

# Comparing Nashrudin Hoja, Juha and Mullah Nashrudin: Finding Out Humor in Middle East Culture

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## Abstract

The name of Nashrudin Hoja seems to be recognized by people in the world with their humorous anecdotes. Some research have studied Nashrudin Hoja with historical approach. This article use approach of humor and semiotic of fiction. From the analysis, is concluded that the figure of Nashrudin Hoja and Juha are real while character of Mullah Nashrudin is fictional. All stories of Nashrudin Hoja, Juha and Mullah Nashrudin contain humorous elements with different shapes and types. The stories of Nashrudin Hoja and Juha are anecdotes styled because the characters are real even though the stories do not necessarily exist, while the stories of Mullah Nashrudin are more fictional. The text of Mullah Nashrudin is more complex and difficult to understand, because the text aims to convey certain teachings to the readers through humor. Meanwhile, the texts of Nashrudin Hoja and Juha are merely more entertainment than for the educative purposes.

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**Index terms**— Nashrudin Hoja, humor, Arabic culture, Turki, Persia.

## 1 Introduction

Some researcher have studied Nashrudin Hoja with historical approach. They mentioned that Nashrudin Hoja was an adaptation of the character "Juha" known in literature, folklore and culture of Arabs in the 7th century. When the Ottoman Turks controlled the Arab region in the 16th century, they adapted the characters Juha into Turkish, and rename the character to be Nasruddin Hoja. After that, in medieval times, when the contact between Turkish and Persian cultures existed, the Persians also adapted the character of Arabs and Turks and named it as "Mullah Nashruddin". This article use approach of humor and semiotic of fiction for analyzing texts of humor from these characters, because it is more interesting and suitable than the previous one.

## 2 II.

Who is Nashrudin Hoja? Sawhney (2004) states that every year in Turkey was held a festival called "Nasruddin Hoja International Festival". The festival is held on a large scale on 5-10 July in a city where Nashrudin Hoja allegedly buried. This festival provides an opportunity for writers and artists to display their works on drama, film, music, animation and painting to preserve the memories of legendary Nashrudin Hoja. His grave is often visited by Author: Faculty of Humanity, University of Indonesia. e-mail: malessutiasumarga@yahoo.com many people. Nashrudin stories show the great influence of Sufism, so some people think that he is a Sufi. The stories are humorous stories about the people and their lifestyles in the past. Usually, they contain hidden meaning of moralities and can be interpreted in various levels of human life and are short observation about people from different aspects of life, such as the life of ordinary people, beggars, kings, scholars, politicians, scholars, merchants, soldiers and others. Some stories contain for instance told about him, his wife and a faithful donkey.

Meanwhile, Burak Sansal (2010) mentioned that Nasruddin Hoja was born in 1208, in a village near the town Hortu Sivrihisar (near Afyon), in the western part of Central Anatolia. In 1237 he moved to the City Aksehir to study with renowned scholars at that time, namely Sayid Mahmud Hayrani and Sayid Haci Ibrahim. He

served as a Muslim judge (qadi) until 1284 which was the date of his death. Hoja Nasruddin was a philosopher, smart and wise man with a great sense of humor. The story spread almost everywhere in the world, among the tribes in Turkey itself, as well as in Persia, Arabia, Africa and along the Silk Road to China, India, and Europe. But, of course, for about 700 years not all of these stories using Hoja attribute. Most of the stories are collection of humorous stories not only from Turkey, but also from other stories in the World. Hoja in Turkish means "teacher", also known in the world by various names, for example, the Turks called Nasreddin Hoca, the Kazakhstan named Kojas Nasreddin, the Greeks called Nasreddin Hoja, People of Azerbaijan and Iran called him Molla or Mulla Nasreddin, the Arabs called Juha and Tajikistan people called him Mushfiqi.

Juha, who refers to the original name which was adapted by the Turks into Nasruddin Hoja, according to Jayyusi (2010) is a traditional figure who has countless funny anecdotes. His characters are so diverse, ranging from a wise people to a foolish one. His humors are also varied, from painful to joyful humors. Helmke (2007) said that Juha is an interesting folklore figure in North Africa and the Middle East. Some figures are characterized as a funny people and also a wise leader. He could solve many problems that people were unable to deal with. Some cases, the story tells about the wisdom and other about the entertainment. However, there are many knowledge or insight that can be drawn from the stories of Juha.

