

Animals as Parables in the Qur'an in the Context of Human Behavior in the Modern Era

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine animals used as parables in the Qur'an and their relevance to human behavior in the modern era. The method used is thematic interpretation by compiling verses containing animal metaphors, then analyzing their meanings and moral messages, and relating them to contemporary social phenomena. The results show that the Qur'an presents parables through various animals such as mosquitoes, dogs, livestock, flies, spiders, and donkeys. Each animal symbolizes human behavior, for example, dogs represent greedy and dissatisfied people, while spiders symbolize the fragility of relying on anything other than Allah. In the modern context, these parables can be linked to phenomena such as hedonism, moral decadence, consumerist lifestyles, the fragility of social media relationships, and the importance of productivity and discipline. Thus, this study confirms that animal parables in the Qur'an are not only relevant at the time of their revelation but also serve as a mirror for modern human behavior, as well as a reminder to make the Qur'an a guide for life that is relevant throughout the ages.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are many themes in the Qur'an that can be discussed about everything on this earth, including themes about animals. Allah even named several surahs in the Qur'an after animals. This shows that the theme of animals has a fairly important position. However, not all animals in the world are mentioned in the Qur'an because the Qur'an is not a book that discusses animals alone.

One of the disciplines in the Qur'an

is the branch of amtsal (parables), where amtsal verses in the Qur'an are verses that compare one thing to another, whether in the form of isti'arah, tasybih, or majaz. The Qur'an contains many verses that contain parables. This is intended to serve as a lesson for humans so that it is easy to understand and accept in instilling noble behavior, especially in this ever-advancing and modern world [1].

Animals that are frequently mentioned in the Qur'an include mammals, birds, insects, and others. Camels are also

extraordinary animals mentioned in the verses of the Qur'an. Allah SWT, through the Qur'an, asks humans to reflect on how camels were created. The way camels drink water is likened to the inhabitants of Hell who drink boiling water greedily. The Qur'an also mentions donkeys in the story of Uzair, who was killed by Allah SWT for a hundred years and then brought back to life. The Qur'an also mentions riding horses, which are one of the most desirable worldly possessions for humans in their lives [2].

Animals are mentioned in the Qur'an not only in the names of surahs that use animal names, but also in stories, parables, oaths, and so on. There are several stories in the Qur'an that mention animals. Such as the story of Prophet Sulaiman a.s. with the hoopoe and the ant. Apart from stories, animals are also mentioned in many parables. Among the parables that mention animals is the parable of people who take protectors other than Allah SWT, likening them to spiders that build houses, the most fragile of which are spider webs, in the words of Allah SWT in QS Al-'Ankabut (29):41: "The parable of those who take protectors other than Allah is like that of a spider who builds a house. And indeed, the weakest of houses is the spider's house, if they only knew" [3].

Based on all of the above, it is clear that animals in the Qur'an have an important position from which we can learn lessons, because nothing that Allah SWT reveals is without meaning or purpose. The Qur'an is a guide, so everything written in it is a step for humans to live their lives in accordance with what is stated in the Qur'an.

Thus, researchers are interested in discussing the issue of animals used as metaphors in the Qur'an to serve as guidelines in everyday life in this modern era. Just as social media today is like a spider's web. We build a wide network of friends, but when we fall, not everyone will actually help us. Relationships are fragile if they are not based on faith and sincere love.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Animal Parables in the Quran Interpretation by M. Quraish Sihab in Tafsir Al-Misbah*

This work explains the verses used as parables in the Qur'an, explains the asbabun-nuzul (reasons for revelation) of these verses, and focuses on one contemporary figure of tafsir. The tafsir book used in this paper is the tafsir book Al-Misbah by M. Quraish Shihab [4].

2.2 *Animals as Representations of Human Behavior in Paintings*

This work explains that painting is a medium of expression that can raise issues in society, a group of people with different characteristics. Expression in painting can be done through metaphor. Animals are used to represent human behavior, which is then translated into a work of art. This paper will visualize proverbs that use animals, and the author will seek the aesthetic side of these proverbs without losing the moral values contained within them. The author will also provide a detailed description of the creative process involving the combination of visual elements, techniques, and meanings contained in paintings with animals as representations of human behavior [5].

