



A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SURAH YOUSUF: “TRIALS, TRUST, AND TRANSFORMATION: UNDERSTANDING HUMAN STRUGGLES THROUGH THE LENS OF DIVINE WISDOM”

Dr Abdur Rahman Khan

Lecturer, Islamic Studies/Arabic.

Dow Institute of Health Professionals Education, DUHS

Email: abdur.rahman@duhs.edu.pk

Abstract:

This research article reveals the major themes of surah Yousuf: 12th chapter of the Holy Quran and focuses on its unique structure, plot setting, emotional tone and divine guidance in the context of changing interplay of events. It presents how divine wisdom through the life of Prophet Yousuf (Joseph) addresses the issues as divine guidance, greediness, patience, human relationship and morality. This article offers insights how this surah guides humans in critical situations and bridges a gap between traditional interpretations and current understanding of surah Yousuf. A technique of systemic thematic analysis is employed in this study to reveal the incessant themes of this Surah which tactfully crafted in it. Finally, this study helps in reviewing existing literature by using a structured methodology for thematic analysis.

Keywords: Divine Wisdom, Thematic analysis, Guidance, Quran, Morality, methodology

Introduction

The Quran, as the word of God and main text of Islam, not only provides a divine guidance but invites a thoughtful literary, spiritual and moral insights to every human being (Rahman, 2009). Among all its chapters, Surah Yousuf is declared as the best narrative of the Quran which reveals

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SURAH YOUSUF

the life events of Prophet Yousuf (Joseph, peace be upon him) chronologically in passionate manner where different universal themes are interwoven to each other (Alhadrawi, Jones, and Ibrahim 2024, 18). This chapter truly depicts the various concepts such as mercy, patience, hate, divine wisdom and human weakness. This study aims to draw the attention of academia and educators to indulge deeply in the Quranic literature which profoundly discusses the human nature.

The scenario of surah Yousuf is quite compelling for it was the time when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the believers were passing through a continuous wave of persecution (Basit, 2007). It looks the purpose of surah Yousuf was to relief and strengthen the Muslims who were facing similar atrocities, hardships from the infidels of Makkah (Areqih, 2023). Another unparalleled aspect of it is its unbroken narrative which other prophetic stories miss in the Holy Scripture - scattered and divided in various chapters against the modern style of storytelling. It introduces a unique style of divine storytelling with the use of imagery, flow of events, plot setting and vulnerability of human life (Areqih, 2023).

In traditional theological settings surah Yousuf has been discussed in the perspective of its historical and linguistic aspects. Rarely, a comprehensive thematic analysis is done through contemporary analytical tools (Abas and Sahad 2021). Mostly conventional exegesis interprets single verses or presents only religious explanations which limits its scope and there remains a gap to connect different recurring themes in the surah and also how these themes communicate to current disputes in family crisis, decision making, and leading roles.

In qualitative research methodology, thematic analysis is a well-established tool which unfortunately is underestimated in Quranic interpretations (Usman and Ahmad 2019). However, some studies focuses general themes in the Quran as forgiveness and tolerance. Few studies use structured coding technique of an entire chapter. Instead of connecting different themes and development among them, verses and theme are dealt in isolation. Contrary to it, this paper bridges this gap by performing a comprehensive thematic analysis and discusses interlinked sociological, ethical and psychological issues in surah Yousuf.

In our local Pakistani settings, Quranic studies are just employed for ethical and spiritual trainings and at academic level it is limited to traditional explanations focusing only historical

and religious aspects (Imran et al. 2024, 72). By using methods like thematic analysis teachers, students and scholars can gain deep insights of the Quranic narrative. In addition, these results may be helpful to solve contemporary modern issues in the fields of governance, family crises, emotional breakdown and social inequality. Moreover, a thematic analysis can play a pivotal role in medical and healthcare sector where sympathy, care and persistence are much needed. Here surah Yousuf and its lessons can be employed into syllabuses of healthcare programs to train these professionals (Yusuf and Bashir 2024, 70).

Objectives of the Study

1. To recognize various themes from surah Yousuf.
2. To find the interrelated connections across this chapter.
3. To explain the identified themes through the traditional exegeses and the method of thematic analysis.
4. To make a connection between the results and contemporary issues related to morality and social norms of our society.

