

Tracing Islamic Sources in the Saraiki Folktales

*Zahoor Hussain

**Saiqa Imtiaz Asif

Abstract

Saraiki is one of the languages spoken by the people of Southern Punjab since prehistoric times. Like all old languages of the world, this language has a long tradition of oral narratives especially the folktales which transferred by word of mouth from generation to generation. This area was ruled by many dynasties and however rulers of the Muslim era remained comparatively longer. Islam spread through the teachings of Sufis in the Southern Punjab. The present study was aimed to find and trace the sources in the Saraiki folktales. The researcher collected the Saraiki religious tales from the informants who were elderly and illiterate members of Saraiki area i.e. Multan. The Holy *Qur'ān*, the Tradition of Holy Prophet and the Seerat books on the lives of Holy Prophet and his Companions were found as sources in the Saraiki folktales, however, the sources were not exactly cited as there were minor deviations regarding number and nomenclature of characters and physical setting of folktales. The plots of some Saraiki folktales enunciated the holy verse from the Holy *Qur'ān* as the rest of plot was woven to exemplify the holy verse. The Saraiki folktales were used as tools to spread and disseminate the message of Islam by the elderly members of Saraikis.

Keywords: Folktales, Religious Tales, Sources, Oral Tradition

Introduction:

Folklore as a tradition started since prehistoric times. It is considered one of the oldest traditions of story -telling that transferred from generation to generation by word of mouth. The forefathers and ancestors exploited this tool of narrative to educate and entertain the upcoming generation because these folktales presented them in such a way as they longed to be portrayed through them before their forthcoming generation. These folktales in fact wrapped their observations, epitomes of their lives, wishes and desires. Zipes¹ opined that myths and legends appeared in the folktales and got disseminated among the masses. With the passage of time, the study of folklore was established and studied as a genre due to its certain typological and structural differences from other types of primitive narratives. The word genre is derived from the French and it stands for a particular kind or class. Genre is also a type of particular text with distinctive aspects, conventions, patterns and these conventions are recognized linguistically by linguists and folklorists (Swales²). Researchers and linguists studied, classified and interpreted various texts through genre because the texts may be grouped on the basis of some linguistic, thematic and other similar aspects. Uther³ coined a method of classification called Aarne-Thompson- Uther and popularly known as the ATU classificatory method on the basis of similarities of plots of different folktales in the world. Uther along with his team

*Ph.D Scholar, Department of English, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan.

**Professor, Department of English, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan.

¹ Zipes, Jack. "Dreams of better Bourgeoisie Life: The Psycho-social Origins of the Grimms Tales" The Brothers and Folk tale, ed. (Jama McGlathary, 2003).

² Swales, John. Genre Analysis. English in Academic and Research Setting. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, Press, 1990).

³ Uther, H. (2004). *The Types of International Folktales. A Classification and bibliography based on the System of Anti Aarne and Stith Thompson 1-3. Editorial Staff: Sabine Dinslage, Sigrid Fahramann chritineGoldgerg., GudrnSchwibbe.* (Helsinki: SuomalainenTiedeakatemia, 2004).

established a typology of folktales and allotted those numbers with respect to their similarities of plots and occurrence. Propp⁴ did his seminal work on the structural patterns of Russian folktales which published as 'The Morphology of Folktale'.

Frazer⁵ was the first folklorist who tried an analysis between two disciplines i.e. folklore and divinities through comparative approach. He was of the view that oral tradition saved and survived the religious stories among the masses. Though in past, both the religious scholars and folklorist were at war so far as the veracity of stories concerned. Lang quoted in Kirpatrick quoted by Murphy⁶ was about the view that the primitive people had two things in common i.e. their beliefs and tales and both the things were saved in the Greek mythology and folklore. There in past, many studies on the sources and symbolic interpretation of folktales in regard to religions and spiritualism were conducted. In the religious tales, different animals stood for various religious phenomena as Bettelheim quoted in Murphy found traces of baptismal symbolism in a religious tale, "The Seven Ravens." In this tale, seven brothers disappeared and reappeared as ravens. They went away to fetch a jug of water for the ceremony of baptism of their sister. This tale gave a new beginning for Christian existence. Similarly, the famous folktale, "Little Red Ridding Hood" was initially collected by the Grimm's Brothers⁷ and it also had a religious interpretation because of the little girl temptation to disobedience. In the folktale, "Iya and Cloudfall" many sources and allusions of religion were traced by Wilson⁸ in his book, "The Russian Story Book." The religious tales are not devoid of their sources as Joel⁹ said that, "they enable us to uncover intriguing aspects of the localized society that produces and consumed them."