2.3 *Moral Messages in the Quranic Parables About Animals (A Comparative Analysis of the Interpretations of Al-Quthubi and Al-Misbah)*

This article explains the moral messages of the Qur'anic parables about animals by examining the interpretations of Imam al-Qurthubi in Tafsir al-Qurthubi and Tafsir al-Misbah by M. Quraish Shihab, in order to answer questions about how the two exegetes interpret the parables in the Qur'an comparatively, and what moral messages are contained in the parables involving animals [6].

This study differs from previous studies, which generally only discuss

one type of animal in the Qur'an, one type of mufasssir, or emphasize solely philological and historical aspects. This study compiles various animal parables thematically (tafsir maudhu'i) and then relates them to phenomena in human life in the modern era. With this approach, animals in the Qur'an are not only understood as symbols of past morals, but also as mirrors of contemporary human behavior. For example, spiders represent the fragility of dependence on social media, bees symbolize productivity in modern life, and dogs depict a hedonistic lifestyle. Thus, this research provides a new contribution to the actualization of the messages of the Qur'an so that they are more relevant as moral and social guidelines amid the challenges of the present era.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach. This research used a literature study, also known as a bibliographic study, which involved collecting and analyzing data from various written sources. This study did not collect field data or conduct experiments; instead, it focused on using existing literature to answer research questions or improve understanding of specific topics, such as books, journals, and various scientific works. The data collection technique used in this study is the literature collection technique. The author examines references to female animals in the Qur'an using a thematic interpretation approach. The aim is to understand the meaning contained in the verses used as parables in the Qur'an and to relate them theoretically to life in the modern era today.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Qur'an as a holy book not only conveys teachings in straightforward language, but also uses parables so that the messages contained therein are easier to understand and remain engraved in the

hearts of humans. One form of parable that is often used is through animals, because the lives of animals are very close to humans and can be used as a mirror to reflect on behavior, morals, and the consequences of every action. By presenting animal parables, Allah wants to awaken our awareness that even though humans are given reason and a noble position, their behavior often resembles certain characteristics of animals if they are not guided by faith and piety [7]. The following are examples of animals used as parables in the Qur'an:

a. The Parable of the Mosquito QS. Al-Baqarah verse 26

In Surah Al-Baqarah verse 26, it says, "Indeed, Allah is not shy to make an analogy of a mosquito or something smaller than that. As for those who believe, they know that it is the truth from their Lord. But those who disbelieve say, "What does Allah mean by this parable?" With it, He leads many astray, and with it, He guides many. But none does He lead astray with it except the wicked" [8].

The reason for the revelation of this verse is that Allah mentions flies (al-Dzubab) and spiders (al-Ankabut) in the Qur'an and makes a parable for the polytheists and Jews who laugh, saying, "What kind of parable is this? This is the word of Allah." Then Allah revealed this verse. This verse is a response to the disbelief of the disbelievers and hypocrites regarding the parables that Allah SWT made for them in Surah al-Baqarah verses 17 and 19 [9].

The real relevance to modern life. Small mosquitoes that have a big impact can be compared to human behavior that seems trivial but has serious consequences. Hedonism is reflected in the lifestyle of people who spend their salaries on parties and entertainment without ever feeling satisfied, just like mosquitoes that keep sucking blood. Moral

decadence is seen in viral content on social media that promotes a free and amoral lifestyle for the sake of popularity, similar to the small bites of mosquitoes that carry dangerous diseases. Meanwhile, a consumptive lifestyle is illustrated by the phenomenon of excessive online shopping just to keep up with prestige, resembling mosquitoes that only take without giving. Fragile relationships on social media often arise due to harsh comments or short statuses that sever friendships, like small bites that damage health. However, this analogy also teaches a positive side: the small mosquito with its orderly life system reminds humans of the importance of productivity and discipline, where simple, consistent actions can have a significant impact on success. Thus, the mosquito becomes a symbol that small things in modern life can result in damage or goodness, depending on how humans manage them.

b. The parable of the dog QS. Al-A'raf verse 176

In Surah Al-A'raf verse 176, it reads, "And if We had willed, We could have elevated him with those verses, but he inclined toward the world and followed his base desires. His likeness is that of a dog: if you drive it away, it licks its tongue, and if you leave it alone, it licks its tongue (as well). Such is the likeness of those who reject Our verses. So relate these stories so that they may reflect" [10].

The reason for the revelation of this verse is generally associated with the story of Bal'am bin Ba'ura, a religious scholar from the Children of Israel during the time of Prophet Moses who was given knowledge and answered prayers, but was then tempted by wealth and position, choosing to follow his desires and siding with the Pharaoh's people. Because of his deviation, Allah

stripped him of his knowledge and made him an example like a dog that always sticks out its tongue, whether it is driven away or left alone [11].