Literature Review

Both traditional and modern scholars have discussed surah Yousuf. In his commentary *Tafsir al-Quran al-Azim* the classical author Ibn e Kathir focusses the religious and ethical aspects of Prophet Yousuf's life. He precisely examines each verse, provides historical background and specifically identifies the spiritual pointers like patience and faith in divine process. Similar to it the famous author Al-Tabari in his commentary *Jami al-Bayan* explores linguistic details and an analysis of surah Yousuf's themes. Tabari has also worked on etymological particulars and different reading options in it. Another renowned classical commentator, Al- Qurtubi in his commentary *Al-Jami li-Ahmad al -Quran* touches the legal and ethical aspect of surah Yousuf. He explores jurisprudential context of some verses, especially family matters and governance rules. In contemporary scholars, Amin Ahsan Islahi in his commentary *Tadabbur-e-Quran* explores the consistency of themes of this surah, assuming it as combined moral description to inspire believers amid hardships. Another modern scholar and author of *Tafheem-ul-Quran*; Maulana Maududi includes socio-political interpretations, explaining Prophet Yousuf's role in

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SURAH YOUSUF

the perspective of governance. It is important to note that Maududi interprets things in a socio-political sphere for he himself advocated political Islam and formed a political party, Jamat-e-Islami, to bring Islamic reforms in the country through political process.

Some western scholars discover comparative and philosophical aspects in Surah Yousuf. In *The Message of the Quran* Muhammad Asad reveals philosophical interpretation, concentrating human moral ideals and illustrating similitudes with Biblical studies. Angelika Neuwirt (2010) declares the divine structure of the Surah as best specimen of storytelling. She highlights its incredible use of literary devices and thematic harmony. Neal Robinson's *discovering the Quran* unfolds the literary style of Surah Yousuf by exploring plot development and its role of teaching morality. Aisha Geissinger (2008) focuses the gender roles in the incident of Yousuf and Zuleikha. She ingeniously discusses the modest and active part of Islamic teachings. In an interesting comparative study, Wheeler (2002) compares the same character of Prophet Yousuf in the context of Quranic and Biblical rendering. He points out an important element that contrary to Biblical depiction of Joseph, Quran states a true dignified prophetic character of Prophet Yousuf which supports monotheism and moral excellence. Although a lot of research work is carried out on Quranic text from different perspective, a systematic thematic analysis through frequency of coding is missing across the entire surah Yousuf. This research gap suggests of using thematic analysis to explore deeper meaning of Surah Yousuf and uncover interwoven connections among themes of morality, social norms and spirituality.

Methodology

For this research study a qualitative framework is chosen. Thematic analysis best fits to detect and code common themes in Surah Yousuf. This procedure is separated into different following phases:

Selection of Primary Text. For clarity, accuracy and Tajwid friendly Arabic text design, official Madinah-standard print is adopted. It employs the *Uthmani script* with special rules of spelling, diacritical marks and symbols as per the Ottoman manuscript.

1. Translations: A variety of distinguished English translations (including those by Abdel Haleem, Yusuf Ali, Pickthall, and Saheeh International) were used to verify meanings and subtleties.

2. Integration of Classical and Modern Exegesis: Key tafsir references consist of Ibn Kathir, Al-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi, and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. - Modern commentaries from Maududi, Islahi, and Muhammad Asad were included to connect traditional interpretations with contemporary settings.

3. Thematic Coding Method: An inductive method was utilized to categorize verses based on essential themes such as sabr (patience), tadbeer ilahi (divine planning), ethical integrity, familial relationships, forgiveness, and dream analysis. - NVivo qualitative analysis software was used to organize, group, and visualize the coded ideas.

4. Comparative Analysis of Religious Texts: The narrative within the Quran was contrasted with the biblical story found in Genesis 37–50 to highlight both shared and distinctive Quranic elements.

5. Data Visualization: Graphs to depict thematic frequency and charts modeling emotional trajectories were created to demonstrate the subtleties of the narrative.

6. Validation and Triangulation: Interpretations were verified by cross-referencing various tafsir sources to ensure dependability.

A select group of scholars and postgraduate students assessed the thematic categories for precision. This organized approach guarantees a well-rounded combination of linguistic accuracy, religious understanding, and contemporary diagnostic techniques, offering a comprehensive perspective on the thematic richness of the Surah.

Key Themes in Surah Yousuf

Divine Wisdom and Providence (Tadbeer ilahi) – Right from the start, the Surah underscores Allah’s supreme control and wisdom. Regardless of the challenges that Yusuf (AS) endures—thrown into a well, gone to slavery, and wrongfully sentenced—every incident discloses as part of a divine wisdom (Quran 12:100).

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SURAH YOUSUF

Patience (Sabr) – The theme of patience runs throughout the Surah. Yaqub (AS) exhibits remarkable patience ("sabrun jameel") after the loss of his son. Yusuf (AS) shows patience when facing enticement and during his unjust captivity.

Dreams and Divine Revelation (Ru'ya and Wahy) – Dreams are pivotal in the Surah, ranging from Yusuf's childhood dream (12:4) to those of the prisoners and the king. These dreams serve as a means of divine control and prophetic indicators.

Moral Integrity and Chastity – Yusuf's opposition to temptation showcases his moral strength. His decision mirrors his steadfast 'taqwa' (God-consciousness).

