> A number of western scholars adopt this approach of literary criticism, such as Issa J. Boullata,<sup>10</sup> Angelika Neurwith,<sup>11</sup> A.H Johns,<sup>12</sup> just to name a few. This approach is also influenced, Muslim scholars. Mustansir Mir is one example in this regard.

Mustansir Mir applied a literary criticism to the Qur'an by analyzing the structures of the story. According to him, the Qur'an

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>9</sup> The development of, or the approach to, the study of the Qur'an in the West can be classified into three stages. The first stage is historical critical approach. This study focuses on the authenticity of the Qur'an from the process of forming text into written text (source criticism and form criticism). The second development is a descriptive anthropological sociological approach. This approach focuses on the study the phenomenology of the Qur'an which includes two objects, namely the phenomenon of text and social phenomena. The third stage is an interpretative approach. This study is based on the paradigm that the Qur'an is the final text that requires interpretation. Therefore they apply a variety of approaches in interpreting al-Qur'an as literary criticism, linguistics and philology. Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Pendekatan Orientalis dalam Studi Al-Qur'an," in *Islam, Agama-agama dan Nilai Kemanusiaan; Festschrift untuk M. Amin Abdullah*, ed. Moch Nor Ikhwan and Ahmad Muttaqin (Yogyakarta: CISform, 2013), 98–109.

<sup>10</sup> Thought of Issa J. Boullata stated in his work *The Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, Richmon: Curzon Press, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Angelika's article on literature that is *Qur'anic Literary Structure Revisited: Sura al-Rahmān Between Mythic Account and Decodation of Myth*.

<sup>12</sup> A.H John's approach can be seen in his article "Joseph in the Qur'an: Dramatic Dialogue, Human Emotion and Prophetic Wisdom," *ISLAMOCRISTIANA* 7 (1981). I also discuss his idea in my article, "Anthony H. Johns dan Pendekatan Narrative Criticism terhadap Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ān: Kajian terhadap Dialog dalam Surat Yūsuf," *Proceeding* (presented at the International Conference on Qur'anic Studies, Jakarta: Pusat Studi al-Qur'an, 2014).

is one of the great literary works like the Bible. Nevertheless, the Qur'anic literary presentations do not vary as many as the Bible does. In the Bible, there are folk songs, poems containing sorrow and lamentation, the excitement of the prophets, poems depicting the beauty of nature and so on. Messages in the Qur'an are presented by literary devices and techniques, such as stories, parables, and character sketches, using the figure of speech and the like. The literary elements of the Qur'an, according to Mustansir Mir, are, as follows.<sup>13</sup>

### 1. *Word choice*

The Qur'an selects its words in a very detailed and complicated way, so their meanings can only be understood after a careful reading.<sup>14</sup> Take for example verse 13 of *al-Aḥzāb*.<sup>15</sup> It is the only verse in the Qur'an that calls Medina with the term "Yathrib", even though the city had long been called "Medina" after the Prophet's migration (*hijra*). The verse describes the events of the crisis, in which a group of Muslims defected and called on other groups, "O inhabitants of Yathrib!". The appeal aims to show that Muslims lost. The use of the word "Yathrib" is to describe the mind of defectors. They believed that Islam would have been defeated and the city would not have been the city of the Prophet anymore, but returned to the pagan status with its former name "Yathrib".<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Mustansir Mir, "The Qur'an as Literature," *Religion and Literature* (1988): 52.

<sup>14</sup> The Qur'an basically calls itself "*al-Kitāb al-Mubīn*", which is the book that is clear. "Clear" here related to the background of the reader, which is considering his age, experience, mental acuity, level of knowledge and linguistic ability. Besides "clear" is also related to the Quran itself (clear in itself), which explains something else, such as explaining the real facts. Mustansir Mir, "Language," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 88–89.

<sup>15</sup> "Some of them said, 'People of Yathrib, you will not be able to withstand (the attack), so go back!' Some of them asked the Prophet's permission to leave, saying, 'Our houses are exposed,' even though they were not – they just wanted to run away."

