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## Conquering The Labyrinth In Ten Centuries, The Frame Tales Of The' Thousand Nights'

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The genesis of the saga of the 'Arabian Nights' apparently was in Baghdad in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century. The originator of the 'Nights' frame tale died after writing and orally presenting 480 stories. It was discovered by the Europeans who were extremely fascinated by its technique of narration. It's an 'Embedded Narrative,' which has been used in variety of versions. The Europeans disseminated this frame-tale through out the world with each writer adding stories on to the 'Arabian Nights'. Each story was either a new one or story-told earlier which was edited, retold or rewritten. The magnanimity of this frame tale is hard to be recorded as the whole world has been influenced by its uniqueness. Umpteen number of movies, TV serials and songs have been made. Innumerable amounts of books and comics have been written. Various literary genres have been applied to labyrinthine structure. The feature of ethereal and infinity addresses multiple issues in encapsulating the entire globe, be it rural or urban. Oppression of female gender has been expedited in this frame tale in which the protagonist Shahrazad fights and evades death through the brutal king's sword gaining victory over the king's evil traits by telling stories each night, leaving the story in suspense to be continued the next night. Eventually she get success in protecting the kingdom and emerges victorious

**KEYWORDS:** Frame tales, colloquialism, corpus, genres, embedded narratives, parable, anecdotes, fable, fantasy, parody, mysticism, metaphysical, labyrinth, exotic, ostensible, bourgeoisie, disseminate, diverse, slay, execution, expurgate, bowdlerized, heterogeneous, intertextuality, recension, recursion, nuances.

### **INTRODUCTION:-**

Discovering the frame tales has actually unfolded an enigmatic form of stories. The concept of "**One Thousand and One Nights**", could have been a mystical symbol denoting chain of events or an exaggerated or extrapolated figure but when this frame tale was found it wasn't in the given number of the thousand Nights. The multilayered tales earliest manuscript was found in "Baghdad" (9th Cent) followed by a Syrian manuscript tradition and then an Egyptian manuscript tradition sans the mention of the various oral traditions

was found (Mahdi, 1995, p. 23). The frame tale accrued over centuries from various regions as Iraq, Iran, Turkey, India, Greece, Central Asia, and even more from the Mongol invasions. The frame tales were adapted for the audience or readers of Central Asia until the Europeans got fascinated by its mystic qualities and soon a process of translation began, and dissemination of the literature throughout the globe got through. Translations came up in European languages such as French, Brazilian Portuguese, English, German, etc (Zipes, 2007, p. 53). The frame tales are filled with massive number of genres such as comedy, tragedy, poems, parables, adventures, mysteries, love stories, myths, fairytales, dramas, fables, horror stories, burlesque, erotica etc. The literature has influenced art forms music and movies. The tales spring from a single story of the king '**Shahrayar**' who would kill all females each done to avenge the treachery meted out to him by his wife but he meets Shahrazad who puts an end to this tirade by telling tales each night upto 3 years there curing the king of his malice (MACK, 1998; Mahdi, 1995; Zipes, 2007)

A Thousand Nights is a collection of popular translation frame tale of Middle Eastern folktales compiled in Arabic during the Islamic golden age. The nucleus of this frame tale was sowed during the Abbasid Caliph Harun al Rasheed's era in the 8th Cent CE. Baghdad during this time had become a Cosmopolitan city and businesses brought merchants from China, Europe, Africa, India, Persia, etc (2007). It was during this time that the original folk stories were transmitted orally and conclusively reach to a decision that a book was compiled based on the main frame tale and a theory floats that the frame tale was actually incorporated in the 14th century. The publication of the first Arabic compilation flashed in Cairo in 1835 (Marzolph, 2007).

