

# DISCOURSE STRATEGIES AND NARRATIVE REPETITION IN THE QUR'ĀN: A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *AL-SHU'ARĀ'*

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## **Abstract**

This paper attempts to explain some discursive strategies in relation to the cyclic structure of narratives in the Qur'ānic context of Sūrat "al-Shu'arā'." To that end, the paper works on three essential interrelated aspects of study. First, it detects the cyclic structure that interconnects the seven prophets' narratives within the Sūrah. Second, it investigates the cross-Sūrah interconnections by examining the (re)occurrence of each prophet's narrative in the preceding and following sūrahs. Third, it discusses how such coherent interrelationships among the relevant sūrahs can reveal certain discourse strategies such as narrative extension, intention, expansion, juxtaposition, and inversion among these sūrahs. Another, yet interrelated, aspect of the study is to explain the "Us/Them" distinction counted in the Qur'ānic narratives involved, and to show how such dichotomy is realized through the use of referential and predicational strategies. The study adopts and adapts Reisigl and Wodak's strategies to address this aspect. Within this analytical approach, the narratives are examined on the basis of two strategies; namely, "despatialization" (actionyms, perceptionyms, anthroponyms, and metaphors of spatiality) and "collectivization"

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(pronouns and possessive determiners). The analysis of data reveals some striking findings that can be summarized in two major points: first, each of the narrative's topoi in the social actors representation evinces the dominance of predicational strategies; second, the Qur'anic discourse is bias-free and is, thereby, drastically distinguished from other types of discourse such as political discourse.

*Key Words:* the Qur'an, prophets, narratives, topoi, discourse strategies.

## 1. Introduction

The text of the Holy Qur'an has a complicated structure in terms of form and content. A glance over the content of Qur'an calls reader's attention to its thematic and stylistic repetitions. These repetitions that occur on all levels (semantic, syntactic, graphologic, narrative, rhetorical, etc.) are supposed to cement the verses and *sūras* to one another; however, they do at times add to the text semantic and thematic tensions. They rupture the text and, thereby, confuse the reader. This feature renders the text nonlinear so that, literally speaking, it sounds fragmented.

The nonlinearity and fragmentation have resulted in the emergence of a huge body of exegeses, trying to clarify Qur'anic text semantically, thematically, narratologically, and syntactically. For instance, al-Qushayrī responds to the changing style and content of the Qur'an by shifting "back and forth between expository prose, rhymed prose, metaphors, and poetry." (Sands 2017, xvii). Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī's exegesis, the longest Sunnī commentary in Persian language, attends to lexicography, the derivation of words, Arabic grammar, Qur'an recitation, biographies, Ḥadīth, the principles of jurisprudence, the science of the legal rulings, the science of transactions and interactions, and the science of bestowal (Chittick 2015, ix-x). Another mostly referred to exegesis is *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* written by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī. Bin Talal, in his introduction, contends the primary and overall goal of *Tafsīr* is "only to clarify the immediate sense of the Qur'anic text, thereby facilitating the reading of the Qur'an." (Bin Talal 2008, xi). In contrast to *al-Jalālayn* whose writers try to "remove any obstacles to understanding any word or sense in the holy text" (Bin Talal 2008, xi), al-Tustarī's *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-aẓīm* has an "allusive, elliptical, and even obscure style." (Keeler

2011, xxvii). The difference lies in their approaches. *Al-Jalālayn* tries to make the holy text understandable at least literally; al-Tustarī's *Tafsīr*, however, attempts to convey spiritual guidance and illumination. The other two exegeses are *Tafsīr Namūnab* and *Tafsīr al-Mizān* that provide detailed interpretations of the Qurʾānic text with an emphasis on its semantic and thereby thematic significance.

The study of the organic unity of the Qurʾān arises out of the analysis of textual relations in the Qurʾān which marks the intersecting point between *Tafsīr* and linguistics. The approach of Muslim scholars in this sense can be divided into two main categories: those who insist on the inimitability of the Qurʾān and the authenticity of its text and order. Scholars such as Muṣṭafá Šādiq al-Rāfiʿī (1995) and Muḥammad Rajab al-Bayyūmī (2000) base the unity of the Qurʾān, despite its variety of topics and their thematic irrelevance, on its unifying mission to convey the preaching of Islam to all mankind, its physical and spiritual unity expressed via rhythms and rhymes that dominate each particular sūrah.

The other category of Muslim scholars focuses on individual sūrahs; they argue the various topics and themes within a single sūrah serve the central idea around which that particular sūrah revolves. Among these, one can refer to Sayyid Quṭb (1967), Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh Dirāz (2000), and Neal Robinson (1986, 1996). Salwa M. S. El-Awa is another scholar who attends to the issue of coherence and relevance in the Qurʾān, focusing only on the “inter-verse level that is between verses of each *sūrah*” (original emphasis; 2006: 11). Amin Ahsan Islahi seeks to establish a theory that covers both inter-verse level and cross-sūrah level throughout the Holy Qurʾān; his *Tadabbur-i Qurʾān* divides the whole Qurʾān in seven groups named *ʿamūd* (central theme). Each section revolves around a specific theme. This renders his theory solely thematic; it does not cover the linguistic or narrative strategies used in the Qurʾān (Rauf 2009, 213).

Although these interpretations pay attention to the narratives which are embedded in Qurʾān's text, they approach these narratives as mere stories that are brought for advice and admonishment of people. The cross-*sūrah* interrelationships between the stories and their contribution to the structure of the *sūrah*, wherein they appear, are not worked on. The present study attempts to fill in the gap, showing how the apparent fragmentations that the narratives bring to the text add to it thematic and stylistic significance.