<sup>16</sup> Mir, "The Qur'an as Literature," 53.

## 2. *The Pictorial Element*

The Qur'an uses a beautiful language. Allegorical and parable expressions are often utilized in it. Its beauty seems to be acknowledged from the way it describes natural phenomena and situations of the 7th century Arabs.<sup>17</sup> It appears, for example, in verses 19-20 of *al-Qamar*:

19. We released a howling wind against them on a day of terrible disaster; 20 it swept people away like uprooted palm trunks.

## 3. *Humor, satire, and irony*

In the Qur'an there are not too many verses that contain humor,<sup>18</sup> as, for example, contained in Sura *al-Kahf*: 62-64 :

62. They journeyed on, and then Moses said to his servant, 'Give us our lunch! This journey of ours is very tiring,' 63. and (the servant) said, 'Remember when we were resting on the rock? I forgot the fish—Satan made me forget to pay attention to it— and it (must have) made its way into the sea.' 'How strange!' 64. Moses said, 'Then that was the place we were looking for.' So the two turned back, retraced their footsteps.

The verses tell the story of Moses and his students who were on the trip looking for the Prophet Khidr. In relation to these verses, Imam Bukhari narrated in the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, who heard from Ubay ibn Ka'b that the Prophet Muhammad said that the Prophet Moses gave a sermon in front of the Children of Israel, and then he asked, "Who is the most knowledgable?" He himself answered, "I am the most knowledgable." So, Allah blamed him for not referring to knowledge to God. Then God spoke to Moses, "One of my servants who live in a place where two oceans meet is deeper than you in knowledge." Moses said, "O

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 57; Mustansir Mir explains some of the reasons related to the importance of discussing the humor in the Qur'an. First, the Qur'an relate and describe the human situation, especially if it involved extensively with human interaction during the period of revelation. Therefore, it is very well possible if the Qur'an contains some elements of humor in some points. Second, if there are allusions in the Qur'an, the humor is also quite possible, because the humor in this case does not mean recklessness. Third, humor is one of the means we use to achieve the purpose. This is because humor can be used to convey religious knowledge and explain the religious teaching. Mustansir Mir, "Humor in the Qur'an," *The Muslim World* 81, no. 3-4 (1991): 179-180.

my Lord, how can I see him?" God said, "Bring the fish in a cart when you lose the fish, then that person over there." Moses then went with his disciples, Yusha bin Nūn and brought the fish in a basket. When they both were in a big stone, they laid their head and went asleep. At the time, their fish escaped from the basket without their awareness. When they awakened, they continued their journey. In the morning, Moses said to his disciples, "Bring our food here, we are really tired from our journey." His disciples said, "Do you know when we looked for shelter in the rock, verily I forgot (to tell about) the fish and nothing made me forget to tell except the devil and the fish took its way into the sea strangely." Moses said, "That is the place we were looking for." Then they both returned, following their trail they had passed.

The humor of the story appears from his speech that is "long-drawn-out". That's a long explanation of the disciples with a sentence that impressed apologized to Moses, and instead of explaining how the fish could be lost. The Cuteness was increased when Moses was very ignoring his guilt and rushed back to the place he appointed.<sup>19</sup>

One of an example of satire in the Qur'an, that is in verses 91-92 of *al-Ṣaffāt*:

He turned to their gods and said. 'Do you not eat? Why do you not speak?'

The verse tells the story of Ibrahim when finding an opportunity to destroy the idols when he saw the food being offered to the idols. Ibrahim then asked the Idols with serious ridicule, "What you do not eat?" Then, because there is no response he pretended to be angry, "Why don't you answer?"<sup>20</sup>

The example of mockery in the Qur'an appears in the events of the life of Abraham. He uses ridicule to rebut the pagans, as described in the verses 74 of *al-An'ām*:<sup>21</sup>

Remember when Abraham said to his father, Azar, 'How can you take idols as gods? I see that you and your people have clearly gone astray.

