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## A Study of the Use of Proverbs as a Literary Device in Jokha Alharthi's "Celestial Bodies"

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DOI- 10.5281/zenodo.13738801

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### Abstract

This paper aims to revisit *Celestial Bodies* from the Language point of view. The novel is linguistically rich and well bound with various language points of view. It is with full of linguistic devices which aptly reflects the Omani culture and the lifestyle of the Omani people. Linguistic devices like Proverbs used in the novel makes the novel more interesting to read and to know about the Arabic culture.

This paper tries to point out the use of proverbs in the novel as language device really made the novel an outstanding work of Jokha Alharthi. This use of proverbs in the text helped to build up the characters and local colour.

*Celestial Bodies* is a recent novel which provides much scope to research from various points of view and not much research has occurred on the same so far. Study this novel from the language point of view could be one more development on the text. Ultimately this paper tries to shed some light on writers attempt to use proverbs in text to make the novel more commendable.

**Keywords:** Proverbs, language, linguistic device, Omani culture.

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### Introduction:

Alharthi's novel originally written in the Arabic language and later on it translated in English by Marilyn Booth. This novel is representation of Omani culture and translated into several languages Serbian, Korean, Italian and German. The novel has huge scope to study critical from different perspective. As this is recent novel not much research has occurred so far. The basic plotline of the novel traces the life of three generations of Omani women. The story moves around the three characters by one male omniscient narrator. Basically it is a saga of Omani family where several changes takes place in the family as far as new generation of Oman is concerned. The three modern sisters live their lives in a very calm life. Maya the eldest sister marries with son of merchant after her disheartened. Asma the other sister marries with an artist as a sense of duty. The youngest one refuse to marry with traditionally and marries her childhood love Nasir a migrant to Canada. Apart from these three sisters there are several women in the novel which plays important role in the storyline. But the common thing about these all woman is they are not enough happy with the life they are living in. each of them have suffered differently. They all fail in having an ideal husband and ideal married life. The novel is recount of three generations right from the Salima the mother of three young girls to the granddaughter London. These three generations are the eminent exemplar to study the woman's life and Omani culture. The structure of the novel is quite

complex as it's each chapter is entitled with name of the characters. The timeline of the novel can make reader confuse as several back and forth has been used in the plot. But we can consider it as a well commentary on the Omani society.

Although it is a social commentary and an Omani cultural document it has much scope to see this novel linguistically rich. The language used in the novel by the translator is really appealing to the readers. Several language devices have been used very promptly to make this novel outstandingly interesting. The linguistic devices like Code Mixing, code switching, poetic lines, figure of speech and specially proverbs are throughout the text. The proverb used in the text by the writer is another remarkable effort of the writer. This use of language devices makes this novel as one of the best novel in the postmodern literature. Alharthi's all these efforts works in presenting the Omani culture and mark her entry in the best writers in the world by winning the Man Booker Prize of 2019.

From the language point of view, this paper is going to focus on the use of proverbs in the novel. Alharthi has used proverbs in the text in enough number. Alharthi's this attempt is really useful to build characters and create the accurate picture of Omani culture. She has successfully tried all her best to make her novel best from all the literary and linguistic dimensions. Using such proverbs in the novel is a good way to make the reader involve in the story. There are number of novel in English Literature in which writer has used proverbs to

make the text more interesting. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is good example where he successfully used 27 proverbs in the text. Achebe's this effort made his novel as a good form of literature. Using proverbs in the text as a literary device helps to explicate the idea and story in a better way. Alharthi might have kept this in her mind while writing this novel.

Proverbs is a language device and its nothing but a short saying which conveys the general truth.

*"A short pithy saying which embodies a general truth. It is related in form and content to the maxim and the aphorism. Common to most nations and people, it is form of expression of great antiquity"*. (Cuddon & Habib. 566)

In every language such proverbs, sayings are existed. It obviously uses generation by generation in the society to convey the general truth. Similarly Alharthi has used the proverbs to convey the general truth about the Omani culture in her novel. Characters like Zarifa, a slave lady who traces her ancestors from South Africa and Abdullah a son of merchant Suleyman use proverbs several times while saying important things. The proverbs they use clearly notify us that what kind of characters they are. Zarifa is although a slave in Abdullah's family she still remains as mother figure to Abdullah. Right from the death of Fatima the mother of Abdullah Zarifa takes care of family as a housewife. Although she represents the slave life she has been shown by Alharthi as equal to the Omani woman.