An obvious feature of the Qurʾānic narratives is their heavy reliance on Us/Them distinction. The occurrence of this dichotomy in political discourse renders it highly biased. Analyzing such a distinction through referential and predicational strategies deployed in the Qurʾānic text would achieve two points simultaneously: first, the distinction between religious and political discourse is highlighted; second, the inter- as well as intra-*sūrah* connections are laid bare.

The present study analyzes discursual features of the Qurʾānic text and its narrative structure with a special reference to the 26<sup>th</sup> *sūrah* of the Holy Qurʾān, “al-Shuʿarā’.” This *sūrah* has been selected because, in comparison to other *sūrahs*, it contains almost all of the main narratives (seven stories) that recur every now and then throughout the Qurʾān. After “al-Baqarah,” this *sūrah* stands as the second for its number of verses (227 verses or *āyahs*). This article approaches the *sūrah*’s text from two perspectives: its proximization discourse and its narratological dimension. It argues that “al-Shuʿarā’” has a cyclic narrative structure which interlinks the beginning of the *sūrah* to its concluding part. The article detects a circular narrative structure that not only keeps “al-Shuʿarā’” running on, but also all the other *sūrahs* that cohere with it through allusion, repetition, symmetry, or rhetorical structure. This circularity is shown to be kept on through Us/Them dichotomy of the narratives.

## 2. Literature Review

“Al-Shuʿarā’” is the second long *sūrah* by verse. *Tafsīr al-mīzān* takes the whole *sūrah* as consolation for the prophet in knowing that other prophets were worse off in their missions (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1997, XV, 248-249). Exegetes are all of the view that “Al-Shuʿarā’” is a Meccan *sūrah* except for its last four verses which have been revealed to the prophet in Medina (Makārim Shirāzī 2008, XV/203). Moreover, due to its denouncement of poets or “Shuʿarā’,” after which the whole *sūrah* has been named, this *sūrah* has been referred to by many exegetes for proving that the Qurʾān is far from being *a poetic work and the prophet is not a poet* (Q 26: 224).

“Al-Shuʿarā’” contains seven main stories of the previous prophets who were rejected by their people. Almost all Qurʾān scholars have attempted an interpretive account of these stories in the *sūrah*. They have not paid attention to the structure of each one of the narratives and how they are interlinked to one another in the body of the *sūrah*, as well as, in cross-*sūrah* relations. The present study tries to find out

a narrative structure in “al-Shu‘arā’.” It analyzes the narratives and their structures from a narratological perspective. In Snævarr’s words, “[s]tory is *what* is being recounted, independent of the medium used. Narrative is the *way* the story is told” (Snævarr 2010, 168). Polkinghorne contends the concept of a story is prototypical in the sense that it

[i]dentifies a protagonist and, a predicament, attempts to resolve the predicament, then the outcomes of such attempts, the reactions of the protagonist to the situation, and the causal relationship among each of the elements in the story. (Polkinghorne 1988, 112)

Similarly, Snævarr emphasizes the causal connection between the events and situations, “If there are no causal connections between them, then we have only a chronicle of non-related events, not a real story, no unity.” (Snævarr 2010, 172).

The other point highlighted by Snævarr about a story is “logical preconditions for actions, not only causes” (Snævarr 2010, 173). By this, he means the actors in a story should have reasons for acting. Thus, Snævarr’s definition of a narrative well applies to the way the Qurʾānic stories are structured; he writes,

[w]e can safely say that N is a narrative if it is a full-fledged, non-schematic ‘told’ (in the wide sense) representation of events, which form a whole, in part owing to causal connections between the events in the story, which N relates and N is told by an explicit or implicit narrator to a likewise explicit or implicit narratee. (Snævarr 2010, 174)

He further explicates any “told” representation of events can be taken as a narrative if and only if it has a “storied structure;” and by “storied structure,” he means it has a given beginning, middle, and end, and it forms a unified whole. (Snævarr 2010, 174-175)

On the significance of narratives, one can refer to Danto for whom narratives are means for explanation and description. He further accentuates the relevance of the narrative to the intentions of the storyteller (Danto 1985, 132). The explanatory and descriptive mission of narratives reveals the storyteller’s intention and interests, and simultaneously accounts for inclusion of some details and exclusion of some others. He writes, “any narrative is a structure imposed upon events, grouping some of them together with others, and ruling some out as lacking relevance.” (Danto 1985, 132). Envisaged as such, the stories in the Qurʾān are explanatory and descriptive narratives, since

they all have a unified “storied structure;” their narrator is God and the people are the narratees. The stories bear God’s intentions which get revealed in the *sūrah*, wherein they occur.

A glance at the stories that the Qur’ān narrates reveals not only do they develop out of Us/Them distinction, but for their affective purpose they depend on this dichotomy in which God stands as “We” or “I” and the people to whom a prophet is sent represent “They.” This dichotomy has been widely utilized in political discourse and renders it highly prejudiced. Theorizing Us/Them dichotomy entails clarification of two main points: group, and the related referential and predicational strategies. The notion of group has been worked on by advocates of referential strategies. Originally, group-living was based on survival strategy (Schaller and Neuberg 2008, 403). Banding together resulted in boundaries between groups (Lovaglia, Houser, and Barron 2002). While the intra-group relations were mostly cooperative, inter-group relations were competitive and conflictual over the limited resources. Gradually, group-living came to rely on the categorization of the social world into “us” versus “them.” (Kurzban, Toobyand, and Cosmides 2001, 15387). This dichotomy led to binary conceptualizations like self/other, friend/foe, familiar/alien (van der Dennen 1999; Chilton 2004).