Islam spread in the subcontinent through the preaching of holy saints and Multan has been the center of many saints since Mohammad Bin Qasim attacked Multan. However, Multan had been the center for mysticism even before the advent of Islam as it was a spiritual center for the Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Muslims, and Qaramtis respectively (Fikri¹⁰). The first recorded saint in the history of Multan was Dewan Chawali who was a contemporary of Hazrat Abu Bin Adhm. Later, Shah Yousaf Gardez started a long tradition of mysticism in Multan with the following list such as Hazrat Bahauddin Zakaria, Shah Rukn e Alam, Shah Shams Sabzwari, Syed Mosa Paak Shaheed, Hafiz Jamaal and many more. Multan has many tombs along with the followers of these saints (Ahmed¹¹). The present study was aimed to trace the sources of Saraiki religious tales collected from the suburbs of Multan – a district of South Punjab.

Methodology:

The present study was qualitative in nature and design. The researchers collected data i.e. the Saraiki religious tales from the informants of study. The informants were

⁴ Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1928/1968).

⁵ Frazer, John. *Tales: Old and New York*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁶ Murphy, Ronald. *The Owl, The Raven, And The Dove*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷ German Brothers who worked on German Folktale

⁸ Wilson, Richard. *The Russian Story Book*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28.

⁹ Joel, Rosenthal Thomas. *Telling Tales: Sources and Narration in Late Medieval England*. (USA: The Pennsylvania State Press, 2003), 28.

¹⁰ Fikri, Allama Attiq. *Al-Ateeq*. (Bahawalpur: Saraiki Adabi Majlis, 1982).

¹¹ Ahmed, Khalil. *Multan Daim Abad*. (Karachi: Fiction House Press, 2014).

elderly, senior and semi -literate members of the Saraiki language. They were 40 and above and were contacted through friend of friend technique. The researchers were facilitated by their family members, friends, relatives and students in this regard. The informants before being recorded were consented and informed about the purpose of study. The researchers collected from the suburbs of district Multan during summer vacation.



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The researchers went in person with a recorder to their inns and drawing rooms. Some informants of the study were bit hesitant to be recorded but the researcher relaxed the atmosphere by establishing rapport with the informants of study: Manzoor Hussain and Illahi Bux and got them recorded in a peaceful and congenial atmosphere. The informants also faced problems of clear enunciation and short memory lapses however the rejoinders of session participants moved them ahead to complete the plots of both the religious tales respectively. The recording sessions were conducted afternoons in the drawing rooms and also under shady trees on big wooded cots which were called in the local languages ‘Hamachas’¹³. Later after the sessions, the researchers listened to these religious tales many times before writing them in Saraiki. The researcher translated them into English and chalked out plots while keeping all necessary details and sequence of events of the religious tales. The researcher selected the rural area of Multan on the following two grounds: the Saraiki people are mostly settled in the suburbs and adjoining rural areas of Multan and folktales as a tradition is usually resided in the rural areas (Thompson, ¹⁶).

Data Analysis:

Religious tales contain religious themes and characters in them. The religious folktales revolve around heaven, hell, sin and punishment along with certain religious performances and rituals. The religious tales have further sub classes which were numbered in the ATU¹⁴ index. There are five categories of religious folktales. First, there are religious folktales where God punishes the transgressors and rewards the abiders of God’s law and these types of tales ranges from 750 to 779 in the ATU index. Second type of religious folktales have plots where at the end the reality and truth comes to broad day

¹² www.google.pk copied on (accessed 20th Aggust, 2018).

¹³ Thompson, Stith. The Folktales. (New York: Dryden,1946).

¹⁴ Aarne- Thompson – Uther.

light and these types of religious tales range from 780 to 791 in the ATU Variants of folktales. Thirdly, there are religious folktales which ranges between 800 and 809 in the ATU Variant and these tales have heaven as a source and rewards for the people who obey God. Fourthly, the religious folktales found between 810 and 826 have the devil as the antagonist and trouble creators for the human beings however in the end the devil is punished in hell. Lastly, there are religious folktales with other types of characters but those are linked with spirituality, mysticism and God.

Saraiki Religious Tale No.1

Saraiki Religious Folktale

District Multan

Title: Hirsī Jatnī (The Greedy Peasant Woman)

PLOT(S)

The Caliph of Muslims, Hazrat Omar marches in the street at night time During his march in the streets of city, he gets a chance to overhear a conversation between an old woman and her young daughter. The old woman who is the mother also insists her daughter to mix water into milk.. The young lass refuses her mother and tells her that God is everywhere and omnipresent. Hazrat after listening this all becomes very happy that the young lass is God-fearing. The next day early in the morning, the Caliph of Muslims reaches the home of that woman with a bag of flour and gives it to the family and especially he lauds the veracity of young lass. The old woman repents over what she said to her God-fearing daughter at night. She repents and apologizes he Caliph of Muslims.

