



**Suggestion and Indirection in English Poetry,  
the Holy Quran, and Sunnah: Their  
Effectiveness in Daawa (Islamic Preaching)**

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## Abstract

This study explores the rhetorical effectiveness of suggestion, indirection, and allusion in English poetry, the Holy Quran, and the Prophetic Sunnah, with a focus on their application in Islamic preaching (Daawa). Drawing on a descriptive and analytical methodology, the paper analyzes selected works by poets such as T. S. Eliot and Emily Dickinson, as well as Quranic verses and Hadith, to demonstrate how indirect communication engages the audience, bypasses resistance, and fosters deeper understanding. The study addresses and corrects prevalent misinterpretations of Quranic references to poetry, arguing that poetry—when aligned with Islamic values—can serve as a powerful and legitimate tool in Daawa. The findings underscore the importance of rhetorical subtlety in guiding individuals toward ethical and spiritual growth, especially in contexts that demand sensitivity and psychological insight.

**Keywords:** Suggestion, Indirection, Revelation, Allusion, Figurative Language, Daawa, Quran, Sunnah, Islamic Preaching, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

مستخلص:

يتناول هذا البحث فاعلية الإيحاء والتلميح والتضمين البلاغيّ في الشّعر الإنجليزيّ، والقرآن الكريم، والسُّنة النبويّة، مع التّركيز على استخدامها في مجال الدّعوة الإسلاميّة. ويعتمد البحث على منهج وصفيّ تحليليّ، حيث يتمّ تحليل نماذج مختارة من أعمال شعراء مثل: توماس إليوت وإميلي ديكنسون، إلى جانب آيات قرآنيّة وأحاديث نبويّة، لبيان كيف أنّ الخطاب غير المباشر قادر على جذب المتلقي، وتجاوز المقاومة النفسيّة، وتعزيز الفهم العميق. كما يعالج البحث بعض التفسيرات الخاطئة الشائعة للآيات القرآنيّة المتعلّقة بالشّعر، مؤكّداً أنّ الشّعر إذا التزم بالقيم الإسلاميّة يمكن أن يكون وسيلة فعّالة ومشروعة في الدّعوة. وتؤكد نتائج الدّراسة على أهميّة الأسلوب البلاغيّ غير المباشر في توجيه الأفراد نحو القيم الأخلاقيّة والروحيّة، لا سيما في السياقات التي تتطلّب حساسية وفهماً نفسياً عميقاً.

الكلمات المفتاحيّة: الإيحاء، التلميح، الوحي، الإشارة، اللّغة المجازيّة، الدّعوة، القرآن، السُّنة، الدّعوة الإسلاميّة، النبيّ محمد ﷺ.

### Introduction:

Literature—particularly poetry—distinguishes itself by its suggestive and indirect nature, setting it apart from the expository clarity found in fields such as history and the sciences. The richness of the poetic experience emerges not from overt declarations, but from what is subtly implied. Poetry’s greatest strength often lies in its ability to communicate meaning through indirection, allowing for ambiguity, reflection, and layered interpretation. Through metaphors, symbolism, irony, and paradox, poets evoke emotional and intellectual responses that direct statements may fail to provoke.

In Islamic preaching (Daawa), similar rhetorical principles are deeply rooted in the divine and prophetic modes of communication. Rather than confronting individuals with harsh or accusatory language, both the Quran and the Sunnah frequently employ suggestion and allusion to lead people toward truth and self-realization. These techniques respect the dignity and psychological states of their audiences and are particularly effective in bypassing resistance, engaging intellect, and nurturing sincerity.

This study aims to explore the profound effectiveness of suggestion and indirection in both literary and religious discourses, arguing that such strategies are not only aesthetically and ethically powerful but are also aligned with the spirit of Daawa. Through a comparative analysis of selected English poems and Islamic texts, this paper highlights the psychological and spiritual depth these rhetorical methods provide and advocates for their broader application in contemporary preaching and education.

### Significance of the Study:

This study is significant for multiple reasons. First, it contributes to a clearer understanding of the rhetorical strategies employed in both literary and religious discourse, offering valuable insights for educators, preachers, and scholars alike. In an age where religious messaging is often rejected for being too didactic or dogmatic, the

exploration of subtle and indirect communication becomes especially timely and necessary.

