

THE LITERARY FACETS OF THE QUR'AN AS A GUIDELINE FOR ISLAMIC LITERARY WRITING

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Abstract

The Islamic theory of literature¹ and its practices are studied in the context of Qur'anic examples. As the Qur'an is a comprehensive guideline to life, and considers the human soul, feelings, thoughts and actions, it gives basic rules and outline to Islamize the literature. Muslim scholars have discussed the Islamic literature based on the stories in the Qur'an and the way of its narration. The Qur'an does not define Islamic literature, however it provides rules and outline through the examples contesting both form and content to the extent of maintaining complete musical effect. Islamic literature has been developed by Muslim scholars, based on this Qur'anic concepts and the style in which it presents its message. Thus, Islamic literature not only carries ethics and values but also addresses the basic human needs and feelings for enjoyment and pleasure.

Keywords

Tasawwur, Qasas al-Qur'an, Sastera Islam, Manhaj al-Qur'an

1. Introduction

The Qur'an is *Kitab al Din* (Book of Religion). However, *al Din* (religion) in the Islamic context is comprehensive and encompassing. *Al Din* is not restricted to specific acts of worship that isolate and separate a person from the course of life from time to time. In fact *al Din* is a comprehensive methodology and system for life covering the human soul, feelings, thoughts and actions. On the other hand art and

¹ For details on the theories of Islamic literature please refer to Rahmah Ahmad Osman. 2006. Islamic literature and Sastera Islami: A Conceptual Comparison. *Intellectual Discourse*. (Vol. 14, Number 1: pg 71- 87); Rahmah Ahmad Osman. 2008. Defining Islamic Literature. *The International Journal of The Humanities*, Australia. (Vol. 5, Issue 11)

literature are beautiful expressions, revealing and inspiring life. Consequently, religion and life meet and correspond within the instinct and intuition of the Muslim in the event that art and literature based on the *al tasawwur al imani* (the Islamic concept of belief) in issues relating to existence, feelings, thoughts, actions and the soul.

2. Source of Islamic Literature

The Qur'an should be the source and recourse in all aspects of life including all artistic and literary functions². However, taking the Qur'an as the "source" does not indicate an unquestioning adoption and imitating of the Qur'an. In contrast what is required is taking cognisance of two dimensions of the Qur'an. The first dimension is the conception and thoughts in the Qur'an. The second is the methods and styles of presentation. Therefore it is not a matter of imitating but of focusing on how to channel, allocate and correlate thoughts and conceptions. For example, the Qur'an welcomes and celebrates the scenes and aspects of nature. Therefore, as conscientious Muslims who respond to the beauty of nature, Muslim writers endeavour to express and illustrate on nature literally in their writings. The Qur'an employs the art of narrating for didactic purposes. Once more as conscientious Muslims who respond to these Qur'anic narrations, Muslim writers also should endeavour to employ the art of narrating for didactic purposes. The Qur'an's method of expression is through illustration. Once more as conscientious Muslims, Muslim writers endeavour in illustration to induce Islamic values in the hearts and minds of readers. Nevertheless, this does not indicate that Muslim writers are limited to themes presented in the Qur'an. On the contrary, Muslim writers are free to innovate and delve into any subject and theme whatsoever that interest them. The only restriction imposed on Muslims is that whatever theme is chosen must emanate from the Islamic worldview and if not it must at the very least not contradict Islamic values. With this in mind, art and literature that deviate from this 'law' have departed from artistic beauty. Similarly,

². Qutb, Sayyid, *Fi al Tarikh Fikrat wa Minhaj* (In the history of thought and methodology), (Beirut: Dar al Syuruq, 3rd edition, 1979).

if a star ever deviated from its course, it would inevitably collide with other stars.

Upon observation, at least three aspects of the art of narration may be derived from the Qur'an, The first, historical stories as exemplified in all the stories about the prophets and those who have equivocated about these prophets and their fates. Second, realistic and pragmatic stories as exemplified in *Surat al Ma'idat* (verses 27-31). The third, exemplary and purposeful stories as exemplified in *Surat al Kahfi* (verses 32-43).

Muhammad Qutb identifies some of the apparent characteristics of these Qur'anic³ stories. Among the apparent characteristics of these Qur'anic stories are, the sense of purity. However, this does not imply that the Qur'an only portrays mankind as pure, truthful, innocent and sinless. On the contrary, the Qur'an describes humanity from different angles portraying its positive and negative characteristic moods and weaknesses. However, the Qur'an does not dwell on human weaknesses so as to imply or lead people to think that these weaknesses and negative characteristic are commendable⁴. For example when the Qur'an touches on the *fitnah* (scandal) that was inflicted upon the Prophets Sulaiman, Dawwud, Yūsuf or Musa, the Qur'an recognises the delicate moments, intuitions and instincts surrounding the incidents. However the Qur'an does not welcome and celebrate these moments (Muhammad Qutb, 1961: 159). In other words recognition does not mean approval.

The artistic aspects of narration in the Qur'an, firstly shows on the variety and diversity in the methods of presentation. For example, some stories in the Qur'an are condensed summaries of stories narrated before. Other stories begin with the conclusion of the story and then the verses proceed to narrate the rest of the story accordingly. There are also stories without beginnings or summaries and there are stories that transmute into action in the sense that the story is narrated through the actions of the characters involved. The second characteristic is diversity and variety in the method of

³ Stories in the Quran.

⁴ To exemplify a writer cannot idolise a prostitute for instance and portray her as the heroin in his story.

unanticipated occurrences and climax⁵. The third aspect lies in the presentation of the story, in the sense that the story is intermittent into scenes aperture from one scene to another. The fourth aspect is the Qur'anic narration's frequent and exuberant use of illustrations. The above aspects are clearly explained (Muhammad Qutb, 1961: 162- 172).

The most important point raised in the preceding discussion is that Muhammad considers form and content to be equally important. This is obvious in his assertion of the importance of literary qualities and features in literature. His aim was to avoid assertion of Islamic values overshadowing literature as a work of art that retains specific artistic traits. Muhammad also emphasises that being a good Muslim is not a craft that enables one habitually to produce creative and artistic writing; Similarly, being an exceptional artist and writer does not indicate that he/ she will be able to produce Islamic art or literature. These two skills are crucial in the [Muslim] writer. They need to be blended, one complements the other. On the other hand, this does not indicate that only Muslims are able to produce *Islamic* writings. To prove his point, Muhammad includes in his list of examples on Islamic literature⁶ works that conform to *Islamic* values produced by non- Muslims, such as the Hindu writer Tagore's "Journey to the Market" (Muhammad, 1961: 199- 202) and Irish Millington Sing's "Riders to the Sea." (Muhammad, 1961: 212-221)

As a matter of fact, Muhammad urges Muslims to follow the example of the literary scene in Russia. Well-known Russian writers have acquired and reinforced Western literary techniques and later, innovated genuine and exceptional literature without damaging and interfering with its original [Russian] traits and features. In Muhammad's opinion, this is exactly how [good] literature should be written. Muslim artists and writers may borrow artistic skills, methods and styles of presentation and performance from wherever they desire, provided that they still maintain their own individual traits and mannerism (Muhammad Qutb, 1961: 226).

Islamic literature is not religious in the narrow sense of the word 'religion'. It is the product of the Islamic *tasawwur*, which

⁵ See details on page 162 in *Manhaj al Fann al Islami*.

⁶See details in Muhammad Qutb, 1961: 184- 221.