The very famous 'Arabian Nights' are the "One Thousand and One Nights", which has its first reference to a fragment found in the 9th century and next it was mentioned by "Al Masudi", the traveler, in his travelogue in a discussion on legendary stories from Iran, Iraq, Turkey, India, China, and probably Greece as the Persian 'Hazaar Afsana' i.e "Thousand Tales" (2004, p. 195). Ibn-al-Nadim (987) says that "a person named Abu Abdullah Abu ibn Abdus Jashiyari began a collection of the 'One Thousand' popular tales from Arabic, Iranian, Greek, etc but as he managed a collection of 480 tales he died and the target of one thousand remained to be completed (Muhsin, 2004)". The name 'Hazar Afsana', ie 'Thousand Tales' was actually intended to imply that the collection had a large number of tales but it was only later that the numbers were taken up literally as stories added to make up the total figure of 1000' (Britannica, 2022). The names of the chief characters are Iranian with the reasonable number of Arabian names with tales variety and geographical range of origin referred to as Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, China, India, Turkey and Greece. The frame tales seemed of Indian origin as well. Since so many countries are involved in this collection it is very unlikely that single authorship can be attributed to 'Hazar Afsana'. Internal evidence supports and proves that this issue of single authorship due to its style comprising colloquialism, is not studied well and also that it is unaffected by the norms of

writing. It also has plenty of grammatical errors which none of the Arabic professional writers would permit (John L, 2004, p. 195; Muhsin, 2004; Britannica, 2022).

The Arabic version was taken from the Persian book. Ibn al Nadim is said to have compiled a book of 200 stories (fihrist) in Baghdad. He noted that the kings of Iran, enjoyed 'evening tales and fables' (Stewart, 2007; Falconer, 1885, p. 20). The literary quality of the book " is truly a coarse book without warmth in telling". The relationship of the Persian to the Arabic version has not been able to prove the original existence. The frame story of Shehrazad dominates the tales and other original Persian tales enter the collection of 'Nights'. These stories include the "Ten Wazirs" or the "History of the king Azad Bhakt and his son", which apparently has been taken from 'Bakhtiyarnama' (Schram, 2000). The Iraqi scholar Safa Khulusi says that the frame story was initially translated into Arabic by Ibn al Muqaffa, a Persian writer. With a few more stories later incorporated into 'Nights' , ultimately, places the genesis of the 'Night Tales' to the 8th Century (Khulusi, 1960; Stewart, 2007; Falconer, 1885). A document from the 9th Century with a few lines in Arabic on the Nights by a scholar "Nabia Abbot" was found, about which is claimed to be the first surviving fragment with the title of the "One Thousand and one Nights" (Irwin, 2004, p. 50 to 51). Professor Dwight Reynolds describes the Arabic version transformation as

"Some of the earlier Persian tales may have survived within the Arabic tradition altered such that Arabic muslim names and new locations were substituted for pre Islamic Persian ones but it is also clear that whole cycles of Arabic tales were eventually added to the collection and apparently replaced most of the Persian materials . One such cycle of Arabic tales centres around a small group of historical figures from the 9th century Bagdad, including the Caliph Harun al Rashid (died 809).His Wazir Jafar al Barmaki (D 803) and the Poet Abu Nuwas (D.C 813). Another cluster is a body of stories from late Medieval Cairo in which are mentioned persons and places that date to as late as 13th and 14th centuries" (Reynolds, 2005).

Studies taken up from the last 10th Centuries give way to how 'Hazar Afsana' was compiled into a single whole by the Western scholars in the 20th century. The theory emerges as stated by the Western scholars that the 'Hazard Afsana' or 20<sup>th</sup> century is a composite work comprising stories originally transmitted orally and developed through centuries and through the passing of time was added unevenly which could have been carried over to several places (Abbott, 1949). The study depicts various lands, cultures, people, etc which proves the journey made by this epic. Various levels of work shows that it originated in Baghdad and other layer which was of larger amount of work proved to belong to the Egyptian background (Qalqashandi, 1913-1919). Later in the 20th century a broader description was laid out regarding the 'Hazaar Afsana' in which six successive forms had been categorized which are as follows;

