

## **KALILAH WA DIMNAH, THE MASTERPIECE OF ARAB LITERATURE AS A MEDIUM IN SHAPING A HARMONIOUS SOCIETY**

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### **Abstract**

The Abbasid Caliphate, the longest surviving dynasty in the history of Islamic civilization reigned from 132H and collapsed in 656H (Ahmad Salabi, 1970). The unrest in the Abbasid Empire has prompted many scholars to produce their literary works in various genres both in poetry and prose. Among them is Abdullah bin al-Muqaffa'' whose work include translating the *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* (KWD) from the Persian language into Arabic. He attempts to create awareness among leaders and the Abbasid community by making KWD as a medium to educate and spread good moral values. A few stories in the KWD have been analyzed by applying the concept of moral values presented by Imam al-Ghazali. Various aspects of moral values have been identified and classified based on four important elements, namely, *al-Hikmah* (wisdom), *al-Syaja'ah* (courage), *Al-'Iffah* (purity) and *Al-'Adlu* (justice). The study hopes to contribute in examining the values in KWD and guiding the readers specifically the leaders in executing their responsibilities towards the people in creating a harmonious society.

**Keywords:** *Kalilah Wa Dimnah*, medium, moral values, al-Ghazali.

### **1. Introduction**

The Abbasid Caliphate first centered its government after the fall of the Umayyah Kingdom in 132 Ah. The Abbasid period has survived as a government for 524 years but fell at the hands of the Tatar (Al-Fakhuri 1991) due to the flaw and weakness of its government. The anomalies, wrongdoings, and inconsistencies have led to the pressures and anguish of the people (Al-Thubaity 2006). This situation triggered dissatisfactions among the Arabs that

led to the collapse of the Abbasid kingdom. Various efforts were made to restore awareness among the rulers, including efforts in the form of writing and producing literary works.

Among the efforts taken to educate the rulers and to restore public harmony were through literary works in the form of prose and poetry, as literature educates while it entertains and functions to spread ideas, views and opinions on issues that occur in society. Thus, scholar such as Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa attempted to give his views, criticism and advice through his masterpiece, *Kalilah Wa Dimnah*.

Initially written to be presented to the mean and malicious King of India, *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* was translated by Abdullah Ibn Al-Muqaffa'' to be specially dedicated to Caliph Abu Jaafar al-Mansur, the Abbasid Caliph at that time (Al-Fakhuri, 1991) as he intended to make *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* as a medium to educate by spreading good moral values towards the leaders and the Abbasid community.

## 2. Literature Review

The unrest in Abbasid empire before its downfall had driven Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa'' spiritually that eventually led him to quicken the process of translating *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* from the Persian language into Arabic (Al-Fakhuri, 1991). A study by Aidah Iwadh has proven that there is a relationship between the surrounding and the moral values that the authors attempted to produce in their works. This finding is consistent with Bertens's statement that suggests the translation of *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* by Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa'' as a form of social criticism, aimed to criticise the Abbasid rulers and to provide a true picture of what was happening at that time (Bertens, 2002). Thus, it is essential and of utmost importance to acknowledge the role of the literary work as a "medium" to educate the Abbasid community.

### 2.1 *Kalilah wa Dimah, the Great Work in Arabic Literature*

The *Kalilah Wa Dimnah*, the famous classical literary masterpiece, was translated by Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa'' (106H-142H); a very prominent Persian author and the pioneer of Arabic prose during the Abbasid Caliphate (Al-Rafie,1968). His translated work has a great influence on the history of Islamic literary development. His work has contributed to the development of prose writing style which uses dialogue and the life of animals as its background aiming at improving human's morality and behaviour. The *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* or better known as the '*Panchatantra*' is famous for two thousand years ago and still attracted many readers in the Arab world (Lunde, 1972). The work of Ibn Muqaffa' utilized free lance translation as he attempted to adapt some new sections in his translation to conform to the teachings of Islam and appeal to the liking of local authors and scholars at that time (Khalid, 1989).