Muslims believe to be the correct and only view, relevant and applicable to all aspects of life. This is because Islam describes itself more as a comprehensive way of life for individuals and communities, than as a religion in the narrow sense of a system of worship and ritualistic practice (Muhammad Qutb, 1983: 138). The teachings of Islam contain specific instructions and recommendations for every aspect and activity of life in a declared attempt to make Man's life better, richer, and happier, both in this world and in the hereafter. Moreover, it is Islam's implied aim not only to form the righteous individual and the virtuous community and state but also to build a civilisation on the pillars of Islamic beliefs and codes of behaviour as discussed at length by M. A. Hamdun (M.A. Hamdun, 1986: 68 and Yahya Armajani, 1960: 27).

Following from this, it is only natural for literature to come, in one way or another, under the influence of the Islamic doctrine and way of life in Muslim communities. This is particularly so in view of the pronounced interest of Islam in the word and the important role that literature or literary practice has played in the propagation of Islam from the very beginning.

It is interesting and enlightening here to notice that the very first word of the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet was an instruction to read, (Qur'an:96: 1-4) signifying the important role reading and knowledge were going to play in the new religion. In the fourth verse of the same chapter we read that it was God who taught Man with the 'pen' (Qur'an: 96: 4). The 'pen' is used as the subject of an oath made by God in the first verse of the sixty-eighth chapter, which significantly carries the title "The Pen."

In fact, the Qur'an, Islam's greatest miracle, has strong and obvious literary undertones. It was through the highly impressive eloquence of the Qur'an that many of the early Muslims in Arabia came to embrace Islam (Abdul Qahir al Jurjani, 1984: ix and Sayyid Qutb, 1980: 11-13). They were a people of great linguistic abilities, and eloquence played a great role in their lives (Taha Hussayn, 1970: 99). They felt that the Qur'an was like nothing they had heard or said before. The Qur'an records an incident with Ibn Mughirah in *Surah al Nur* (Qur'an: 24:18- 24). The above put forward the claim that the Qur'an was not the word of a human being but of God. This claim

testifies to the Qur'an's highly sophisticated use of language, the like of which no one of the ancient Arabs could produce. This incident illustrates how Islam depended largely on linguistic and literary aspects of the Qur'an in propagating and supporting it in the early days. Moreover, this aspect of the miracle of the Qur'an still holds strongly today (See M.M. Badawi, 1993: 48).

Scholarly volumes are continually being written on the Qur'anic use of language and its rhetorical inimitability (See Abu Bakr al Baqillani, 1965 and Hifni Muhammad Sharaf, 1970). This is exemplified in the innumerable instances in which the Qur'an uses highly imaginative figurative language to drive home its points (See Sayyid Qutb, n.d.: 73; Muhammad Qutb, 1961: 145- 148). In its description of the state of mind of the hypocrites who profess Islam and hide disbelief, for example, the Qur'an gives two graphic pictures. The first depicts those who have lit a fire in order to see around (signifying the light of faith they once had or professed to have had), but the fire leaving them in total darkness. The other figure is that of total darkness broken by intermittent thunder and lightning (perhaps again signifying the light of the message they professed to hold), which instead of giving them light gives them fear and makes them put their fingers in their ears for fear of death.

“These are they who have bartered guidance for error. But their traffic is profitless and they have lost true direction. Their similitude is that of a Man who kindled a fire. When it lighted all around him, Allah took away their light and left them in utter darkness, so they could not see.” (Qur'an: 1: 16-19).

To show the status of believers, the Qur'an uses the image of a healthy plant that is the pride of the farmer and provokes the envy and anger of his enemies. The Qur'an states that this is the example for believers given in the Bible as well.

“Allah has promised those among them who believe and do righteous deeds, forgiveness and a great reward.” (Qur'an: 48: 29).

Many literary critics would frown upon the idea of discussing the content and the form of a literary work separately. The Qur'an provides a perfect example of the match between form and content. Therefore, it should be noticed that the Qur'an gives 'form' due attention. According to Sayyid Qutb, a major example lies in the complete and balanced musical effect of many of the Qur'anic verses and passages. (See Sayyid Qutb, n.d.: 74)⁷. The Qur'an goes to some lengths to maintain the built-in musical effect of many of its passages although it is obviously and naturally impossible to discern or discuss this trait in a translation⁸.

3. Guidelines for a conceptual framework for Islamic literature.

Considering what has been said about the Qur'an's impact and role in the discourse of Islamic literature, it is pertinent to point out that the specific characteristics and nature of Islamic literature are not explained clearly in the Qur'an and the hadith. In other words, the Qur'an does not define an Islamic concept of literature. Knowing the importance of the role of literature in the propagation of Islam, it might be asked why the Qur'an and hadith do not specify the characteristics of literature? Furthermore, if the definition of Islamic literature is not provided in the Qur'an and hadith, how is it that the Qur'an is always mentioned as the reference for formulating a definition of Islamic literature? The answer to the above is, it is not the duty of the Qur'an to discuss issues related to literature, as the Qur'an is a book of religion and legislation. What is found in the Qur'an, though, are general guidelines as to how Muslims should conduct themselves, applicable to all aspects of life including literature. Furthermore, the fact that the Qur'an itself is, in one of its facets, a literary miracle naturally makes it an essential reference in formulating the definition and characteristics of Islamic literature.

⁷ In his book "Al Taswir al Fanni fi al Quran (The Artistic Expression in the Quran): 74- 118.

⁸ Sayyid Qutb has written at length on this topic under the title "al Tanasuq al Fanni" (The Artistic Symmetry of the Quran) in his book "Al Taswir al Fanni fi al Quran (The Artistic Expression in the Quran): 74- 118. Muhammad Qutb has also elaborated on the Quranic Artistic Symmetry in his *Manhaj al Fann al Islami*: 137- 155.

Poetry is the only literary genre touched upon specifically in the Qur'an. This was due to the allegations made about the Prophet Muhammad by the unbelievers that he was 'merely a poet' and that the revelation of the Qur'an was a sort of magical charm for witches. What is implied though by scholars insisting and emphasising that Islamic literature should take its example from the Qur'an, lies in its unique literary style.

Muhammad Qutb suggests that in order to benefit from the Qur'an in the field of art and literature, concentration has to be focused on two aspects of the Qur'an simultaneously: the Qur'an's comprehensive concepts and the style in which it presents its message, which one should not merely imitate but rather innovate in the same style (Muhammad Qutb, 1983: 140).

A better understanding on the Qur'an's comprehensive concepts as mentioned by Muhammad Qutb may be obtained by observing the Qur'anic method as proposed by Sayyid Qutb (1965/1966)⁹. Sayyid Qutb's commentary on the *Qur'anic method* provides an interesting and overall example of those who consider Islamic literature as an *ibaadat* (act of devotion). Sayyid asserts that the *manhaj al Qur'ani*'s presentation of the Islamic belief has a distinctive characteristic. It appeals to all the elements constituting human nature leaves no aspect untouched and no avenue of knowledge ignored, and does not merely address man's intellect alone (Sayyid Qutb, 1968: 17).

It is from this *Qur'anic method* that the *Islamic worldview* is derived (Sayyid Qutb 1968: 6). Accordingly, it is in conformity to the constituents of the *Islamic worldview* that Muslim scholars, in this case Sayyid Qutb, propose the following guidelines towards creating a conceptual framework for *Islamic literature*:

1. Everything is related to Allah- and He is the axis of the Islamic worldview. This axis has a fixed meaning, i.e there is no scope for change or development here. This relates to the existence of Allah, His eternity, His oneness, His power and dominion

⁹ Sayyid Qu'lb wrote on the *al manhaj al Qur'ani* in his writings on the characteristics and components of al tasawwur al Islami while in imprisonment. He died before these writings were compiled and later published by his brother, Mu'ammad Qu'lb in 1968.

over His creation, the absolute freedom of His will, and each of His attributes operating within the universe, on the earth, and among human beings.