Haqiqiyah (2010), Juha mentioned that the real name of Juha was Abu al-Ghushni ibn Thabit al-Dujayni Fazaari (60-160 AH / 680-777 AD). Many people wonder whether or not that the famous figure of Juha with full of funny stories is a real person? In fact, Juha is a real funny character, although his name was not mentioned in the history. In Arabic, the name of Juha has become a symbol in art and humor. Thousands of anecdotes or humorous stories for centuries came from his mouth. People may forget his historical roots, but they can not and will never forget him in the context of his humorous characters. Although there are a lot of humor in the Arab stories and cultures, the Juha is still the most famous figure and still exist today in the Arab literature, folklore and culture. Therefore, it is not surprising that Juha could live a hundred years. The story of Juha that is still prominent and influential till today is not only because of his creativity in writing and expression but rather showing the genuine expression of the Arabs in general. In the past people used to divide the story of Juha into two major characters; Juha who was stupid and crazy and Juha who was are clever and smart. Now people categorize it into various themes, according to its content. There are political, social and cultural themes. However, the influence of Juha is not confined to political and social criticism, but also reflects other aspects, such as psychology and aesthetics. Juha's stories are about the reality of his situation and other people.

At the beginning the funny story of Juha was oral stories and then converted into written form. The story of Juha is categorized into a popular culture that depicts more stories of ordinary people, not deals with the sexual and vulgar stories of the upper-class society. The stories of Juha depict everyday life narratives, like going to the market to buy a head of roasted lamb or spending the night with neighbors. Then, on the 17th and 18th century, it emerged a collection of stories about the humor of Juha containing obscene languages (sexual exposures) using local dialects. In addition, there are also stories of Juha inserted into a book of literary and anecdotes without mentioning the name of the author (Hanna 2003).

Through his unique style which combines elements of humor and wisdom at once, Juha was considered as a spokesperson of Arab people in all aspects of life. He was an adviser, jurist, philosopher, wise man, comedian and mediator of people's hearts in all events of everyday life. The purposes of these funny stories are to improve the social and moral decays as much as possible and to give social critiques of society. Juha was smart enough. It can be seen from the topic he dealt in which he talked about specific problems surrounding him as well as true and real problems. He opposed those who did not describe something correctly. Many events that occur in society are not portrayed correctly and surrender to realities and conditions. The stories of Juha are parts of his personal ideals and purposes of his life. (Barakat 2007) However, mentioned that when the Ottoman Turks controlled the Arab region in the 16th century AD, they adapted the story Juha into Turkish and change it as Nasruddin Hoja. Later, in medieval times, when the contact between the Turkish and Persian culture occurred, the Persians also adapted the story from the Arab and Turkish and named it as Mullah Nasruddin.

Then, who is the actual name of Mullah Nasruddin? The oldest story of Mullah Nasruddin contained in the book "Saltukname", written in 1480, which mixed with other folklores and legends. The book mentions that Nasruddin was born in a village in Turkey, named Sivrihisar, in 1208. Other sources mention that Nasruddin was born in the village of Horto, near Sivrihisar. Later, he moved to Aksehir in 1237 and died in 1284. Mullah Nasruddin was a Sufi who left the worldly life. The word Mullah in Arabic means "priest" or "ulama". Therefore mullah is a legend in several countries in Central Asia, including Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Tajikistan and other countries that each claimed that Mullah Nasruddin was born there. Even Uzbekistan people claim that Mullah Nasruddin was born in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. The story of Mullah Nasruddin is also very popular in North Africa, Greece, Italy, France, Pakistan, the United States and others. Seeing his places of birth as described above, therefore Mullah Nasruddin is a different name for Nasruddin Hoja (Sawhney 2004) No one knows where and when Mullah Nasruddin was born. He was a classic character created by the adherents of Sufis in order to reach in a certain level of sufi teachings which is a part of Sufi mysticism. Mullah Nasruddin is a character whose behaviors are difficult to be followed and his personality never dies. He is a message, not a figure for Sufis so that his history and place of death is unknown. (Yadav 2007). Mullah Nasruddin was the most clever and smart person in the human history. For centuries, he made people around the world to laugh. Sawhney (2004:7) mentions that there is a famous writer from Afghanistan, Idris Shah, who collected hundreds of stories of Mullah

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Nashrudin into a book that consists of three volumes. The Sufis use the story of Mullah Nashrudin as a means to insert the teachings of Sufism in the simple way. Many stories from the great Sufi poets, such as Jalaludin Rumi, Hafiz and Sadi, are retold in the story of Mullah Nashrudin. Many of such stories contain the elements of Mullah Nashrudin humor and usually end by a question. (Sharma 2002) In an article entitled *asy -syakhshiyah* in *Juha asy -syakhshiyah al-Haqiqiyah* (2010) it is clearly III. The Humor of Nashrudin Hoja, Juha and Mullah Nashrudin