---

<sup>19</sup> Mir, "The Qur'an as Literature," 57.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



#### 4. *Wordplay and ambiguity*

One example of a wordplay in the Qur'an contained in verse 61 of *al-Baqarah*:

Remember when you said, 'Moses, we cannot bear to eat only one kind of food, so pray to your Lord to bring out for us some of the earth's produce, its herbs and cucumbers, its garlic, lentils, and onions.' He said, 'Would you exchange better for worse? Go to Egypt and there you will find what you have asked for.' They were struck with humiliation and wretchedness, and they incurred the wrath of God because they persistently rejected His messages and killed prophets contrary to all that is right. All this was because they disobeyed and were lawbreakers.

There is a word that is not defined in the verse. That is "Misr" which means "city". The context of the verse is that Israel is geographically diverse from Egypt. Hot deserts there make them tired and recall their life in Egypt. Therefore, the purpose of the verse might basically be to say: "If you want to enjoy good and comfortable life, then please live back in Egypt".<sup>22</sup>

#### 5. *Narrative*

The Qur'an usually does not tell a whole story but tells in parts and in a different chapter.<sup>23</sup> It aims to emphasize a purpose why a story is told in a chapter.<sup>24</sup> For example, the story of Abraham is contained in the following suras: *al-An'ām*, *al-Anbiyā'*, *al-Dhāriyāt* and *al-Mumtaḥanah*.

The story of Ibrahim in *al-An'ām* addressed to the pagans of Mecca and prominently criticized them. Part of the letter (verses 74-83) is related to the events of Ibrahim who deny the pagans. While the situation in Mecca when the revelation of the verse was

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>23</sup> The story told in full by the Qur'an is the story of Joseph in sūra of Joseph as we will discuss in the next chapter.

<sup>24</sup> According to Mir, the principle in understanding the story is with "Tasrif". This principle noticed the change, change and diversity in the stories of the Qur'an. The principle is a variation of the pattern of movement and lead to a diversity of ways in which the message of the Koran is presented in different places in the Qur'an. Thus, this principle is focused on how the message of the Qur'an is presented. Mustansir Mir and Roberta Sterman Sabbath, "Some Aspects of Narration in the Qur'an," in *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur'an as Literature and Culture* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 99.

very respectful to Abraham as the ancestor. The linkage of the situation in Mecca with the verses became clear, that if they follow their ancestor Abraham, they had to forgo their idolatrous behavior.<sup>25</sup>

As for the story of Abraham, it is narrated in verses 51-57 of *al-Anbiyā'*. In these verses, it is told how Ibrahim destroyed the idols which were worshiped by the Meccans. The illustration of the damage indicates the defeat of polytheism. What Ibrahim has done is also reflected in the actions of the Prophet. In the event called *Fath Makkah* (the Opening of Mecca), the Prophet requested that all the idols surrounding the Ka'bah be removed.

As for the story of Abraham, it is mentioned in verses 23-24 of *al-Dhāriyāt*, which also include the story of Loth. The verses illustrate the story that Abraham would be rewarded with a son in his old age, while the people of Prophet Lut will be destroyed due to their crimes. The story indicates that the system of reward and punishment in this world to be guidance to the system of rewards and punishments that will run in the next.

Further story of Abraham is found in verses 4-6 of *al-Mumtaḥanah*. The verses tell the story of Abraham who broke with his people when they finally turned against him. The story basically teaches that Muslims should separate themselves from the people of pagan Meccans.