2. The entire universe, comprised of objects and living beings, is Allah's creation and His original and unique creativeness (Sayyid Qutb, 1968: 77). And his creation is not dependent on time, on instruments or means or any conditions whatsoever. Existence waits on His will, or plan, or intention. The moment He wills a thing, it becomes His Word or Command, and the thing forthwith comes into existence (Yusuf 'Ali, 1995: 1134).
3. As creatures of Allah, everything and everyone is His servant, without possessing any part of the attributes of divinity. In this relationship of servitude to their Creator, they are all equal.
4. Action without faith in Allah is just as useless as faith without action. Belief in Allah, including the attributes that He has ascribed to Himself, and in His angels, His books, His messengers, and in the Final Judgement, whereby good and evil are appropriately recompensed, is a precondition for worthy actions. Their acceptance by Allah depends on this faith. Without this faith, actions are meaningless from their very inception, incapable of acquiring any value, rejected, and neither taken into account nor accepted by Allah.
5. The meaning of Islam is to worship Allah alone, to ascribe Divine attributes to no one but Allah alone, and then to submit to His commands and be pleased with His judgements in human affairs and with His prescribed way of life embodied in the Islamic Jurisprudence.
6. Man is the noblest of all Allah's creations on earth, because he is Allah's vicegerent on earth.
7. Everyone on earth is from the same origin. Hence they are equal. The only value and quality that differentiate them from

the other are their fear and piety towards Allah and their good deeds.

8. Man is required to respond only to Allah's command in carrying out his daily affairs. Out of love and gratitude for Allah, every intention and action is dedicated to seek His blessings.
9. Life in this world is a test of belief and action. Life in the Hereafter is the product of one's action in this world (Sayyid Qutb, 1968: 77- 79).

Bearing the above guidelines in mind and based primarily on the observation that a goodly and eloquent word is itself a powerful tool and the key to the hearts of many (Salih Adam Bilu, 1985:15), it is no wonder that it was a medium of prophecy. Therefore, it is important that Muslims revert to employing the above in their writings to "awake the sleepy, inflame the senses of the half-hearted, and lay the ground for a mass-oriented trend following a specific goal" (Sayyid Qutb, 1967: 35).

Secondly, based on the verses from the Qur'an that portrays the Qur'an "as guidance and blessings to the universe" and from statements made by the Prophet Muhammad such as the statement, "I (the Prophet) have left you two things that if you hold on to them you will never go astray, the Qur'an and the Sunnah), Muslims are taught to refer to the Qur'an and hadith in all their actions. This in my opinion should be the vital point of any discussions on Islamic literature irrespective of whether it is in Malay, Arabic or any other language. This is exactly the reason why many Muslim scholars (Arab and Malay) insist that in order to produce Islamic literature or *sastera* Islam, one should always retreat and follow the example of the Qur'an and Sunnah. On the other hand we also come across other Muslim writers and scholars who dispute the involvement of Islam (Qur'an and Sunnah) in non- religious functions in nature, such as literature.

The following are the views and perceptions of both the Middle Eastern and Malay scholars on literature.

4. The Middle Eastern perception of literature

Like the term 'literature' in the West, *al adab* the Arabic term for literature has also gone through many transformations of meaning in the history of Arabic literature. However, the general understanding of *al adab* throughout this history has continued to indicate the meaning of didacticism and congruity (*al tahdhib wa al nizam*). (Nasr el Din Ibrahim 1998: 7). Nevertheless, the term *al adab* in Arabic is a homonym in the sense that it refers to both literature and behaviour.

The term *al adab* as found in al Zabidis dictionary, Taj al Arus is defined as "[the quality] which differentiates the writer from the common people. The writer of literature is named after the word *al adab*, *al adib* because the *adib* (writer) enlightens or directs people towards good and ethical behaviour and discourages them from immorality. And the origin of *al adab* is call or prayer." In the dictionary Al Misbah, *al adab* is defined as the teaching on spiritual exercise and ethical behaviour. Abu Zaid al Ansari regards literature as a good exercise, which brings benefits for people. Al Khafaji on the other hand defines *al adab* as good ethics and an act of kindness. According to Al Khafaji, *al adab*'s application to Arabic studies originates with the beginning of Islam. (Cited in Adnan Ali al Nahwi 1987: 30). The above has also been affirmed by Taha Husayn, according to whom, there is no mention of the term *al adab* in any accurate text from Arabic Pre-Islamic times, nor is the term *al adab* referred to in the Qur'an. Taha Husayn also indicates that the term *al adab* (literature) was unfamiliar and was never employed [in a text] before Islam. (Taha Husayn 1991: 25). However, the belief that the term *al adab* was never employed in texts in the Pre-Islamic era has since been found to be of doubtful reliability, due to contemporary findings, which prove otherwise. A case in point is Nasr el Din's study entitled, "*Nahwa Itar Islami li al Syir al Arabi*" (1998), in which Nasr el Din argues that the term *al adab* was in fact employed in texts during the Pre-Islamic times and that the term *al adab* in Pre-Islamic terms contained a moral meaning (Nasr el Din Ibrahim 1998: 10)¹⁰.

The didactic and moral meaning of the term *al adab* is also

¹⁰ For a detail description on the matter, see Nasr el Din Ibrahim 1998: 10- 17.

generally associated with the following hadith, in which the Prophet says, “I have been cultured/ educated by my God and how good is my education” (*Sahih al Bukhari* 240/3; Taha Husayn 1991: 25; Hasan al Amrani 1998: 26- 27; Nasr el Din Ibrahim 1998: 18). During the Prophet’s times and throughout the history of Islam the term *al adab* was characterised with the Islamic cognition, which was directed towards educating the individual and [developing] moral values (Nasr el Din Ibrahim 1998: 25).

Taha Husayn asserts that the term *al adab* was commonly used during the Ommiads period and apparently it was commonly associated with [informal] education through narrating. Nasr el Din (1998) shares a similar view and maintains that the educative/ didactic and moralistic objectives that were initially embodied in the term *al adab* were reaffirmed during the Ommiad and Abbasid periods (Nasr el Din Ibrahim 1998: 25- 31). According to Taha Husayn, the term *al adab* continued to embody the above meanings throughout the history of pure good Arabic (classical Arabic), declining and increasing at one point or another in accordance to developments in Arabic literature. *Al adab* was a term for poetry, genealogy, reportage on war and bibliographies. Subsequently, the study of linguistics emerged and individual studies were collected and put down in writing and [specific] principles and axioms were set up on the basis of these studies. All of which were regarded a component of *al adab*. However, at the turn of the third century, the term *al adab* reverted to its initial meaning, as a word for poetry, genealogy, reportage on war and bibliographies. During the period of the Abbasid, with the beginning of penmanship, *al adab* encompassed the art of narration. Yet another ‘genre’ emerged during the Umayyad period, in the form of literary criticism in the manner applied by al Jahiz, al Mubarrid, Ibn Qutaybat and Ibn Salam in their writings. As a result, *al adab* has since been identified with whatever was associated to poetry and narration including the study of aesthetics in poetry and narration (Taha Husayn: 28- 29) [bringing with them the didactic and moralistic objectives previously mentioned].