Second, by addressing and correcting misinterpretations of Islamic texts regarding poetry, the study promotes a more balanced and informed religious understanding. Such clarification is essential in countering the extremist or fundamentalist views that may arise from rigid literalism and ignorance of rhetorical nuance.

Third, this paper advocates for the constructive integration of literature and religion in the service of ethical and spiritual development. By showing that the Quran, Sunnah, and classical poetry share common communicative principles, the study reinforces the idea that beauty, emotion, and subtlety are not only artistic tools but also moral and religious imperatives.

### **Research Problem:**

Despite the deep historical and spiritual value of poetry, it is often misunderstood by both general audiences and certain segments of the Muslim community. Many reduce poetry to a form of frivolous entertainment, detached from religious or moral significance. Furthermore, some Muslims have interpreted certain Quranic verses as a condemnation of poetry altogether, leading to the assumption that poetic expression is antithetical to Islamic teachings.

This paper seeks to challenge such assumptions by clarifying the actual intent of Quranic and prophetic texts concerning poetry. It also aims to demonstrate that poetry—when grounded in moral and spiritual purpose—can serve as a powerful and effective tool in Daawa. More broadly, the research addresses how the techniques of suggestion and indirection, commonly found in poetry, are also essential features of Quranic and prophetic rhetoric and are instrumental in guiding and transforming individuals.

### **Research Questions:**

1. What are the key rhetorical and psychological techniques

employed in Islamic preaching (Daawa)?

2. To what extent can indirect forms of communication contribute to more effective Daawa?
3. Is poetic expression compatible with the ethical and spiritual goals of Islam?
4. How do classical English poets and Islamic texts utilize suggestion and allusion to shape the moral consciousness of their audiences?

### Research Objectives:

This paper aims :

1. To clarify the proper interpretation of Quranic verses that appear to criticize poetry, highlighting the distinction between morally deviant poetry and poetry that aligns with Islamic values.
2. To demonstrate that poetry is not only compatible with Islamic teachings but also a historically respected mode of spiritual and ethical reflection.
3. To illustrate how indirect forms of communication, including allusion, metaphor, and suggestion, can enhance the effectiveness of Daawa.
4. To offer guidance for preachers, educators, and Daawa practitioners on how to employ rhetorical techniques that are psychologically sensitive and spiritually resonant.

### Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical methodology. It involves a close textual analysis of selected English poems, Quranic verses, and Prophetic Hadiths to examine the strategic use of suggestion, indirection, and allusion. The research does not seek to provide statistical generalizations but rather to reveal deep rhetorical patterns and psychological insights within these texts.

The poetic works of Emily Dickinson and T. S. Eliot are

analyzed for their employment of figurative and suggestive language. Simultaneously, Quranic examples and Prophetic sayings are examined to trace similar rhetorical strategies in Islamic preaching. By drawing comparative insights between these domains, the study emphasizes their shared communicative ethos, especially in terms of persuasion, subtlety, and moral transformation.

## Literature Review Definitions of Poetry

### Poetry has long resisted a singular:

Definition, as its essence lies in evoking what is felt rather than what is simply understood. Literary figures and scholars have offered a variety of definitions that reflect poetry's emotive and suggestive qualities:

Edwin Arlington Robinson defines poetry as “the language that tells us something that cannot be said otherwise.”

Edgar Allan Poe describes it as “the rhythmical creation of beauty,” suggesting a focus on aesthetics and harmony.

William Wordsworth famously called poetry “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility,” emphasizing emotional depth.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge viewed it as “the communication of pleasure rather than truth,” highlighting its artistic aim rather than doctrinal clarity.

Percy Bysshe Shelley saw poetry as “a record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds,” reflecting human excellence and idealism.

Emily Dickinson remarked, “If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that it is poetry,” stressing its shocking, transformative power.

These definitions, though varied, all converge on a single point: that poetry relies heavily on indirection, ambiguity, and emotional resonance. It suggests, rather than states; it evokes, rather than explains. This makes poetry a uniquely potent medium for

addressing spiritual, ethical, and philosophical themes without alienating or confronting the audience directly.

### **Types of Poetry and Their Rhetorical Power:**

Throughout literary history, various poetic forms have served as vehicles for suggestion and symbolic communication. Each poetic form not only represents a structural pattern but also embodies a distinct rhetorical capacity for indirect persuasion. Below are some of the major types of poetry, with emphasis on how their structure and function align with the theme of indirection.