## 6. *Dramatic dialog*

The dialogue in the Qur'an is usually given in a simple text containing a deep understanding of the mind and human behavior. The dialogue is usually found in the narration of the stories in the Qur'an, such as the dialogue between Moses and Khidr (Sura *Al-Kahf*: 65-83), Moses with Pharaoh (Sura *al-Shu'arā'*: 16-37) and others.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Mir, "The Qur'an as Literature," 59.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 61; Mustansir Mir discusses the aspects of this dialogue in his article "Dialogue in the Qur'an". According to him, the dialogue in the Qur'an aims to mediate "the transaction" between God and man. It mediates the Qur'an to offer a dramatic illustration of a theme. The dialogue in the Qur'an is also used to connect the compositions of the Qur'an as a theme that had been presented in the particular context. Furthermore, the dialogue in the Qur'an offers in-depth

## 7. Character

From the theological aspect, the characters that are mentioned in the Qur'an appear from the manifestation of the nature or characteristics of the figure narrated. In comparison with others the characters of the prophets, such as Abraham, Moses, Joseph, and others, are mostly mentioned in it.<sup>27</sup>

### Mustansir Mir's Reading of the Sura of Joseph

The chapter of Joseph (*Sura Yūsuf*) is the only chapter in the Qur'an that wholly presents the story of Joseph in a complete way.<sup>28</sup> The story includes the following episodes:

- a. Joseph had a dream. Joseph dreamed of seeing eleven stars and the sun and moon which all kneel down to him. His father told him not to tell his dream to his brothers because they will make a plot to commit crimes against him.
- b. Joseph with his brothers. Joseph's brothers felt that his father (Jacob) loves Joseph and his brother (Benjamin). They felt that his father wrong. They plan to harm Joseph so that the attention of the father will be only directed to them. They want to insert him into a bottom of the well so that he was picked up by some traveler. They asked for permission and persuaded his father to bring Joseph with them. Reluctantly, his father allowed them. They took him and put him to the bottom of the well, then they came to their father in the evening weeping and carrying his shirt covered in blood. They told his father that when he went to play, they left Joseph with the goods, then the wolves devoured him. After hearing their explanation, Jacob was very sad and just surrender to Allah. Joseph was eventually discovered by a

---

knowledge related to the characters in a story. See Mustansir Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an," *Religion & Literature* 24, no. 1 (1992): 4–6.

<sup>27</sup> Mir, "The Qur'an as Literature," 62.

<sup>28</sup> The story of Joseph basically reflects the contradiction between the Prophet Muhammad with the scribes. The Prophet was asked about the perfect story in the Qur'an. The the sūra of Joseph was revealed in response to the question. Khalafullāh, *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣ*, 341 The perfection of the story of Joseph also appears on the efforts of scholars when analyzing and exploring the story. They always find aspects of literature different in each study.

group of travelers who were taking water from the well. Then they hid him for sale.

- c. Joseph will have the temptation. The traveler sold Joseph for a cheap price. Subsequently, he was bought by the Egyptians and was later adopted until she was an adult. At one point the woman who adopted Joseph teased him. She pulled Joseph's shirt from behind, his clothes torn. When her husband knew that incident, she was even alleged that Joseph had been teased. Joseph refused the allegations. Then a witness from her family testified. He said that if his shirt was torn from the front, then she was right. If his shirt was torn from behind, then Joseph was correct. The witness saw Joseph's shirt torn from behind. Thus it was clear who was at fault. He subsequently asked Joseph to keep secret the incident
- d. Joseph was jailed. The news of al-Azīz's wife who seduced Joseph has been sounded by the women in the city. When the wife of al-Azīz heard their reproach, then they were invited to their reserved seating and were each given a knife (to cut the fruit). They asked Joseph to get out and appeared to them. When the women saw him, they were amazed at his beauty until they were not consciously hurt his finger. The wife of al-Azīz said that Joseph was what he heckled by them. She also said that she had seduced Joseph but he refused. And if he did not obey what she commanded, then he will be imprisoned. Joseph asked the Lord to avoid deceit. He preferred to jail than to follow their wishes. Then the Lord answered his prayer. He was subsequently jailed after they saw signs of the truth.
- e. Missionary endeavor of Joseph in Prison. In prison, there are two youths. One of them said that they had been dreaming of a wine press. The other young man also said that he dreamed of carrying bread on his head and partially eaten by birds. They asked Joseph to explain the meaning of his dream. They saw that Joseph was the person skilled in interpreting dreams. Joseph said that one of them will give wine (*khamr*) to his master. As for the other one will be crucified, and the birds eat the portion of the head.