4.1. Literature according to scholars of Islamic literature in the Middle East.

Sayyid Qutb has offered two definitions of the term *al adab* or literature. Qutb (1947) once defined *al adab* as a literary expression, which derives from a primal creative intuition or spirit endowed with senses and passions. This literary expression is later revealed in an inspirational and revealing illustration. In his later years, Qutb offered another definition of *al adab* in his book, "*Fi al Tarikh fikrat wa minhaj,*" in which he states, *al adab* "is a primal creative intuition [which is born in the soul of the writer] which expresses the "enigmatic reality" of life which moves the soul of the writer under the impact of a definite emotion"¹¹ (Sayyid Qutb 1962: 11).

Qutb argues that this "enigmatic reality of life" derives from an individual's particular views or conception and perception about life and from the obligations or commitments, which the individual possesses towards the universe and towards other human beings. Because Islam has its own particular world-view, Islam has specific values and characteristics, which manifest themselves in the Islamic world-view. Obviously, these values when applied in literature will produce a literary expression distinct from an expression, which is produced on a non-Islamic world-view. Hence, when the writing of a Muslim writer does not conform to the Islamic world-view, there is an error on the part of the writer (Sayyid Qutb 1962: 15).

It is from the above perception that Qutb later defined Islamic literature as a literary expression produced from a primal creative intuition which is born in the soul of the writer as a result of an overwhelming Islamic feeling (Sayyid Qutb 1947: 28).

In response to Sayyid Qutb's call for an Islamic literature, his brother, Muhammad Qutb in 1961 produced his book *Manhaj al fan al Islamiyy* (Methodology of Islamic art), in which he discussed at length all the issues of art within an Islamic perspective. His book is considered to be the first and the most important in the field so far.

While agreeing with Sayyid Qutb on the superiority of the

¹¹ I have found Jacques Maritain expressions on poetic intuition in his book, "Nature of Poetic Knowledge" (1953), very useful and thus have borrowed some of these expressions in translating the Arabic definition in an initiative to present an appropriate comprehension of Sayyid Qutb's views.

Islamic worldview and system, its ability to lead humanity to happiness, prosperity, peace and justice and its relevance to all places and all times, Muhammad Qutb (1983) emphasises that the fact that one is a Muslim is not sufficient to produce Islamic art and literature. He acknowledges though, that only a Muslim has the potential to appreciate the Islamic worldview. At the same time, there is no harm in benefiting and acknowledging the general Islamic values shared and advocated by non-Muslim writers (Muhammad Qutb, 1983: 181-183).

Muhammad Qutb's perception of *al adab* can be derived from his definition of *al fann* (art). Qutb defines art as a human being's attempt to recollect all the harvests of experience and memory preserved in the soul about the reality of existence or presence of "the being" in a mode of depiction which is beautiful, inspiring and illuminating (Muhammad Qutb 1983: 11).

It is from the above perception that Qutb defines Islamic art as "an aesthetic interpretation of the universe, life and mankind, within the Islamic world-view," in his book "*manhaj al fann al Islami*" (Muhammad Qutb, 1983: 6).

Elsewhere, Muhammad Qutb (1996) defines Islamic literature as "A literary product which conforms and concurs with the concepts of Islam, with the values and morals of Islam, with the principles and convictions of Islam, with the Islamic vision, concerning the universe, life and mankind" (Muhammad Qutb 1996: 32).

Muhammad Qutb adds that, "A certain impetus or stimulus leads to a profusion of literary expressions. The impetus precedes the expression. The expression does not simultaneously emerge. [Therefore] Expressions expressed simultaneously at the time [actually] impersonate the irritation or excitement [at the time] and are [therefore] not a work of art. While on the contrary, an artistic expression requires time for the soul to absorb or to assimilate the 'influencing factor'. [The soul] relives and remembers the influencing factor from within itself, responding to it emotionally, spiritually, and then it emerges or effuses in an artistic and literary form or shape. [However], it is not abnormal for an Islamic awakening to precede an artistic or literal expression, because such a phenomenon occurs in all languages" (Muhammad Qutb 1996: 33).

Ever since the Qutb brothers, there have been several attempts by other Arab scholars to define how and what Islamic literature should be. These attempts often reflect their personal expectations of such literature and religious beliefs. These definitions demonstrate and explain the interpretations of each individual writer as to the Islamic world-view relating to the universe, life and mankind.

In 1985, *al Baith al Islami Journal* published two issues touching on the characteristics of Islamic literature. Among those who participated in the discussion was Muhammad Majdhub (1981). He defined Islamic literature as “an artistic illustration using persuasive words.” (Muhammad Majdhub, 1981: 68). This definition, on its own, is very general and does not specify or emphasise the Islamic world-view in literature. It exemplifies the sense of uncertainty among some Arab scholars about the nature of Islamic literature and the reservations of others in suggesting an Islamic point of view in literature. The above definition was developed with a more emphatic way by Abd al Rahman Rafat al Basha (1985). He advocated a more positive and detailed definition. In his view, Islamic literature is “an artistic and objective illustration of the realities of life and the universe and mankind within the ecstasy of literature, in accordance with the Islamic concept and world view, pertaining to the principle of harmony operating in all spheres of life, between the Creator and the created, God and man” (Abd al Rahmān Rafat al Basha, 1985: 92).

Basha’s definition accords with Sayyid Qutb’s interpretation of the Islamic *tasawwur*. It emphasises the principle of harmony in Islam which stands against any kind of polarisation, whether material, spiritual, doctrinal, or practical. This also supports his view of Islamic social justice, in which he stresses the following:

“Islam came to unify all powers and abilities, to fuse together spiritual aspirations and bodily desires, to harmonise their directions, and thus create a comprehensive unity in the universe, life and man” (Sayyid Qutb, 1969: 5)

Imad al Din Khalil (1987), in his book, *Madkhal ila nazariyat al adab al Islami*” proposed that Islamic literature is “an artistic representation, which represents the Islamic worldview in relation to the ultimate purpose of (human) existence” (Imad al Din Khalil, 1987: 69).

Najib al Kaylani (1992) defines Islamic literature as “An inspiring aesthetic and artistic expression. It issues from a believer [of the Islamic faith) and interprets [this believer’s Islamic interpretation] of life, mankind and the universe. It is in conformity to the Islamic conviction of the believer. It pleases [the reader] and benefits him/ her. It inspires the soul and stimulates thoughts. It is prepared to meet the challenges ahead.” Najib proceeds to summarise Islamic literature as:

1. An artistic expression, which is beautiful, dominant and captivating.
2. It derives from a person, who is assured with faith (*iman*).
3. It is an interpretation of life, man and the universe.
4. It is in accordance to the Islamic conviction (*aqidat*) of a Muslim.
5. It is inspires happiness and enjoyment (*mutat*) and is beneficial.
6. It stimulates thoughts and emotions.
7. It is prepared to face the challenges and changes of life. (Najib al Kaylani 1992: 32- 36).

Adnan Ali al Nahwi (1987) proposes two definitions of Islamic literature. In his first definition, he says that Islamic literature is, “The art of employing words to express [emotions or thoughts]. This art contains the distinctive artistic elements [required] in literary writing,” (al Nahwi, 1987: 36). In his second definition, he says, Islamic literature reflects “a natural human intuition and reaction which transpire between the mind and soul when confronted with certain conditions or situations. The above intuition is thus inspired to express [the feelings and thoughts, which transpired in the mind and soul] in an artistic literary form” (al Nahwi, 1987: 37).

The Universal League of Islamic Literature in Riyadh, under the supervision of Abu Hassan ‘Ali al Nadwi (d.1999) proposed a unified

definition in 1993. It defined Islamic literature as “an objective artistic interpretation of the Islamic worldview in issues relating to mankind, life and the universe” (The Universal League of Islamic literature, 1993: 72).