Table No. 1 Plot of Saraiki Religious Tale

The Saraiki religious folktale, ‘*The Greedy Peasant Woman*’ was recorded from ‘the informant namely Mohammad Baksh¹⁵ who lived in a far flung village Chah Dhoran Wallan¹⁶ District Multan. The above stated Saraiki religious folktale comes within the type of, ‘The Truth Comes To Light 780-791’¹⁷ because at the end of this folktale both the protagonist and antagonist are recognized. The informant was an elderly and illiterate member of Saraiki community. Allama Jozi quoted by Naeemi¹⁸ in his book *Manaqib e Ameer Ul Momeenin : Hazrat Omar Bin Khataab* a similar type of story. According to Naeemi one night Hazrat Omar and Hazrat Aslam were marching in the streets of Madina and they heard a conversation between a mother and her daughter. She said to her daughter, “O my daughter, add water to milk”. And the daughter replied, “O mother, don’t you know about the order issued by the leader of Muslims.” The mother refuted the stance and egged on her daughter to add water by taking plea that the leader of Muslims was not present there, But she replied, “Verily, I will obey and follow the order issued by the leader of Muslims, Hazrat Omar. And I will not transgress his order”. The next day, Hazrat Omar called for the girl and appreciated her commitment. Further, it is mentioned in the same story mentioned by Jozi that she was married to the son of Hazrat Omar, Hazrat Asim. Many other stories regarding good governance of Hazrat Omar were also recorded by Nomaani¹⁹ in a book *Alfarooq*. Similarly, Kandhalvi and Haq²⁰ mentioned

¹⁵ The native Saraiki speaker.

¹⁶ Name of Village in Multan.

¹⁷ A Variant of ATU.

¹⁸ Naeemi, Mohammad Tariq. Hazrat Omar Bin Khataab. (Lahore: Shakir Publication Urdu Bazar, 2014).

¹⁹ Nomaani, Shibli. Alfarooq. (Lahore: Ilm o Arfaan Publications, 2014)

many stories in their book *Hayat ul Sahiba*. From the story of Hazrat Omar march in the street of Madina as given by Naeemi and the plot of story recorded by the informant of our study, there are certain deviations however the main scheme of events remain same. The deviations were that the girl said that God is omnipresent and another deviation is the girl called on Hazrat Omar. Despite these minor deviations in the plot of this Saraiki folktale; it follows other aspects as the characters are more or less same. The character of girl in both the cases remains as the protagonist and her mother as antagonist in the Saraiki folktale and the story narrated by Naeemi.

Saraiki Religious Tale No.2

Saraiki Religious Folktale

District Multan

Title: Hazrat Yousaf tay unday bhira (Joseph And His Brothers)

PLOT(S)

Joseph dream that some stars are bowing down before him and he is in the center of stars like a shining moon. The next early in the morning, Joseph goes to his father Hazrat Yaqub AS and tell him the whole dream he saw last night. Hazrat Yaqub AS becomes very happy and gives him the interpretation of his dream that one day he will become a great ruler and king. He also advises him not to tell the dream to his brothers because they were already jealous with him. One day, his brothers request their father to take Joseph with them along with their herd. There they throw him into a well and Hazrat Yousaf is rescued by a wandering caravan and sold in the slave market of Egypt. He is bought by a member of royal family however Hazrat Yousaf is elevated as the king of Egypt due to his wit and wisdom. Unfortunately, a severe famine strikes his town and consequently his brothers approach him to request for grain. They recognize him and request for pardon. Joseph forgives them.

Table No. 2 Plot of Saraiki Religious Tale:

The Saraiki folktale Hazrat Yousaf tay unday bhira (Joseph And His Brothers) was recorded from the informant Manzoor Hussain ²¹ who lived a village Basti Mohammad Pur²² which was an adjacent area of district Multan. The informant was about 70 years old with no school education. The informant had this religious folktale out of his memory and he claimed to hear it from his ancestors during his childhood. The Saraiki folktale Hazrat Yousaf and His Brothers falls within the Aarne-Thompson- Uther of 'God Rewards and Punishes' as Joseph was finally rewarded by God the rank and file in Egypt and his brothers were punished by starvation. The same story has been further narrated in detail in *Qasus Ul Ambia*. Qasmi²³ gave the background of this story as once the Jews of Mecca asked the Holy Prophet the story of Hazrat Yousaf in order to confirm the veracity of Holy prophet's prophet-hood. The Holy Prophet told the story of Hazrat Yousaf even from the dream which Yousaf shared with his father. His father Hazrat Yaqub AS became happy and forbade Hazrat Yousaf to share his story with his step brothers because they were already jealous with him. After his brothers threw him in a well, Yousaf was rescued by a wandering caravan. But he was sold in the slave market of Egypt. A royal member of Egyptian family Fotifaar bought him and Hazrat Yousaf within a short span of time got recognition in the court due to his manners and wit and he was

²⁰ Kanhalvi, Yousaf Mohammad and Haq, Mohammad Ahsan. *Hayaat ul Sahaba*. (2nd Ed.). (Lahore: Mushtaq Book Corner, 2012).