In Schaller and Neuberg’s observation, what promotes avoidance is not mere categorization of an individual as an out-group; it requires “the activation of some sort of negative stereotype.” (Schaller and Neuberg 2008, 405). They further call the cognitive categories and associations that link the out-group with expectations of harm and harmful intent as prejudice “syndromes.” (Schaller and Neuberg, 2008; Schaller et al. 2004). These syndromes or stereotypes are characterized as ideologies. According to van Dijk, ideologies include a “very general polarisation schema defined by the opposition between Us and Them” suggesting that “groups build an ideological image of themselves [...] in such a way that (generally) We are represented positively, and They come out negatively.” (van Dijk 1998, 69). Associating the out-group members with threats or threatening intentions provokes the in-group members’ discriminatory and exclusionary behaviors (Schaller et al., 2004; van Dijk, 2000a and 2000b).

The in-group/out-group distinction is best presented through referential and predicational strategies. Reisigl and Wodak regard referential strategies as the basic ones in the communication of prejudice (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Adopting a broader definition,

they contend referential strategies construct social actors as “ingroups and outgroups.” (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 45). They refer to “nationalisation,” “de-spatialisation,” “dissimilation,” and “collectivisation” as referential strategies (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 48-52). For Reisigl and Wodak, nationalization is nationality-oriented. But in the Qurʾānic stories, the people’s nationality is not always a discriminating factor; rather, in some cases nationyms become a generalizing force. The linguistic means that the Qurʾān draws upon in its stories are mostly those related to de-spatialization defined in terms of action (actionyms), anthropology (anthroponyms), metaphors of spatiality, and collectivization (pronouns and possessive determiners) (see Figure 2.5 in Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 48-52).

In addition to referential strategies, there are predicational strategies that activate cognitive modules and promote behavior (Hart 2010, 62). Therefore, they are emotively coercive. Coercion is a proposed strategy in political discourse (Chilton 2004; Chilton and Schäffner 1997) and it means to “affect the beliefs, emotions and behaviours of others in such a way that suits one’s own interests” (Hart 2010, 63). For Chilton, there are two kinds of linguistic coercion: cognitive coercion and emotive coercion. Cognitive coercion is propositional and produces cognitive effects in text-consumers; emotive coercion appeals to the text-consumer’s emotions to make them behave in a certain way (Chilton 2004, 118). While referential strategies are more often evaluative (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 46), predicational strategies are provocative.

Predicational strategies aim at achieving emotive and cognitive coercion. For achieving emotive coercion, text-producers represent the out-group in relation to a particular, recurring “topoi.” Van Eemeren et al. (2013, 38) translate a “topos” as a rule or procedure. Topoi are related to pragmatic presupposition and defined in terms of “assumptions the speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge” (Givon 1979, 50). For Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 74), topoi are content-based, expressed as conditional “conclusion rules.” It is in terms of these two strategies that the topoi in the Qurʾānic narratives are to be analyzed and discussed.

### **3. Methodology**

This part comprises two sub-sections: corpus and analysis procedure.

### 3.1. Corpus

The data of the present study are driven from “al-Shu‘arā’,” since it is the only *sūrah* wherein the main narratives appear together in a well-defined systematic structure. It then moves on through the other *sūrahs* such as “Hūd,” “al-Nisā’,” “al-Anbiyā’,” “Saba’,” “al-‘Ankabūt,” “al-Baqarah,” “Ṭā-Hā,” “al-A‘rāf,” “al-An‘ām,” “al-Naḥl,” “Āl ‘Imrān,” “Yūnus,” “al-Dhāriyāt,” “al-Najm,” “al-Mu‘minūn,” “al-Qamar,” “al-Taḥrīm,” and “al-Mā‘idah” to present how the narratives are exposed to discursal extension, intension, expansion, juxtaposition, and inversion throughout the text.

### 3.2. Analysis Procedure

This study adopts and adapts Reisigl and Wodak’s (2001) referential strategies of de-spatialization and collectivization. The stories in the Qur’ān and the way the Qur’ānic discourse represents social actors have been analyzed as shown in *Table 1*.

Selected strategies	Linguistic means	Examples
De-spatialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Actionyms</li> <li>▪ Perceptionyms</li> <li>▪ Anthroponyms</li> <li>▪ Metaphors of spatiality</li> </ul>	Rejection, telling lies, accusation Non-believers Residents of the Hell
Collectivization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pronouns</li> <li>▪ Possessive determiners</li> </ul>	We (I), they, Us (Me), them Our (My), their

*Table 1.* Referential Strategies in the Narratives of the Qur’ān

Topos	Association
Character	Unreliable, hypocrites
Sin	Sinners, perverse
Threat	*dangerous (danger)
Power	Exploiters and loiters

*Table 2.* Recurring Topoi and Typical Associations

The study also detects and analyzes the topoi that span the Qur’ānic text by way of its stories. The following table summarizes the topoi that have been detected in *sūrahs*.



## 4. Results

This part is divided into three main sections: narrative structure in which the cyclic structure of the seven prophets' narratives in "al-Shuʿarā" is presented. In addition, different narrative strategies such as narrative extension, exclusion, inversion, ellipsis, or expansion are presented. Two succeeding sections deal with discourse strategies, referential and predicational. The detection of these strategies is restricted to the seven prophets' narratives. The part on referential strategies is based on the dominant linguistic means: actionyms, perceptionyms, anthroponyms, and metaphors of spatiality. The last section deals with predicational strategies and is divided into topoi of character, sin, threat, and power.