Nadwi¹² himself argues that, “literature in Islam retains a secure and stable intention, exuberant with intense and impulsive vivaciousness and animation. It bears with it an eminent celestial revelation that is humanistic, Islamic and universal (Nadwi 1994: 14). Literature in Nadwi’s opinion is a living object, which has an affectionate heart, and a conscious mind, sensitive, and steadfast in his faith and has an objective [in life]. Literature as a living object endures pain when opposed with pain and hardship and is exultant and joyful when received with joy. Nadwi argues that any literature, which does not answer to the above description, is a stilted, callous, lifeless and immobile literature (Nadwi, 1994: 12).

Mustafa Haddarah (d. 1997) defines Islamic literature as literature that conveys the proper Islamic view on all that represents the universe and all that takes place in it (Haddarah, 1993: 22). More recently, Muhammad Hassan Barighish (1996) has chosen to give an explanatory definition of Islamic literature. He defines Islamic literature as “literature which illustrates the Islamic world-view on all aspects of life and upholds the Islamic view and conforms to the Islamic legislation and will not contradict Islam whatever the circumstances are” (Barighish, 1996:111).

Barighish (1996) sees Islamic literature as conveying the Islamic view of life in all its different dimensions and aspects. It is a literature that upholds the Islamic worldview and coincides with God’s injunctions and never transgresses the bounds of piety (Barighish, 1996:111).

¹² I have included al Nadwi’s views in the discussion of the views of Muslim scholars in the Middle East because although he is not initially from the Middle East, al Nadwi’s direct involvement in The Universal League of Islamic Literature in Riyadh has renowned him with exceptional recognition in the Middle East. Furthermore, the fact that al Nadwi was chairing the League until his death in 1999, his presence in the headquarters of the League in Riyadh is inevitable.

5. The Malay perception of *sastera* (literature).

The discussions on the Malay perception of *sastera*, the Malay term for literature, have been very wide and extensive. Because this study is primarily concerned with the Islamic literature discourse in Malaysia, the discussions on the Malay term for literature is confined to Dr Ungku Maimunah's argument on the matter¹³. I have found Ungku's argument straightforward and clear, and therefore appropriate to the needs of this study. According to Ungku, in general *sastera* (literature) is used to connote language that is beautiful and content that is good or beneficial. Furthermore, the two aspects singled out, the emphasis on language, in particular beautiful language, seems to dominate Malay understanding of literature. Beautiful language is seen as an integral component whose presence gives validity to a text's claim to literariness.

Apparently, the same may be said about the Indonesian literary canon. According to Kratz (2000) the Indonesian literary canon adheres to a rather narrow concept of belles lettres or high literature which lays great emphasis on the use of a literary language which is more 'refined' than the spoken language" (Kratz 2000: 149).

Kamus Dewan, the Malay dictionary, on the other hand, defines *sastera* as "language used in books, not everyday language." The definition not only emphasises language and its employment but also distinguishes language, which is not beautiful as "not literature." Darus Ahmad on the other hand defines *sastera* in the following manner:

Su: means beautiful, good, beneficial. *Sastera*: means words or books *Ke-susastera-an*: a collection of books whose language and content are beautiful and beneficial respectively (Darus Ahmad, 1965: 9).

Abdul Rahman al Ahmadi's general explanation of literature is:

¹³ See Ungku Maimunah, "Between Content and Aesthetics: "Modernity" In The Writings of Abdullah Munsyi, The Acclaimed Father of Modern Malay Literature". 1997: 60.

1. A collection of good writing, with beautiful language and good content.
2. Artistic language, language employed in literature is generally artistic, and as such literature may be referred to as the artistry of language (Abdul Rahman Ahmad 1966: 3).

R.J.Wilkinson on the other hand argues that, “A Malay defines literary composition to be a “stringing together” (*karangan*) of beautiful words and sayings; he describes a story as a necklace of pearls or a crown of diamonds or a garland of flowers or an ordered garden full of ponds and parterres. He does not consider the parts of a story to be mere accessories to the story as a whole; they are the pearls, while the narrative is the necessary thread.” (R.J.Wilkinson, 1907: 5).

According to V.I.Braginsky (1993) one of the characteristics of a properly ‘coordinated’ [Malay] literary work, and one much more important than beauty, is ‘benefit’ (V.I.Braginsky 1993: 36).

Affirming the ‘benefit’ characteristic of Malay literary work, Muhammad Haji Salleh (2000) states that, “The objective of literature is to give benefit or to profit the audience while amusing the disheartened soul” (Muhammad Haji Salleh 2000: xiv).

Elsewhere, Muhammad Haji Salleh (2000) claims that the “beautiful” in Malay literary writings “seems to be a product of a long line of tradition, emerging from people of ancient times, the revered source of the good and true. To come from the old is to come from these sources, and the elders seem to have lived around these sources of all things, including beauty and truth...Original beauty, thus, is genuine beauty.” (Muhammad Haji Salleh 2000: 236).

The discussion on definitions for *Sastera Islam* begins with Budiman Radzi. Budiman Radzi (1963) who defines Islamic art (including literature) as “*Seni untuk bertakwa*,” “Art for the sake of piety” (Budiman Radzi, 1963: 52). Budiman asserts that an artist or writer cannot be overpowered by art and society because the above will violate the freedom of his inborn artistic soul, which Allah has bestowed upon him. The artist will then be diverted from the path of righteousness to the path of evil. Furthermore, the above will distract the artist or writer away from the truth and lead him/ her closer to

immoral. Budiman affirms that art/ literature must precede to the path of righteousness and truthfulness, “*Kesenian tetaplah menuju jalan makruf, yang haq dan yang benar*” (Budiman Radzi, 1963: 52).

Badaruddin H.O. (1966) takes the discussion a step further and describes the whole concept of Islamic literature. Badaruddin (1966) defines Islamic art and literature as art that portrays illustrations of life (*gambaran- gambaran kehidupan*) within the Islamic concept [world-view]. It is a beautiful proclamation about existence (*wujud*), creation (*kejadian*), life (*kehidupan*) and mankind from an Islamic point of view. Badaruddin states, “*Seni Islam ialah seni yang melukiskan gambaran- gambaran kehidupan dari konsep keislaman. Ia adalah pernyataan yang indah tentang wujud, kejadian, kehidupan dan manusia dari sudut pandangan Islam*” (Badaruddin, 1966: 68).

Another significant writer is Syed Naquib al Attas. Al Attas (1972) argues for a *Sastera Islam* that is scientific (al Attas, 1972: 31, 32), rational and intellectual in nature (al Attas, 1972: 45). The above, al Attas posits coincides with the nature of Islam as a religion, which has a ‘scientific’ literary tradition, “...*bahwa Islam, berbeda dengan agama- agama Hindu dan Buddha, adalah suatu agama yang bersifat kedudayaan sastera yang saintifik*” (al Attas, 1972: 31).

“[The fact that] Islam is different from the religions of Hindu and Buddhist, is because [Islam] is a religion characterised by its scientific literary culture.” By scientific, al Attas is implying to the psychological bearing and nature [of the literary culture], founded on a tradition of knowledge, which intently examines something with “*tatatertib ilmiah*” (intellectual ethics). He affirms, “...*dengan istilah ‘saintifik’ dimaksudkan sesuatu yang mempunyai bawaan dan sifat akliah berdasarkan pada ilmu pengetahuan, yang mempunyai chara dan gaya menilik sesuatu mengikut tatatertib ilmiah*” (al Attas, 1972: 31).