- f. Joseph's interpretation of King's dream. Once the king said unto his chiefs that he dreamed of seeing of seven fat cows being eaten by seven skinny cows. He also dreamed that seven ears (wheat) is green and the other seven ears dry. He asked them to explain the meaning of his dream, but no one can. The survivors among those imprisoned with Joseph remembered that Joseph could interpret the dream. He told the king that sent him to meet Joseph. After he met with Joseph he was telling the king's dream and begged Joseph to interpret the meaning of the dream. Joseph explained that dream was a sign that the country is going to face a prosperous period of seven years. After that, the state will experience a drought for seven years. Therefore people should store food reserves in preparation for the dry season.
- g. Joseph's freedom from jail. The king sent the maid to bring Joseph into the Palace. Joseph asked them to go back and ask the King-related events that injure women their hands. Then the king said to the women, and they explained that Joseph was innocent. Wife of al-Azīz also admitted that she seduced Joseph. Demand from Yūsuf has intended that the King knew that Joseph was not a traitor to him, and Allah will not be pleased with guile those who defected. The king then ordered the guard to take Yūsuf and chose it as his confidante. He was also given a position in Egypt.
- h. Joseph's meeting with his brothers. Once Joseph's brothers come to Egypt and snapped into place, Joseph knew them, but they did not recognize him anymore. He told his brothers to bring their younger brother, Benjamin. If they did not bring him, they would not get groceries. They told Joseph that would persuade their father to take him there. Arriving home they persuaded her father to allow Benjamin go with him. Her father disappointedly allowed them on condition that they should swear in the name of God to bring Benjamin back. When they entered Joseph's place, Joseph took Benjamin into place and said that Joseph was his brother. Joseph wanted Benjamin to stay with him. He planned to trap Benjamin by inserting the cup into his sack. It was intended that they were accused of being thieves. Thus Benjamin would be redeemed

and not come home with his brothers. Joseph actually carried out this plan. Hearing Benjamin detained, Jacob cannot withstand grief. Jacob asked the brothers to come back for Benjamin. When Joseph's brothers came back into place, he revealed his true identity. Immediately, the brothers apologized for the past mistakes. Joseph forgave them and asked them to return home with his shirt and put it into their father's face so that he could see again. He also ordered them to bring the whole family to come see Joseph.

- i. Joseph's meeting with his father. When his father and family went into the place of Joseph, he embraced his parent. He sat on his throne to his parents. They all laid down as he bowed down to Joseph. He said: "O my father, this is what the dream a long time ago. Indeed, my Lord has made it a reality. Indeed, my Lord has been good to me after the devil destroys the relationship between me and my brothers. When He freed me from the prison and brought you from the village in the desert. Indeed, my Lord Supreme Gentle on what He wills. Indeed He is Knowledgeable and Wise."

In analyzing these stories, Mustansir Mir focused on three aspects: a reading of the plot, themes, and characters in the story of Joseph.<sup>29</sup>

## 1. Plot

### a) Tension and solving the problem

A special feature of the story is if the plot is tight and generating troubleshooting. The composition of the plot of the story of Joseph is as follows:

1. Joseph's dream (4-6)
2. The brothers against Joseph (8-18)
3. The wife of King attempt to seduce Joseph (23-29)
4. The effort of Women of Egypt to seduce Joseph (30-31)
5. Joseph's imprisonment (35)
6. The King's dream (43-44)

---

<sup>29</sup> Mustansir Mir, "The Qur'anic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes and Characters," *The Muslim World* 76, no. 1 (1968): 1.