#### **1. Epic Poetry:**

Epics such as Beowulf, The Iliad, or The Divine Comedy narrate grand, heroic journeys and often use elevated language and symbolism. Rather than providing didactic moral instruction, these poems subtly reflect values such as bravery, sacrifice, loyalty, and divine justice through their characters and narrative arcs. The Quran, too, uses stories of prophets and past peoples in a similarly indirect but powerful moral framework.

#### **2. Ballads:**

Rooted in folk traditions, ballads are narrative poems that recount events or legends in a song-like rhythm. Their appeal lies in emotional storytelling, often involving tragedy, love, betrayal, or divine intervention. The ballad's use of repetition, imagery, and symbolic actions offers a subtle but effective form of moral communication.

#### **3. Odes**

An ode is a lyric poem of elevated style, often addressed to a person, object, or abstract idea. For example, John Keats's Ode to a Nightingale meditates on the nature of beauty and mortality. Odes are reflective and contemplative, using suggestion and emotional tone rather than logical argument to convey meaning.

#### **4. Sonnets:**

Typically 14-line poems with strict rhyme schemes, sonnets are often used for philosophical inquiry or emotional reflection. Shakespeare's sonnets, for example, explore themes such as time, love, beauty, and morality. Their rhetorical tightness makes them ideal for nuanced thought and layered meaning.

### 5. Elegies:

Elegies are poems of mourning and reflection, usually written in response to death or loss. However, they also serve to affirm life, faith, and memory. The power of the elegy lies in its emotional restraint, tone of reverence, and subtle spiritual suggestion.

### 6. Lyrics:

The lyric poem expresses the personal emotions and reflections of the poet. It is perhaps the most intimate and indirect form of poetry, as it relies on the inward voice and subjective vision to evoke shared feelings. Dickinson's short lyric poems, for instance, achieve depth through understatement and metaphor rather than explicit declaration.

Each of these poetic forms relies on indirection and implication to create deeper emotional and intellectual resonance. In this way, they mirror the style and ethos of Islamic religious discourse, which often eschews overt confrontation in favor of patient guidance and allusive wisdom.

### **Indirection in Poetry: Case Studies** **Emily Dickinson's Use of Suggestion**

Emily Dickinson's poetry is emblematic of subtlety and introspective suggestion. Her poem "I like to see it lap the Miles" is a masterclass in metaphorical indirection. Although the poem describes a steam train, it never explicitly names it. Instead, Dickinson uses phrases such as "lick the valleys up" and "prodigious step" to animate the train as a living beast.

Her unique punctuation, capitalization, and fragmentary syntax all contribute to an ambiguous tone that invites the reader to interpret the text beyond the literal level. This poetic style aligns with Islamic rhetorical strategies in that it preserves the dignity of the reader (or listener), encouraging them to arrive at understanding through reflection rather than imposition.

#### **T. S. Eliot's Use of Allusion:**

T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is steeped in literary and religious allusions. Prufrock's anxious self-reflection unfolds through a series of indirect references to Dante's *Inferno*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night*, and Andrew Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress*.

These allusions not only enrich the poem's psychological complexity but also serve as subtle mirrors of the protagonist's insecurities and moral dilemmas. Rather than describing Prufrock's condition directly, Eliot draws parallels with well-known texts, letting the reader infer meaning through cultural association and intertextual layering.

This form of communication is strikingly similar to the Quranic and Prophetic approach. Just as Eliot's allusions guide the reader into deeper understanding, the Quran often references stories of past nations or uses metaphorical language to encourage reflection rather than confrontation.

## **Indirection in the Holy Quran and Sunnah Quranic Suggestion and Allusion**

The Quran is replete with verses that utilize suggestion, analogy, and indirect speech. Rather than addressing individuals with direct accusation, the Quran often presents stories, parables, or generalized statements that invite introspection. This approach preserves the emotional and social dignity of the audience and opens space for sincere internal transformation.

### **Examples include:**

#### **1. Surah Al-Asr (103:1–3):**

“By the time, surely mankind is in loss—except those who believe and do righteous deeds and exhort one another to truth and patience.”

This short surah conveys a profound moral message indirectly. Instead of commanding people to change behavior, it outlines a general truth that encourages the reader to reflect on their position in relation to time and virtue.