Inspired by al Attas’s views as mentioned above, Affandi Hassan¹⁴ in 1989 started to develop his “*pendekatan tauhid*” (the Tauhid Approach) in literary criticism and “*pendekatan estetis-intelektual*” (the Aesthetes- Intellectual Approach) in literary

¹⁴ Affandi Hassan’s views on literature will be discussed individually later in the study.

writing and reviewing. The above is especially obvious in Affandi's development of the concept of knowledge and intellectual/ knowledgeable literature (See Affandi Hassan, 1994: 3- 9) and his emphasis on the importance of proper analysis and employment of methodologies in his discussion on Methodology and Analysis (See Affandi Hassan, 1994: 9- 41).

Yusuf Zaki Yaakob (1974) defines *sastera Islam* as a literature, which portrays the Islamic concept and values in life (Majalah Dian, September/ October 1974). Yusof has also contributed a few key ideas on the relation between religion and literature to the *Sastera Islam* discourse. **Yusof Zaki Yaakob (1973) emphasises that literature should not be disassociated from religion as propogated in the West and rendered by the French slogan from the early 19th century, "l'art pour l'art", which expresses a philosophy that the intrinsic value of art, and the only "true" art, is divorced from any didactic, moral or utilitarian function.** This is because both literature and religion emanate from the same source, sublime or virtuous feelings and awareness/ consciousness. There can be neither literature nor religion without virtuous feelings and awareness/ consciousness. Yusof affirms, "*Tiada sastera tanpa keluhuran perasaan dan kesedaran dan begitu juga tiada agama tanpa keluhuran perasaan dan kesedaran*" (Yusof Zaki Yaakob, 1973: 12- 13). Yusof affirms that the Qur'an, which is the main basis and source of Islam is revealed in the "bahasa sastera Ilahi yang seni" ('Godly literary and artistic' language/ expression). Yusof posits that the reason the Qur'an is revealed in a literary [eloquent poetic] expression/ language, is because literature is the expression of the "*hati nurani*," soul. Which is precisely why religion should first be reinstalled into the soul and then followed by the mind, "*Kerana sastera adalah bahasa hati nurani, sedangkan agama harus diserapkan lebih dahulu ke dalam hati nurani manusia sebelum diserapkan ke dalam akalunya*" (Yusof Zaki Yaakob, 1973: 13). In Yusof's opinion, literary works are evaluated in accordance to the influence they have on readers. A literary work is considered good if it is of good influence and nurtures sincerity into the reader's feelings and consciousness. In contrast, writings, which assimilate evil influences on the reader, are

therefore bad literary work irrespective of whether the intention of the writer was initially good or bad (Yusof, 1973: 13). Yusof's assertion on literature as the expression of the "hati nurani," soul and his emphasis on the function of literature and its influence, benefit and impact on the reader concur with Prof. V. Braginsky's (1993) assertions on the three spheres in the system of Classical Malay literature (V. I. Braginsky, 1993: 1- 2). Braginsky identifies these three spheres as "*sfera fungsional*" (the sphere of function) (Braginsky, 1993: 1), "*sfera faedah*" (the sphere of advantage) (Braginsky, 1993: 2) and "*sfera kesempurnaan rohani*" (the sphere of perfecting the soul) (Braginsky, 1993: 2).

Within the perceptual framework that any literary activity is an ibadah, an act of worship no different from prayers, fasting and the like, Shahnun gives the following definition of *Sastera Islam*:

"[It is] literature produced in the name of Allah and for humankind. The two expressions, "in the name of Allah" and "for humankind," are closely interrelated, for when we produce literature in the name of Allah, we believe automatically, without doubt, that everything which Allah commands of us (through the Qur'an and the Sunnah) is for the well-being and happiness of human beings. As such, we can conclude that Islamic Literature is literature in the name of Allah and for the good of all humankind" (Shahnun Ahmad, 1981: 3) (English translation quoted from Ungku Maimunah's *Sastera Islam* article, 1989: 240).

It is interesting to note that the well known Indonesian 'ulama, Hamka had made the same statement as Shahnun about Islamic literature back in the 1930s. Concurrent with its cogitation with guiding readers towards the path of God, *Sastera Islam* proposes that moral clarity is a crucial consideration. Narrative strategies and devices employed should therefore be geared towards highlighting moral. In short, within the tradition of *Sastera Islam*, morals are often regarded as superior to aesthetics. On this basis, Shahnun stresses that *Sastera Islam* is an 'ibadah (Shahnun Ahmad, 1981: 3), a form

of worship, and it is thus incumbent upon writers to dedicate their art to truth as set down by Allah, and to guide their readers towards an awareness and understanding of this truth, a higher morality and the achievement of Allah's grace.

Abdullah Hussain. Abdullah chose to narrow the scope of *sastera Islam* to poetry and prose. In his attempt to widen the prospects of Islamic criteria within Malay literature he chose to first focus on themes that do not contradict teachings of Islam and the Islamic moral conduct. Secondly, on themes, which contain unsur *ibadah dalam pengertian yang luas* ' (religious elements). (Abdullah Hussain, Dewan Sastera, July 1977). Obviously, Abdullah concentrated more on the aspects of theme and message in his definition of *sastera Islam*.

Muhammad Kamal (1977) prefers that concentration and focus be given more on how to adapt to the Islamic perspectives of literature rather than on the term *sastera Islam* itself. He argues that in the issue of Islamic literature, the focus and issue should be on the Islamic commitment of the writers and their writings, in accordance to the Islamic world-view. However, he prefers the term *Sastera Islam* instead of *Sastera Islam*. In his opinion, the term *Islamic* asserts that the author is otherwise engaged to uphold Islamic values. In other words, *sastera Islamic* is a '*literature engagee*', which upholds the Islamic cause and its vision of reality. It strives to revive and revitalise the nation in accordance with the Islamic world-view (Muhammad Kamal Hassan, 1977).

Dr. Ismail Ibrahim affirms that *Sastera Islam* is literary writing, which is built on the [philosophy] of *Tauhid*. He concludes that a writer who has the philosophy of *Tauhid* implanted in him, is a writer who believes in Allah and is able to instruct his mind in accordance to the teachings of Islam, and not for the sake of reputation or publicity. This is considering the fact that the evaluation [of literature] is not based on imagination and emotion. However, literary writings are evaluated according to the writer's consciousness. In the above, lies the difference in the Islamic approach to literature (Ismail Ibrahim, 1977: 5). Literature Ismail posits is a main vehicle of thought of the people, which breaks through the boundaries of language, the colour of the skin and hair of man (Ismail Ibrahim, 1978: 8). Elsewhere,