- 8<sup>th</sup> century Arabic translation of the Persian 'Hazar Afsana' ' was called 'Alif Laila' (Chauvin, 1900; Nacht, 1925).
- A 9<sup>th</sup> Century version based on Alif Laila including several new stories which were then in the 9<sup>th</sup> century the latest one stop in the 10<sup>th</sup> century wrote some stories (Penzer, 1923, pp. 126,130-32).
- The 12<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian tales were added to the collection.
- Finally at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century a version appeared which comprised the earlier material with the addition of stories of the Islamic counter or crusades and also were included on those tales that entered the Middle East by the Mongols (Littmann, 1928, pp. 687-88; Chauvin, 1900; Nacht, 1925; Penzer, 1923). Popular tales of the 'Hazaar Afsana' or 'A Thousand Tales' in the West were 'Sindbad the Sailor', 'Aladdin's lamp', 'Alibaba Forty Thieves', etc were later incorporated to the original Corpus; also have they become a part of the Western folklore added in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the European adaptations (Galland, 1704,1717).

In much of the Medieval European literature the stories from the 'Hazar Afsana', various fairy tales, Legends, Parable, Anecdotes, Fables, Romances and Adventure stories be it realistic or exotic ones have all been set within a frame story or tales (Andrea, 2017). The tales vary widely as variety of genres are used such as Tragedy, Comedy, Poetry, Burlesque, Love stories, Legends, from the Arabian land. There is this projection and descriptions of djinns, weird and exotic locations with magicians at work with human beings who meet or collide with each other to create suspense and fantasy (Abbott N. , 1949). The original stories have the character of a Caliph named Harun Al Rashid (protagonist in the frame tale). There is this Vizier, whose daughter is Shahrazad, Poet Abu Nuwas. The frame tale then continues with tale within tale, an 'Embedded Narrative'. The tale often and mostly ends with the hero in awkward position either trapped dangerously or the enemy has captured him or he is faced with dangerous cliffs, hills, oceans, etc. Shahrazad at times pauses at twists such as abstract philosophical principles or abstruse points of Islamic theology and surprisingly at junctions where she gives vivid descriptions of human anatomy (Al-Musawi, 2009). Such wit evokes curiosity in the king due to which his imagination is in a state of wanting to explore the unknown and unseen of the metaphysical world (Andrea, 2017; Abbott N. , 1949; Al-Musawi, 2009).

### **The Redemption of Shehrayar: The Frame Story of Shahrazad's Enchanting Tales:**

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In this frame story the original background is that of Central Asia or peninsula of India and China where the king Shahrayar gets extremely agitated on the discovery that his wife has been unfaithful to him as she is involved with another man. In his fit of anger he slays her and vows to kill a female each night after marrying her (Burton, 2001). This continues till no girls are left. But the vizier has two daughters named Shahrazad and Dunayazad. Shahrazad asks her father to get her married to the king as she has devised a plan to save other girls and herself. She begins telling the king stories full of thrill and mysticism and leaves the story incomplete to be continued on the next night. The attention of the king is diverted on to the stories and the king keeps putting off her execution each night which finally ends after the span of 3 years and till then she has borne the king heirs to the throne. The king is a transformed personality by then and is filled with the aura of spiritual and metaphysical world which makes him renounce his cruel game of killing girls. This was the frame tale into which one thousand stories were fitted and disseminated all through the world (Nielson, 1886-1957).