Mir saw that there are irregular plot structures of the story. For example, the episode of the dream of two people imprisoned with Joseph (verses 36-42) was not taken into account, it may only be considered an attachment to the groove thereafter, the episode of Joseph imprisoned (35). Likewise, the same applies in the episode of the liberation of Joseph that occurred after the recognition of the wife of al-Azīz and Egyptian women. Mir saw that al-Azīz basically has ordered to release Joseph before such recognition while Joseph is willing to get out of jail because he wants the truth about these women plan revealed.<sup>30</sup>

*b) Parallel<sup>31</sup>*

There are parallels in some of the scenes in the story of Joseph, which might not have otherwise from a cursory reading, namely:

1. In Kana'an Joseph was dropped into the well, whereas at the time in Egypt incorporated into a prison. This happens for a crime he did not do. The first incident caused by hatred of his brother, while the latter was due to the love of the wife of al-Azīz to Joseph.
2. When Joseph was a child, his brothers took him away and they went home without him. They have a bad intention to harm Joseph. When he went to Egypt they took Benjamin and went home without him. However, it is aimed at both, because if it does not abandon Benjamin they cannot get wheat for their livelihood.
3. There are two attempts to win the love. Joseph's brothers were trying to gain the affections of his father and wife of al-Azīz who tried to get the love of the Joseph.<sup>32</sup>

*c) Dramatic Element*

The story of Joseph is rich in the dramatic element. There are striking scenes and moments that are very dramatic in the story. It is evident from the beginning of the story in the form of the extraordinary dream of Joseph. Readers will quickly feel that

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> Parallel is the arrangement of such a statement with a parallel structure "A.B.A.B". The parallel depicts a movement of scene in a story. Mustansir Mir, "Some Figures of Speech in the Qur'an," *Religion and Literature* (2008): 34-35.

<sup>32</sup> Mir, "The Qur'anic Story," 3.

dreams are important, but it would be wrong to guess what the dream was. In addition, some events foreshadow one another, such as maintaining a balance between something that is predictable or not. For example, Jacob knew Joseph's dream and asked him to stay away from his brothers. In the verses later we find the evil plans of his brothers. What scares Jacob really happened. The element of surprise in this story is when Jacob thought Joseph's brothers tried to hurt him if they know about his dreams. In fact, Joseph's brothers still hurt him even though they did not know about Joseph's dreams.

## 2. Theme

### a) Major theme

- 1) God is the One who was omnipotent.

Joseph's story represents a defense of the thesis that God had the power and the fulfillment of his will is not negotiable.<sup>33</sup>

- 2) God is the One of Gentle

The story also highlights that God's power cannot be denied.<sup>34</sup>

- 3) God is the One who is Aware and Wise

The structure of the text (*āyāt*) is often found together in the beginning, middle and end of the story. It aims to emphasize that the Qur'an wants people to view the story in order to obtain the extraordinary wisdom of the One who is omniscient.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup>As outlined in verse 21 of Sura Yūsuf: *"The Egyptian who bought him said to his wife, 'Look after him well! He may be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son.' In this way We settled Joseph in that land and later taught him how to interpret dreams: God always prevails in His purpose, though most people do not realize it."*

<sup>34</sup>As outlined in the Sura Yūsuf: 100. *"And took them up to (his) throne. They all bowed down before him and he said, 'Father, this is the fulfillment of that dream I had long ago. My Lord has made it come true and has been gracious to me— He released me from prison and He brought you here from the desert—after Satan sowed discord between me and my brothers. My Lord is most subtle in achieving what He will; He is the All Knowing, the Truly Wise."*

<sup>35</sup> Mir, "The Qur'anic Story," 5–7.



b) *Minor Theme*

- 1) Harmonization with the intention of God: an absolute requirement  
Humans must act in harmony with God's purpose. In other words, humans need to establish harmony with the moral law. Although God determines human guide, humans need certain qualities such as *'ilm*,<sup>36</sup> *ta'wakkal*<sup>37</sup> dan *ihsan*.<sup>38</sup>
- 2) The balance of views between a provision of religious and human freedom.
- 3) Examination rewards service and regret.