Ismail cites the verse from the Qur'an, which reads, "Have We not created for them a pair of eyes, a tongue and a pair of lips? And We revealed to them two paths (the good and the bad)." (Surat al Balad: 8-9). Ismail posits that the above Qur'anic saying reminds man of the endowments God has given him. The eyes the tongue and the lips are the most valuable things that God has bestowed on man. A pair of eyes that are alert and sharp, a tongue that is fluent and a pair of lips that is creative will bring forth finesse [artfulness] from man, whether in the form of words or expressions of feelings through writing and painting. Thus man is also reminded of the two paths, the rightful and the wrong one, that exist in front of him. Because of that all artistic expressions that are made should contain everything that is good and pure in order to show gratitude to Allah for all those that He has bestowed upon man. Man's expression of art must evolve around high moral and spiritual values, which can raise the position, self and soul of man to a high level, the level of *taqwa* (fear and respect for God), *Imaan* (faith), *maruf* (benevolence) and good deeds (Ismail Ibrahim, 1978: 1). Ismail further affirms that expressions of art that are not based on strong *taqwa* or *Imaan* will manifest themselves in a questionable form due to the contest of time. It will only meet the satisfaction of lust and worldly benefits. This will bring destruction to life, create problems in the society, and give rise to feelings of anxiety, fear and all sorts of uneasiness in man. In creativity and writing, a writer should conform to Allah's approval; establishing truth and justice as shown by Him should be his first objective. All creative works done in the name of Allah will themselves turn out to benefit man and his welfare (Ismail Ibrahim, 1978: 2). On the subject of beauty in literature, Ismail states that literature is synonymous with beauty, and beauty in turn is relative in nature, it can thus be interpreted as best as possible in many ways according to different inclinations and viewpoints. A saying of the Prophet according to Ismail, suggests that indeed Allah is most beautiful and He loves beauty. Based on this concept, it can then be concluded that beauty in literature is focussed on the beauty of truth and justice, which has a direct link with the heart and mind of man who has faith and whose source is the *aqidah* (conviction), which is true and real. Furthermore, Ismail asserts, beauty in all forms that is found in the world and this life is the manifestation and splinters of the real

beauty possessed by Allah, absolute and perfect (Ismail Ibrahim, 1978: 8).

Another academician is Mana Sikana. Mana Sikana defines *sastera Islam* as literature, which promotes piety and godliness in life. It emphasises the good values in society, in accordance to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Berita Harian, October 1975). Elsewhere, Mana Sikana (1983) proposes that *Sastera Islam* is "sastera pengabdian," literature, which is devoted to serving Allah. This "Sastera Pengabdian" reflects the *taqwā* way of life, which emphasises righteousness in the actions of the *ummah* in accordance to the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Mana, 1983: 19). Mana cites Mahmud Abbas al 'Aqqad (1974) as stating that Islamic literature is literary writing, which portrays the Islamic concept and value of life. It guides [the reader] towards the development of the human civilisation and culture (al 'Aqqad, 1974: 4, cited in Mana Sikana, 1991: 6). Mana further posits that *Sastera Islam* actually is an expression of the [daily] life of the Muslim individual and society. It is created for the sake of obtaining Allah's blessings. *Sastera Islam* is also intended to offer an interpretation of life and endow meaning to life (Mana Sikana, 1991: 6). He proposes two categories of *Sastera Islam*. The first category consists of writings, which conform to the Islamic concept of literature. The second category consists of writings, which illustrate some elements or substances of Islamic writing (Mana Sikana, 1991: 6).

Sastera Islam in Shafie Abu Bakar's opinion is literature produced by Muslims in accordance to Islamic values (Pentas, April 1983: 3). Elsewhere, Shafie asserts that *Sastera Islam* is based on the philosophy of Tauhid. *Sastera Islam*, Shafie claims is a emanation of the Islamic culture, "*pancaran budaya Islam*" (Shafie, 2000: 2). *Sastera Islam* Shafie further asserts, is the creative product of a Muslim writer as he designates expressions as beautiful as can be in the most conceivable and feasible artistic form. He posits that assimilated in *Sastera Islam* is the humanitarian, spiritual, universal and aesthetic aspects/ factors [of literature]. Shafie affirms, "*Sastera Islam ialah hasil kreativiti seorang sasterawan Muslim menggunakan bahasa seindah mungkin di dalam bentuk- bentuk sastera sebaik mungkin. Teradun di dalamnya faktor- faktor: Insaniah, Alamiah,*

Rohaniah dan estetik” (Shafie, 2000: 2). Shafie emphasises the importance of the writer being a Muslim.

Other Malay scholars, who propose definitions for *Sastera Islam*, include Baha Zain, Rahman Shaari, Ismail Hamid and Rahmanmat. Baha Zain defines *sastera Islam* as a literature, which is in accordance to Islamic values irrespective of the writer’s faith and religion (Baha Zain, 1983: 4). *Sastera Islam* in Rahman Shaari’s opinion, is literature that has chosen Islam as the solution to all problems (Rahman Shaari, 1983: 54). Ismail Hamid on the other hand suggested *sastera Islam* as to be a literature, which emphasises the importance of values in society, “...*sastera yang membawa penekanan terhadap kepentingan masyarakat*” (Mana Sikana, 1983: 15). In his attempt to come to terms with Shahnnon’s assertion that *Sastera Islam* is literature for the sake of Allah, Rahmanmat proposes that *Sastera Islam* is “*Sastera yang menyorot upacara keislaman,*” literature, which depicts Islamic rituals (Rahmanmat, 1977: 6). Rahmanmat takes issue Shahnnon’s above assertion. According to Rahmanmat, an act of worship or to serve Allah and to produce literature are two separate issues, which are not related to one another. While worshiping is an act, which is strictly devoted to Allah, literature on the other hand is produced by humans for the pleasure of humans. Rahmanmat asserts, “*Beribadah atau berbakti kerana Allah tidaklah sama bersastera bertunggakkan Islam. Beribadah kerana Allah adalah mendekatkan diri pada Allah...Tidak ada ungkapan bersastera kerana Allah, kerana Sastera hanya lahir untuk manusia dari manusia*” (Rahmanmat, 1977: 6). Rahmanmat is a classical example of borrowing Ungku Maimunah’s (1989) expression, “the literary public, [which] grappled with the idea” (Ungku Maimunah, 1989: 233) of *Sastera Islam*.

Although Kemala has not prescribed any specific definition for *Sastera Islam*, he does assert though that writings on *Sastera Islam* are not lifeless and passive. In fact in conformity to its adaptable form and degree to carry out critical religious didactic (*pendakwahan*) tasks, *Sastera Islam* is industriously and spiritually motivated. Notwithstanding, it’s universal and dynamic nature. In Kemala’s opinion, *Sastera Islam* must be inventive, innovative and scientific (Kemala, 1994: 198). Kemala posits that in Islamic art, the

geometrical boundaries that transports the artist or those who appreciate art into a divine world in which the artist is helplessly devoted to the greatness and comprehensiveness of the Creator of this divine world (Kemala, 1994: 198). The above is asserted as he states, “*Karya sastra Islam bukanlah karya yang mati dan pasif. Sesuai dalam bentuk dan kategori bagi tujuan pendakwaan yang kritikal, berjiwa ijtihad dan rohaniah, kesusasteraan Islam sesuai dengan cita-citanya yang universal sekali gus memperlihatkan dinamikannya. Ia bukanlah karya yang menyerah dan pasif. Ia juga bersifat penerokaan yang inventive, innovative dan saintifik*” (Kemala, 1994: 198).

Therefore, following the example of the Qur’anic style of expression, the following guidelines are derived by Muslim scholars as elements and values to be implanted in Islamic literature:

1. The significant and evident presence of the *Islamic worldview* in writings, based on the verse from the Qur’an, “*I have only created Jinns and men, that they may serve Me*” (al Dhariyyaat: 56). Therefore, Man, as the vicegerent of God, should be the measure of all things. Man should respond to God alone with his whole being in exclusive service and obedience and devotion and worship. Man’s whole life should be an act of devotion and service to God. The position of the writer is closely tied up with the Islamic concept of a human being as having two roles, namely those of “servant” (*Abd Allah*- Surat Maryam: 30) and of “vicegerent” (*khalifah*- Surat al Baqarah: 30). The role of servant enjoins persons to submit themselves totally to Allah and none other.