To find the difference of the three anecdotal figures, the sub-chapter will analyze one story from each character. First story that the author will discuss below derived from from Burak Sansal (2010):

One day, a few people from Aksehir joked to Nashrudin Hodja, "Hey, Hodja, you are said that your level are higher than the saints. Try to prove it! " Of course, Nashrudin Hodja can not answer it, but because he was kept pressed, he finally answered, "Yes, that is, approximately" "The saints got supernatural powers and they ever showed his power to the people. If your level is higher than them, then show your supernatural powers "Asked those people. "Okay, let's try," said Hoja as he walked toward a big tree in front of him. "Hi the big tree quickly came to me and stand in front of me!" Of course, the tree can not follow what is asked by the Hodja. Thus, Hoja immediately walked toward the tree and stood there. Seeing what the Hoja, then The people of Aksehir were laughing and mocking, "Hey, Hoja, what are you doing? You can not make the tree to walk here, but instead you are going there! " "As a person who ranks higher than the saints, we must not be arrogant," said the Hoja. "If that tree could not walk here, yes, then we have to come there."

To determine whether this text is fiction or non fiction, of course the text above is fiction. This is evident from the words "one day" at the beginning of the story. In the English version of the story begins with the words "one day" or "dzaat yawm" in Arabic versions. As said by ??oest (2007) that the fictional indication can be divided into two main forms, namely the formal and the referential. In a formal indication of fiction, there are signs in the text that tend to reveal that we are dealing with fiction is more on its form rather than its denotation meaning. For example, we can find many indications, such as the phrase "once upon a time ..." at the beginning of the story and the phrase "they are so happy and have a long life" at the end of the story. These words are a specific indication for a children's fairy tale.

However, whether the characters in this story is real or not, we can say that Nashrudin Hoja figures in this story is real because there is no indication of referential fictional, that is the proper name of someone who never existed but is mentioned in the text. The figure Nashrudin Hoja and people from Aksehir really exist. It can be seen from the place of birth and when he was born. Likewise, other characters such as "some people from Aksehir" strengthen the argument that the figures involved in the story is true, because there are similarities between the village's name mentioned in the story with the place where the Nashrudin Hoja studied, namely Aksehir. Therefore, it is certain that the story took the form of anecdotes. As said by Dananjaya in his *Foklore Indonesia* (1986) that the anecdotes are humorous fictional story of a prominent person or a few characters that actually exist. Meanwhile, regarding the content of the story could have been a fiction or non fiction.

Furthermore, the elements of humor in the story above can be found from the following words such as: One day, a few people from Aksehir joked to Nashrudin the saints. Try to prove it! " The phrase your level is higher than the words are joke words that contain elements of humor. Why is it called humor? Because the actual circumstances of Hoja is not the case since the level of Nashrudin Hoja is no higher than the saints but people of Aksehir considered him as such. Al-Hufi (1956) names such humor with the term *al-Tahakkum bi* occurs because of the ability of someone to mock other people who have less morality and soul.

Similarly, the words: of course, Nashrudin Hoja can not answer, but as it continues pressed, he finally was forced to answer, "yes, that's approximately" can be said to contain elements of humor. This text will not be funny, if Nashrudin Hoja answered with the actual words, like "no. My level does not exceed the level of saints." Instead of being funny, if Nashrudin answered this way, then the story will end up uninteresting. However, because he felt pressured and embarrassed because being mocked by his friends, so he went to say to follow what his friends said. Al-Hufi (1956:159) names this kind of humor with the term the humor that occurs when someone is in difficult situation but is very smart in finding an exact answer.

Another part of the text that makes this story the large tree in front of him. "Hi, big tree quickly came to me and stand in front of me!" These words can be said to be funny, because the answer is not what we are guessing. We do not suspect that Nashrudin Hoja would do such a thing in which he walked toward the tree, called and told him to come to him. His response is something that we do not expect to occur. If Nashrudin Hoja did something that we already guessed it then the story would not be funny. As said by White (1955) ??1988: 40), one of elements to create the foundation of humor is something that is impossible, something that can not happen, such as when trees may be invited to speak and told to come. Something impossible in general contains a high level of funny effect. This matched with the ideas as presented by Claire (1984), that joke can make people laugh if it contains elements that make no sense (illogic). Nashrudin Hoja did something that was illogic, didn't he? Furthermore other words that contain elements of humor can be seen from Nashrudin Hoja's answer when he was asked: "Hey, Hoja, what are you doing? You can not make the tree to walk here, but instead you are going there! "So Nashrudin Hoja simply answer it:" as a person whose level is higher than the saints, we must not be arrogant, "said the Hoja."if that tree could not walk here, yes, then we have to come there." This text is funny, first of all, because Nashrudin Hoja is very smart in looking for answers. We do not think that even Nashrudin