### **A Tapestry of Tales: The Art of Frame Narratives and Embedded Narratives in Literature:**

Frame tale or story is a literary genre, which is a unifying story within which one or more tales are related. A frame story or tale is a single story or tale in which the opening and closing constitutes a frame. A story which begins as a single one but then the readers stumble upon the stories or tales within the basic story- a few maybe externally imposed and loosely bind the diversified stories (Herman, Jahn, & Ryan, 2013; Ricoeur, 1984-1988). 'The Thousand and One Night' is one such frame tale in which Shahrazad strives to survive and challenges the king to stop him from killing her by telling interesting stories each night and leaving them incomplete in order to continue it the next night. Another example of frame tale can be found in 'Jatakattahavannana', which is also a massive collection of 550 popular stories of the Buddha known as 'Jatakkas'. The collection is a framework of the Buddhist ethical teaching 'Canterbury Tales', 1387-1400 by Geoffrey Chaucer has a frame tale of 'The Pilgrimage', it brings together varied tellers of tales, who are vivid personalities, who develop dramatic relationship among themselves by relating their tales (Nicoll, 1964). Another is a famous frame tale by Giovanni Boccaccio's 'Decameron' who presents a frame tale on the ten people who fled the 'Black Death' and gathered in the countryside and relate their stories amongst themselves (Boccaccio, 1982). The theme has been woven by a single common theme ie the refined lives of the bourgeoisie who had great respect for conventions and open minded behavioural patterns towards personal behaviours (Herman, Jahn, & Ryan, 2013; Ricoeur, 1984-1988; Nicoll, 1964). In another definition of the frame story- 'The Arabian Nights', consists of a frame narrative that connects a series of tales and tales within tales ostensibly told by a Queen to her sister but really intended to capture the attention of a jealous king with the frame narrative beginning with an account of two Royal brothers.

A framed tale or narrative can prolong its existence and establish its infinite nature through a process of self embedding (Schutz, 1973). Jorge Luis Borges an Argentinian writer, in his essay writes that this process occurs in 602 number of the tales night of 'The Arabian Nights' (Fishburn, 2004). The story is repeated by Shahrazad and embedding story itself gets embedded and as this happens the narrative doubles back on itself continuously without being interrupted, similar to moebius strip emblematic of recycling of elements (2004, p. 36). 'Thousand Nights', comprises of framing, unknown and unrevealed patterns, self-reference, intertextuality, recursions, which has become a storehouse for modern writers be it Parody, Fiction or for artist or artisans to imitate or to allied arts and literature (2004, p 39). The structure of the 'Thousand Nights' is like a labyrinth as the readers plunge into a well of the unknown directionless twist and turns created out of the embedded narratives. Its not surprising to find that the stories are either replicated or analogous versions have already been told but each compiler or translator has added or deleted according to choice of the writer, since the beginning to the modern day. The "frame narrative" has the quality to self-generate and self-perpetuate (Fishburn, 2004; Schutz, 1973).

The storyteller of the 'Nights' and the tales, use several innovative techniques and literary genres for enhancing suspense, thrill and other emotions in a dramatic manner.

**Embedded narrative :** In the 'One Thousand and One Nights', we find story within a story which is the embedded technique which can be found in the Indian Panchatantra and Persian 'Hazar Afsana'. In the 'Nights', a vivid description can be found often in the embedded narrative of 'Sindbad the Sailor'. We find Sindbad in the story narrating his story of seven voyages.

### **The Web of Fate: A Tale of Destiny and Anomalies in the 'Thousand and One Nights':**

Destiny is a major reclaiming factor of the 'Nights' and the plot's device is generally used to represent the stream and is supposedly a coincidence. Italian film director and maker Pier Paolo Pasolini observes that:

“Every tale in the 'Thousand and One Nights', begins with an appearance of destiny which manifests itself through an anomaly and one anomaly always generates another. So, a chain of anomalies is set up. And the more logical lightly knit, essential to this change is, the more beautiful the tale. By beautiful I mean vital, absorbing and accelerating. The chain of anomalies always tends to lead back to normality. The end of every tale in the “Thousand Nights” consists of a disappearance of destiny which sinks back to the somnolence of daily life.... The protagonist of the stories is in fact destiny itself” (Irwin, 2004, pp. 199-200).

**Unmasking the Unreliable: Suspense and Deception in the 'Nights':** In the 'Nights', the king's son has been accused of assaulting a courtesan, as in reality she had failed to seduce

him. Seven Viziers narrate 7 stories to prove the women's false claims and Courtesan too narrates a story to prove her innocence to prove the unreliability of the Viziers. The literary device creates suspense and thrill.

**Echoes of the Past: Repetition as a Unifying Element in the 'Thousand and One Night**

It relates to the theme or motive of the given story and it is the main factor which helps it form several stories into a chain of stories. The technique was a favourite one which helped shape the constituent members of their story cycles into a coherent whole (Heath, 1994).