### 4.1. Narrative Cycle

"Al-Shuʿarā" comprises 227 verses. The narration of seven main stories begins from verse 10 and ends in verse 190. These stories are both preceded and succeeded by "And verily, your Lord is He, the Exalted in Might, most Merciful" (Q 26:9 and 191). The same verse comes between the stories, separating the story of each nation from one another (Q 26:68, 104, 140, 159, and 175). Narratologically, the stories in this sūrah meet the requirements that Snævarr has enumerated for a narrative. First, they have storied structures; second, they have middle, beginning, and end. Third, they are a unified whole. The narrator in all of them is God and the narratee is, first, the prophet and, then, people. The stories in this sūrah have a basic schema: God sends a prophet to a people. The people reject, accuse, or ridicule him. God punishes the people for disobeying and saves the prophet. In these short stories, the people's actions have causal relations and their doomed end is the logical result of their disobedience. Although the first story which is about Moses and Pharaoh is longer and has more details (Q 26:10-67), it follows the same narrative schema. The repetitive narrative schema in these seven stories, and their being

separated from one another by a single verse, gives the recounting verses a cyclic structure which can be shown in the following figure:

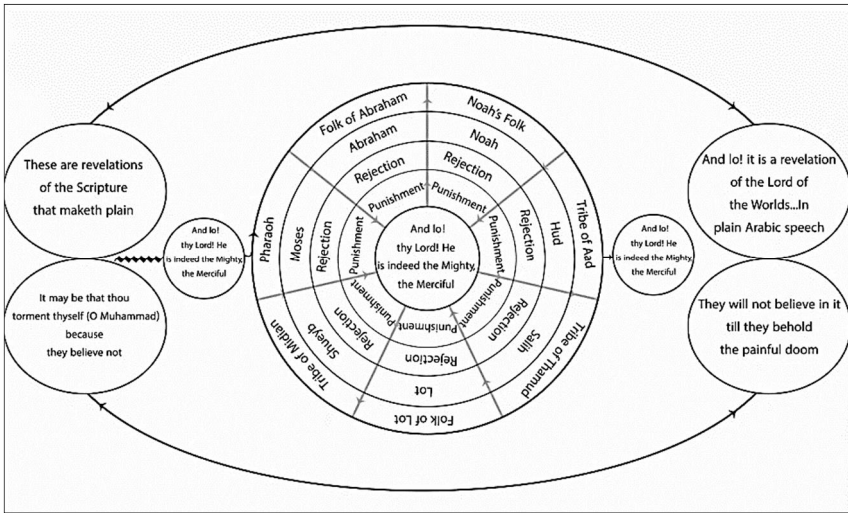


Figure 1: The Designed Cyclic Structure of Seven Prophets' Narratives in "al-Shu'arā'"

As Figure 1 shows, this cycle does not run on its own; there are four major forces in the *sūrah*; three of these forces will be discussed here and the fourth will be elaborated on in the part related to referential strategies. First, the same demarcating verse (situated at the center) appears on both sides of the cycle (Q 26:9 and 191) and thus interlinks the stories with the main body of the *sūrah*. Besides, the second verse of the *sūrah* which refers to the Holy Book, "[t]hese are Verses of the Book that makes (things) clear" (Q 26:2), is given further details and descriptions in the verses that immediately appear after the cycle, "Verily this is a Revelation from the Lord of the worlds" (Q 26:192). The third point that makes the stories relevant to the context of the whole *sūrah* is God's intention of narrating them to His prophet. In the third verse, God wants his prophet not to torment himself because "they do not become Believers" (Q 26:3). Then, He starts narrating the stories of seven preceding prophets who were similarly rejected by their nations. Narrating their stories in much the same manner, God draws a parallel line between all the previous prophets and the prophet of Islam. Through this juxtaposing repetition, God compares the Arab nation with the previous ones and predicts for them the same end. Foreseeing

such a doom for the prophet's people has a gesture to any reader who is the Qurʾān's narratee and, thus, makes the cyclic structure of the stories run on endlessly. This in itself can be taken as one of the signs of the miraculous narration of the Holy Book.

#### 4.1.1. Narrative Extension

The first mention of Moses and his conflicts with Pharaoh occurs in "al-Baqarah" (Q 2:47), where God directly addresses "O Children of Israel!" in a reminding gesture to His graces on them and their mischievous ingratitude. He refers to the sufferings they went through and the fact that only He could save them, "And remember, We delivered you from the people of Pharaoh: they set you hard tasks and punishments, slaughtered your sons and let your womenfolk live; therein was a tremendous trial from your Lord" (Q 2:49). In the following verse, God refers to the way He saved them, "We divided the sea for you and saved you and drowned Pharaoh's people within your very sight" (Q 2:50). This *sūrah* does not disclose more about how Moses' folk were brought to the sea and rescued. This hole in the narrative is filled in Ṭā-Hā, verse 77, where God states, "And We sent an inspiration to Moses: 'Travel by night with My servants, and strike a dry path for them through the sea, without fear of being overtaken (by Pharaoh) and without (any other) fear'" (Q 20:77). Yet still, some point remains untold in this story, and that is how Moses strikes a dry path in the sea. The details about this event are given in al-Shuʿarā': "Then We told Moses by inspiration: 'Strike the sea with your rod.' So it divided, and each separate part became like the huge, firm mass of a mountain" (Q 26:63). Following up Moses' story about the way he rescued his folk through the sea interconnects the *sūrahs* across the Book and, simultaneously, in each repetition of the story some detail is added to the story; this can be called a case of narrative extension.