The *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* is also known as '*Panchatantra*' among Hindus (Al-Subayel, 2007) or 'Five Discourses' which means 'Five Animal Stories'. It is also known as *Aesop's Fable* or 'Fairy Tale' in Greek society (Hancock, 2004). *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* was originally a Hindu work, neatly arranged in Sanskrit by a philosopher named Baidaba, to fulfill the request of an Indian King known as Maharaja Dabsyalim (Osman Khaled 1989, Al-Subayel 2007). Initially, *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* was translated from Sanskrit into the Persian language by al-Barzawy, a trustee of the Anusyirwan King (Al-Muqoffa', t.t.) and was entitled *Kalile va Demne* (Roziyah & Mat, 2012). '*Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa*', the person responsible for translating the book from the Persian language into Arabic, introduced it with the name *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* (Denys Johnson-Davies, 2003). The title was taken after the two wolves became the main characters in the first story (Lunde, 1972). The main character in *Kalilah*

*Wa Dimnah* is a Lion King, Rimba; two wolves, Kalilah and Dimnah; a Shatrabah bull, and a few other animals as friends and assistants to the king of the jungle. The *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* Book is a work of an animal-based exemplary story of pure value (Syalabi, 1970: 246). The animal-themed story, translated into almost every language of the world, has its own charm. The use of animal themes as the main character in channeling the main message is more effective than normal stories. According to Al-Zayyat (1999), the use of animal characters in the *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* is a strategy to create awareness and to educate the leaders at that time. Despite the use of animal characters, the ideas and messages presented represent the real reality that occurs in human life. The portrayal of the animals highlighted a variety of symbols representing diversity of attitudes such as courage, loyalty and wisdom (Nurhasma, 2012). This feature makes it easier for readers to understand the message and comprehend the values they try to absorb through reading. Until now the *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* has been translated into Greek, French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, German, and English (Radzi, 2008). According to Lunde, the *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* is also translated into Greek, Latin, Old Church Slavic and German. The Arabic versions of *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* are also translated into Syrians, Turkish, Malay, Japanese, Siam, and Ethiopia. In the 19th century, *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* was translated into Hindustan, as well as completing a round that had begun since 1,700 years earlier, in Kashmir (Lunde, 1972).

## **2.2 The Framework of Imam al-Ghazali on Good Moral Values**

The formation of a righteous person with good moral values requires the individual to work and practice the commendable and praiseworthy qualities as suggested by the Qur'an and the Sunnah. In the case of Imam al-Ghazali, there are four main principles that constitute the element of commendable character formation; *al-Hikmah* (Wisdom), *al-Syaja'ah* (Courage), *Al-'Iffah* (Purity) and *Al-'Adlu* (Justice). These four elements are the foundation of shaping a commendable and noble personality as taught in Islam. Al-Wisdom (Wisdom), is derived from the strength of knowledge that advocates individuals to distinguish between true and false in words, between right and wrong in trust and between beautiful and vile in acts (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). From the strength of knowledge, comes the value of wisdom which is the main pillar of the construction of commendable and noble character. With it, life will be under control and one will be motivated in achieving success and happiness (Al-Qasimi, 2006). Among the elements of *Al-Hikmah* listed by Imam Al-Ghazali are; the ability to effectively manage, having a good sense of mind or understanding, to possess an optimistic perception, having the right expectation, to be careful and perfect in work (Al-Ghazali, n.d.).

*Al-Syaja'ah* (Courage) is produced when the power of anger is subdued, and controlled by reason, which is controlled by wisdom (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). According to Imam al-Ghazali r.a., *Al-Syaja'ah*, forms glory, courage, power, speed and wisdom, is able to defeat lust, assumptions and delusions, firm stand, able to withstand anger; honour, and affection (Al-Ghazali, n.d.).

*Al-'Iffah* (Purity) is born through the power of lust that is subdued by wisdom (*Al-Hikmah*). Through *Al-'Iffah*, a person will always maintain the purity of self by preserving and abstaining from obscene conducts and sinful acts (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). *Al-'Iffah* develops generosity, modesty, patience, tolerance, 'redha' or acceptance, piousness and abstaining oneself from obscene conducts, politeness, helping each other, and reduces greed (Al-Ghazali, n.d.).

The last element is *Al-'Adlu* (Justice) which is the power of the soul to curb anger and lust fairly and guide anger according to the will of the mind and religion to achieve *Al-Hikmah*

(Wisdom). *Al-'Adlu* (Justice) drives individuals towards safety, harmony, peace, and happiness.