3. *Character*

a) *General character*

Study of characters from the story of Joseph help understand the content of the Qur'an regarding human character.

b) *Major character*

1. *Jacob*

The starting point of the dramatic conflict in the story of Joseph is Jacob's love for Joseph, or rather the perception of Joseph's brothers related to the love. The Qur'an indicates the character of Jacob, who sided with Joseph because of the latter's remarkable talent. Jacob felt that only Joseph who is qualified to carry on the tradition of Abraham. He set it upon learning of Joseph's dreams.

Jacob is also described in the Qur'an as a person who was very clever and very sensitive until he was blind when he lost Joseph. The sensitivity of Jacob also appears of telepathy, he could grasp the smell of Joseph when his brother brought him

---

<sup>36</sup>As outlined in Sura Yūsuf: 68. "And, when they entered as their father had told them, it did not help them against the will of God, it merely satisfied a wish of Jacob's. He knew well what We had taught him, though most people do not."

<sup>37</sup>As outlined in Sura Yūsuf: 67. "He said, 'My sons, do not enter all by one gate – use different gates. But I cannot help you against the will of God: all power is in God's hands. I trust in Him; let everyone put their trust in Him,'"

<sup>38</sup>As outlined in Sura Yūsuf: 90. "And they cried, 'Could it be that you are Joseph?' He said, 'I am Joseph. This is my brother. God has been gracious to us: God does not deny anyone who is mindful of God and steadfast in adversity the rewards of those who do good.'"

clothes. Jacob also described as being very easy to believe. He hesitated to Joseph's brothers but allowed Joseph and even Benjamin to go with them. However, Jacob is a combination of "*tadbīr* and *taqdīr*". He had tremendous belief in God, though it did not prevent him from always trying to take precautions against a possible harm. When his plan or action fails, he patiently bears, crying out to God. He has a remarkable self-control. It appears from his ability to control his anger. Even his patience reaches the level of "*ṣabrun jamīl*" (high and beautiful patient).<sup>39</sup>

## 2. *Joseph*

Joseph was described as a shy, humble and respectful since he was a child.<sup>40</sup> When growing up, he became pious. He was very aware of acts of sin and had a very deep faith. The way he introduced his religious establishments showed his brilliance. Life in prison showed the character of honest thus strengthening his honor. He was also known for his forgiveness.<sup>41</sup>

## 3. *Joseph's brothers*

Joseph's brothers were known as very confident. It is because they were always in groups whenever they did their daily routines and this formed a strong formation of solidarity and partnership. But they lacked awareness, primarily related to the religious consciousness. They were also tricky and used all means to fulfill their desire.

## 4. *The wife of al-Azīz*

Of the salient character of al-Azīz's wife include sensual, aggressive and resentment. In addition, she was also tricky, willing to lie openly, but is very confident.

---

<sup>39</sup> Mir, "The Qur'anic Story," 11.

<sup>40</sup> Yūsuf character is evident from his words when he told his dream, using the word "*ra'aitu*" (I saw). The words become a clue to know the character, where the word "*ra'aitu*" is the answer to a question that was not disclosed. Joseph knew the meaning of his dream, but he hesitated to tell his father, because it will eventually become vanity. (See the story of Joseph in Genesis 37: 9)

<sup>41</sup> Mir, "The Qur'anic Story," 12.

c) *Additional characters*

1. *The caravan*

The caravan in the story described the people who had the view that they got the ultimate chance, especially after finding Joseph in the well.

2. *Al-Azīz*

Al-Azīz is described as the person who had a fair mind and could scold his wife who committed evil intrigues. Unfortunately, he was under the powerful control of his wife, so he could not act to deal with the situation of Joseph in prison.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion

This study shows that in reviewing the Qur'anic story of Joseph, Mir focuses on analysis of the plot, themes and characters. In this regard, it can be noted the important aspect of his methodology and the content of his interpretation.