#### 4.1.2. Narrative Exclusion

In Moses story which appears first in "al-Baqarah," God reminds Children of Israel of the torments Pharaoh inflicted on them (Q 2:49). However, the *sūrah* does not reveal the reasons for these tortures. The whole story then is recounted in al-Aʿrāf, where Pharaoh's wizards are defeated by Moses' miraculous staff and, thus, fall down prostrate, "Saying, we believe in the Lord of the worlds" (Q 7:121). Whereupon, Pharaoh decides to torment the believers, "Their male children will we slay; (only) their females will we save alive" (Q 7:127). Before the final

annihilation of Pharaoh in the sea, God strikes them with “years (of droughts) and shortness of crops” (Q 7:130); then, He sends “(plagues) on them: Wholesale Death, Locusts, Lice, Frogs, and Blood: Signs openly self-explained: but they were steeped in arrogance,—a people given to sin” (Q 7:133). After all, when they insisted on their non-belief, God drowned them in the sea. The details before their getting drowned are omitted from *al-Shu‘arā’*, because God’s intension here is not to show Pharaoh’s perseverance with denial of His signs and His endurance; rather, He wants to show the doom of deniers. After all, if such details were included here, the balance (in terms of length) between Moses narrative and the other stories would have been disturbed. This discursal technique is called narrative exclusion.

#### **4.1.3. Narrative Inversion**

*Al-A‘rāf* continues Moses’ folk story, after their survival from the sea, and recounts the way they turned against him; first, they asked him to give them idols to worship (Q 7:138), and then in his forty-day absence, they made a calf and worshipped it (Q 7:148). However, *al-Nisā’* reports that Moses’ folk chose the calf “after Clear Signs had come to them.” (Q 7:153). One of those proofs was shown to them for their request to see Allah, “Show us Allah in public.” Upon this, “they were dazed for their presumption, with thunder and lightning” (Q 4:153). After this, they turned to worshipping the calf. However, the same events are presented somehow else in *al-Baqarah*. In this *sūrah*, it is said that Moses returned to his people after forty days of absence to find them worshipping a calf. When he blamed them for this, they said, “O Moses! We shall never believe in you until we see Allah manifestly” (Q 2:55). This is called inversion in repetition; and inversion in sequence of the events of the story each time it is repeated gives the text narrative tension. The tension may apparently confuse the reader. However, there is a delicate rhetorical trick behind this inversion and that has to do with people’s stubbornness in their unbelief. The inversion of the sequence of events in Moses story may imply that no matter before the calf incident, the lightning seized his folk’s gaze or after that; in any way, they did not and would not believe and remained doomed.

#### **4.1.4. Narrative Ellipsis**

In *al-Shu‘arā’*, the incidents of the calf and the request of Moses’ people to see Allah are omitted; however, these incidents had already

been related in detail in three *sūrah*s before al-Shuʿarāʾ: Al-Baqarah, al-Nisāʾ, and al-Aʿrāf, respectively. Thrice repetition of the story is in itself of significance and highlights its importance. Therefore, when it is omitted from al-Shuʿarāʾ, it does not imply their insignificance. Rather, the mention of Moses and his folk brings onstage all the events that had already been mentioned in previous *sūrah*s. This kind of repetition is called narrative ellipsis in which the already stated is not overtly but only implicitly (elliptically) repeated in what is mentioned right now.

The same applies to Abraham’s narrative. The Abraham al-Shuʿarāʾ speaks of is the prophet whose story has already been recounted in al-Baqarah. In this *sūrah*, Abraham asks God to show him how He revives the dead in order to put his heart at ease, “He said: Take four birds; tame them to turn to you; put a portion of them on every hill and call to them: they will come to you (flying) with speed” (Q 2:260). Abraham reappears in al-Anʿām to argue against his non-believing father, Āzar, and proves no entity in the universe (star, the moon, and the sun) equals God in power and deserves to be worshipped (Q 6:74-81). He is the prophet who begets a child by God’s power while he and his wife are both old (Q 11:69-72). These stories provide a good background for Abraham’s reappearance in al-Shuʿarāʾ wherein he challenges his people’s disbelief. Narratologically, Abraham’s previous experiences of death and (re)birth well justifies his firm belief in the Almighty. In this way, the previous stories, ellipticized, can function as logical reasons for what the prophet says and does. The mention of Abraham in the succeeding *sūrah*, al-ʿAnkabūt has a gesture back to what had gone on in al-Shuʿarāʾ, “And if you reject (the Message), so did generations before you” (Q 29:18). Thus the following mention of Abraham emphasizes his mission in an act of repetition.

#### 4.1.5. Narrative Expansion and Exclusion

The first mention of Noah appears in al-Aʿrāf. This *sūrah* simply relates how Noah asked his people to believe in God, how they denied him, and thereupon received God’s punishment (Q 7:59-64). This story with almost the same details reappears in Yūnus, verses 71 up to 73. It is in Hūd that Noah’s story is detailed from the start of his mission till he is inspired by God to build an ark to save his household save for his son, “O Noah! He is not of your family: for his conduct is unrighteous. So ask not of Me that of which you have no knowledge ...” (Q 11:46). The detail about his son is omitted from al-Shuʿarāʾ. With respect to the

previous *sūrah*s, al-Aʿrāf and Yūnus, the addition of details in Hūd is an instance of narrative expansion; but with respect to al-Shuʿarāʾ the omission is one of narrative exclusion.

