

The Representation of Prophetic Figures in The Works of Nurullah Gench

Rajabov Foziljon Ulash Zoda

Doctoral Researcher (PhD Candidate), Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article examines the classical literary tradition shaped by Islam and its continuation in the poetry of contemporary Turkish poet Nurullah Gench. In particular, it analyzes how the images of prophets mentioned in the Qur'an Noah, Jacob, Joseph, David, and others are interpreted in his poetry through the art of *talmeh*. The study demonstrates that through these images, the poet conveys the spiritual state of the lyrical hero, his inner suffering, and religious worldview. The article aims to reveal the religious-Sufi foundation of Nurullah Gench's poetry and its connection with the classical literary tradition.

Keywords: Prophet imagery, Nurullah Gench, Sufism, modern Turkish poetry, classical tradition, symbol.

Introduction: With the advent of Islam, profound transformations occurred in the literary life of Central Asia and the broader Muslim world. Literature, while retaining its aesthetic and artistic function, began to acquire a religious-enlightening and moral-educational dimension. These changes were primarily reflected in both the content and form of literary genres. In particular, the tradition of compiling *divans* emerged in medieval Muslim literature. Poets customarily began their *divans* with praise to God (*hamd*) and eulogies to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Through this practice, they not only expressed their faith and religious views but also encouraged readers toward spiritual and moral virtues. References to the verses of the Qur'an and the meanings of hadiths increasingly appeared in literary works.

"The doctrine of prophethood and the Qur'an are considered a source of inspiration for themes and expressions in classical literature. In Islamic thought, the attitude toward poetry and poets acquires a distinct essence and character. It is known from history that a group among the companions of the Prophet Muhammad were poets. Both in the Prophet's attitude

and in the Qur'an itself, there exist particular perspectives regarding poetry and poets." [1:119]

Poets widely employed the artistic device of *talmeh*—that is, allusion to historical and religious figures or events—in their works. Through *talmeh*, the lives of prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, the trials they endured, and universal moral values were harmonized and presented as symbolic images. The distinctive place of prophetic figures in poetry can be explained by their function as a medium through which the author conveys his psychological state, social attitudes, and religious beliefs. For example, the figure of Prophet Joseph (peace be upon him) symbolizes patience and beauty; the image of Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) represents justice, resistance against oppression, and the strength of faith; while Prophet Noah (peace be upon him) embodies patience, faith, and salvation. Thus, each prophet enters poetry with a specific symbolic meaning, and through these images, the path toward human perfection is expressed.

METHODS

The study employs comparative-analytical and textual analysis methods. The poetic collections of Nurullah

Genç (Yürüyelim Seninle İstanbul'da, Hüzünün Lalesidir Dünya) are used as primary sources. The poems are analyzed based on the criteria of the art of talmeh, and the prophetic images within them are compared with the traditions of classical literature and Sufi interpretations.

RESULTS

The Image of Prophet Noah (peace be upon him)

In the poetry of Nurullah Genç, prophets mentioned in the Qur'an such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Jonah, Solomon, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them) are frequently referenced. The depiction of prophetic figures in poetry carries a distinct spiritual and philosophical meaning. In Sufi poetry, in particular, these figures are enriched with symbolic and aesthetic approaches. This tradition is continued in the poetry of Nurullah Genç. The poet evokes some of the prophets mentioned in the Quran through the literary device of "talmih", focusing on significant aspects of their lives. Specifically, the poetic interpretation of the figure of Adam (peace be upon him) reflects the poet's desire to comprehend the connection between humanity and the divine. According to tradition, Adam (PBUH) is recognized as the first representative of humankind, a prophet who fathered all people. Through the events of his creation, the prostration of the angels before him, his placement in paradise, and his subsequent expulsion for eating the forbidden fruit, two facets of human nature are revealed: greatness and frailty. He is interpreted as a sinful being who strives for perfection, yet is prone to making mistakes. In Sufism, the figure of Adam (PBUH) holds a special symbolic meaning: he is a creature capable of attaining divine truth, but who must pass through trials on this path.

Vuslat aşkını Leyla düşürmedi çöllere

Arzı Mecnun'a hicran eyleyendir gözlerin

Gözlerinde başladı tarihin macerası

Adem'i Havva'ya ram eyleyendir gözlerin [2:53]

Translation:

It was not Layla who cast the love of union into the deserts

It is your eyes that made Majnun yearn for separation

The adventure of history began in your eyes

It is your eyes that made Adam submit to Eve

The poet symbolically expresses divine love through the figures of Layli and Majnun. In this poem, the image of the eye is interpreted as the "eye of the heart" - a means of perceiving truth. It is precisely through these "eyes" that the beginning of human history occurs: Adam's attraction to Eve. This signifies that humanity was created on the foundation of divine love and innate nature. Through the eyes, the poet conveys not only aesthetic beauty but also an inner perception that leads to truth.

The narratives of Prophet Noah (peace be upon him), who is regarded as the first among the Ulul Azm (possessors of great resolve), occupy a significant place in Sufi literature. In particular, Jalaliddin Rumi, in various parts of the Masnavi, alludes to Noah and his story, portraying him as a figure who attained the مقام of fanā' fi'LLāh (annihilation in God) and became united with the Divine [3:251].

From the poet's poem "Son yangın" ("The Final Fire"):

Kalem son limanıdır deniz fenerlerinin

Nilüferler büyümüş içinde her birinin

Ben Nuh'un gemisiyim; o bir tufan güneşi

İki meftûn pervane ağlatıyor dervişi

Translation:

The pen is the final harbor of the lighthouses;

Water lilies have grown within each of them.

I am the Ark of Noah; he is a sun of the flood.