These four elements will shape and contribute to the moral traits and commendable character of a person that will ensure the well-being of the community, thus creating a safe and harmonious society.

### 3. Research Method

This study is a qualitative study using text analysis method. A total of eight (8) stories from the 16 stories in *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* have been analysed for this study. The main source of this study is the *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* which contains 296 pages and is the first printing published by *Al-Maktabah Al-Thaqafiyah*, Beirut, Lebanon. However, the year of publication is not stated in the book. The book contains sixteen stories; five of which are the original writings of Baidaba, the initial writer of *Kalilah Wa Dimnah*, while the other eleven stories are stories authored by Abdullah Ibn al-Muqoffa' (Marroum, 2011).

Below is a table showing eight samples from the *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* that are analysed in the study:

**Table 1.** Content analysis sample unit from the *Kalilah Wa Dimnah*.

No	Chapter	Page	Title
1	First	109	باب الأسد والثور (The Chapter of the Lion and Bull)
2	Third	172	باب الحمامة المطوقة (The Chapter of the Ringdove)
3	Fourth	190	باب النور والغريبان (The Chapter of the Owl and Two Crows )
4	Fifth	215	باب القرد والغليم (The Chapter of the Monkey and Tortoise)
5	Sixth	222	باب الناسك وإبن عرس (The Chapter of the Hermit and Weasel)
6	Seventh	225	باب الجرذ والسنور (The Chapter of the Rat and Wild Cat )
7	Eight	232	باب ابن الملك والطائر فنزة (The Chapter of the Son of King and Parakeet)
8	Ninth	238	باب الأسد والشعير الناسك (وهو ابن أوى) (The Chapter of the Lion and Wolf)

In analysing the data, Imam al-Ghazali's approach to cultivate moral values has been applied. Each element is matched with the qualities of the characters inherent in *Kalilah Wa Dimnah*. However, in this study only one quality is analysed according to the four key elements in moral development, namely, *al-Hikmah* (Wisdom), *al-Syaja'ah* (Courage), *Al-'Iffah* (Purity) and *Al-'Adlu* (Justice). These elements are the basis of shaping and moulding the noble and commendable personality as taught in Islam.

### 4. Results and Discussion

Eight (8) stories are analysed using the framework of Imam al-Ghazali in describing noble and commendable personalities that became the basis of forming a harmonious society.

#### 4.1 *Al-Hikmah* (Wisdom)

Imam al-Gahzali has identified a number of qualities derived from *al-Hikmah*, namely; the ability to effectively manage, having a good sense of mind or understanding, to possess

an optimistic perception, having the right expectation, to be careful and impeccable in work (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). The ability to manage or the ability to organise and plan is a trait that will lead to the achievement of an aspiration. This is because the aspiration will only be achieved through a sound approach and strategy. The ability to plan and strategies an action is a feature of *Al-Hikmah* that will only be obtained through our strength of knowledge. This is explained by Al-Imam al-Ghazali r.a. which read (Al-Ghazali, n.d.); "If it (the strength of knowledge) is great, then with it comes wisdom." (Translation)

The *Al-Mutawwaqah* or the ringdove character is described as a wise leader in dealing with an alarming situation. Despite being trapped in the snare, he was able to take on the responsibility to advise and calm his friends emotionally. Additionally, he calmly planned his strategy to escape the trap built by the hunter. These are the reasons that made *Al-Mutawwaqah* honoured and respected by all the doves.

"And '*Al-Mutawwaqah*' said:" *Do not give up (despair), nothing is more important than a person except his friends. (Come) let's help each other, let's try to escape the trap (this trap), together we save ourselves. " So, as they work as a team, they all managed to escape the snare and fly high into space".* (pg. 173) The character of *Al-Mutawwaqah* or the ringdove is created by the author to show the importance of having the ability to administer, manage and plan strategies in a leader. This wisdom of a leader is capable of protecting the rights, preserving the interests and ensuring the well-being of the leader and the people. Here, the author invites readers to strive and do the best to establish themselves as responsible leaders, to work hard and to perform their duties properly in order to ensure the well-being of society.