## **4.2. Referential Strategies**

### **4.2.1. Collectivization: Pronouns and Possessive Determiners**

All through the Qurʾānic narratives, God as the speaker appears in the form of first-person singular or plural pronoun (“I” or “We”). This distinguishes God and His people from non-believers who are referred to in third-person plural pronoun (“them” and “their”) and sometimes in third-person singular pronoun (“he” and “him”). As an instance, one can refer to this verse, “If (such) were Our will, We could send down to them from the sky a sign, to which they would bend their necks in humility.” (Q 26:4). In this verse, “We” has the position of a subject which objectifies “them.” Through objectifying pronouns and possessive pronouns, God collectivizes the non-believers and puts them all (the ancient and the new) in the out-group. In the seventh verse of al-Shuʿarāʾ, God refers to His power, stating, “Do they not look at the earth, – how many noble things of all kinds We have produced therein?” Distinguishing “We” as the omnipotent power separated from “they” that have limitation in vision, this verse segregates the speaker from the out-group. Assigning the prophetic mission to Moses, God expresses His support against the Pharaoh whom Moses fears for his life (Q 26:14). The following verse reads, “Allah said: ‘By no means! proceed then, both of you, with Our Signs; We are with you and will listen (to your call).’” (Q 26:15). In this verse, the speaker is distinguished by “We” and the possessive determiner “Our” both of which are also capitalized. Read in the light of the previous verse, God extends His support towards Moses and his brother against any harm from Pharaoh’s part. The verse thus discriminates Moses and his brother as members of God’s in-group from Pharaoh and his troop categorized as the out-group. Thus when in the next verse, Moses speaks using “we” in “We have been sent by the Lord and Cherisher of the worlds.” (Q 26:16), this first-person plural, non-capitalized pronoun “we” puts Moses and his brother in God’s in-group distinguished from the out-group.

#### **4.2.2. De-spatialization**

De-spatialization strategies that the Qurʾān draws upon in its distinction of believers from non-believers are actionyms, perceptionyms, anthroponyms, and metaphors of spatiality. Actionyms applies to people's deeds, and perceptionyms to their beliefs. Actionyms are closely related to perceptionyms. Since the Qurʾān specifies Hell for wrongdoers and Heaven for the righteous, their anthroponyms are also involved. The common actionyms of non-believers against the prophets is rejecting them and disobeying their commands.

In al-Shuʿarāʾ, the non-believers are de-spatialized in terms of their perceptionyms and actionyms; thus the pronoun “they” occupies the subject position of an agent only when they “will not believe” (Q 26:201), “perceive it not” (Q 26:202), “Our penalty to be hastened on” (Q 26:204), “disobey you” (Q 26:216), “wander distracted in every valley” (Q 26:225), and “they practise not” (Q 26:227). All the stories that condemn non-believers to sever punishment de-spatialize them as non-believers which is their anthroponyms. Therefore, they are demarcated from God's in-group as being residents of the Hell and the receivers of His doom.

Hūd's folk resist his invitation, relying on the religion they had inherited from their fathers, “Hast come unto us that we should serve Allah alone, and forsake what our fathers worshipped?” (Q 7:70). Rejecting him, they accuse him of lying and madness, “We see you are an imbecile!” and “We think you are a liar!” (Q 7:66). They even shun him as being “seized ... with imbecility” by one of their gods (Q 11:54). His folk are described as those that ascribe partners to God (Q 11:54), “they rejected the Signs of their Lord and Cherisher; disobeyed His messengers; and followed the command of every powerful, obstrinate transgressor.” (Q 11:59). Thus they were the receivers of “a severe penalty” (Q 11:58). His folk are described as pleasure-seekers (Q 26:128) and “men of absolute power” (Q 26:130).

Šāliḥ presents a she-camel as a token from God and warns his people not to harm her. Being scornful and unbelieving, they hamstring the camel which is their actionyms (Q 7:73-78). Similarly, Moses' non-believing folk are discriminated as the out-group in terms of their actionyms: they chose a calf for worship; “they did wrong themselves” (Q 2:57); “when they were commanded to fight, they turned back” (Q 2:246); “they broke their covenant” and slew the

prophets wrongfully (Q 4:155). They are also dichotomized for their perceptionisms at the core of which lies their non-believing in Moses and God's signs to them.

The character of Noah as a member of the in-group is presented as a "warner" (Q 11:25); and his people are objectified as "those who had been warned" (Q 12:73); yet they are "the ignorant ones" (Q 11:29), "wrongdoers" (Q 29:14), persisting in sin (Q 51:46), and "most unjust and most insolent transgressors" (Q 53:52). They reject him as a liar (Q 11:27); while he was building the ship, his people "threw ridicule on him" (Q 11:38). His folk were exposed to God's punishment and got drowned.

Referentially, Abraham is often distinguished from his folk, "he joined not gods with Allah" (Q 2:135; Q 3:67 and 95; Q 6:79 and 161; Q 16:120 and 123). This description sets up the character of out-group in terms of their actionisms calling them idolaters; these are abandoned by God; thus God orders, "Do not marry unbelieving women (idolaters) until they believe: a slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman ... Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe... Unbelievers do (but) beckon you to the Fire. But Allah beckons by His Grace to the Garden." (Q 2:221). This verse discriminates the idolaters through their actionisms and de-spatializes them, making them residents of Fire in contrast to those of the Garden. These idolaters are receivers of God's curse, "They are (men) whom Allah has cursed." (Q 4:52). In another verse, God distinguishes idolaters from believers and condemns them, "and those who reject Faith fight in the cause of Evil: So fight you against the friends of Satan: feeble indeed is the cunning of Satan." (Q 4:76). In al-Mā'idah, idols are represented as Satan's handiwork (Q 5:90) and are thus condemned.