#### **2. Surah Ash-Shu'ara (26:224–227):**

“And the poets—the deviators follow them... except those who believe, do righteous deeds, remember Allah often, and defend the oppressed.”

This verse, often misinterpreted as a blanket condemnation of poetry, in fact distinguishes between misleading poetry and that which serves moral and religious ends. The distinction is indirect yet essential, requiring careful contemplation.

#### **3. Parables (Amthal):**

The Quran often uses parables (e.g., the parable of the good tree in Surah Ibrahim 14:24–25) to convey complex truths about faith, morality, and society in symbolic terms.

### **Prophetic Indirect Communication:**

The Sunnah records numerous instances where the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) communicated indirectly to guide, teach, and correct behavior. His style exemplified empathy, subtlety, and deep psychological insight.

#### **Examples include:**

The Prophet would say, “What is wrong with some people who say such things?” instead of naming individuals, thereby correcting behavior without causing embarrassment.

He praised before correcting: “What a good man Abdullah is if only he prayed at night.”

This indirect structure encourages improvement through encouragement rather than shame.

He used metaphors and analogies, such as comparing the believer to a tree or the world to a traveler’s resting place. These indirect images conveyed complex religious ideas in accessible terms.

This mode of communication resonates with modern theories of effective pedagogy and persuasion, which emphasize respect for the listener’s autonomy and emotional state. In this regard, the Prophet's rhetorical approach bears remarkable resemblance to the strategies employed by great poets.

### **Correcting a Misinterpretation: Poetry in Islam:**

One of the central motivations of this study is to address and correct the misinterpretation of Quranic verses that seem to denounce poetry. The often-cited passage from Surah Ash-Shu’ara (26:224–227) states: “And the poets—the deviators follow them. Do you not see that in every valley they roam, and that they say what they do not do? Except those who believe and do righteous deeds and remember Allah often...”

Some Muslims have taken this verse to mean that all poets are

misguided. However, the context clearly indicates a critique of poets who engage in irresponsible, immoral, or deceitful speech—poets whose work misleads rather than uplifts. This criticism is not of poetry itself, but of its abuse.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not oppose poetry in principle. In fact, he praised good poetry and allowed it to be recited in his presence. The Hadith, “Inna min al-shi‘r la-hikma” (Indeed, some poetry contains wisdom) is a well-known affirmation of poetry’s moral and spiritual value.

Therefore, when poetry promotes truth, beauty, and ethical reflection, it aligns with the core values of Islam and becomes a legitimate instrument of Daawa.

## Conclusion

The study demonstrates that indirection—whether through suggestion, metaphor, allusion, or subtle rhetorical strategies—is a powerful and time-honored means of persuasion. In both literary and religious discourses, such techniques transcend the limitations of direct communication by addressing not just the intellect, but also the emotions, subconscious, and conscience of the audience.

In poetry, the use of indirection enriches the reading experience by allowing multiple interpretations and deeper emotional resonance. Figures like Emily Dickinson and T. S. Eliot employed suggestive language to engage readers in a participatory act of meaning-making, creating room for reflection, ambiguity, and discovery. Their poetry proves that what is implied often moves the heart more than what is overtly declared.

Similarly, the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are replete with examples of indirect communication, designed to guide rather than confront. These divine and prophetic methods recognize the human need for dignity, the psychology of resistance, and the spiritual power of reflection. Through parables, indirect admonitions, and carefully chosen metaphors, the Islamic tradition upholds the value of subtle yet transformative communication.

The research further addresses the persistent misinterpretation that views poetry as inherently un-Islamic. By examining the relevant Quranic verses and Hadiths, the study clarifies that Islam does not condemn poetry itself, but only the poetry that promotes vice, falsehood, or frivolity. On the contrary, poetry that fosters wisdom, remembrance of God, moral guidance, or social justice is not only acceptable but can also be a valuable component of Islamic preaching (Daawa).

In the contemporary world, where communication is often polarized and confrontational, the techniques of suggestion and

indirection offer an alternative rooted in humility, beauty, and psychological insight. These methods, drawn from both literature and religious tradition, are essential for Daawa that seeks not just compliance but genuine transformation of the heart and mind.

Ultimately, this paper calls upon scholars, educators, preachers, and Daawa practitioners to embrace the art of indirect communication—not as a rhetorical flourish, but as a prophetic strategy that honors human dignity and fosters deeper spiritual understanding.

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