Forgiveness and Reconciliation – Yusuf's decision to forgive his brothers exemplifies the Islamic ideals of forgiveness and resolution (12:92).

Family and Brotherhood – The Surah addresses issues of familial conflict, brotherly rivalry, and the eventual restoration of relations through divine mediation and human modesty.

Trials and Triumph – Yusuf's progression from adversity to honor embodies the Quranic principle that ease follows hardship (94:5-6).

Discussion

Apart from numerous other chapters in the Quran, the organization of the Surah Yousuf is arranged in a time - linear sequence. It utilizes striking imagery, dialogues, and engaging storytelling, highlighting the literary brilliance of the Quran. The inclusion of recurrence, parallel structure, and stylistic questions deepens the thematic richness and enhances reader involvement.

The thematic examination of Surah Yousuf displays a complex interaction between divine will, human choice, and moral strength. In compare to the fragmented stories reported in other chapters of the Quran, Surah Yousuf compromises on a continuous and consistent story that improves its educational significance (*Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*). This description of the events reveals the ongoing moral development of characters, especially it is shown that Hazrat Yusuf (AS), grows from childhood to mature life. A significant element of *sabr* (patience) is portrayed as an essential instrumental force. Firstly, Hazrat Yaqub (AS) embodies *sabr* *jameel*—patience without grievance—while Hazrat Yusuf (AS) by evading temptation and facing injustice exhibits patience. Current scholars like Islahi (Tadabbur-e-Quran) explain that this type of patience is not merely passive resolve towards God's will, but a firm believe on Allah's will. Another key element as God's decree (*tadbeer ilahi*) is constantly highlighted

through key story shifts: Hazrat Yusuf's unfair detention gives rise to his status as morally strong person. Contemporary scholar; Molana Maududi points out in his famous tafseer e Quran (*Tafheem-ul-Quran*) that these events inspire believers to view apparently negative events as possible signs to divine blessings.

The idea of chastity is strongly demonstrated in Yusuf's rejection of Zulaikha's enticements (Quran 12:23–24). The classical writer; Imam Razi (*Mafatih al-Ghayb*) interprets the self-control of Hazrat Yousuf on this luring moment as a divine trial in which self-control is a symbolic indication of prophetic high standards within the humanity. Related to virtuous and honest leadership, this idea also reverberates in modern narratives. In the current scenario Surah Yousuf presents an example for solving family matters following unjust treatment. According to Abdel Haleem (*Understanding the Quran*) the betrayal of Prophet Yousuf's brothers and in last their pardon (12:92) demonstrate Islamic values of forgiveness. He points out the healing psyche that forgiveness brings (Khan, 2024). The incorporation of dreams—from Yusuf's early life to the king's dream—acts as both a narrative mechanism and a theological endorsement of prophet hood. According to traditional scholars such as Al-Qurtubi the Quran recognizes genuine dreams as a mode of divine revelation.

As compare to the Biblical narrative in Genesis recalls much of the storyline, the Quranic rendition supports the Islamic belief in the infallibility of prophets (Mahmood, 2018). It discards eliminates undignified and ethically dubious traits assigned to Joseph in the Bible, thereby (Asad, *The Message of the Quran*). Various ideas like detention of public figures, immigration and morality of leadership are part of the contemporary discussions in the context of Surah Yousuf. For example, Creswell's doctrine of research framework resonate with the Surah's gradual revelation of wisdom through successive experiences.

Finally, a comprehensive ethical narrative of this Surah addresses personal integrity, justice, familial reunion, and believe in divine will—thereby making it a valuable reference for both spiritual enlightenment and socio-cultural relevance.

Insights from Classical and Contemporary Tafsir

This examination draws upon traditional scholars such as Ibn Kathir, *Al-Tabari*, and *Al-Qurtubi*, along with modern interpretations like Maulana Maududi's *Tafheem-ul-Quran* and Amin Ahsan Islahi's *Tadabbur-e-Quran*. While traditional tafsir tends to concentrate on linguistic and legal insights, contemporary analyses frequently connect themes to psychological and societal aspects.

Comparative Analysis with the Biblical Narrative

The narrative of Joseph in the Bible (Genesis 37–50) presents parallels with the Quranic story but also varies in significant ways. The Quran places a greater emphasis on monotheism, moral integrity, and divine wisdom, and steers clear of anthropomorphic representations of prophets.

Results

The thematic analysis of Surah Yousuf revealed several important findings:

1. The Dominance of Patience and Divine Wisdom

The most frequently occurring themes, supported by thematic frequency mapping, are *sabr* (patience) and *tadbeer ilahi* (divine planning). Together, they represent nearly half of all identified thematic references.