²¹ An Informant of the study, the native Saraiki speaker.

²² A village in Multan.

²³ Qasmi, Mohammad Abdul Rashid. *Qasas Ul Ambia*. (Lahore: Kutab Saan e Islam, 2012).

elevated in the court. There he went under another trial and turmoil as the wife of Egyptian king tried her level best to trap him but he escaped her sexual assault and also defended him in the court. This story in the Holy *Qur'an* has been elaborated in detail however the above stated Saraiki religious tale has not given all the points mentioned in the Holy *Qur'an* and the books on it. It gave only a general overview of the story in simple and plain words. The Chapter 12 in Surah Yousaf has the same story of Hazrat Yousaf AS in the verses:

إِذْ قَالَ يُوسُفُ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوْكَبًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ رَأَيْتُهُمْ لِي سَاجِدِينَ ۚ قَالَ يَبْنَئُ لَا تَقْصُصْ رُءْيَاكَ عَلَىٰ إِخْوَتِكَ فَيَكِيدُوا لَكَ كَيْدًا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ۚ وَكَذَلِكَ يَجْتَبِيكَ رَبُّكَ وَيُعَلِّمُكَ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ وَيُتِمُّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ يَعْقُوبَ كَمَا أَتَتْهَا عَلَىٰ أَبِيكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِنَّهُ هِيمٌ وَرَاحِقٌ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ۚ لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي يُوسُفَ وَإِخْوَتِهِ آيَاتٍ لِّلسَّاعِدِينَ ۚ إِذْ قَالُوا لَيُوسُفُ وَأَخُوهُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيْنَا وَمِنَّا عَجِبَةٌ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ۚ

“When Joseph said unto his father: O my father! Lo! I saw in a dream eleven planets and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating themselves unto me. He said: O my dear son! Tell not thy brethren of thy vision. lest they plot a plot against thee. Lo! Satan is for man an open foe. Thus thy Lord will prefer thee and will teach thee the interpretation of events, and will perfect his grace upon thee and upon the family of Jacob as he perfected it upon thy forefathers, Abraham and Isaac. Lo! thy Lord is Knower, Wise. Verily in Joseph and his brethren are signs (of Allah's Sovereignty) for the inquiring. When they said: Verily Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than we are, many though we be. Lo! our father is in plain aberration.”²⁴

The words of Holy *Qur'an* has the same story of Hazrat Yousaf AS because the story of Joseph in the Holy *Qur'an* also mentioned the dream as a background for the future life of Hazrat Yousaf AS and these details of Hazrat Yousaf's dream and its interpretation by his father are found in the above stated plot of Saraiki folktale. The Saraiki folk teller gave the salient and main points of this story in the traditional form of folktale. Like all other folktales, this folktale has the initial situation followed by the characters usually found in folktales such as the protagonist, the antagonist, the donor who usually helps the protagonist achieve their targets. Hazrat Yousaf is the protagonist as he performs difficult tasks, solves riddles, and stands the various tests. His bothers perform the role of antagonist as they threw him in a well. Finally, like all the heroes of folktales, he is rewarded.

Conclusion:

Islam spread in this continent by the efforts of holy saints as they devoted their lives for Islam. And they preached their messages through their continuous tours and visits in the sub-continent. Multan is one of the oldest cities in Pakistan and it has been inhabited for almost 5000 years without break. It has been ruled by different dynasties since prehistoric times however the message of Islam reached Multan in 712 AD with the arrival of Mohammad Bin Qasim. Since then, it has been the center for preaching Islam as many saints resided here to spread the message of Islam. It has tombs of many saints within the four walled city and in its suburbs (Ahmed, 2004). The preaching by the local saints had also impact on the oral tradition of story- telling. The elderly member of Saraiki community transferred these religious stories of their memory to their upcoming generation. The analysis of Saraiki religious tales revealed that their plots had sources from the Holy *Qur'an* and the traditions of Holy Prophet and his companions. However, the plots had certain deviations from the original sources because the religious tales travelled orally from generation to generation by word of mouth.

²⁴ Al-*Qur'an*, Al-*Yusaf*:4-8

²⁵ Pickthall, Mamaduke. Meanings of the *Qur'an*.