In Hūd, the people of Lūṭ are described as sexually perverse ones, desiring his male guests instead of his daughters (Q 11:78). In return for their sins, "We turned (the cities) upside down, and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay, spread, layer on layer." (Q 11:82). His folk are "marked as from your Lord: nor are they ever far from those who do wrong" (Q 11:83). Al-Anbiyā' discriminates Lūṭ from his folk, "And to Lūṭ, too, We gave judgment and knowledge, and We saved him from the town which practised abominations. Truly, they were a people given to evil, a rebellious people." (Q 21:74). His people's immoral lust is well detailed in al-Shu'arā' where Lūṭ scorns them, "Of all the creatures in the world, will you approach males, /



And leave those whom Allah has created for you to be your mates? Nay, you are a people of transgressing (all limits).” (Q 26:165-66). Upon his resistance, his people threaten him, “If you desist not, O Lūṭ! you will assuredly be cast out.” (Q 26:167). This *sūrah* only suffices to inform that God rained on them “a shower (of brimstone): and evil was the shower on those who were admonished (but heeded not).” (Q 26:173). In al-Naml, Lūṭ discriminates his folk for their actionyms, “Would you really approach men in your lusts rather than women? Nay, you are a people (grossly) ignorant!” (Q 27:55).

Shuʿayb’s people are discriminated by their actionyms detailed in al-Aʿrāf: “Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due; and do no mischief on the earth after it has been set in order ... / And squat not on every road, breathing threats, hindering from the path of Allah those who believe in Him.” (Q 7:85-86). Thus they are described as “those who did mischief” (Q 7:86). Like Noah’s people, his folk are scornful and disbelieving.

### 4.3. Predicational Strategies

The recurring topoi in al-Shuʿarāʾ are rendered in terms of character, sin, threat, and power. The *sūrah* describes and thereby discriminates the out-group as non-believers (Q 26:201), liars (Q 26:223), the doomed (Q 26:213), “removed far from even (a chance of) hearing it” (Q 26:212), deniers (Q 26:189), tyrants (Q 26:130), extravagant (Q 26:151), transgressors (Q 26:166) and accusers (Q 26:185 and 186). They are marked as “lying, wicked” persons (Q 26:222), the wrong-doers (Q 26:227) and “people of iniquity” (Q 26:10), in possession of “hearts of the sinners” (Q 26:200), “those who are in error” (Q 26:20). This *sūrah* discriminates the out-group members in terms of the threats they have for the in-group. Moses asks God to protect him against Pharaoh or Pharaoh will kill him (Q 26:14); Pharaoh is said to have “enslaved the Children of Israel” (Q 26:22). He threatens his people who believed in Moses, “Be sure I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will cause you all to die on the cross.” (Q 26:50). Noah is also threatened to be stoned to death (Q 26:116). The folk of Lūṭ threaten to outcast him (Q 26:167). These tribes are cast as out-groups in terms of power; although they outnumber the prophets and most of them are in position of supreme power for being kings, they are disempowered by God, the Almighty.

Describing Noah’s son as “of evil conduct” banishes him as an out-group member who deserves severe punishment. Noah’s folk are

described as “a people given to evil” (Q 21:77). His folk are predicationally depicted as accusers and mockers who take him as “only a man possessed: wait (and have patience) with him for a time” (Q 23:25; Q 54:9); further on, they become a source of danger for Noah, threatening him, “They said: ‘If you desist not, O Noah! you shall be stoned (to death).’” (Q 26:116).

Šālih’s deniers describe him as “one of those bewitched” (Q 26:153). Like the other folks, his people refuse to believe him, sticking to the religion of their fathers. He warns them against “evil and mischief on the earth” (Q 7:74). His folk are described as being “arrogant,” despising the believers (Q 7:75).

Al-‘Ankabūt portrays Lūṭ’s folk as “wickedly rebellious” (Q 29:34), “(addicted) to crime” (Q 29:31), and “people who do mischief” (Q 29:30). In contrast to them, Lūṭ is repeatedly reported to be among the “righteous” (Q 29:27). Like the other people, his folk challengingly accuse him of lying, “Bring us the wrath of Allah if you tell the truth.” (Q 29:29). When punishment is to come, his wife is categorized as an out-group member, not one of his household; she is “of those who lag behind” (Q 29:33). In al-Taḥrīm, God discriminates Noah’s and Lūṭ’s wives from the righteous, calling them betrayers (Q 66:10); they are despatialized as residents of Hell, “Enter you the Fire along with (others) that enter.” (Q 66:10).

People threaten Shu‘ayb, “We shall certainly drive you out of our city – (you) and those who believe with you; or else (you and they) shall have to return to our ways and religion.” (Q 7:88). God discriminates them as “ruined” (Q 7:92) and strikes them with earthquake. In Hūd, Shu‘ayb narrative reappears with almost the same details, “Give not short measure or weight.” (Q 11:84). In al-Shu‘arā’, Shu‘ayb advises his folk to “And weigh with scales true and upright / And withhold not things justly due to men, nor do evil in the land, working mischief.” (Q 26:182-3). He is rejected as being “bewitched” and a liar (Q 26:185 and 186). Like the previous tribes, Shu‘ayb’s folk threaten him to death, “among us we see that you have no strength! Were it not for your family, we should certainly have stoned you! For you have among us no great position.” (Q 11:91). They accuse him of lying (Q 11:93). Like the previous people, they received God’s doom, “the (mighty) blast did seize the wrong-doers, and they lay prostrate in their homes by the morning.” (Q 11:94).