This character Zarifa is mysterious in nature; she speaks very less and sits back all the time in all communication with anyone. She has never retorted against her pathetic life rather she believes that her Master Suleyman is a God for her and her family. After Abdullah's mother's death, she was the only responsible lady in the family to bringing up Abdullah. However, Abdullah was not happy with her on her silence on his mother's death. Each time Abdullah asks how his mother Fatima died Zarifa avoids speaking. In the novel, Abdullah asks the same question to Zarifa many of times but she always cut the communication. She uses proverbs in her speaking several times. Her using proverb makes her a clam, mysterious, full of frustration and tolerant personality. Her philosophy towards life convey through her proverbs. Alharthi has used these proverbs also to convey the apt reality of the woman issue in Oman and Oman culture etc. If we observe the characters in the novel we can see everyone is representing the certain social issues. The three girls represent the unhappy married life, Landon the young generation represents the fake love, and the others Zarifa represents slavery life, Salima and Fatima represents the traditions of the Family. These all have been

ultimately represents in the text by putting commendable language efforts. An especially proverb which has used shows us that how this novel has become one of the best literary work.

#### **Proverbs Used in the Celestial Bodies:**

Proverbs are vary culture to culture in all the languages but these are similar to some extent as far as human life is concerned. This helps to provide the perceived truth from the experience of daily life. As this paper aims to justify that Alharthi has used proverbs in the novel to make this text wonderful from all the aspect of literature and linguistic, it has been included major proverbs to analyse Alharthi's efforts to her Man Booker Prize winner book *Celestial Bodies*. 1

1. *Ignorance is Bliss* (Alharthi. 30)

2. *Knowledge means pain, not knowing keeps me sane*. (Alharthi. 78)

3. *Every father knows misery and pain*. (Alharthi. 117)

4. *Your is still your own even if its putrid to the bone*. (Alharthi. 122)

The very first example "*Ignorance is Bliss*" is used by Zarifa to Abdullah. Whenever Abdullah ask how his mother Fatima died to Zarifa avoids telling the truth. Rather she let Abdullah to forget about it. Zarifa deliberately refuse to talk on the Fatima's death issue all the time and to stop the communication uses proverbs like, "*Ignorance is Bliss*". This actually means some things we shouldn't know forever because such things will takes us to the huge pain. To knowing painful past, it's better to ignore and move on to good. These proverbs looks very general but it helps to create many question regarding Abdullah's mother mysterious death in readers mind. By such techniques by writers it helps to indulge the reader with the story and make readers to find out the reason of Fatima's death in remaining novel.

The second proverbs "*Knowledge means pain, not knowing keeps me sane*" is used by Zarifa when Abdullah asks her about her husband Habibi who left her long back. Why didn't find him and stay with him. But the bitter reality of slavery and bad experience with husband her mind never allowed her to find Habib and bring him back. Even she never tried know about him, where is he, what he is doing and so on. Rather she tried to convey Abdullah if she know about him anything it create pain for Zarifa. Therefore she admits that satisfactorily knowing nothing about him is better than to push herself in the extreme pain.

The next proverb is "*Every father knows misery and pain*" is about the represent a father figure who suffers from losing his two sons in his early life. This term father itself has a huge meaning. It shows a man with responsibilities of the family, children and wife. As an important figure father's always face several up and downs in their

entire life. They become familiar with each and every happiness and sadness in the life while securing the family and upbringing the children. Here in this novel this proverb, “*Every father knows misery and pain*” has used to convey Azan’s grief of losing his two sons. Father’s are always an accountable of the family. Similarly Azan also completes his responsibilities and acted as an accountable man of the family in his entire life. He had to face many of miseries too like losing the two sons.

The last proverb I have taken to analyse is, “*Your is still your own even if its putrid to the bone*”. Here Mausouda a wife of Zayed tells her misery that her husband is not well enough good. She says about him he finishes one woman he finds another which make him salacious. But she cannot do anything because she is bound by the male dominant society. Even she cannot raise her voice against such betrayal husband. Only she can do is, she has to ignore all about this. Here this proverb “*Your is still your own even if its putrid to the bone*”. To convey the same thing if someone from your close one is doing any illegitimate thing and you know his bad deeds you have to ignore to save him. We don’t punish him rather expresses sympathy.

#### Conclusion:

These all proverbs play very crucial role in the story. It also helps us to connect with the Omani culture and life of middle class people. By these proverbs we can come to know about the actual human nature as it helps in making the characters like Zarifa and Abdullah. Alharthi’s this attempt of using the proverbs in the novel is really works to make the text and characters interesting. Rather we can say Alharthi made the use of such techniques in the novel made the novel more appealing. Alharthi also used several literary devices which we can come across with while reading the text. The devices like parody, irony, intertextuality, metafiction code-mixing and code-switching, humour etc. Through these all literary forms and linguistic dimensions she could make her novel one of the best novel in the postmodern literature.

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