2. The consistent presence and consciousness of the *al amru bi al maruf wa al nahyu an al munkar* factor in writings, i.e. that as vicegerent on earth, it is incumbent upon writers to encourage or enjoin good, and to discourage or prohibit evil (*al amru bi al maruf wa al nahyu an al munkar*). In the Qur’an the expression occurs eight times, *Surat Ali Imran*: 104, 110, 114, *Surat al Araf*: 157, *Surat al Taubah*: 71, 112, *Surat al ‘aj*: 41, *Surat Luqman*: 17). In this role as *khalifat*, a Muslim’s concern goes beyond his or her immediate self to concern for others. Similarly, in literary activities, Muslims are bound by these

two concerns of seeking Allah's pleasure as well as the welfare of others. In this sense then, literary activity is a form of *ibadat* (worship), no different from prayer. It is on this basis that Shahnun and others who agree with him that an author's religious conviction is a necessary prerequisite for Islamic literature.

3. There should not be encouragement to evil doing. On the other hand there should be recognition of good and evil. Because literature is a form of human activity, it is evident that it should portray the constant human striving between good and evil, between the contented soul (*al nafs al mutmainnah*) and the soul that is susceptible to evil (*al ammarah bi al su*). On the one hand Allah has created man in the best possible image (*aḥsan al taqwim*) and given him Divine Spirit (*wa nafakhtu fihi min ruhi*). On the other hand He has placed man in the world of matter and given him a passionate soul in his body (*al nafs al ammarah*), which tempts him towards the lowest of the low (*asfal al safilin*). Allah has not stopped the great evil power, Satan, from trying to tempt man from the path of righteousness. Hence, man is constantly in conflict within himself and with forces surrounding him (Syed Ali Ashraf, 1982: 24). Making the portrayal of this conflict is 'part and parcel' of literature (Muhammad Salleh Yaapar, 1999)¹⁵.
4. Based on the verse from the Qur'an, "*A goodly Word is like a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the heavens. It brings forth its fruit at all times by the leave of its Lord. So Allah sets forth parables for men, in order that they receive admonition. And the parable of an evil Word is that of an evil tree: it is torn up by the root from the surface of the earth: it has no stability. Allah will establish in strength those who believe with the Word that stands firm in this world and in the Hereafter; but Allah will leave to stray those who do wrong: Allah doeth what he willeth*" (Surat Ibrahim: 24- 27). Likewise, Muslims are taught in their daily

¹⁵ In an interview with him at U.S.M. on 30/ 11/ 1999.

life not to talk vulgarly and rudely, writings like speech (*kalam*) should also refrain from using vulgar and rude expressions and instead use other expressions. This is stated by the Prophet Muhammad when asked by 'Aisyah on the *Íukm* (rule) of poems which contain vulgar and rude expressions, He said, "*al Sy'ir ka al kalam, husnuhu wa qubhuhu.*" Meaning, "Poetry is like speech just as good speech is commendable and bad speech is intolerable and prohibited, poetry should practice similar values." The Prophet Muhammad also urged Muslims to maintain rationality and reason and show wisdom in recommending Islam to others, "*udu ila sabili rabbika bi al hikmah wa al hasanah.*"

5. The importance of sincerity and focus in writings. Based on the verse from the Qur'an, "*And the Poets. It is those straying in evil. Seest thou not that they wander distractedly in every valley?*" (Al Syuara': 224- 226).

Besides the guidelines derived from the Qur'anic verses mentioned in the preceding discussion, there are other aspects in the Qur'an that have been taken as guidelines and examples in the production of literature. Arabic prose and poetry provide an interesting example of the Qur'an's influence on literature. Arabic prose and poetry had in their development achieved an identical breakthrough of which the supreme as well as sublime exemplar was the Qur'an itself. Arabic poetic genius had produced poems which can be read backward as well as forward, which begin nowhere and end nowhere, whose recitation can begin at the beginning or anywhere else and whose resultant impression upon the mind is one of inclusiveness. The same poem follows a rhythmical pattern which can be repeated *ad infinitum* and the repetition of which is pleasant as well as gripping so that when the poem comes to an end, the desire of the reciter is to continue and to do so *ad infinitum* (al Faruqi, 1970: 77).

On how to produce prose, *Surat Yusuf* sets an interesting example of how a writer should describe the events in prose. The story of Yusuf and Zulaykha's is a story of human weaknesses and the strength to overcome desires. Nevertheless, the Qur'an portrays these

weaknesses but does not play and elaborate on them. Similarly, the Qur'an leaves out the details of Zulaykha's seduction of Yusuf. Rather, the Qur'an relates the events that befell Yusuf that brought on this seduction. This contrasts with some writings of fiction, which dwell on such events so as to titillate the reader and satisfy the craving of the writer and the curiosity of the reader. Still on the story of Yusuf, the Qur'an avoids describing the beauty of Yusuf at length. Rather his beauty is portrayed indirectly through the incident of the women cutting their fingers out of admiration for his beauty, which they described as angelic and not human. This, too, is not to encourage admiration for another human and also to avoid arousing the sensual instincts of the reader. Similarly when describing how Yusuf's brothers threw him into the well, the Qur'an avoids giving details of how they carried out this evil deed. Similarly, with the story of Adam's sons, the Qur'an avoids details of how the brother murdered his brother. This example reminds us that we are not allowed and should avoid relating and elaborating on evil doings so as not to encourage others to behave similarly. This is because humankind is a combination of two different elements that have been blended into one being. These two elements are "*qabdatun min tin alard*" (sounding clay) and "*nafkhatun min ruh Allah*" (Allah's spirit) as stated in following Qur'anic verses, "*Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I am about to create man from clay. When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him"*" (Surat Sad: 71- 72). Therefore, according to Muhammad Qutb, man is a result of this combination of clay and spirit. This combination on the other hand combines the desires and the plight of human on earth (*raghaib al ard*) and Allah's spirit (*nafkhatun min ruhihi*) that represents superiority and power and the faculty of God- like knowledge and will. Thus, the above combination in Muhammad Qutb's opinion would if rightly used give man superiority over other creatures (Muhammad Qutb: 33, Yusuf 'Ali: 624- 625, 1176).

Conclusion

This study has shown that Islam does not designate a specific form of Islamic literature. All the theories and views discussed in the

preceding discussions are but guidelines because neither the Qur'an nor the Sunnah has prescribed any specific form for literature. This is because the Qur'an, around which the whole of Muslim moral, religious and social life revolves, contains no ethical theories in the strict sense, although it embodies the whole of the Islamic ethos. How to go about eliciting this ethos thus becomes of paramount importance to the student of Islamic ethics and morality. There appear to be three promising directions in which the search can be fruitfully conducted, all of which lead back to the Qur'anic text itself: Qur'anic exegesis (*Tafsîr*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and scholastic theology (*kalâm*). Muslim scholars, who have frequently invoked the authority of the Qur'an in support of their theoretical and ethical claims, cannot be said to have developed a thoroughly Islamic view of the universe and of man, owing to the extraneous influences, social and political.

The Qur'an should be the source and recourse in all aspects of life including all artistic and literary functions. However, taking the Qur'an as the "source" does not indicate the unquestioning adoption and imitating of the Qur'an. On the contrary it is the cognisance of the two dimensions in the Qur'an, which is required in formatting Islamic literature. The first dimension is in the conception and thoughts in the Qur'an. The second is in the methods and styles of presentation. Therefore it is not a matter of imitating but focusing on how to channel, allocate and correlate thoughts and conceptions.

This study has shown that in conformity to the Islamic worldview, Islamic literature must maintain a sense of balance between its Islamic commitment and between its literary characteristics. Islamic literature must adhere to individuality as a creative work of art and literature. On the other hand, it must not overlook its commitment to uphold the Islamic values.

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