**Thematic Patterning: Unveiling the Common Threads in the Stories of the 'Nights:**

Yet another technique used in the 'Nights' of the thematic patterning which can be best explained as "the distribution of recurrent thematic concepts and moral stick motives among the various incidence and frames of a story. In a skillfully crafted tale thematic pattern maybe arranged so as to emphasize the unifying argument or salient idea which disparate events and dispatch frames have in common (Heath, 1994, pp. 358-360).

**Foreshadowing in the 'Thousand and One Nights': Unveiling the Intriguing Twists:-**

Its a technique of repetitive designation and presently labelled as 'Checkov's Gun' which contains repeated references to some character or object which appears insignificant when first mentioned but which reappears later to intrude suddenly in the narrative" (Heath, 1994).

**Envisioning Worlds: The Art of Dramatic Visualisation in Diverse Genres:**

Its the representing of an object or character with an abundance of descriptive detail or the mimetic rendering of gestures and dialogue in such a way so as to make a given scene "visual or imaginative presented to the audience". The genre elements include those of horror fictions, crime fictions ,fantasy, science-fiction, poetry, etc (Heath, 1994).

**EDITIONS:-**

Antione Galland, was the first to publish 'The Nights', making it the first translation and the first published edition known as the " les Mille et Une Nuits, Contes arabes traduits en francis" (Galland, 1704,1717),"The first published edition by source was Galland's main text which was a four volume Syrian manuscript; but the later volumes consist of several tales oral and various sources. Until the mid of the 19th Century Galland's translations remained a standard and the same were being retranslated into Arabic. A complete Arabic text was published in Kolkata.4th. Vol, (1839- 42) (Marzolph U. , 2012). The Vulgate text was the source for later translations. And Egyptian recension was published in Bulaq in 1835 and was also reprinted several times (Galtier, 1912, pp. 135-94). Galland's edition and other versions in French and English continuations added stories from oral and manuscript sources which had been compiled with others in the Breslau edition 5th vol from 1825-1843 by Maximilian Habicht (2004, p. 516) Later on the

translation were made with variations from the Bulaq pics. Translation into English of the 19th Century were that of Sir Richard Francis Burton who used the translation work of not very popularly known English writer known as John Payne, to his unexpurgated production of 'The Thousand Nights and a Night' (Marzolph U. , 2004).

In Galland's first translation were the stories like 'Aladdin's lamp' and 'Alibaba 40 Thieves', but these were not found in the original writings. Galland informs that he heard these through a storyteller in Aleppo in Syria who was a Maronite scholar named "Youhenna Diab" (1901, p-6), called as 'Hanna' in 1709. John Payne in his version of 'Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp' and other stories (London 1901) describes of Galland's encounter with a Maronite scholar "Hanna" and the discovery of two manuscripts of Aladdin and two additional stories stories. Payne remarks that Galland had utter disregard for Islamic scholarship (1901, p-5) with the result that

".. ...complete copies of the genuine work rarely to be met with, collections ....and the fragmentary copies which existed were mostly in the hands of professional story tellers, who were extremely unwilling to part with them, looking upon them as their stock in trade, and where in the habit of incorporating with the genuine text, all kinds of stories and anecdotes from other sources to fill the place of the missing portions of the original work. This process of addition and incorporation, which has been in progress ever since the first collection of the Nights into one distinct work and is doubtless still going on in Oriental countries, (especially are least in contact with European influence ), may account for the heterogeneous character of the various modern manuscripts of the Nights and for the immense difference which exist between the several texts aswell in actual contents as in the details and diction of such stories as are common to all" (John, 1901).