Methodologically, Mir determines the theme of the story of Joseph and divides it into some compositions of the plot. This way seems to be affected by Farahi-Islahi idea of the coherence in the Qur'an (*nazm*) that became of his concern before. It can be seen, in his previous work he discussed the Islahi's concept of coherence in the Qur'an (*nazm*) in *Tadabbur-i Qur'an* that built on the theory of his teacher, Farahi who is the first scholar offered theory that Qur'an is marked by thematic and structural form called *nazm*. Those concepts that seemed to inspire Mir in his work. Besides, his method can be categorized as structuralist approach. This is evident from its efforts to further explore the intrinsic elements of the story of the Qur'an rather than the extrinsic elements. It is also related to an analysis of how the Qur'an presents its message through the structure of the stories that have a high literary. What he does is something that makes him different from other scholars in studying the sūra of Joseph.

While from the aspect of his interpretation, he finds that there are parallels or similarities that may escape from a cursory reading. First, when in Kana'an Joseph inserted into a hole/well,

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 13–14.

while in Egypt he was put into prison. Second, when Yusuf was a child, his brothers took him away and went home without him. When he went to Egypt, they took Benjamin and went home without him. Third, there are two attempts to win the love. Joseph's brothers were trying to gain the affections of his father and wife of al-Aziz who tried to get the love of the Prophet Joseph. Moreover, Mir also afford to reflect on the nature and power of God and reveals the moral messages in the scene and structured dialogue on the passages in the sūra of Joseph. It has become a point of Mir's analysis of the story of Joseph. He said, the story of Joseph basically wanted to show that God is the Almighty, the Most gentle, All-Knowing and Wise. Therefore, he not only reveals the detailed and meticulous characters of scenes and dialogue in the sūra of Joseph, but also able to deduce its moral message.

### References

- Abdel Haleem, Muhammad. *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style*. London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001.
- Amīn al-Khūlī. *Manāhij Tajdīd fī al-Nahw wa al-Balāghah wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab*. Cairo, 1995.
- Anthony, A. Johns. "Joseph in the Qur'an: Dramatic Dialogue, Human Emotion and Prophetic Wisdom." *ISLAMOCRISTIANA* 7 (1981): 29–55.
- Bint al-Shāṭi', Aishah 'Abd al-Raḥmān. *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.
- Boullata, Issa J. *The Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*. Richmon: Curzon Press, 2000.
- <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/people/mustansir-mir>.
- <http://philrel.ysu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/MirCV.pdf>.
- Khalafullāh, Muḥammad Aḥmad. *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣ fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. Beirut, 1999.
- Mir, Mustansir. "Dialogue in the Qur'an." *Religion & Literature* 24, no. 1 (1992): 1–22.
- — —. "Humor in the Qur'an." *The Muslim World* 81, no. 3-4 (1991): 179–193.

- — —. "Language." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, edited by Andrew Rippin, 88–106. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- — —. "Some Figures of Speech in the Qur'an." *Religion and Literature* (2008): 31–48.
- — —. "The Qur'an as Literature." *Religion and Literature* (1988): 49–64.
- — —. "The Qur'anic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes and Characters." *The Muslim World* 76, no. 1 (1968): 1–15.
- Mir, Mustansir, and Roberta Sterman Sabbath. "Some Aspects of Narration in the Qur'an." In *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur'an as Literature and Culture*, 93–106. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009.
- Selden, Raman, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Fifth Edition. Great Britain: Pearson Longman, 2005.
- Stern, M.S. "Muhammad and Joseph: A Study of Koranic Narrative." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (1985): 193–204.
- Syamsuddin, Sahiron. "Pendekatan Orientalis dalam Studi Al-Qur'an." In *Islam, Agama-agama dan Nilai Kemanusiaan; Festschrift untuk M. Amin Abdullah*, edited by Moch Nor Ikhwan and Ahmad Muttaqin, 95–110. Yogyakarta: CISform, 2013.