The parable of the dog in the Qur'an describes humans who reject the truth even though it is clear to them, and who are always controlled by their desires. In the context of the modern era, this parable can be linked to the phenomenon of human behavior that is greedy, never satisfied, and has lost moral control. Hedonism is reflected in individuals who continue to pursue worldly pleasures without regard for what is lawful or unlawful, similar to a dog that sticks out its tongue whether it is chased away or left alone, as a symbol of permanent dissatisfaction. Moral decadence is evident in a free lifestyle that rejects religious values despite knowing the truth, resembling people who prefer lust over guidance. The phenomenon of consumerism is also in line with the nature of dogs, which always want to take, without ever feeling satisfied, reflecting a modern society that is greedy for wealth and goods. In the realm of social media, aggressive behavior and hate speech can be analogized with dogs that bark incessantly, disturbing the public peace. However, on the other hand, this parable reminds humans of the importance of productivity and discipline, namely learning to control desires so that one's potential is not wasted. Thus, the parable of the dog becomes a sharp mirror for modern human behavior, warning against indulging in desires and greed that can erode human values.

c. The parable of livestock QS. Al-A'raf verse 179

In Surah Al-A'raf verse 179, it reads, "And indeed, We will fill Hell with many of the jinn and humans. They have hearts, but they do not use them to understand (the

verses of Allah), and they have eyes (but) they do not use them to see (the signs of Allah's power), and they have ears (but) they do not use them to hear (the verses of Allah). They are like cattle, even more astray. They are the heedless ones" [10].

According to the history of interpretation, this verse was revealed in relation to the polytheists of Mecca who rejected the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, even though they had heard, seen, and known the clear signs of truth. Allah describes them as being like cattle, even more misguided, because they have hearts, eyes, and ears, yet they do not use them to understand, see, or hear guidance. While it is natural for cattle to follow only their instincts, humans should use their reason and hearts to recognize the truth [6].

In the modern context, this parable can be linked to various real phenomena. Hedonism is reflected in individuals who only pursue physical pleasures, such as parties and entertainment, without caring about spiritual values, resembling livestock that only focus on eating and breeding. Moral decadence is seen in societies that know the limits of religion and ethics but still choose deviant behavior, similar to livestock that know no rules other than instinct. A consumptive lifestyle appears in people who work hard only to satisfy their desire to shop and keep up appearances, rather than for more noble purposes. The fragility of social relations is also evident in relationships built on short-term interests, like livestock that gather only when looking for food, without strong bonds of value. Meanwhile, when viewed from a positive perspective, this parable serves as a warning for humans to be more disciplined and productive by using their intellect and senses for

good, not merely to fulfill physical needs. Thus, livestock becomes a symbol of modern humans who are negligent, as well as a reminder to return to appreciating the potential of the intellect and heart as divine gifts.

d. The parable of the flies QS. Al-Hajj verse 73

In Surah Al-Hajj verse 73, it reads, "O mankind! An example has been made. So listen! Indeed, everything you call upon besides Allah cannot create a single fly, even if they united to create it. And if the fly took something from them, they would not be able to take it back from the fly. The worshipper and the worshipped are equally weak" [12].

This verse was revealed to refute the polytheists of Mecca who worshipped idols and other deities besides Allah. These idols were considered to have power and could bring benefits, when in fact they could do nothing, not even create a creature as small as a fly. Even if a fly lands and takes something from the food offerings presented to the idols, the deities are unable to take it back. Through this analogy, Allah shows how weak deities other than Him are, and how misguided humans are who worship them [7].

In the modern context, this parable can be linked to various social phenomena. Hedonism is reflected in people who glorify worldly possessions such as gadgets, luxury cars, or fashion; even though these things cannot help humans when they are in trouble, just as idols cannot protect them from the weakness of a fly. Moral decadence is seen when people choose to follow their desires and false idols, as if they could be a source of support, when in reality they are weak and mortal. A consumptive lifestyle is reflected in societies that chase excessive shopping trends, where the items

they boast about are easily damaged or lost, and are even powerless in the face of the slightest damage. The fragility of social media relationships is also evident when someone idolizes virtual celebrities excessively, but when faced with life problems, these figures cannot help in the slightest. Meanwhile, the parable of the fly also teaches us about productivity and discipline, namely that even though it is small, the fly is able to survive, keep moving, and has a significant ecological function; this reminds humans not to underestimate small things, because Allah can place wisdom in something that seems trivial. Thus, the parable of the fly serves as a modern mirror that any form of dependence other than on Allah will only end in fragility and disappointment.

e. The parable of the spider QS. Al-Ankabut verse 41

In Surah Al-Ankabut verse 41, it reads, "The parable of those who take protectors other than Allah is like a spider that makes a house. And indeed, the weakest of houses is the spider's house, if only they knew" [3].