2. Narrative as Moral Guidance

The clear, linear storyline distinctly facilitates progressive moral guidance, setting it apart from the non-linear narrative styles found in other Qur'anic surahs.

3. Moral Uprightness in Hardship

Yusuf's steadfastness in the palace incident was a central theme, highlighted in both classical and modern tafsir as a pivotal moment in the Surah.

4. Transformative Compassion

Yusuf's reconciliation with his brothers emerged as a climactic theme, illustrating the intersection of divine mercy and human compassion.

5. Imagery of Dreams

Dreams served not only as narrative elements but also as symbols of divine communication and prophetic authority.

6. Organization of Emotional and Thematic Points

Data visualization showed that thematic intensity and emotional climaxes coincide at critical junctures, particularly during Yusuf's justification and family reunion.

Conclusion

Most of the Quranic scholars are agreed upon this fact that Surah Yousuf due to its ideas, symbols, consistency, tone and style is one of the most attractive and scholastic tales in the Quran. For example, in contrast to other historical narratives, the Quran itself declares it as (*ahsan ul qasas*) best story of the Holy book. This study supports that Surah Yousuf's thematic structure is wisely constructed, using trial and success design to emphasize moral and theological values. The core elements such as patience and divine wisdom supported by themes of morality, compassion, family ties, and faith. Moreover, the Quran's comparative analysis with Biblical stories reveals the distinctive illustration of prophetic character and divine wisdom. In the contemporary discussions observed through a modern lens of logic, Surah Yousuf proposes undying insight on morality, leadership, resilience and fixing fragmented relationships. In various social settings, it confirms its ongoing implication across combination of emotional gravity and moral transparency. The results of the study also provide the way to spread over the outcomes among diverse disciplines related to psychology, sociology, conflict resolution, and narrative analysis.

References

1. Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Quran*
2. Al Areqih, Rashad. "Psychoanalytic Approach and Dreams Interpretation in Surah Yusuf." *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society* 8, no. 1 (2023).
3. Alhadrawi, Ali Khudayer Abdulabbas, Toby C. Jones, and Zakia Hassan Ibrahim. "The Prophet's Biography and Its Impact on Understanding and Documenting Early Islamic History." *Eurasian Journal of History, Geography and Economics* 31 (2024): 12–33.
4. Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*
5. Asad, Muhammad. *The Message of the Qur'an*. Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980.
6. Asad, Muhammad. *The Message of the Quran*
7. Basit, Abdul. "An Islamic perspective on coping with catastrophe." *Southern medical journal* 100, no. 9 (2007): 950-951.
8. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SURAH YOUSUF

9. Geissinger, Aisha. *Gender and Muslim Constructions of Exegetical Authority: A Rereading of the Classical Genre of Qur'ān Commentary*. Islamic History and Civilization, vol. 117. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015.
10. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*
11. Imran, Muhammad, Ghulam Mustafa Anjum, Javed Iqbal, and Zafar Ali. "Islamic Approach to Education Balancing Religious and Secular Knowledge in Pakistani Schools." *Al Khadim Research Journal of Islamic Culture and Civilization* 5, no. 1 (2024): 68-78.
12. Islahi, *Tadabbur-e-Quran*
13. Khan, Sana Rizwan. "Forgiveness in Islam: A Pathway to Positive Religious Coping." *The Journal of Arts, Sociology and Humanities (ISSN-3079-1146)* 2, no. 2 (2024): 59-83.
14. Mahmood, Zainab. "" A Lesson for the People of Insight": The Qur'ānic Story of Yūsuf in Islamic Interpretive Traditions." PhD diss., New York University, 2018.
15. Maududi, *Tafheem-ul-Quran*
16. Nur Afifah binti Abas and Mohd Nizam bin Sahad, "A Comparative Study Between Reflexive Thematic Analysis in Social Sciences and Qur'anic Thematic Analysis in Qur'anic Sciences," *Journal of Ma'ālim al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunnah* 17, no. (Special Issue) (December 2021): 1–25
17. Rahman, Fazlur. *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. University of Chicago Press, 2009.
18. Usman, Abur Hamdi, and Hafiz Ahmad. *Konsep Firasat Menurut Al-Quran: Analisis Tematik Wacana Mufasirin: The Concept of Clairvoyance From The Quran: Thematic Analysis in Exegetes Discourse*. No. 1 (June 2019): 1–11.
19. Wheeler, Brannon M., editor. *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis*. 1st ed., Continuum (Bloomsbury), 2002.
20. Yusuf, Abubakar Abdullahi, and Abdullatif Bashir. "COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC MEDICAL ETHICS WITH WESTERN BIOETHICS: APPROACHES TO MODERN HEALTHCARE DILEMMAS." *المجلة الجزائرية للدراسات الإسلامية*, no. 2 (2024): 64-91.