#### 4.2 *Al-Syaja'ah* (Courage)

When the power of anger is subdued by 'akal' or the ability to think and reason, and *syara'* (Islamic law), it will turn into *Al-Syaja'ah* (Courage) (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). Our analysis discovers some of the elements of *Al-Syaja'ah* that constitute the theme and contain the elements of good moral values that could benefit the readers. The *Al-Syaja'ah* elements comprise themes such as courage to defeat the enemy, compassionate, ability to control our emotion and anger, and abstaining ourselves from accusing and attacking others without checking the truth.

The uncontrollable rage of the lion king has resulted in the lion king to be arrogant, haughty and superior so as to deprecate and condemn *Syatrabah*. He thought that he could not be defeated by *Syatrabah*, a grass-eating animal;

"*If even the Syrababah loathe me as you say, indeed he cannot harm me. How is he capable of doing so; he's a grass-eating animal whereas I'm a meat eater? Surely he is my only food, and not the reason I'm afraid of him* ". (p. 132)

According to Al-Ghazali r.a., excessive anger and anger not guided by reasoning will make it easy for individuals to use abusive words, curses, profanities and expletives (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). Based on this description, the author invites readers not to be arrogant, and not to insult or belittle others. Instead, readers are encouraged to practice *tawadu'* or humility and be humble accordingly. These qualities if practice, will produce a more loving and harmonious society.

#### 4.3 *Al-'Iffah* (Purity)

*Al-'Iffah* (Purity) is to subdue the power of lust with the guidance of thinking and reasoning, and *syara'* (Islamic law), and always abstaining from the acts of evil and bad deeds (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). Our analysis suggests that the element of *Al-'Iffah* (Purity) advocated by the author is categorised into several themes such as helping each other and cooperation, abstaining from greed, pioussness, and avoiding useless deeds, malicious intentions, and

avoiding the feeling of al-Syamaatah (a euphoria when something bad happen to an opponent).

The themes of helping each other and cooperation are portrayed through the Chapter of the Mouse and the Wild Cats. The rivalry between Faridun and Rumi, transforms into mutual need for each other. This condition proves that the power of lust subdued by thinking and reasoning can lead to *'Iffah*; as hatred between Faridun and Rumi can turn into mutual respect and cooperation. It happens when each of them realises they need each other because they have to deal with other more difficult enemies.

(Faridun said): "If you help me, I will help you escape from on your trap, and I will release you from this distress." (p. 228)

#### 4.4 Al-'Adlu (Justice)

*Al-'Adlu* (Justice) is the power of the soul to curb anger and lust, and to be maintained and led by reasoning and *syara'* (Islamic law) will eventually lead to achieving *Al-Hikmah* (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). This power will inspire individuals towards achieving safety, harmony, peace, and happiness. Analysis of the elements of 'Adlu (Justice) in the story discovers themes namely; be fair, do not be selective or biased, evaluate things carefully and restore peace.

The non-favoritism or biasness is depicted in the conversation between *Dimnah* and the lion king. The lion king tried to be fair on *Dimnah's* charge over *Syatrabah*. In this situation, he tried to act fairly to avoid hostility with *Syatrabah*. He described *Syatrabah* as an individual who always welcomes kindness and humanity, and denied that *Syatrabah* will deceive and destroy him.

The lion said: "I understand it. (However), I do not believe that the bull (*Syatrabah*) will deceive me and want to ruin me. How would he do that, whereas I never saw him commit a crime? And I never asked for kindness unless he did it with me? ". (p. 131)

Through the above data, it shows that the author attempt to highlight the optimistic values by saying kind words to maintain the harmony of the lives of fellow human beings that will bring about a prosperous and harmonious life in society.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the analysis on the eight stories in *Kalilah Wa Dimnah*, we conclude that Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa'' through various animal characters has advocated and encouraged good moral values, noble and commendable characteristics as examples to society. On the other hand, he attempts to highlight the sinful acts and despicable nature that we need to curb in the effort to restore harmony in society particularly the ties between the leaders and the people. Through the medium of storytelling, it is believed that it can create awareness among the society on the irregularities, anomalies and the wrongdoings that happened in any government.

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