Burtan's 'One Thousand and One Nights', is the best known to the English speakers and his Ten volume translation, Unlike the previous editions was not bowdlerized. The translation although printed in the Victorian Era, it comprised of pederastic allusions added to the main story of Burton, erotic nuances of the source material, "replete with sexual imagery" (Burton R. , 1856). Burton printed an edition exclusively for his subscribers rather than publishing a formal book. He then published 6 more editions as the 'Supplemental Nights to the Thousand Nights and a Night', printed between 1886-88 (Burton R. , 1856). The most accurate and elegant version upto date was that of the French doctor J. C. Mardrus, translated by Poali Mathers and an addition based on the 14th century Syrian manuscript in the "Bibliotheque Nationale". An addition of a series of different Arabic manuscripts especially the Syrian was translated from Portuguese by a Brazilian scholar Mamede Mustafa Jarouche in 2005 with the release of 5-6 volumes. A Polish Noble travelled to the Orient in the 18th century to look for the original edition of the 'Nights' but never found one. On his return to Europe, he wrote his masterpiece which was a multilayered one and said to be the cousin of the 'Nights'. This manuscript was found in Saragossa by Jan Potocki (Burton R. , 1856; John, 1901).



## **Adaptations**

An addition was compiled as 'Thousand and Second Tale of Scherazade', by Edgar Allan Poe. Its about Sindbad's final Voyage with his crew and his encounter with various mysteries in which Shahrazad's tales are disgusting to the king and he executes her. Next is the creator of the comic book series 'Fables' by Bill Willingham who used 'One Thousand and One Nights' as the base of his 'Fables Prequel', 'Fable's 1001 Nights of snowfall' in which Snow White tells the tales of the fables magical literary character to stop the Sultan from killing her'. Naguib Mahfuz, the Egyptian writer wrote two books that is 'Arabian Nights and Days', and 'When Dreams Travel' by Githa Hariharan. Based on the 'Arabian Nights' Poetry' in English has been composed on by William Wordsworth 'The Prelude' (book 5 1805) and Alfred Tennyson's poem- 'Recollection of the Arabian Nights' (1830).

## **Conclusion:-**

The title 'One Thousand and One Nights', was found to be incomplete in the count as the title suggested. It was found in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century as a fragment. The traveller Al -Masudi in 947 CE mentioned about the 'Nights' in a discussion of the legendary stories from multiple countries such as Greece, Iran, Iraq, India, China, Afghanistan, Turkey, etc. Up to 942CE, only 480 stories were completed by Al Nadim. Hence it manifests that the writer intended to describe or to give an expression that he intended to just indicate a large number. It was in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that the Western scholars reached to a consensus that the 'Thousand Nights', was initially transmitted orally which developed gradually through centuries with stories being added haphazardly at multiple times and places.

The story telling saga each night by Shahrazad to the king Shehrayar meant her struggle against the impending death by the king and in a broader sense of wanting to end the Socio- Political effect on the girls in the kingdom. Her image is that of a knight or a warrior fighting against odds and redeeming the female gender and liberating them from a curse by the king. Here the concept of liberation from evil, redemption and salvation persists. These stories by Shahrazad produced a therapeutic effect on the king by using poetry, songs and stories. The status of the King refers to the dominant equation of the consciousness of a people. Apparently it seems as if the principle of collective consciousness had ceased, indicating in- sufficiency of power in a collective whole to operate to which the frame tale is a solution. The irrational dominates on the feminine who is subdued and suppressed which indicates that consciousness gets petrified, giving way or rise to the doctrines and formulas. Utterly surprising is that, an age old issue validates its significance to the present time conflict of the male domination and female suppression. Deterioration is balanced by generating and receiving humaneness and goodness. Shahrazad here is a symbol of coexistence of the opposite that is unequal and imbalanced. Each tale told by her each night was a remedy to his malice of killing girls and

an indicator of the fact that the king was captivated by Shahrazad's charm and the tales-a balm to his hurt caused from the treachery of his wife.

The mention of the Genie symbolises the unconscious state of mind, a place which a human ventures in sleep or while facing extreme emotions. Genie lives in the sea and his coming or emerging from it is an indicator of an architect approaching the human consciousness. The beheading of the females by the king is a manifestation of the segregation of Reason from the head and body with the preference to love against brute force to dominate entirely over everything.

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