**3 ONCE UPON A DAY, JUHA CAME TO THE HOUSE OF HIS FRIEND TO BORROW MONEY. "WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH THAT MONEY?" ASKED A FRIEND OF JUHA. "I'M GOING TO BUY AN ELEPHANT." JUHA SAID. "AN ELEPHANT?" REPLIED HIS FRIEND QUIZZICALLY. "DO NOT YOU THINK THAT YOU DO EVEN HAVE A PLACE THAT IS SUFFICIENT TO RAISE THE ELEPHANT? DO YOU HAVE MONEY TO BUY FOOD FOR THE ELEPHANT? HEARING THAT ANSWER, THEN JUHA REPLIED, "DO NOT YOU THINK I COME HERE TO BORROW**

**MONEY, INSTEAD OF ASKING ADVICE."** (Hufi, 1956), the humor happens when someone flipped reversal or confront a situation with another situation. This text is funny, because Nashrudin Hoja flipped reversal of circumstances. Supposedly, according to the scenario that the tree that is expected to come to him and not Hoja Nasrudin who come to the tree.

Meanwhile, the text about Juha that the author takes from Helmke (2007) is as follows:

**3 Once upon a day, Juha came to the house of his friend to borrow money. "What would you do with that money?" Asked a friend of Juha. "I'm going to buy an elephant." Juha said. "An elephant?" Replied his friend quizzically. "Do not you think that you do even have a place that is sufficient to raise the elephant? Do you have money to buy food for the elephant? Hearing that answer, then Juha replied, "Do not you think. I come here to borrow money, instead of asking advice. "**

As in the text of Nashrudin Hoja, this text also begins with the words "Once upon a day". This indicates that the text is in the form of fiction, because there are indications of fictional forms. However, judging aspects of some characters, the characters in this story are real. Juha, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, is real even though it is found in the text some indications of fictional references, namely beside Juha some names found in the text do not really exist. The Figures of Juha's friend is not considered as a real figure because he represents a general name. Therefore, this story can be considered as anecdotal because the main character is a real character, but the story does not necessarily occur.

However, when compared with the text of Nashrudin Hoja, the element of humor almost occur in every sentence of Hoja whilst only few elements of humor exist in the text of Juha. This is probably caused by the number of sentences contained in the text of Juha are fewer than the text of Nashrudin Hoja. Elements of humor in the text of Juha can be seen in a phrase: do not you think. The reason why these words considered funny is because Juha started to imitate his friend's words. If Juha did not use such phrase then this text will be no necessary funny. Al-Hufi (1956) calls this humor as al-La'bi bi 'Alfaz, the humor that occurs because of person's ability in playing some words.

Similarly, the words: I came here to borrow money, instead of asking advice. These words can also be considered funny, because the answer is not as desired by the person who asked. People who asked hoping that after he gave his advice, Juha will be aware of his false and will not try to borrow money. However, in contrast, Juha replied with such words. If, Juha did not answer it with such phrase that did not expect by his friend, then there is no the possibility of this text considered as funny. The kind of humor according the Al-Hufi (1956) referred to al-'Ijabat gayri bi al-matlub, the humor that occurs because the person answers the questions with something that are not desirable.

The last text is the text about Mullah Nashrudin taken from Yadav (2007):

Once upon time, a neighbor was looking Mullah Nashrudin bending searching for something. "What are you looking for, O, Mullah." Ask neighbor. "Key" said Mullah. After a few minutes of searching, another neighbor also asked, "where did it fall in?" "At home." Mullah replied casually. "Then, why do you look for it here," asked neighbor confused. "Because here, the light is better."

This text can also be regarded as a fiction text, because there are indications of a formal fiction that is "once upon a time". Meanwhile, viewing from the aspect of characters, a character in this story is real because as kind described in the introduction that the figure of Mullah Nasrudin had the place and date of birth with Nashrudin Hoja. However, it also can be considered unreal because as it is mentioned in the introduction that the figure of Nashrudin Mullah was created by the Sufis to teach their mystical teachings.