Two enamored moths make the dervish weep.

Here, the "pen" symbolizes divine inscription—the power that determines destiny. The "lighthouse" represents guidance in darkness, embodying the light of truth. The pen as the "final harbor" of these lights signifies the ultimate point of truth, implying that human beings should seek their destiny within the knowledge and will of God.

The water lily (nilüfer) symbolizes delicacy, inner beauty, and the lover whose face has turned pale due to the intensity of love. The flourishing of such beauty within each source of guidance indicates the cultivation of spiritual virtues—such as patience, gratitude, humility, and trust in God along the Sufi path (sulūk).

The poet likens himself to "Noah's Ark." In Sufi thought, this symbol has been interpreted in various ways. For

instance, Baqli compares the ark to the heart of the 'arif (gnostic), while Ibn Ajiba interprets the ark as human intellect and the sea as divine unity (tawhîd) [4:115].

The two moths symbolize beings who burn themselves in the path of love; this reflects the dervish's inner spiritual struggle and suffering on the path toward annihilation (fanâ'), love, and ultimate truth.

The Image of Prophet Jacob (peace be upon him)

The story of Prophet Jacob (peace be upon him), also widely known from the Qur'an, is reflected in the poem as follows:

Ben bir rüya kızıyım, şehriyindir gözlerim

Bir Yâkub hasretiyle eritir tenhâları

Nerdesin ey sonsuza gidenlerin baharı

Alev üstünde yürür, mâverâyı özlerim [5:159]

Translation:

I am a girl of dreams; my eyes belong to the city of beauty.

With the longing of Jacob, I melt the solitudes.

Where are you, O spring of those who have gone to eternity?

I walk upon flames, yearning for the beyond.

The story of Jacob (peace be upon him) and his son Joseph (peace be upon him) is described in the Qur'an as "the most beautiful of stories." The term karîm denotes generosity, nobility, moral excellence, and refinement. In classical (divan) poetry, the figure of Jacob is often used as a symbol of sorrow and melancholy. Through this, the poet conveys his inner emotional state by employing the name of Jacob as a talmeh.

According to the narrative, after losing his son Joseph, Jacob falls into deep grief and suffering. As a result of weeping and gazing into the distance for a prolonged period, he eventually loses his sight. The expression "with the longing of Jacob, I melt the solitudes" signifies a state in which the intensity of longing surpasses even the deepest sorrow experienced in loneliness, dissolving all grief and suffering. Through the voice of the lyrical subject, the poet seeks — through a tone of questioning — the "spring" of those who have departed to eternity, that is, the peace, mercy, and divine presence belonging to the eternal realm.

The Images of Prophets David, Jacob, and Joseph

(peace be upon them)

In Nurullah Genç's poem "Beni reddedip gidişine" ("For Leaving Me by Rejecting Me"), states of rejection and spiritual suffering are expressed through symbolic references drawn from religious narratives. In the poem, the figures of David, Jacob, and Joseph (peace be upon them) reflect the inner anguish of the lyrical subject. The poet employs these figures not only as religious allusions (talmeh), but also as reflections of the psychology of the modern individual.

Duymadın göklerimde Davud'un nağmesini

Yâkub'un o lâlezâr gözüydü reddettiğin

Züleyha'nın yoluna cellâdımı koyarken

Yûsuf'un dayanılmaz yüzüydü reddettiğin [6:80]

Translation:

You did not hear the melody of David in my heavens;

It was Jacob's tulip-garden-like eye that you rejected.

As I placed my executioner on Zuleikha's path,

It was Joseph's irresistible face that you rejected.

DISCUSSION

In the first line of the poem, the "melody of David" represents an image imbued with Sufi and aesthetic meaning, interpreted as a sincere call arising from the heart, the remembrance of the Beloved (dhikr), inner pain, and pure emotion. Each prophet is endowed with a distinct attribute, and Prophet David (peace be upon him) is particularly known for the beauty of his voice. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), praising the recitation of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, said: "Indeed, you have been given one of the melodious voices of David" [7:176], thereby emphasizing the exceptional nature of David's voice.

In the second line, the symbols of the "tulip garden" (lâlezâr) and the "eye" are employed. The tulip garden signifies a space formed by the lover's blood-like tears shed in separation, while the eye in Sufi poetry symbolizes the perception of truth, hope, and longing. Prophet Jacob (peace be upon him), who endured the loss of his son Joseph, patiently suffered, wept for years, and lived in hope of reunion. Through this symbol, the poet likens the emotional state of the rejected lyrical "self" to Jacob's grief-stricken eyes.

In the third and fourth lines, the poet recalls the story of Zuleikha and Joseph. However, the situation is

presented in an inverted manner: while Zuleikha overcame all obstacles in pursuit of union with Joseph, the lyrical subject, by contrast, encounters an executioner on the path of love. The image of the “executioner” (cellâd) here functions metaphorically, symbolizing rejection, obstruction, and hostility. As noted, “some poets have compared their love or idealized concept of beauty to the figure of Zuleikha, employing certain of her characteristics to express their own feelings of love” [8:127].

In literary tradition, Prophet Joseph (peace be upon him) is regarded as the highest embodiment of human beauty. By portraying the lyrical “self” as a figure akin to Joseph, the poet does not merely engage in self-exaltation, but rather emphasizes the purity and intensity of the rejected emotions. The hyperbolic expression in this line serves to convey the depth of the lover’s suffering.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Nurullah Genç skillfully employs prophetic figures not only as religious allusions but also as universal symbols expressing the inner world of the modern individual. This demonstrates the poet’s ability to organically connect the tradition of classical literature with contemporary poetic expression.

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