This verse was revealed concerning the polytheists of Mecca who worshipped idols other than Allah and made them their refuge and protector. They believed that idols could intercede and protect them from harm, even though in reality they had no power whatsoever. Allah then made an analogy with a spider's web: although it appears to be an orderly and beautiful net, in reality it is very fragile and easily destroyed. Likewise, the polytheists who depend on other than Allah have a very weak foundation, even more fragile than a spider's house [13].

In the context of the modern era, this can be linked to various

phenomena. Hedonism is reflected in people who make worldly pleasures their foundation in life; like a spider's web that appears strong but is fragile, the false happiness of parties, wealth, and luxury will collapse when disaster strikes. Moral decadence is seen in those who rely on misleading ideologies or groups; like thin spider webs, they easily fall apart when tested. A consumptive lifestyle resembles people who build "virtual houses" in shopping malls and luxury goods trends, even though there is no real value in them. The fragility of social media relationships can be analogized to a spider's web: it appears vast, connected to many points, but is easily broken by a small problem such as a negative comment or fake news. Conversely, on the positive side, this analogy reminds us of the importance of productivity and discipline: spiders build their webs with perseverance and regularity, even though the results are fragile. This teaches us that efforts without reliance on Allah will be in vain, while efforts accompanied by faith will be solid and meaningful. Thus, the spider analogy is relevant to modern life as a symbol of the weakness of worldly reliance and a call for humans to anchor their lives to Allah, the Almighty.

f. The parable of the donkey QS. Al-Jumu'ah verse 5

In Surah Al-Jumu'ah verse 5, it reads, "The parable of those who were entrusted with the Torah, then did not carry it (did not practice it) is like donkeys carrying thick books. Very bad is the parable of those who deny the verses of Allah. And Allah does not guide the wrongdoers" [14].

This verse was revealed concerning the Jews during the time of the Prophet. They were entrusted with the Torah, which contained commandments and prohibitions, as

well as signs of Muhammad's prophethood, but they did not practice it and even rejected his prophethood. They knew the truth, but they did not want to follow and practice it. Therefore, Allah likened them to donkeys carrying thick books; the donkeys only carried the burden of the books on their backs without being able to understand their contents [15].

In the modern context, this parable is relevant to the phenomenon of knowledgeable people who do not practice what they preach. Hedonism is evident in people who have mastered religious and scientific knowledge, but still use their knowledge to pursue worldly pleasures without any moral concern. Moral decadence is seen in the phenomenon of academics or public figures who know the limits of ethics, but still fall into corruption, manipulation, or abuse of power, so that their knowledge only becomes a burden. A consumptive lifestyle is also evident in educated people who have mastered economic theory but continue to live extravagantly and are trapped in consumer debt, so that their knowledge has no impact on their behavior. The fragility of social relations can be exemplified by individuals who understand the importance of healthy communication but in practice spread hate speech on social media. Conversely, on the positive side, this parable emphasizes the importance of productivity and discipline: knowledge is only useful if it is put into practice, just as a donkey will not become more noble even if it carries a book, unless humans are different by practicing their knowledge. Thus, the parable of the donkey serves as a stern warning

that knowledge should not stop at the theoretical level, but should be manifested in real deeds that benefit life.

5. CONCLUSION

Animal parables in the Qur'an are not merely symbolic stories, but rather a means of moral education and spiritual reflection that remain relevant throughout the ages. The Qur'an presents various animals such as mosquitoes, flies, spiders, donkeys, dogs, and livestock as mirrors of human behavior. Each parable contains a message that certain behaviors, both positive and negative, can be projected through the characteristics of these animals. In the context of the modern era, these parables find their relevance in the phenomena of hedonism, moral decadence, consumptive lifestyles, and fragile social relationships due to digital media, while emphasizing the importance of productivity and discipline. Thus, animal parables in the Qur'an not only describe the weaknesses and misguidance of human behavior but also provide guidance for humans to utilize their intellect, hearts, and spiritual potential to build a meaningful, moral life based on monotheism.

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