Meanwhile, judging its elements of humor, the story of Mullah Nashrudin can not be equated with the previous stories in which its humorous elements are easily observed from the phrases used in the text. To see the elements of humor in the story of Mullah Nashrudin, it requires a special and thorough. As mentioned in The Encyclopedia of Pointless (2008) that the humor has some levels. The first level is abstractness. It is the most basic level of humor, humor that is contradicts with conventional things. Second level is nonsensicalness, humor whose words is quite long and wordy but has no sense except exposing something taboo and improper in the society. The

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third level is pointlessness which uses concepts of humor that is more intellectual, such as irony, parody and satire. The fourth is a comedy that is most difficult to create it. Someone who creates the humor must design an interesting situation and present characters that are different with the existing characters in general in order to affect the highest attractiveness.

The text of Mullah Nashrudin may be categorized into a comedy. As mentioned in the introduction that the figure of Mullah Nashrudin was created by Sufis to convey their mystical teachings. According to the author through the character of Mullah Nasrudin the Sufis wanted to convey the messages to readers that human beings always want to get something in easy way. They tend to look at where the "light" appears even though they are looking for something that is actually difficult grasp by naked eye. In addition, the Sufis also tried to remind the people not to look at things from the outside (zahir) but from the inside (batin).

This kind of humor by Hufi (1956) firstly it is referred to al-Tanaqud, the humor that occurs when person does something that is contrary to general opinion: the key fall at home, but he looks for it elsewhere. This is contrary to common understandings, isn't this? If the key fall at home, then it should be looked for it at home. Both are al-al-Ma'ani La'bu, the humor that occurs because of different perceptions in understanding the meaning of the word: extrinsic (majaz) or intrinsic (hakiki), denotative or connotative. This Text is funny because there are different perceptions between the reader and the author (Sufis). The readers essentially take the text in denotative meaning: the key falls at home, but look elsewhere, because there is light. Meanwhile, the meanings made by the Sufis are extrinsic and connotative.

## 4 IV.

## 5 Conclusion

Based on the description and structural analysis of the text above, it can be concluded that the figure of Nashrudin Hoja and Juha are real while character of Mullah Nashrudin is fictional. It can be analyzed from the information contained in previous research in the introduction and strengthened by indication analysis of non-fictional and fictional in the texts. There is overlap between the figures of Mullah Nasrudin and Hoja Nasrudin. This can be observed from some of stories that at once mention the names of Mullah Nashrudin and Nahsrudin Hoja. There is a reference that classifies a story into the story of Nashrudin Hoja but in one of its dialogues also calls Hoja Nahrudin as Mullah. On the contrary there is another reference stating that Mullah Nashrudin's place and date of birth is same with Nashrudin Hoja. This means, if the figure of Mullah Nashrudin is true then that figure is Nahsrudin Hoja.

All stories of Nashrudin Hoja, Juha and Mullah Nashrudin contain humorous elements with different shapes and types. It is indicated in the analysis of the contents of the text that show the different types and forms of humor in these texts. The stories of Nashrudin Hoja and Juha are anecdotes styled because the characters are real even though the stories do not necessarily exist, while the stories of Mullah Nashrudin are more fictional in which there are certain Sufi teachings implicitly expressed. These categories can be seen through structural and content analysis of all three texts. It seems that the text of Mullah Nashruddin is more complex and difficult to understand if it is compared with the texts of Nashrudin Hoja and Juha. It happens because the text of Mullah Nashrudin aims to convey certain teachings to the readers through humor. Meanwhile, the texts of Nashrudin Hoja and Juha are merely more entertainment than for the educative purposes.

Among the three, it can be concluded that the figure of Nashrudin Hoja is most prominent than two other figures. From this perspective, it creates doubtful among readers, especially the writer himself, whether it is true that the story of Nashrudin Hoja is an adaptation of the character of Juha whose stories are not too famous. Moreover, as Juha, Nashrudin Hoja Juha's date and place of birth is certain that suggests that the character of Nashrudin Hoja is real and can not be equated with the figure of Juha. Of course, this can be proven through analyzing the style and content of the texts. Even Turkish references about Nashruddin Hoja have never mentioned any indication that the figure of Nashruddin Hoja is an adaptation form Juha's story.

Thus, the story of Nashrudin Hoja usually is paralyzed with Abunawas' story which is full of humor. Although, there is a story played by Mullah Nashrudin, it is clear that the story is about Nashrudin Hoja, not Juha. Until now, many readers, especially the writer himself consider that both Nashrudin Hoja and Mullah Nashrudin are the same figures. It is because both use the same name, "Nashrudin", whilst the name of Juha is not so familiar to readers outside the Arab world.<sup>1</sup>

## 5 CONCLUSION

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Figure 1:

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