## 5. Discussion

The analysis of the stories in al-Shuʿarāʾ has revealed their cyclic narrative structure. The cycle is firmly embedded within the *sūrah* and thus interlinks the earlier verses with the later ones. Then the analysis takes a step further to see how this cyclic structure interconnects the other *sūrah*s across the Qurʾān. The recurrence of each prophet's story in the previous and succeeding *sūrah*s creates a link that runs all through the Qurʾān. It is also shown that the repeated stories may contribute to the cyclic narratives in al-Shuʿarāʾ in different ways: they may extend, invert, or expand the narrative. Accordingly, they may re-emphasize the significance of the narrative or even give the text narrative tension. Therefore, the narratives here function as means of cohesion leading to coherence.

The other important issue followed up in the analysis is extracting the way Us/Them dichotomy is realized all through the seven narratives in their different versions. It can be argued that God as the narrator and sole speaker in the Qurʾān discriminates between believers and non-believers. He puts His messengers, the righteous, and the believers in the in-group and distinguishes them from the wrongdoers, deniers, and non-believers. This discrimination is carried out through referential and predicational strategies. The out-group are always referred to by pronoun "they," and objectified as "them" and "their." They are discriminated in terms of their perceptionyms since they do not believe the messengers and God. This perception leads them to act wrongfully (their actionyms). Their wrong deed leads to their getting de-spatialized as the folk who deserve severe punishment and residency in Hell.

As for predicational strategies, the non-believers are depicted in terms of their character, sin, threat, and power. The Qurʾān presents their characters differently, but all in a morally negative way. In Moses narrative, they are condemned as liars and hypocrites; in Abraham story, they are idolaters. For Noah, they are denouncers, and for Hūd they are of evil conduct. In Šāliḥ narrative, they are disobedients, and for Lūṭ they are lewd and sexually pervert. For Shuʿayb, his folk are cheaters in people's goods. Therefore, their characters are portrayed based on their wrong deeds and the sins they commit.

The non-believers pose threats to God's messengers; Pharaoh threatens to slay Moses and his followers. Abraham's folk fling him into a big fire. Noah and Shuʿayb are threatened to get stoned to death.

Şāliḥ, Hūd, and Lūṭ are threatened to get outcast from their society. Only a few of their folk did believe in the prophets; so they comprised the minor who were rejected and mocked by the major. The major had power over the minor especially in the case of Moses whose opponent was the king. In the case of other prophets, the chieftains of their folk posed the greatest resistance and threat. In comparison to the chieftains, the non-believers were stronger and their strength itself was a threat for the believers. However, in comparison to God, the Almighty, their power was nothing. This point is quite clear in the way they all were wiped out of the face of the earth, “As if they had never dwelt and flourished there.” (Q 11:95).

As already mentioned, any discourse based on Us/Them dichotomy is highly biased. The discourse analysts have based their theories on political discourse. Christopher Hart studies the referential and predicational strategies applied by politicians and statesmen against immigrants and asylum seekers (Hart 2010; see also van Leeuwen 2008; Fairclough 1999, 2010). In the works of these analysts, the bases of discrimination between the in-group and the out-group are race (ethnicity, nationality), class, and gender. The in-group as the speaking self located here and now regards the out-group located there and then as the threatening “other” and thus seeks ways to evade the (spatial, racial, sexual, and cultural) intrusion or fusion of the other. However, such discriminational bases do not apply to the Qurʾānic discourse. As the analysis of actionyms and perceptionyms of the *sūras* reveal, the out-group, as non-believers, are distinguished and demarcated from the in-group because of their own beliefs and actions, not because of such biological differences as gender or race. Even social class has no voice in God’s approach to man, or His messengers would have been selected from among the rich or the chieftains so that they would not have to suffer so much. This point is expressed explicitly in Sabaʾ where God says, “It is not your wealth nor your sons, that will bring you nearer to Us in degree, but only those who believe and work righteousness.” (Q 34:37). Also in al-Ḥujurāt, the racial, social, and sexual discriminations are rejected as invalid criteria for membership in the in-group: “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you.” (Q 49:13). In fact, all those people God has exposed to His doom are receivers of punishment only because of denouncing

their prophets, mocking them, threatening them, instead of believing in them and their message. This point draws a sharp contrast between political and the Qurʾānic discourse. In contrast to the political discourse where Us/Them dichotomy renders it highly prejudiced, the Qurʾānic discourse which deploys the same dichotomy but defines it in other terms is far from being biased or prejudiced against any nation or group.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study reacts to the Orientalists' challenging claim against the Qurʾān as an incoherent book (Jeffery 1958). Adopting and adapting the narrative and linguistic methodologies, this study tries to fill the gap in the Qurʾān studies to prove its overall coherence at both levels of inter-verse and inter-*sūrah*. It starts with the analysis of the narratives in al-Shuʿarāʾ and detects a cyclic narrative structure in the *sūrah* which interlinks the beginning with the ending parts. It also investigates the mention of each one of the prophets narratives in other *sūrahs* and shows the kind of relation different versions of the same narrative has to the cyclic structure in the selected *sūrah*. It pinpoints the referential and predicational strategies that the Qurʾānic discourse deploys to discriminate non-believers as the out-group from believers, the in-group. In a comparison between the Qurʾānic discourse and political discourse it is discussed that unlike the latter, the former is bias-free and its Us/Them dichotomy is based neither on social class, nor on biological differences (race and gender). Rather, it is only people's actions and perceptions (beliefs) that discriminate them from one another and procure for them membership in the in-group or outcast them as the out-group.

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